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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 25 June 2015

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Cross-Departmental Environmental Agenda

1. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What contribution her Department is making to cross-departmental work on the Government's environmental agenda. [900535]

12. **Ben Howlett** (Bath) (Con): What contribution her Department is making to cross-departmental work on the Government's environmental agenda. [900548]

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): On 5 June, I marked world environment day by visiting the Thames barrier, an important defence and an iconic part of London's landscape. When designed, it was expected to close once or twice a year, but has closed 61 times in the last five years alone, clearly demonstrating the impact of climate change. We are determined to protect and enhance our natural environment for everyone and pass it on to future generations. That is why my Department is leading the cross-Government work to push for a strong global deal in Paris, and ensure that we are the greenest Government ever.

Fiona Bruce: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer and welcome her to her post, to which I know she will bring great expertise and passion. It is especially pleasing to have a Conservative Secretary of State for this Department—for the first time in 18 years. Which Departments has my right hon. Friend had discussions with and why are the discussions important?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is of course right. Cross-governmental work is incredibly important for delivering our ambitious targets. It is already happening, including between my Department and the Department for Transport through a joint unit on ultra-low emissions vehicles. There is also DECC-Department for Communities and Local Government collaboration on energy efficiency in homes, and DECC-Department for Business, Innovation and Skills collaboration on helping businesses to save money on their energy costs by cutting their energy use. Government policies have contributed to an overall 22% decline in energy intensity since 2004—more than for most comparable economies.

Ben Howlett: May I echo the congratulatory comments made to the Secretary of State? In my Bath constituency, an incredibly active climate change lobby is working very hard day to day to educate young people about the impact of climate change on future generations. Will the Secretary of State update us on proposals to work with the Secretary of State for Education to ensure that climate change is taught as part of the national curriculum?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Making sure that the dangers of climate change are communicated to the next generation remains an important part of our plan. We work closely with the Department for Education to ensure that that happens. I recommend to my hon. Friend and to other Members the global calculator, which demonstrates to people what levers need to be pulled and what changes need to be made in order to achieve our climate change targets. We have a particularly user-friendly children's version, which hon. Members might choose to show at their schools.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): What is the Conservative Government as opposed to the coalition Government policy on carbon capture? There are three deep-mine pits left in Britain, and they are going to close within the next 12 months unless something is done on that front. The Conservatives always say that they differ from the coalition Government, so I want to test this new Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. Will she save those three pits? The last Government took £700 million out of the miners' pension fund. Let us give some of it back, apply for state aid, save the three pits in question and save a lot of jobs.

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman made an interesting point on which we can agree—that carbon capture and storage could and should be a very important part of our future. If we are to achieve our climate change targets and reduce emissions, we must have success with carbon capture and storage. We are committed to continuing to spend on and invest in CCS, and we hope that it will yield a positive result for our targets in the 2020s.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Secretary of State to her new job, but want to press her on this. Could we see more sign of joint research and development innovation with Departments such as the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs? At the moment, I am getting very little response from DEFRA on squaring up to the fact that climate change is changing the nature of the plants we can grow in this country, which is a great challenge to our economy.

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman is right that we need more joint working. The ambitions we have to address our climate change targets require joint working. I will meet my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in order to work more closely with her. If we are to protect our environment from dangerous climate change, all Departments need to play an active role—and I will ensure that they do so.

Renewable Energy

2. **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): What steps she is taking to increase the proportion of energy that is generated from renewable sources. [900537]

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): As the hon. Lady may know, the most recent step we have taken to support renewable energy deployment is the introduction of contracts for difference, which give companies the certainty they need to make long-term investments. This has helped us to drive down costs and focus on best value for consumers by requiring renewable technologies to compete for support for the first time.

Liz McInnes: Last week it was revealed that we had missed our interim EU 2020 target for renewable energy generation. How will pulling the plug on the cheapest form of renewable energy help us to achieve it?

Andrea Leadsom: We do not accept that we have missed it. Our interim reporting covers the period to the end of 2015, and we believe that we are on track to meet that target.

The important point made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in her announcement last week was that we do not want to over-deploy onshore wind, because only a certain amount of subsidy is available to meet the requirements of decarbonisation while keeping bills down. Any over-deployment of onshore wind could cause other, important, technologies to lose out.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): It is pleasing that the Secretary of State recently granted development consent to the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon. Does the Minister agree that tidal lagoons offer the potential of not only reliable, large-scale renewable generation, but a world-beating British industry?

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend is right: this is an exciting new opportunity. It is at a very early stage, but it is a perfect example of the newer technologies that the United Kingdom should support and promote when it has the chance to be a world leader, and we are certainly doing that.

Mr Douglas Carswell (Clacton) (UKIP): The tidal lagoon project in Swansea will undoubtedly generate renewable energy, but the payment that the Government will guarantee for that energy will be three times the current market price. Does the Minister think that that is a good use of public money, and does she think that it is good for our energy competitiveness?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman must recognise that a diverse set of energy sources is vital not just to our energy security but to decarbonisation, and to our ability to keep consumer costs down. The Government are looking into the different opportunities presented by different technologies. The price of the lagoon project is a long way away from being agreed, but we are keen to promote new ideas and new technologies, and we want the United Kingdom to be at the forefront of that.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): The announcement that the renewables obligation for onshore wind will be closed early has caused huge uncertainty and anxiety in the renewables sector in Scotland and throughout the United Kingdom. With that in mind, will the Minister tell us when the timetable for the next contracts for difference allocation round will be published?

Andrea Leadsom: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we called time on the renewables obligations for onshore wind early as a result of the success of its deployment, and we are now thinking about what to do next. We are considering all our policies, including those relating to CfDs. We have the tools that will enable us to meet our manifesto commitments on onshore wind, and we will present proposals on the new CfD round in the near future.

Callum McCaig: The Minister's response suggests that uncertainty still reigns. The Green Investment Bank, whose headquarters are in Edinburgh, is to be privatised by the Government. How will the Minister ensure that the original purpose of the bank, which was to accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy, will be maintained when it is in private hands?

Andrea Leadsom: Conservative Members are delighted to learn that owing to the success of the Green Investment Bank, which was only created under the last Parliament, it is now in a position to expand even further by means of private sector investment and access to capital markets, and to do yet more to support and improve the emergence of a green carbon economy. The hon. Gentleman should join us in welcoming that announcement, rather than expressing concern.

Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): I apologise for the fact that my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) is at a hustings in Scotland this morning, and is therefore unable to be present. As this is the first session of Energy and Climate Change questions of the new Parliament, let me take the opportunity to welcome the Secretary of State and the Minister to their positions.

Will the Minister explain how, given a fixed renewables target and a fixed budget, replacing the cheapest renewable electricity technology—which is onshore wind—with more expensive technologies can possibly lead to lower bills for consumers?

Andrea Leadsom: I welcome the hon. Lady to her position.

We have explained time and again that the bill payer's subsidy is there to promote emerging technologies in the low-carbon and renewables sector. It is not there to give long-term support to different projects. Interestingly, representatives of the industry to whom I have spoken in the last few days think that, in the near future, they could envisage contracts for onshore wind with no subsidies at all, and that is exactly where we want to go.

Julie Elliott: I thank the Minister for that response. She wants to decarbonise at the lowest possible cost but is effectively banning the cheapest renewable technology; she wants to help boost our economy but is thwarting a sector that contributes £1.7 billion in gross value added; and she wants a good relationship with the clean energy sector but could soon find herself being sued by two of its primary industries. Is it not the case that the only conceivable reason for that policy is to placate Conservative Back Benchers?

Andrea Leadsom: I really do fail to understand why Opposition Members keep insisting that onshore wind should be the only game in town. Onshore wind employs 19,000 people; offshore wind, 14,000; solar, 34,500; and

biomass and bioenergy, 32,000. What about the whole range of energy sources that we want to promote? We cannot simply keep putting up the costs to the bill payer. My Department's priorities are to keep the bills down while decarbonising at the lowest cost possible, and that is what we will do.

Paris Climate Change Conference

3. **Craig Williams** (Cardiff North) (Con): What preparations her Department is making for the 2015 Paris climate change conference. [900538]

6. **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What preparations her Department is making for the 2015 Paris climate change conference. [900541]

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): I can assure the House that securing a global climate deal in Paris is my highest priority this year. Within the first two weeks of becoming Secretary of State, I attended the Petersburg dialogue in Berlin, and G7 Climate Ministers recently reported on the shape of the deal in their meeting. We will take every opportunity to press for an agreement that is ambitious, with regular reviews to further increase ambition and effective rules to allow us to track progress. I should also like to thank my predecessor, Ed Davey, for the leadership that he brought to this critical issue.

Craig Williams: I, like other Members, was delighted to welcome constituents led by Christian Aid, in my case from Cardiff North, to talk about climate change last week. I spoke to members of Beulah church about the importance of the Paris conference and, in particular, about ensuring that countries such as China and India are brought along. Will the Secretary of State update us on that?

Amber Rudd: I, too, met constituents and leaders from that climate change campaign last week, part of the "Speak Up For The Love Of" climate lobby, which demonstrates support across many sectors. Many MPs met their constituents to discuss the issue. I spoke to counterparts in India and China when I attended the Berlin talks last month, and I was reassured by their commitment to a successful outcome in Paris. We look forward to both countries submitting their intended nationally determined contributions as soon as possible, and we are pressing for them to be ambitious.

Huw Merriman: I know the Secretary of State will be familiar with Glenleigh Park school in Bexhill-on-Sea, which was the first school in the Schools Energy Co-operative and has the largest community-owned primary school solar installation in the UK. How important does she think it is that all age groups engage with the issue of climate change ahead of the Paris conference?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: Glenleigh Park school is an excellent example of the engagement of young people with climate change, because it has the largest solar array of any primary school in the UK, generating clean, green energy, helping to cut the school's carbon emissions but, above all, showing children how important and easy it is to access green energy in their everyday lives.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): May I welcome both Ministers to their new roles and wish them well in their jobs? In addition to the Paris conference, there is the important New York conference on sustainable development goals, including climate change and energy. Will the Secretary of State make sure that her Department works with the Department for International Development to ensure that those issues are high on the agenda and we do not have a missed opportunity for the next 15 years?

Amber Rudd: I share the hon. Gentleman's commitment to ensuring that the sustainable development goals become as binding and successful as the millennium development goals. I am working with my colleagues at the Department for International Development to ensure that we make those commitments happen in New York.

John McNally (Falkirk) (SNP): In my constituency, many people are concerned about the impact of fracking on their area, as it has a direct effect on their lives. Will the Secretary of State present a detailed health and environmental impact assessment of fracking to the conference in Paris?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that this Government have made a commitment to ensuring that we can extract shale and to do it in the safest and most environmentally friendly way. This country has a long history and record of safe environmental working in oil and gas. Let me reassure him that that will always be a priority in ensuring that we access the shale.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): It is important that we make progress in Paris, and the EU must have a position on that. Is the Secretary of State concerned that no other country within Europe has made carbon reduction commitments that equate to what we are doing in the Climate Change Act 2008? In particular, I am thinking of countries such as Germany, which is now building unabated coal power stations at scale and whose carbon emissions are a third higher than ours per capita already.

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend will be aware that Germany, despite that, has continued to reduce its emissions, but he makes the good point that we are ahead of our European counterparts. The great thing about that is that it gives us the leadership potential we need to make sure that the EU works as one unit and is ambitious in driving the agreement that we hope to get in Paris at the end of the year. It gives us that leadership opportunity.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State give us her assessment of the importance of Britain's membership of the EU to our achieving a successful outcome at the Paris climate change conference? Following on from what she has just said, is she keen to see Europe agree an even more ambitious reduction in greenhouse gas emissions than the 40% already announced?

Amber Rudd: Let me take the opportunity to welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place, stepping in for the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), who I understand had something else to do this morning.

He is absolutely right to say that making these targets is essential to us. The leadership provided by this Government within the EU was an important part of uniting the EU to make sure that we made the targets which enabled us to provide international leadership. The leadership role we have been able to play in the EU will be crucial to getting the Paris deal, and hon. Members on both sides of the House will draw their own conclusions about how important that is in terms of delivering on this important issue.

Jonathan Reynolds: I welcome those words from the Secretary of State, but she did not appear to want to make the specific commitment to a 50% reduction in Europe's greenhouse gas emissions. She will, of course, be aware that our domestic interim target of a 50% reduction by 2025 is already tougher, so does she not agree that it would be in our best interests, as well as those of the EU, to commit now to tougher action?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we have reserved our position; having brought the EU to the agreement, we will do a 40% reduction by 2030. We would still like to see it go further, but we are not pushing for that at the moment because we are looking to hold the whole of the EU together. We are working to make sure that we can use that unity to get a global deal, but that proposal is still on the table as a possibility we may yet push.

Nuclear Generating Capacity

4. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What her policy is on investment in future nuclear generating capacity. [900539]

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): The Government fully support the expansion of nuclear generation. My hon. Friend might be interested to know that nuclear already supplies 19% of our electricity in the UK, which is broadly equivalent to the amount provided by renewables. It is therefore a key part of our base energy supply, and I am delighted that industry has plans to develop approximately 16 GW of new nuclear power, across five sites.

Bob Blackman: I welcome my hon. Friend to her new position. Clearly there is a need to replace the ageing nuclear power stations that we already have in order to create the mixed environment to which she has referred. What plans does she have to accelerate the development of new nuclear power stations so that we have that proper mixed economy?

Andrea Leadsom: The Government and EDF are working together to finalise the Hinkley project documentation. EDF anticipates Hinkley Point C beginning production in 2023. I can assure my hon. Friend that we are committed to the next wave of new nuclear projects, and we hope to be able to meet 35% of UK power needs from nuclear by 2028.

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Will the nuclear generation programme require any state subsidies, either direct or indirect?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that we are looking at all options for the production of new nuclear. As he will know, an arrangement has already been made for Hinkley Point C, and we are looking at the options for further nuclear projects.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): Back in 2008, and in their manifesto, the Conservatives promised no nuclear subsidies on any account, yet the European Commission has granted a subsidy to the UK Government of £17.6 billion for Hinkley Point. How is it that we can subsidise nuclear to that extent yet the Government are cutting subsidies to renewable energy sources?

Andrea Leadsom: I think I have said a number of times that diverse sources of energy are vital for our energy security. Currently, 36% of our electricity comes from coal, and around 19% is from old nuclear, much of which will shut down in the next decade. It is vital that we look to new nuclear to provide the base energy supply to meet the bulk of our energy security needs. Other technologies are also vital for diverse sources of energy. That is the approach we are taking.

Wind Farm Applications (Subsidies)

5. **Phil Wilson** (Sedgefield) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the effect of the reduction in Government subsidies on the number of wind farm applications. [900540]

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): As my right hon. Friend said during her statement to the House on Monday, we estimate that around 7.1 GW of onshore wind capacity proposed across the UK will not be eligible for the grace period and is therefore unlikely to go ahead as a result of the announcement of 18 June. That equates to around 250 projects totalling around 2,500 turbines.

Phil Wilson: Durham county has an excellent record on renewable energy development, especially wind farms. The issue now in the county is the cumulative impact of so many wind farms in a given area, and, because of that, the planning system is now working and further development is being rejected. If the planning system is working, why is there a need to have a blanket ban on wind farm subsidies, which will affect jobs and investment in the future?

Andrea Leadsom: As I and my right hon. Friend have said on a number of occasions, we believe that onshore wind has met our targets. Deployment will reach between 11 GW and 13 GW, which is within our target range. We want to keep bills down for consumers and to promote other sources of renewable technologies that will add to our energy mix. The hon. Gentleman must accept that, as the cost of onshore wind comes down, we do not want permanently to subsidise an industry that has the ability to stand on its own two feet.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that we have heard an awful lot about the generation of power, but in my constituency of Tonbridge and Malling a lot is being done to insulate and therefore save power in a different way? Will she

please tell us a little bit about what she is doing to bring forward the commitment to do more with 1 million homes?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is right that energy generation is one part of the story but so too is energy use and ensuring that we have proper policies to try to manage the demand for energy. Our policies, such as insulating homes and the warm home discounts, are under review, and we will make a statement soon.

Mr Speaker: That is a fascinating reply, but it is not altogether adjacent to the issue of wind farm applications, from which I think the Minister was led astray, good naturedly, by the hon. Gentleman.

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm that, under existing secondary legislation, her Department is obliged to issue renewable energy certificates to all applicants until March 2017? Will she also confirm that her Department will continue to issue renewables obligation certificates after March 2016 in the event that her proposed legislation to bring them to an end is not on the statute book by that date?

Andrea Leadsom: We intend to bring forward primary legislation in the Energy Bill to close the renewables obligation for onshore wind early. As my right hon. Friend said in her statement, that will mean that the grace period will be for those that already have planning consent, grid connection and land rights.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): May I thank the Government for having the guts to get rid of the subsidy on wind turbines? If it does mean fewer applications, it will bring three cheers from the people of the Ribble Valley. Does my right hon. Friend agree that wind turbines have a visual impact, and is it not about time that local people finally had their wishes known as far as their siting is concerned?

Andrea Leadsom: Yes, my hon. Friend is exactly right. It is vital that local communities' views are taken into account and, under this Government's policy, they now will be.

Renewable Energy

8. **Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): What recent discussions she has had with representatives of the renewable energy industry on the future of that industry. [900544]

17. **Mike Weir** (Angus) (SNP): What recent discussions she has had with representatives of the renewable energy industry on the future of that industry. [900555]

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) does not need to despair. There are plenty of opportunities. It is rare for him to be silent for very long. We will hear from him in due course.

Andrea Leadsom: I have had the pleasure of meeting a number of representatives of the renewable energy industry in my new role. I am delighted to hear how the sector is thriving in the UK, with seriously good prospects for new, emerging technologies, including storage, on the horizon.

Owen Thompson: Following the comments of Keith Anderson, the chief executive of ScottishPower Renewables, that

“if you prematurely bring onshore wind to a halt you will end up costing consumers £2bn to £3bn”,

does the Minister share my concern that the Government's headlong rush to scrap subsidies for onshore wind will hit the pockets of consumers hardest?

Andrea Leadsom: As we have explained, the early closure of the RO for onshore wind will save consumers money. The subsidies in their bills that would have gone towards an excess of deployment above our targets would have cost consumers hundreds of millions of pounds more.

Mike Weir: Following the announcement of the closure of ROs for onshore wind, many renewables developers are worried about what else might be in the pipeline. Will the Minister give an absolute assurance that there are no plans to cut the funds available through contracts for difference for offshore wind developments?

Andrea Leadsom: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the policy on CfDs is being considered right now. It is certainly our intention to continue to promote a successful and thriving renewables industry and we will make announcements in due course.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The hon. Lady has already mentioned the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon, which is an excellent and very exciting project that will create thousands of jobs in my constituency. It is critical that the foot is kept on the accelerator; otherwise the timings will be seriously out, seriously jeopardising the future of the project. What discussions has she had with state aid officials in Brussels to ensure that the project is not held up there?

Andrea Leadsom: We are very focused on removing all the potential obstacles to the project, including by having conversations with the European Commission on state aid issues. Our foot is firmly on the accelerator and we will do everything we can to support the project.

Household Energy Efficiency

9. **Debbie Abrahams** (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help households improve their energy efficiency. [900545]

16. **Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help households improve their energy efficiency. [900554]

20. **Joan Ryan** (Enfield North) (Lab): What steps she is taking to help households improve their energy efficiency. [900558]

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): I am determined to help keep homes warmer for less, save carbon and meet our important fuel poverty targets. We need a long-term, coherent and affordable policy framework that ensures that Government support is targeted at those who need it most. My Department is already working closely with consumer groups and industry alike to test and develop ideas based on evidence of what works, and I look forward to setting out our approach in the autumn.

Debbie Abrahams: More than 2 million households are in fuel poverty, including 4,259 in my constituency of Oldham East and Saddleworth. Energy efficiency is key to tackling fuel poverty, but with an 80% reduction in such measures in this Parliament, is the Secretary of State serious about doing that or is she just going to redefine what it is?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Lady will be aware that the previous Government redefined fuel poverty to the satisfaction of most groups, who agreed that we had proposed a better definition. She should be under no illusion: addressing fuel poverty will remain a priority of this Government. She is probably aware that the energy company obligation, or ECO, measures installed by the energy companies have been the most efficient way of delivering energy efficiency. In her constituency, 6,323 measures were installed to nearly 5,000 individual households and £700,000 was invested through the green deal communities fund. I hope that she saw some significant improvements under the previous Government and we will continue on that route.

Sue Hayman: In the coming years, there is a huge amount of proposed infrastructure investment in west Cumbria as well as a new academy school to be built in my constituency. We also have the new National College for Nuclear. What financial incentives and support will the Government provide to developers so that energy efficiency is central when we build these large projects?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Lady is right to focus on the need for energy efficiency in large buildings. I am delighted to hear about the infrastructure investment in her constituency. The National College for Nuclear will help the UK seize opportunities for economic growth in the nuclear industry and provide skills and jobs. I remind her that the DECC-funded Salix loan scheme provides public sector organisations with interest-free loans to make a range of energy efficiency improvements in their existing estates. The scheme has already supported more than 1,000 public bodies, so she might find it helpful.

Joan Ryan: Some 4,000 households in my constituency—that is one in 10—are in fuel poverty. The energy company obligation, which suffered severe cuts in the last Parliament, is due to end in 2017. How will the Government meet their responsibilities to people in fuel poverty once the ECO has ended?

Amber Rudd: The right hon. Lady is right that the ECO continues until 2017. Under the last Government, 2,000 measures were installed in her constituency, and the ECO remains a successful way of accessing homes in fuel poverty. Of course, we also have our fuel poverty commitments to ensure that, through five-year measuring

plans, we deliver a C band for homes by 2030, with bands E and D on the way to getting there. There are many different ways of delivering efficiencies in homes to reduce fuel poverty, and the best thing we can do at the moment is take advice from industry and work with voluntary groups to work out what they think is the best way to do that. We will come back to the House with the results of that.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State and the Minister of State to their new positions. They have made a good start, although “putting your foot down on the accelerator”—a phrase they have used repeatedly—is perhaps not the most energy efficient approach. Does my right hon. Friend share my astonishment at the ruling by the European Court of Justice earlier this month that effectively directs the UK to charge full-rate VAT on the supply and installation of energy-saving materials? Will she robustly, and jointly with the Treasury, challenge that ruling and impress on our European partners that if they are serious about energy efficiency, that is exactly the wrong way to go about it?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The ruling is unwelcome and we are considering the full implications. No one who has already pre-ordered or prepaid will be affected by the changes required as a result of the ECJ ruling, but we remain committed to tackling fuel poverty, and we will look at it very carefully.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Energy efficiency measures are the only way to prevent fuel poverty, and the levels of fuel poverty in the UK are a national disgrace. The Conservative manifesto promised that just 1 million homes would be insulated in this Parliament—a reduction of more than 80% from what was done in the last Parliament. At that rate, it will take more than 100 years to eliminate fuel poverty. That would be financially and morally wrong. What is the Secretary of State going to do to put that right?

Amber Rudd: It is disappointing that the hon. Gentleman fails to recognise the good progress we made in the last Parliament, both with the ECO and various grant groups that went out and reached people in fuel poverty. I was particularly pleased with the green deal communities programme, which went street by street to reach people in fuel poverty and was able to build community confidence in the programme—not everybody wants strangers coming to their door. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are engaging with industry and voluntary groups to make sure that the new proposals from this Government tackle fuel poverty in the most efficient way. We are also working with the Department for Work and Pensions to use, where possible, the data that it holds to target measures more efficiently.

Mr Speaker: Nobody could accuse the right hon. Lady of excluding from her answers any matter that she judges in any circumstance might be thought material.

Oil and Gas Industry

10. **Stuart Blair Donaldson (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP):** What steps the Government are taking to support the oil and gas industry; and if she will make a statement.

[900546]

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): The Government are committed to supporting the oil and gas industry, which is vital to our energy supply, as well as supporting 375,000 jobs across the UK. We are establishing the new Oil and Gas Authority, which is already helping industry to drive down costs and improve efficiencies. The Chancellor has also introduced strong fiscal measures to maintain and build investment.

Stuart Blair Donaldson: The Aberdeen and Grampian chamber of commerce oil and gas survey showed that the industry believes that more needs to be done to increase exploration drilling, without which there will be no new projects. Will the Minister engage with the industry to develop proposals to incentivise exploration and protect long-term employment?

Andrea Leadsom: We are absolutely committed to that. The establishment of the Oil and Gas Authority under Dr Andy Samuel is a vital part of that. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government have provided some money for seismic studies to identify potential new finds. I assure him that we and the Oil and Gas Authority will be doing everything we can to support the very important work to maximise economic recovery from the North sea basin.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): The oil and gas industry in the North sea faces very challenging times, and it is very important to the East Anglian economy. New Anglia local enterprise partnership is creating an oil and gas taskforce to support the industry in these difficult times. Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State arrange for her Department to be represented on the taskforce, alongside my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis) and me?

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning this to me. I had the great pleasure of speaking in Parliament at a recent east of England oil and gas meeting. I would be delighted to meet him to discuss this further, and if appropriate, we will certainly make sure that officials attend the meeting he mentions.

Renewable Energy Jobs (Scotland)

11. **Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP):** What estimate she has made of the number of jobs in Scotland supported by the renewable energy industry. [900547]

15. **Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP):** What estimate she has made of the number of jobs in Scotland supported by the renewable energy industry. [900552]

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): Renewable energy supported around 23,200 jobs in Scotland in 2013. As green energy is not about having wind farms

“any time, any place, anywhere”,

which is how the Scottish Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism once criticised the approach in Scotland, it is important to note that these jobs were supported across a variety of renewable energy technologies, and by supply chains.

Peter Grant: We know that some jobs will be lost as a result of the Government’s decision prematurely to withdraw the subsidy from onshore wind farms. The Government were reluctant to tell us how many jobs they thought would be lost. Will they tell us what an acceptable price would be, in terms of Scottish jobs? How many jobs would have to be lost in the Scottish renewables sector before the price was deemed too high?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear me say that job creation and job support are incredibly important in Scotland, and in the UK overall. Renewable energy remains a growth area, with high employment and investment. Scotland has a number of employees in the offshore wind sector, which continues to grow. I attended a conference on the sector yesterday. It is beginning to have a serious impact on exports.

Stuart C. McDonald: Of course, it is not only existing jobs that will be affected by the Government’s short-sighted policy on onshore wind; the opportunity to create further highly skilled and well-paid jobs will also be affected, perhaps even more so. As the Minister of State said, around 19,000 people owe their livelihoods to the UK’s onshore wind industry, but according to RenewableUK, that figure could have increased to as many as 37,000 by 2023 if Government policies had remained supportive. Is it not nonsense for the Government to turn their back on an industry with such enormous jobs potential?

Amber Rudd: As my hon. Friend the Minister of State pointed out, onshore wind has been a great success. If we continued to support it at the level that we had done over the past few years, there would be an impact on everybody’s bills, because we already have an aim for 2020 of getting between 11 GW to 13 GW from onshore wind; if onshore wind continues to be deployed at the level it has been over the past few years, that will contribute to an additional cost on people’s bills. I urge the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) to think about his constituents, who would not welcome another £10 or £15 on their bills.

Mr Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Has my right hon. Friend any estimates of, or would she care to hazard a guess, how much it would cost the average Scottish household if the ambitions of the Scottish National party to resume subsidising wind farms were realised, but the cost was met by the Scottish Government and Scottish taxpayer?

Amber Rudd: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point that highlights the impact on people’s bills of supporting these subsidies. We have the levy control framework to make sure that we provide for a cap. As for what it would cost the Scottish Government to reapply the subsidies, I urge them to look at that themselves.

19. [900557] **Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP):** The Secretary of State will by now have received a copy of a letter from the Binn Group in my constituency, with whom I met earlier this morning. It is involved in one of the £3 billion-worth of onshore wind projects that are in the planning pipeline

and at risk owing to the Government's recent decision. Will she confirm that her Department will consider that letter, to help protect at least 100 jobs at the Binn Group and ensure the creation of at least 100 more?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I have not yet seen her letter, but of course I will look carefully at what she has asked me to look at. I would, however, ask her, her constituents, and the developers who have obviously come to see her to bear it in mind that we have made our statement, and that our decision will be taken forward in primary legislation: we will end onshore wind subsidies.

Carbon Abatement Technologies

13. **Huw Irranca-Davies** (Ogmore) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the potential contribution of carbon abatement technologies to the Government's decarbonisation strategy. [900549]

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new position as Chairman of the Environmental Audit Committee. To meet our legally binding target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 80% in 2050 we are taking action right across the economy. This means delivering carbon savings through a range of technologies from nuclear and carbon capture and storage to low carbon heat technologies and energy efficiency measures in homes and businesses.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I welcome both Ministers to their positions. The fourth carbon budget report stressed the criticality of carbon abatement technology, and increasingly so post-2030, but the International Energy Agency report shows that if we fail, particularly on carbon capture and storage, the costs of decarbonisation and lower emissions could be up to 70% higher. On that basis, if the fifth carbon budget recommends greater investment in carbon abatement technologies and a faster trajectory to decarbonisation, will the Government accept those recommendations without reservation?

Andrea Leadsom: The Government have an open mind on the subject. We will put forward our policies towards the fifth carbon budget by the end of 2016. The hon. Gentleman is exactly right to point out the vital importance for the future of carbon capture and storage. He will be aware of the two projects—White Rose and Peterhead—that are currently under discussion, looking to achieve fulfilment so that we can prove the technology works. We hope to make progress on that.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): Trees can play a very important part in combating greenhouse gases—the gases that we are all talking about which cause climate change. How much is the Department encouraging tree planting, especially in my constituency, Taunton Deane—where we have had terrible flooding and are dealing with the wider area—and worldwide? If we stopped cutting down the rain forest, that would have an enormous effect.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is right to raise that point. She will be aware that tree planting has benefits not only for reducing carbon emissions, but for

improving public health. In our environment it is vital to have trees and proper landscaping, so I can assure her that the Government are committed to such projects, and that the private sector, too, is pretty good at ensuring that its developments are properly screened and properly planted.

21. [900559] **Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): The Prime Minister told the Liaison Committee in 2010 that he supported a substantially decarbonised electricity sector by 2020. Is that still his view, and does “substantially” mean more or less than 75%?

Andrea Leadsom: It is, indeed, still the Prime Minister's view. The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that in real terms between 1990 and 2013 emissions dropped by 30%. That is good. There is a lot more to be done, but we are making progress and we are fully committed to it.

Mr Speaker: Patience rewarded. I call Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Thank you for the encouragement, Mr Speaker. On the environment, since the Secretary of State said what she did about onshore wind, the industry needs to know what the Government intend for feed-in tariffs, contracts for difference and islands with regard to onshore wind.

Andrea Leadsom: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new position. He is right. We want investor certainty. Our priority for the Department is to keep the bills down, to keep energy security and to decarbonise. In order to do that, we recognise that significant private sector investment is needed. We want to give certainty as soon as possible, and that is what we will be doing.

Topical Questions

T1. [900525] **Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): I would like to take this opportunity to highlight an issue that crossed my desk earlier this week. Tuesday was National Women in Engineering Day, and in a visit to National Grid I was pleased not only to see the robust arrangements that it has in place to ensure the security of our energy supply, but to meet some of its fantastic female engineers. We had an excellent discussion in which I heard their views on what more we need to do to encourage girls and women to become engineers, including identifying more role models and challenging stereotypes, which are often reinforced from a young age. Only 6% of UK engineers are female—clearly, too few. That demonstrates how much remains to be done, and I was delighted to meet this group of inspiring women who go out and act as role models.

Kerry McCarthy: The Competition and Markets Authority will publish its remedies for the energy retail market next week, but what does the Minister think should be done to address the persistent exploitation by the big six of their most loyal customers? New customers

are attracted with loss-leading tariffs, whereas the most vulnerable customers are often kept on the highest tariffs. What consideration has the Secretary of State given to a proposal by Ovo Energy that Ofgem set a 12-month social tariff for which all the suppliers' most vulnerable customers should be auto-enrolled?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Lady raises an important point. We have taken several helpful steps to encourage switching; we had a campaign to do that at the end of the previous Parliament, and we had outreach campaigns to support local communities in getting to the harder-to-reach people, so there are great opportunities for switching. However, I accept her point that there are still people on a default tariff, so something needs to be done to access them. That is why we referred this to the Competition and Markets Authority, and I very much look forward to its response and, hopefully, to taking its guidelines to ensure we address that.

T6. [900531] **Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): My constituency will benefit from the knock-on effects of the development of Hinkley Point C, the first new nuclear power station to be built in the UK for decades, which will bring with it a predicted 4,000 jobs across Somerset. Can the Secretary of State give assurances: a, that the project is progressing; and b, that the Government are working to enable and encourage other low carbon industries to develop around it, as they will benefit not only Taunton Deane and Somerset, but the wider economy?

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that important point. As she knows, the Government are committed to supporting new nuclear. Hinkley Point C is close to a final investment decision, and we are doing everything we can to push that as fast as we can. We are also excited about other opportunities for new nuclear, and we will be lending those as much support as possible.

Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): The green investment bank is a vital tool for boosting our clean energy generation. Thus far, the bank has used £2 billion of investment to leverage a further £6 billion of private capital. However, it has been shackled by the Government's refusal to grant crucial borrowing powers. The Minister has confirmed that the Government will privatise the bank. What reassurances can the Secretary of State give that the Chancellor is not simply raiding the bank's capital reserves and, in so doing, robbing the UK of a unique tool to power the clean energy sector?

Amber Rudd: As the hon. Lady is surely aware, the green investment bank has been very successful in unlocking private sector investment. It was set up by the Government in the previous Parliament, with £1.8 billion of Government money, and it has successfully become a market leader, located as it is in Edinburgh. In the previous Parliament the Labour party called for the bank to have more borrowing powers, but we have gone one step further and are now allowing it to raise more capital in order to take advantage of that. I can reassure her and hon. Members that the purpose of the green investment bank is, and will remain, green investment.

T7. [900532] **Chris Skidmore** (Kingswood) (Con): Improving home energy efficiency in my constituency is important for reducing fuel poverty. Will the Minister update me on the progress the Government are making in Kingswood in that regard?

Amber Rudd: The Government are committed to tackling fuel poverty and meeting the 2030 statutory target. We estimate that in 2013 there were around 3,300 fuel-poor households in Kingswood. By the end of March 2015 the energy company obligation had delivered over 1,600 measures in around 1,400 households in Kingswood, including 336 affordable warmth measures, which were targeted at low-income and vulnerable households. Keeping homes warmer for less and helping those who find it most difficult to pay are my top priorities.

T2. [900526] **Karin Smyth** (Bristol South) (Lab): This week *The Lancet* commission on health and climate change stated that tackling climate change could be the greatest global health opportunity of the 21st century, but it will require cross-Department co-operation and Government action. What reassurance can the Secretary of State give my constituents that there will be cross-Department Government action on the issue and that there will be support for Government health programmes such as those explaining the benefits of walking and cycling as part of the lasting legacy of Bristol being the green capital of Europe?

Amber Rudd: I congratulate the hon. Lady on representing Europe's green capital city. I visited Bristol last year and saw the great initiatives that are being taken. I can reassure her that we are taking action to ensure that we remain at the forefront of green targets and campaigns. She should take comfort from the action that this Government are taking.

T8. [900534] **Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): Will the Secretary of State update the House on the progress being made towards developing fusion technology?

Amber Rudd: The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority carries out fusion research on behalf of the Government. Its scientists and engineers are working with partners around the globe to develop that potential source of clean energy. It is an example of an exciting potential source of clean energy, and we are very keen to use our scientist and funds to back innovation to take our targets forward.

T3. [900528] **Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): The MOZES—Meadows Ozone Energy Services—community energy co-operative was to be at the forefront of the clean energy revolution in my constituency, but the Government have not delivered on promised support for the project, despite the best efforts of Greg Barker when he was a Minister in the Department, and it is now at risk of collapse. Will the Secretary of State agree to meet me and representatives of the project to see if a solution can be found?

Amber Rudd: I will of course meet the hon. Lady. She is right: there are measures in place to support community energy groups like MOZES. Community energy groups can now apply for the rural and urban community

energy funds, which provide funding to support community electricity projects in England. I am pleased to say that the community energy sector is thriving, having attracted up to £29 million through community shares since 2012. I understand that the Government have provided financial support to MOZES and other community energy projects through the low carbon communities challenge. I recognise the particular issues that the hon. Lady may have regarding the community group, and I will meet her to take the matter further if necessary.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that a vital part of the debate about how to address climate change is our energy consumption? In that context, people in Twickenham are very aware of the three Rs—reduce, reuse, recycle—but we do not have smart meters everywhere. I do not see a smart meter here; I do not have one in my office. How is the roll-out of smart meters going?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is exactly right. It is incredibly important to reduce the amount of energy we use in order to be more efficient, pay lower bills, and reduce our carbon footprint. I can tell her that good progress has been made. The industry is making extensive preparations in meter procurement, in building and testing its systems, and in staff recruitment and training. Consumers are already benefiting from the roll-out. About 1.5 million meters are already operating under the programme, putting consumers in control, but the full roll-out is due to complete by 2020.

T4. [900529] **Edward Miliband** (Doncaster North) (Lab): The Secretary of State will be aware of the very serious pressures that Hatfield colliery in my constituency is under, partly as a result of the doubling of the carbon price floor earlier this year. May I urge her to work urgently with her colleagues at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to ensure that the mine can at least stay open until the summer of next year, as originally planned, because fairness to workers in industries affected is an essential part of a just low carbon transition?

Amber Rudd: The right hon. Gentleman is aware that the Government agreed in May to provide Hatfield Colliery Partnership with the £20 million support it needed to continue operating until its planned closure in August. To protect the taxpayer interest, the repayable grant is available for drawing down in tranches subject to performance. To date, the company has drawn down £12.6 million. My officials are in regular contact with Hatfield and are fully aware of the situation.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): During her visit to Bath prior to the election, the Secretary of State saw the sustainable energy plant, one of the UK's leading centres, which is providing hot water to thousands of homes. What plans do the Government have for a roll-out across the rest of the UK?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for that question and, indeed, for the visit, when we saw an excellent example of industry and finance coming together to promote different innovations in this area. I would be delighted to hear more about progress that the initiative has made, because the fascinating thing about this

whole area of energy use and development is that it is so fast-changing, and we need to make sure that we access all the innovations we can in order to deliver.

T5. [900530] **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): There is a huge opportunity to increase renewable energy production and save public money by installing solar panels on public buildings such as schools. This has the added benefit of providing an opportunity for children to learn about climate change and to see at first hand how it can be addressed. Given the up-front cost of installation at a time when school budgets are already under pressure, what additional assistance can the Secretary of State provide to make it easier for schools and communities to generate their own clean energy?

Amber Rudd: I share the hon. Lady's view. Having solar on schools is a fantastic way for young people to understand that energy can be collected from the sun, and they can link that closely to what they do in school. We in the Department are very keen to find ways to enable schools to do this. People will hear more from the Government very soon about the use of solar specifically on public buildings and on schools.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): Last year there was a considerable increase in the amount of electricity produced from nuclear globally, but that was not the case in the UK. Do Ministers agree that it is extremely important that we make progress not just on Hinkley Point C, but on Sizewell, Wylfa and other stations, if we are going to come close to meeting our climate change obligations?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is exactly right. About 19% of our electricity needs today come from old nuclear, much of which is due to shut down in the next decade, so it is vital that the Government set out a single, coherent energy policy that gets us to where we need to be: keeping the lights on, powering the economy with cleaner energy and making sure that people pay less for their bills. New nuclear is a vital part of the UK's energy mix and we are absolutely committed to bringing it forward.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): If it is right and just to subsidise by billions of pounds French multinational energy companies, is it not right and just to subsidise the British deep-mining coal industry and save British jobs?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is cross-House agreement that unabated coal cannot continue. It is extremely high carbon-using and dangerous to human health, and there is a long legacy of coal, which is not desirable. We have invested to enable coal mines to close down in an orderly fashion. Where possible, we are looking at alternative solutions and, of course, we are bringing forward carbon capture and storage as a long-term solution.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): Offshore wind has the potential to create many jobs in East Anglia and it is great news that two schemes—East Anglia One and Galloper—are now moving quickly forward. For the industry to realise its full potential, it is vital for it to

have a long-term economic plan beyond 2020. Will my right hon. Friend work with the industry to put that plan in place?

Amber Rudd: I share my hon. Friend's enthusiasm for offshore wind in terms both of generation in the UK and of the supply chain. It has fantastic potential for export. Yesterday I visited the offshore wind conference in London and it was buzzing with excitement and enthusiasm. I reassure him that we will provide that certainty in due course.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): May I also wish the Ministers well for the future in their new positions? What steps are they taking to ensure greater collaboration between the agri-food industry and the renewable energy sector, particularly on solar farms and panels and on diversification for farmers?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman is right that there needs to be increased collaboration between the agribusinesses and my Department to ensure that there is no further friction on solar. Solar can no longer access the renewable obligation, which was for the large-scale solar farms, and we will review the best way to ensure that solar is used in the most efficient manner, including on public buildings and schools.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): As the Member for Swansea East, where the tidal bay lagoon will be based, I know that there is a great desire to get the project up and running and delivering on what it promises. Will the Secretary of State give an indication of the timescales in announcing the conclusion of negotiations for the contract for difference?

Amber Rudd: I share in principle the hon. Lady's enthusiasm, but there is a lot of due diligence to do first, in order to reach any final numbers. There is also the issue of state aid and of cost, as has been raised by the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who is no longer in his place. Although we share in principle the hon. Lady's enthusiasm, it is at an early stage and we cannot give a timetable at the moment.

Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I have been saving the hon. Lady up and her time has arrived.

Mary Glindon: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Does the Secretary of State share my concern that Maersk, in receiving a substantial tax allowance from the Treasury for its Culzean project, will place very few jobs in the UK? Will she meet me and representatives of the industry from my region to discuss how her Department can ensure fair play for the UK industry before she makes a decision or approves the fuel development plan?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Lady has, of course, long run the oil and gas parliamentary group. I look forward to working closely with her to ensure that the oil and gas industry gets fair treatment and is supported as much as it can be, given the situation with the oil price. We need to make sure that we give it as much support as possible. I will certainly meet her to discuss it further.

Mr Speaker: Last but not least, I call Graham Jones.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): Fuel poverty in east Lancashire is linked to hard-to-treat cavities, and the Government's changes to the energy company obligation cancelled a lot of programmes. There is a large stock of terraced houses in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Kate Hollern). What policies are the Government going to introduce to deal with hard-to-treat cavities, after they effectively cancelled the previous programmes by reducing the subsidy?

Amber Rudd: I take issue with the hon. Gentleman's description of us cancelling the previous programme. In fact, what we did was get the balance right to ensure that bill payers were not overburdened by the costs of ECO, while continuing to focus ECO on the most fuel-poor. That element was not changed. We recognise that cavity wall insulation and cavity walls in general are an important part of making homes more fuel-efficient. ECO carries on until 2017 and we will be coming forward with more suggestions before then.

Child Poverty

10.35 am

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will answer a question about the state of child poverty.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Iain Duncan Smith): The latest low-income statistics, based on the “Households Below Average Income” report, are published today, covering April 2013 to March 2014. They show that the percentage of individuals and children in relative low income is at its lowest since the 1980s. The latest figures also show that the proportion of people in both relative and absolute low income remained flat on the year for children, working-age adults and disabled people. For pensioners, there is a statistical change, but the proportion in relative and absolute low income has increased slightly.

The figures that I have quoted are measured against the retail prices index. As the House will know, the RPI has become a discredited measurement anyway, as the consumer prices index is used everywhere else in the world. Therefore, I have also taken the liberty of putting into the publication what the UK Statistics Authority has also produced: the effects when measured against CPI, which is much more widely used. Those figures are even more positive than the others we have seen today. Today’s figures demonstrate that if we deal with the root causes of poverty—as I believe this Government are doing—then even under a measure of poverty that I have consistently over the last few years described as flawed, we can still have an impact.

Let me remind the House of some of the important things that my Government have done to help families on low income through tackling root causes. In education, we have introduced the pupil premium and tackled failing schools with the free schools programme. There is our commitment to supporting families through the groundbreaking troubled families programme, which is turning really difficult families around in difficult communities. There is our investment in early-years support and childcare and our unprecedented back-to-work programmes that have helped support hundreds of thousands of people, once written off, back into work. We have also raised the tax threshold, which means that those on the lowest incomes often do not pay any tax, or if they do, they pay a lower rate of tax and keep more of their own income. Finally, there is our fundamental belief that the most powerful way to change lives is by creating a welfare system that makes work pay, writes no one off and supports people into work.

That is what we have been doing and what the left has failed to understand—particularly the Labour party. If you deal with the root causes of poverty, of which work is a critical component, many of the symptoms start to sort themselves out. Today’s figures show, I believe, how important it is to both balance the books and continue reforming welfare.

Chris Leslie: This morning’s statistics show a depressing slowdown in the progress that we should be making as a country towards the abolition of child poverty in the UK. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the numbers

of children in absolute poverty have risen over his time in office? Will he confirm that last year, 19% of children were in absolute poverty, and that this year, 19% of children are still in absolute poverty? Will he also confirm that this year, 17% of children were in relative poverty, and that there are still 17% of children in relative poverty today?

Has the Secretary of State dropped the ambition to end child poverty by 2020? This is not a time for complacency. The Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission has warned that there is now “no realistic hope” of that target being met. The Prime Minister says that he will be

“judged on how we tackle poverty”,

so what is the Government’s plan to catch up on the lost ground? Will the Secretary of State pause and reflect on the fact that nearly one in five children in this country is still growing up without some of the basics? We are talking about the lives of children up and down this country—about whether their parents can put money in the meter to keep their home warm in winter, and about whether they have something or very little for their tea.

The Child Poverty Act 2010, which Ministers opposite supported, placed one of the most important duties on the Government: to ensure that in the 21st century, children do not grow up suffering deprivation or lacking the necessities that most of us take for granted. Yet progress has now slowed to a snail’s pace. Would it not be shocking if the Government departed from the consensus that children should be free from such disadvantage by the end of this decade? I therefore ask the Secretary of State to give a straight answer to the House today: does he remain committed to the Child Poverty Act or not?

Do not the Government need a serious strategy to address low pay and boost productivity? They should be providing incentives for a living wage and new opportunities for high-quality skills, as a more positive route out of poverty. But what does this Secretary of State do when faced with an end to the progress in reducing child poverty? He threatens to cut £5 billion from the tax credits of children, which would mean 3.7 million working families losing, on average, £1,400 a year. That will not address child poverty; it will add to it.

Does the Secretary of State realise that it is parents who are already working who would be hit by such a decision? How does it help to make work pay to pull the rug from underneath them in that way? Why is he trying to kid people into thinking that such a hit to incomes can be easily replaced? Unless he is planning a rise of 25% in the minimum wage, that will not happen.

Labour lifted more than 1 million children out of relative poverty and more than 2 million children out of absolute poverty. On the Secretary of State’s watch, progress has stalled. Is it true that, instead of developing policies to tackle low pay, the Government, faced with statistics that show such poor progress, will try to erase the figure altogether, redefine the measure and pretend that the problem has gone away? Is he really going to propose that statistical redefinition? The Conservative party manifesto promised that they would “work to eliminate child poverty and introduce better measures to drive real change”.

Nobody realised that meant that they would just change the measure. Instead of shifting the goalposts when things get uncomfortable, Ministers should take responsibility and tackle low pay, not attack the low-paid.

Mr Duncan Smith: The Opposition, and particularly the hon. Gentleman, have scored a massive own goal today. They tabled the urgent question before the statistics came out, so certain were they and their friends on the left that the statistics would show a massive rise. They were wrong. They cannot accept that our welfare reforms, which they never made in their time, are working.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that I am committed to the purpose of getting people out of poverty and ending the process of families being in poverty. Most of what I have done over the past 10 years has been dedicated to doing that. The trouble with the Labour party is that it is wedded to this income measure. Its whole policy was skewed as a direct result of that.

Our reforms have tackled the root causes of poverty. Employment is up by over 2 million since 2010. I remember the hon. Gentleman saying that employment would fall as a direct result of our changes. The level and rate of children in workless households is at a record low. The proportion of households in social housing that are in work is the highest it has ever been since records began. The rate and level of children in workless households is also at a record low. That is tackling the root causes of poverty.

The truth is that the Opposition have egg all over their face today. I find the hon. Gentleman's comments close to rank hypocrisy, because they comprehensively failed to meet their own targets, despite dumping huge sums of money into the welfare system. They did nothing to transform people's lives. They missed their own target to halve child poverty by 2010. Under the Labour Government, in-work poverty rose by 20%, even though they ploughed money into the welfare system, increasing welfare spending by 60%. Let me remind the Opposition how they did that. Tax credit spending rocketed in the years before each election. In 2003-04 it rose by 60%, and in 2004-05 it rose by 7.2%. Then, strangely, between elections it went flat and even fell slightly. Then just before the 2010 election, it rose by 14.4% and then 8.5%.

The reality is that we set out in our manifesto that we need to look at new measures of child poverty. Looking at life chances is the right way to do it, to get to the root causes of why people get into poverty. The current measures led the last Labour Government to a benefit system that gave families an extra pound here or there just to push them above the poverty line but did nothing to transform their lives.

Let me give an example of a family who are officially in poverty under those measures, with parents who have huge drug problems. When they go over the line, according to the measurement, they are not in poverty, but because the parents are likely to spend all their money on drugs, the children do not get fed. The reality is that the measurement is not of that family's life chances but only of the income transfer.

At the beginning of the last Parliament, I started a debate about whether the current measures were a sensible way of directing Government efforts towards changing people's lives. We undertook a consultation in 2012 and 2013 that received a wide range of responses, with a broad consensus that the current measures did not recognise the range of actions needed to improve children's life chances. As a result, the Government have a clear manifesto commitment on child poverty—we

will work to eliminate it and introduce better measures to drive real change in children's lives by getting to the root causes.

I believe that we have a proud record of tackling the problem. We have raised the minimum wage faster and further than the last Government did and focused on supporting families, improving educational attainment, supporting people into work and allowing people to keep more of what they earn. Today's figures are a vindication of our approach, and as the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), whom I see in his place, said this morning:

"Most of the electorate...find the definition of poverty...as defined by academics and politicians to be utterly bewildering."

I have always believed passionately in a welfare system focused on changing lives. Today shows that not only has Labour lost the election, it has lost the argument. No wonder it is referred to as the welfare party. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. There has been a very considerable cacophony in the Chamber. I can advise the House that at least three dozen colleagues are seeking to catch my eye on this important matter. I want to try to accommodate the level of interest, but we have business questions to follow and then a statement by the Secretary of State for Transport, before we embark on a significantly subscribed debate following the Anderson report, so there is a premium on brevity from both Back and Front Benchers. I hope that we will be given a tutorial in that by Sir Oliver Heald.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): I start by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the best figures in his and my time in the House.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is sad to see Labour concentrating on statistics and benefits when the central insight that the Government have had, which is working, is that this is all about work, education and tackling barriers to employment?

Mr Duncan Smith: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right. We are determined to bring about life change to improve people's lives in the poorest communities. I made the point that more households in social housing are in work than ever before, and that is life change. They are taking control of their lives.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): May I congratulate the Secretary of State on the public relations success of winding up the media with the idea that these would be the worst figures ever published? Might that ingenuity now be applied to developing indices on life chances? What taxpayers are interested in is whether we can prevent poor children from becoming poor adults. Might he ask the Select Committee on Work and Pensions to undertake that inquiry and report to the House and then to his Social Justice Committee, so that the Government might act on it before the year is out?

Mr Duncan Smith: May I just correct the right hon. Gentleman on one small fact? I have not spent my time winding up the media. With respect, I think he needs to look at those on his Front Bench, and some of their friends, who have spent the whole time winding up the media.

[Mr Duncan Smith]

I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his new post. He knows very well that the door is open, and I am happy to sit down and discuss that proposition, and, more importantly, what I believe should be in the measures.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Making sure that work pays is vital to lifting families out of poverty. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the effective roll-out of universal credit is critical to achieving the goal of reducing poverty?

Mr Duncan Smith: I welcome my hon. Friend to her place. Yes, universal credit will reduce poverty, because it makes every hour of work pay. That means that going into work is no longer a tough decision: it becomes an easier decision and progressing into full-time work becomes much easier.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): It is a sad day for all of us when we come to this Chamber and hear that the Conservative Government wish to redefine child poverty. It takes me back to what we faced under the Thatcher Government at the end of the '70s and the beginning of the '80s, when they fiddled and changed the unemployment statistics. History is repeating itself. The Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland has said that on the basis of the £12 billion of cuts that are to come between now and 2020, an additional 100,000 children in Scotland will be pushed into poverty. It is an utter, shameful disgrace that that is happening today in a civilised society and wealthy country.

I see from the figures released for Scotland that 210,000 children in Scotland are living in relative poverty after housing costs—22% of children in the country of Scotland. After housing costs, 140,000 children are living in combined low income and material deprivation—an increase of more than 20,000 in the past year. That is the reality of what the previous Government's economic agenda has done to Scotland, and we know there is more to come if the right hon. Gentleman and his Government get their way. [Interruption.] Because of the impact of the Government's policy in Scotland— [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. Let me explain for the benefit of the House, because some people do not have long enough memories, that when the Liberal Democrats were the third party, in respect of urgent questions they received an allocation of time comparable to that of the person who tabled the question. Of course, the hon. Gentleman will wish to try to preserve the attention of the House, but the hon. Gentleman is enjoying the entitlement only that was previously accorded to third parties. I hope he will therefore be accorded appropriate courtesy.

Ian Blackford: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

As I was saying, the Scottish Government are having to intervene. We have funded poverty action campaigns in Scotland, with an additional £300 million, against the bedroom tax and other measures to try to alleviate some of the problems this Government are causing for our people. Is it not a disgrace that in my own constituency, for example, the biggest increase in food bank use has

come from those who are in work? That is the reality of this Government's policies and that is why, in the election campaign, the Scottish National party campaigned for a £2 increase in the minimum wage over the lifetime of this Parliament and the adoption of the living wage. It is unacceptable that anyone in this country should be living in poverty. Far too many families in Scotland, and throughout the UK, are having to make the choice of whether to heat their home or feed their children. That is morally unacceptable.

We believe the best way to deal with poverty is to have an integration of tax and benefits, leading to a ladder that would take people out of poverty, not the stigmatisation we see from this Government which punishes the poor in our society. I ask—

Mr Speaker: Order. When I am on my feet, the hon. Gentleman resumes his seat—that is the situation. I am trying to be helpful to the hon. Gentleman, but I fear that subtlety did not quite work. When I see a process of constant page turning, that is a source of anxiety to the Chair. I simply say to the hon. Gentleman that the thrust of the matter has to be a series of questions. Once we get beyond that to a series of comments or rhetorical questions, I feel that the hon. Gentleman, in the interests of the House and in the interests of himself, can appropriately resume his seat. We are very grateful to him.

Mr Duncan Smith: I had been looking at those sheets of paper and assumed there was a bit more to come! I welcome the hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) to his post. I agree that there is always more to be done. We want to eradicate poverty and child poverty. I think the figures show that we have made good progress, but I am not complacent.

The Scottish nationalists have campaigned, obviously, for independence, but they have many of the levers in their hands, and if the hon. Gentleman complains about poverty and child poverty in Scotland, my question would be, to what degree have the Scottish Government acted to make some of the changes that he wants? He made a couple of points, but my point would be that employment in Scotland is at a record high, which has not been the case in the past after recession. The work that we have done to get people back into work, including those in workless households and in social housing, has been a huge success. It is worth reminding the hon. Gentleman that across the board in the UK, some 800,000 fewer people are in relatively low income before housing costs, and 300,000 fewer children are in relatively low-income households.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about reforming the benefit system so that it has a connection with the tax system; I can tell him that universal credit is exactly what he is hoping for. So far, we have had a bit of resistance from his Government. I hope he will now go back and say, "Let's go for this full time."

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that working to support families to prevent family breakdown is critical to improving children's life chances, especially as family breakdown hits the poorest hardest? Does he also agree that Labour singularly failed to address that when they were in government?

Mr Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend is doughty campaigner for families and for assisting families to stay together. Many of our reforms are helping families to stay together. Our reforms to the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission—the Child Support Agency, as it was often known in the past—hugely offers families the chance to sort their problems out before they go through the system. We are now seeing record numbers of those making their own balanced arrangements. We have put extra money—millions of pounds—into counselling for families on the verge of break-up, and we believe that that is helping them. The Troubled Families programme is aimed at stabilising families.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): Poverty in inner London after housing costs is the highest in the country, at a scandalous 33%. Does the Secretary of State share my disappointment that, while we all believe that work should pay and is the best route out of poverty for many, the numbers on low pay in London have risen for the fourth year in a row and a third of a million more Londoners are now on low pay than in 2010? Can he reassure me that the way to tackle low pay is not to cut tax credits?

Mr Duncan Smith: What the figures show is that, as I know as a London MP, parts of London have particular and deep-rooted problems. We want to address those particular problems. First of all, it is true that people are better off in work than they would be out of work, because without work they would have no chance of raising their income. As I made clear on Monday, we also want companies to start paying people a proper wage. I have campaigned endlessly to raise the minimum wage. We have raised it, and the Government are committed to raising it further. I have said to companies, “It is time now that you pay more money to your employees, to rate them as they should be for the work that they have done.”

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the target-based culture of the left actually encourages dependency and makes people stay in poverty because that is the right incentive for them, and that his policies are offering a new opportunity, which is transforming people’s lives? He deserves the full support of the House and the country.

Mr Duncan Smith: I thank my hon. Friend, who makes a critical point. If we set up a target process that deals with only one aspect of a symptom, we will not get to the root causes. We have set out to get to those families who are the furthest away from employment, and move them into independence through employment. The figures I have given on the number of people in social housing now back in work and those on the lowest incomes now back in work are dramatic. They are better than any other records previously established.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The Secretary of State has been in his post for five years. In that time, the number of households living in absolute poverty has gone up by 2 million and the number of children doing so has gone up by half a million. Is not ditching the relative poverty measure and moving to focus on absolute poverty a complete own goal?

Mr Duncan Smith: Let me remind the hon. Lady of the statistics. There are 800,000 fewer people on relative low income, 300,000 fewer children on relative low income, 100,000 fewer pensioners on relative low income, 670,000 fewer workless households, and 390,000 fewer children living in workless households. Those are the real statistics. Let me make this point to the hon. Lady: it is far better for us to look at the real life chances of families that were left behind by Labour. Those families were trapped in poverty because they could not change their lives, but we are changing them.

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the single best way out of poverty is to have a job, and is he pleased that the number of children in workless households is at a record low under this Government?

Mr Duncan Smith: I welcome my hon. Friend to the House, and I agree with what he has said. Let me tell him about a couple of record lows. The number of workless households has fallen by more than 670,000 since 2010 and there are 50,000 fewer households in which no one has ever worked. Those are people who were left behind by the Labour Government.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State agree that, given the limited powers of the Scottish Government, Scottish children cannot be protected from the extreme breadth and extent of the attacks made on the welfare system by successive Conservative Governments?

Mr Duncan Smith: I welcome the hon. Lady to the House, but she cannot have it both ways. The Scottish Government demanded and were given extra powers relating to, for instance, taxation. They cannot turn around and say, “It is not our fault that we cannot change anything in Scotland.” If SNP Members want those powers, they cannot come to the House of Commons and complain because they cannot change anything in Scotland.

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con): Poverty levels are at their lowest since the mid-1980s. That is good news, and it shows that work actually does pay, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the current poverty measure is out of date, and that we need a measure that highlights the root causes of poverty?

Mr Duncan Smith: As the House will know, we began a debate about that back in 2011, and engaged in a full consultation not long before the last election. I have thought for some time that we need a better way of measuring what happens to families who are trapped at the lowest income levels and do not seem to be able to change their lives. The current measures are inadequate and give no indication of how that problem can be resolved. Life change is the key, and we need to be able to measure the way in which we can bring it about.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Unemployment in Wales has clearly fallen, but a third of the children in Wales—200,000 children—are living in absolute poverty. What plans has the Secretary of State to tackle zero-hours contracts, insecurity at work and low pay, and does he think that cuts in child tax credit will improve the present situation dramatically?

Mr Duncan Smith: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, Wales has historically experienced deep-rooted problems. Some of its communities have often found themselves literally, physically, distanced from developments in other parts of Wales. However, we are working hard to ensure, through transport links, that people can travel to work more quickly, and can travel further to find jobs. As the right hon. Gentleman said, employment in Wales has improved, which it was not doing previously. We are working hard, but I should be happy to talk to him about any specific details, because I am determined to help Wales to improve even more than it has already.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that ensuring that all children are given a high-quality education and an opportunity to acquire vital skills is critical to enabling those who are growing up in low-income households to escape from welfare dependency and find well-paid jobs?

Mr Duncan Smith: Indeed I do. My hon. Friend—whom I welcome to the House—is exactly right. We must work harder to ensure that the circumstances of families with deep-rooted and deep-seated problems are turned around, and that they can obtain work and become independent, rather than depending on what the Government do.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): When the Secretary of State received the confidential Government assessment marked “sensitive”, which warned him that reducing the benefit cap could plunge up to 40,000 more children into poverty, did he stop to think about the consequences, or is he sticking to his insulting idea that people want to be on benefits, despite the reality that most people want to work but the decently paid work they need simply is not there?

Mr Duncan Smith: I have never believed that people want to be on benefits; I actually believe the vast majority of people on benefits want to do something about that and change their lives. Everything I do is about trying to do that: every policy we have is aimed at getting the economy right and helping people get back into work.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): The Secretary of State is right to stress that child poverty is a problem not just of income, but many families on low income need support—to make them work-ready, or those with mental health problems—and there are still many tens of thousands of children in this country with attachment problems. Although he rightly mentions the success of the Troubled Families programme, does he agree that we also need a pre-Troubled Families programme to tackle inherited problems at source, often involving attachment disorder?

Mr Duncan Smith: I recognise and pay tribute to the huge work that my hon. Friend has done, and continues to do, to try to transform the lives of the most troubled families. The Troubled Families programme was a success but we are now extending it, and within that extension there is scope to do exactly what he wants to do.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State agree that all of us who want every child in our country to have a full and happy life

do get worried about not just the issues in this morning’s debate, but the fact that responsibility for children is spread over so many Departments? There is no longer enough focus on children in a holistic sense. Will he lead the Government in doing something quite quickly about that?

Mr Duncan Smith: The hon. Gentleman is right—I often find myself in agreement with him. I am now tasked with chairing the Social Justice Cabinet Committee, the purpose of which is to bring together all work on families and children and to ensure that we have a concerted, single approach to it. But he is absolutely right that that is half the problem in government.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that today’s statistics, showing that the percentage of children in relative low income is at its lowest level since the 1980s, are proof that this Government’s policy is working not just in that area, but in terms of social justice as a whole?

Mr Duncan Smith: I believe that is the case, but there is hugely more to do. I do not for a moment stand here today and say, “It is all brilliantly successful”—quite the contrary. This is a very difficult area, but we are dealing with and trying to turn around some of the most troubled and difficult families. My hon. Friend is right, but we have more to do, and that is my purpose and why I am here.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): If the situation has, according to the Secretary of State, improved substantially, why are there so many food banks—a far larger number than previously? Is it not quite clear that some Tory Members have no idea at all about the amount of poverty that exists—in many cases in their own constituencies?

Mr Duncan Smith: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. Most of my colleagues are hugely involved in food banks and help them. I welcome food banks: I welcome decent people in society trying to help others who may, for various reasons, have fallen into difficulty. I do not accept that the single cause of that is welfare reform—quite the contrary. Food bank usage has been rising over a period. It was never part of the British system, but in Germany, where we can argue that their welfare payments are higher, 1.5 million people a week use food banks—much more than people do here.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State’s commitment to tackling the root causes of poverty, but one big issue for low-income families is their level of debt. What more can the Government do to help families in that situation?

Mr Duncan Smith: Problem debt is a huge issue. With universal credit, through “Universal Support—delivered locally”, we are working with local authorities so that if people have a debt problem, we will continue to pay their rent but insist that, working with the council, they are put on debt programmes to help them manage their money and become independent. If they are in debt, they will not sustain themselves through work. That is the key thing to change; my hon. Friend is right.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): Child poverty in St Helens is higher than the national average. Does the right hon. Gentleman think that taking in-work benefits away from working families would increase or decrease the level of child poverty in my constituency?

Mr Duncan Smith: Our purpose is to support people as they go into work and progress into full-time work—that is what universal credit is all about. I believe that what the hon. Gentleman will see as we complete its roll-out is that more families will benefit, to the degree of taking control of their lives and having that independence of a pay packet.

Paul Maynard (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): Does the Secretary of State share my desire to focus on those children in persistent poverty—those in that situation for three years out of four—many of whom are, sadly, in my constituency and face multiple disadvantages within their family? Does he agree that they were a specific group wholly ignored by the previous Labour Government's anti-poverty strategy?

Mr Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend has campaigned hard on this and he is right; one problem with setting a narrow measure such as this and then being governed by it is that it is all about rotating people at the top of the relative poverty scale and not actually dealing with the deepest and deep-set problems. Dealing with those is what our purpose must be as we go forward to look at new measures.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Blue-collar Conservatism did not last long. Instead of hitting hard-working families with billions of pounds-worth of cuts, driving up child poverty, why does the Secretary of State not instead shift the burden of deficit reduction to the very wealthy and implement sound Liberal Democrat policies, such as extending free school meals and childcare?

Mr Duncan Smith: I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his position. I simply remind him that for five years he was part of what we were doing, so I hope that he would welcome today's figures. I am sure that he has a new set of policies and I am happy to look at what he has come up with.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Before the Secretary of State was in his post, I encountered a benefit culture in my constituency surgeries; people in families where nobody had ever worked were coming to my surgeries. Gradually, over time, that has shifted, with more and more people getting jobs. Is that not the root success story: if we can get people into work, we break the benefit culture?

Mr Duncan Smith: That is exactly the point. It is work that takes people out of poverty. We must support those who are furthest away and have the greatest difficulty, but we want the rest of them to move into work. We want the barriers, the debt problems and all those issues to be removed and we want to get them into work. We want to improve their kids' education and improve their life chances. My hon. Friend is spot on.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): A failure to increase child benefit and child tax credit in line with the cost of living means that more

than one in five families struggle to provide the basics for their children. Given that unacceptable situation, does the Secretary of State support the End Child Poverty campaign calling on the Government to give children's benefits the same triple lock protection as the state pension?

Mr Duncan Smith: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his post. May I say that the latest figures from Scotland show a fall of 40,000 in the number in relative poverty between 2012-13 and 2013-14? Our position is to help the worst-off, to support pensioners through the triple lock and to get all of them into a sustained life of good income.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): This week, I attended the launch of Scope's Extra Costs Commission, which is looking at the barriers faced by disabled people in entering the workplace. May I urge my right hon. Friend to do all he can to continue the Government's strategy to ensure that more disabled people are able to enter the workplace?

Mr Duncan Smith: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. It is worth reminding hon. Members that, through our Disability Confident programme and the support we are putting in to get more people with disabilities back into work, there are now more people with disabilities in work than ever before. That is still not good enough—the line is still too far below the line for others in work. We want to halve that gap by the end of this Parliament.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State can use any definition he likes, but the root cause of child poverty in my area is the fact that a quarter of all the full-time jobs pay less than the living wage. What is this Government's strategy on low pay and in-work poverty?

Mr Duncan Smith: One of the greatest causes of difficulties for those families was the economy crashing and people losing their jobs. It is my Government who have raised the minimum wage faster and higher. Is it high enough? No, but we are committed to raising it again in October, and we want to drive it further up. I have made it clear that employers should be paying that living wage, as the Prime Minister has said. The hon. Gentleman will have to watch this space.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we want to eradicate poverty and I even have it in my constituency of Twickenham? *[Interruption.]* I have seen poverty in different parts of the world, but I have not seen there the isolation of families who are relatively poor in my area. May I applaud the continuing plans for free childcare for two-year-olds? That is where I have seen part of the eradication of poverty—families coming together and being part of the community in Twickenham.

Mr Duncan Smith: May I welcome my hon. Friend to her post? Opposition Members were making noise while she was speaking, but they should recognise that her back story is remarkable: the work she has done to help communities and families. I welcome her to the House. She is absolutely right. Getting those families who have educational difficulties and who are isolated from the

[Mr Duncan Smith]

community back into the community, and supported and helped back into work is absolutely key. She is right on the money.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): With 48% of children in Orchard Park and Greenwood ward in my constituency living in poverty, does the Secretary of State think that removing the in-work benefits will increase or reduce that number?

Mr Duncan Smith: The best thing we can do for those families is provide the support programmes that I have talked about. Those programmes are about helping those families get a better education, be more stable and get into work. Being in work and progressing in work is the greatest solution to poverty in the hon. Lady's area, as it is in mine.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Clearly, one triumph of the coalition Government was the troubled families initiative, which concentrated resources on those most in need. Will my right hon. Friend describe the impact there has been on the child poverty aspects of those families who have been assisted?

Mr Duncan Smith: The impact has been enormous. We dealt with 120,000 families. Against all the target measures, including being in work and educational attainment, more than 105,000 of them had their lives turned around by February 2015. We will extend that programme to incorporate more troubled families.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): For the avoidance of doubt, I should like to ask the Secretary of State a question about people who are already in work. Will he tell me whether cutting tax credits for people in work will help or harm the poorest children?

Mr Duncan Smith: Quite simply, the view is that we need to support people in work to ensure that they have the support that is necessary and that they progress in work. I make a simple point that I have made already in this House, which is that it is also the responsibility of companies to pay people a decent wage, and not to rely solely on Government to top up those incomes. We will continue to back those families, and universal credit will make that even more relevant with a greater level of support.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): What is the impact of the Government's policy of taking low-income families out of tax altogether and how many families directly benefit from that approach?

Mr Duncan Smith: We have taken millions of people out of tax altogether, which has dramatically improved their incomes. Something like 25 million people have seen their tax bill reduce directly. For those who have a limited amount of income, this is a huge change and a huge support. That is not ever recognised by the Opposition, who basically raised taxes rather than lowered them.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): The Secretary of State will have no doubt read "The Spirit Level", which shows that social ills correlate strongly with

income inequality, crime, mental illness, infant mortality and much more besides. At the worst end, there is the USA, and at the best end, the Scandinavian countries. These social ills cost billions to the public purse. We continually languish close to the USA end, rather than the Scandinavian end. Does that not make a powerful case for dramatically reducing income inequality and thus reducing child poverty?

Mr Duncan Smith: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. The purpose is to get income inequality down, and it actually fell over the last Parliament. The way to do that is to improve the numbers going into work, to get them to go further and into full-time work. Universal credit helps that enormously.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I invite the Secretary of State to come to Taunton and to Halcon, where he will see how the Government's long-term strategy to address the root causes of poverty is working. Halcon is among the 4% most deprived parts of the country and has four generations of unemployed families. The One team's project with police, education and everybody working together is working, so may I urge him to come and have a look?

Mr Duncan Smith: I welcome my hon. Friend to this place. I absolutely will—it would not take much to get me out to Taunton. As my right hon. Friend the Chief Whip is sitting next to me, I hope that he will be tolerant when my hon. Friend asks me and I ask for a slip.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am going to try to accommodate the remaining interested colleagues, but they need to be extremely brief. I know that the Secretary of State will follow suit.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): The Secretary of State will find support on the Labour Benches if he champions a higher minimum wage and asks employers to pay the living wage. Is it not the case, however, that getting every employer to pay the living wage will take considerable time, whereas his Government are looking to cut tax credits for people who are in work and on poverty pay overnight?

Mr Duncan Smith: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman says that, because I genuinely believe that we should expect British employers to pay a decent wage to the people they employ, and I am engaged in that process. I do not think that he is right, as I think it will take a much shorter time to get employers to face up to their responsibilities, but as he has offered his support I am very happy to talk about it.

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for taking time to visit Nelson job centre with me. In Pendle, we have some fantastic local organisations, such as branches of Christians Against Poverty, the local citizens advice bureau, Colne Open Door and many others, running job clubs. What is his Department doing to work with such organisations and charities to help families out of poverty?

Mr Duncan Smith: Job centres have been given the freedom of the flexible support fund, so they have money to help to support some of these organisations. We now do a lot of work with debt counselling, and we use both local and national debt counsellors.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): London has some of the highest levels of child poverty in the country. Given that the Secretary of State's welfare cuts will be particularly harsh for working Londoners because of our high housing costs, why is he not at least calling for the implementation of the London living wage?

Mr Duncan Smith: I have done. I insisted that all the contractors in my Department pay a London living wage and the Department for Work and Pensions pays a London living wage. We showed that we did not lose any jobs, that efficiency improved, and that people were happier and did a better job. I agree with the hon. Lady. I am determined that others should learn from that and recognise that we need to pay people a decent wage for the job that they do.

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): In Kingswood, unemployment is down from 1,320 in May 2010 to 609 today, a fall of 54%. Does my right hon. Friend welcome this and agree with me that the most important action that can be taken to reduce child poverty is to reduce long-term unemployment, ultimately ending long-term welfare dependency?

Mr Duncan Smith: I agree with my hon. Friend. Long-term unemployment is falling and we are getting to the root causes of the problem. That will continue and is the key to helping people out of poverty.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): With the approaching long school summer holidays, this is a particularly difficult time for children living in food poverty, as they do not have access to free school meals or breakfast clubs. What is the Department going to do to tackle that issue?

Mr Duncan Smith: That is not directly in my Department, but I am very happy to talk about any specific issues and problems if the hon. Lady wants to come and see me. Through my Social Justice Cabinet Committee, we can drive to ensure that the support is available for those who need it.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands), in which he perhaps unintentionally highlighted some of the successes of the Scottish Government in using their limited powers to mitigate the worst impacts of his Government's cuts. Does the Secretary of State not agree that the Government could immediately stop making child poverty worse by announcing an immediate end to any benefit sanction against families with young children?

Mr Duncan Smith: Actually, it is improving. The last bit of the hon. Gentleman's question was slightly lost, but I think I heard that he was raising sanctions.

Peter Grant: On families with children.

Mr Duncan Smith: Right. If we do sanction someone, the processes before that happens are exhaustive—*[Interruption.]* Oh yes they are. People continue to be supported through all the child support mechanisms, including child benefit, and the household support that is available as well.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): In my constituency, 31% of the children—more than 6,000 children—are born into poverty, and the parents of 36% of them earn less than the living wage. I have already had people who are working arrive at my surgeries in tears, terrified about what will happen when the Government chop tax credits. What would the Secretary of State like me to tell my constituents?

Mr Duncan Smith: I should tell them that they should wait, as should the hon. Lady, to see what we bring forward. They may be surprised.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Has the Secretary of State considered calls for the establishment of a child poverty prevention board or council, as happens elsewhere, so that we can focus all our energies on the things that really make a difference and avoid getting trapped in a sterile debate about how we measure, rather than how we reduce, poverty?

Mr Duncan Smith: That is an interesting question. I agree that it is important to get beyond this sterile debate. I want to bring to the House what I consider to be the right measures, and then I will be happy to discuss options. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) has come up with an idea, and I am happy to discuss that as well.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I have to say I found the Secretary of State's tone absolutely breathtaking. Given that two thirds of children living in poverty are from working families, will he answer the question—this is the sixth time of asking—what assessment have his Government undertaken of the proposed cuts in tax credits and how they will affect child poverty levels?

Mr Duncan Smith: We have got more people back into work and more people progressing through work, and more people are better off. They are better off in work than they are out of work—a fact that the hon. Lady seems to miss completely. The tax changes and the reductions in tax on take-home pay mean that people are actually better off. The answer to her question is simple: we will continue to support people who need that support through getting into work and beyond. That is the purpose of universal credit, she should stand assured.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Today's households below average income survey report, on page 45, makes it quite clear that the percentage of children in relative income poverty has been flatlining since 2011-12, so it is not the policies of either this or the previous coalition Government that have reduced poverty; it is the legacy of the previous Labour Governments. Does the Secretary of State agree?

Mr Duncan Smith: Okay, that is an interesting argument. I simply say that, if the hon. Lady wants to claim that, she can also claim the disaster of the crashed economy that the Labour party delivered, putting millions of people out of work.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Following his damascene conversion on the road to a Glasgow housing estate, the Secretary of State pledged that there would be no going back on Labour's target to end child poverty. With nearly 9,000 children in poverty in Erdington, the great majority in working households, what does he have to say to the working mums I met in the Erdington food bank, who despair at what now looms for them in the next stages? To use the grotesque words of the Chancellor, these are strivers, not shirkers, but his Government are about to make them and children poorer.

Mr Duncan Smith: I hope the hon. Gentleman also tells them that his Government failed to halve child poverty against their target. Before we get another lecture about child poverty from that lot over there, I simply say to them that their economic mess—crashing the economy and putting millions out of work—did more damage to his constituents than anything else. We are here to help them and get them back into work.

Business of the House

11.29 am

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

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): Before I do, it may be appropriate—I hope this view is shared by Members in all parts of the House—for us to express our solidarity with and good will towards the Parliament in Kabul, after the dreadful terrorist attack there this week. We express all our sympathies for those affected. It is a matter of great dismay to me when a democratically elected Parliament is a target in this way.

The business for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 29 JUNE—Consideration in Committee of the Scotland Bill (day 2).

TUESDAY 30 JUNE—Consideration in Committee of the Scotland Bill (day 3).

WEDNESDAY 1 JULY—Opposition day (4th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 2 JULY—General debate on Britain and international security.

FRIDAY 3 JULY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 6 July will include:

MONDAY 6 JULY—Conclusion of consideration in Committee of the Scotland Bill.

TUESDAY 7 JULY—Opposition day (5th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 8 JULY—My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will deliver his Budget statement.

THURSDAY 9 JULY—Continuation of the Budget debate.

FRIDAY 10 JULY—The House will not be sitting.

Ms Eagle: May I associate myself with the Leader of the House's commiserations and good thoughts for those caught up in the awful events in the Parliament in Kabul?

There is just over a year and a half until the BBC's charter runs out, but the Government still have not set out a timetable or plan for its renewal. After the Prime Minister's election threat to close down the BBC, and given that the last charter renewal process began three years before the charter expired, could the Leader of the House say when and how the House will be kept informed of progress on this important issue?

On Tuesday, the Equality and Human Rights Commission revealed that a staggering 88% of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people had experienced some form of hate crime, and 35,000 such cases go unreported every year. As I dust off my pink Stetson, ready to join the LGBT community at Pride, does the Leader of the House agree that we need to redouble our efforts to root out prejudice and discrimination at home and abroad? Does he agree that the Foreign Secretary's decision to ban the Pride flag from being flown at UK embassies around the world sends exactly the wrong signal?

Later today, EU leaders will meet in Brussels. The Prime Minister has briefed that the meeting is all about his renegotiation, but I read this morning that one senior EU diplomat has said that discussion on the

subject would be “cursory”, so I thought I would take a look at the agenda. I can see items on migration, terrorism, jobs, growth and competitiveness. Squeezed in just before the end, above the adoption of the minutes of the last meeting, is our Prime Minister. His Back Benchers have got him on the run, and his tour of European capitals has been an object lesson in how to lose friends and alienate people. One Slovak official said:

“He is not the brightest spark in terms of getting what he wants...His approach is making him irrelevant”.

But not to worry: the Prime Minister has come up with a cunning plan. Instead of successful renegotiation, he has apparently decided to rebrand our membership of the EU by calling us associate members. Given that the right hon. Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox) has indicated that Eurosceptics, such as the Leader of the House, will resign before the referendum, perhaps the Prime Minister should consider offering his Cabinet associate membership to hold his Government together.

This Government really do say one thing and do another. Just last year, they promised more disabled people would be in work. Now we know that fewer than one in 10 disabled people on the Work programme have actually found a job. Before the election, the Government claimed they had exceeded their target for selling off Government land for house building, but now we know that they were counting land sold off from 1997. On Monday, the Prime Minister claimed he had saved £1.2 billion through the troubled families programme, but within minutes the National Institute of Economic and Social Research had dismissed his comments as “pure, unadulterated fiction”, so may we have a debate in Government time on the Tory parallel universe where a person can say something and do the complete opposite, and hope nobody will notice?

It is three months since the right hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) ceased being Chief Whip. I would be missing him, if he had ever bothered turning up, so I thought I would take a look at what he has been up to in the Ministry of Justice. After a period of uncharacteristic silence, he has suddenly sprung to life and issued a detailed guide on grammar for his civil servants. His rules include never using the word “impact” and avoiding “anything too pompous”. I wonder who on earth he has in mind, Mr Speaker. Over at his old Department, I notice that the Secretary of State for Education has also been tackling the big issues. She has appointed a new low level bad behaviour tsar, presumably to help deal with Tory Eurosceptics.

Finally, I feel compelled to mention the developing drama in the Liberal Democrat leadership race. Only the Liberal Democrats could manage to have a split when they have eight MPs. This week the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) had to apologise after his activists were caught discrediting his rival by calling round the party’s entire membership, which cannot have taken very long, although he earned the endorsement of boxer Frank Bruno, which means that at least he has one big hitter.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady began with a question about the BBC. The next 18 months will be an important period in deciding how the future of the BBC will be shaped. We have a new Secretary of State—a very welcome appointment—who has been in post only a

few weeks. He has already started work on this important issue and the House will be updated in due course about progress on that front.

On hate crime, I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady. It is not simply a matter of those in the LGBT community; in other parts of society hate crime is wholly unacceptable in whatever form—in relation to sex, colour, creed or whatever. All of us in the House should deprecate it and we should always seek to ensure that our authorities deal with it in the appropriate way. I hear the hon. Lady’s comments about flags. She will no doubt raise that question also with the Foreign Secretary. There are many countries around the world which need to change their approach to gay rights and I very much hope they will do so.

On Europe, let us be clear. What I hope and believe will come out of the European summit is a historic agreement with our European partners to renegotiate our membership of the European Union. That is a major step forward. I listen with interest to the Labour party, which seems to waver in the wind on this issue. It opposed a referendum; now it supports a referendum. It seems to support some form of renegotiation, but it does not appear to believe that any change is necessary to our relationship with the European Union. When Labour Members have a clear policy and a clear view on what our relationship should be, perhaps we will start to listen to them and take them seriously, but right now, we will not do so.

On the employment front, I am sorry to tell the hon. Lady that the Work programme has been a great success. It has led to a massive drop in the number of long-term unemployed in this country. This Government have, and the coalition Government as well had, a fantastic record on employment. We have seen a huge increase in the number of people in work to record levels. We have seen a massive drop in unemployment and a very welcome increase in the number of disabled people in work.

The hon. Lady mentioned guidelines issued by Ministers—in this case, on grammar. I would rather have a former Education Secretary issuing guidance to his correspondence team on how best to phrase letters from his Department than a Chief Secretary to the Treasury issuing instructions to his civil servants about how to make his coffee.

Finally, it would be wrong to end without a quick glimpse at the Labour leadership contest this week. I have, as usual, taken a look to see what has been happening. I had a look at the website of the Wallasey Labour party—where else to get an insight into what is going on? There, on the front page, I found an article about the Labour leadership candidates with the headline “The candidates are awful”. Enough said.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on burial and cremation services, as Government burial funds are not keeping pace with the increasing costs of making dignified funeral arrangements?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend raises an important point. Through the current system, the Government provide nearly £50 million of support a year for people going through the trauma of bereavement. I encourage him to bring forward a debate in the House or to raise the matter in oral questions, and I know that Ministers will listen sensitively to the points that he raises.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week and for his comments on the attack on the Parliament in Kabul, which I think were well made. Next week we will return to consideration of the Scotland Bill, with two days for further amendments to try to improve it and return to it the principles of the Smith commission, which the Scottish Parliament's devolution Committee believes have not been met, and neither does the House of Commons Library, as my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) told the Prime Minister yesterday. Will the Secretary of State for Scotland therefore come to the House next Monday and Tuesday in a much more accommodating mood, in order to ensure that the principles of the Smith commission are met?

The Leader of the House had better not be thinking about amending the Scotland Bill in the unelected House of Lords. The House of Lords, I can tell him, has never been held in such contempt by the Scottish people, who see it as nothing other than a repository for the donors and cronies of the UK parties. The Bill must be amended in the elected House of Commons, so may we have an assurance that any important amendments will be made here and not in that bloated, ermine-coated, absurd legislature down the corridor?

I see that we are to have a debate next week on English votes for English laws as it would apply to north Wales, secured by the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen)—I do not see him in his place. Perhaps we will at last get some answers on English votes for English laws, because the Leader of the House has failed to answer a single parliamentary question on the matter. We now have three weeks until the summer recess, so will he bring forward his plans and start answering questions? He is going to have to turn up to the debate next Wednesday, so can we hear some more about English votes for English laws and how that will affect my hon. Friends and you, Mr Speaker, because it will place you in the most invidious political position. We need some answers.

Lastly, the Scottish schools go on holiday next week. Our recess is almost three months long, yet we seem unable to match our recess arrangements with the school holidays in a large part of the United Kingdom. Many of my hon. Friends have young children. It is great that English Members will get to spend the whole recess in their constituencies with their families, but my hon. Friends will not. We are off for almost three months! Surely it is not beyond the wit of this House to design a recess period to cover that. I suggest that we do away with the *Daily Mail* fortnight in September and with the conference recess. Let us have a recess that covers all the school holidays and then let us return here, like everybody else in the country, after the August bank holiday. Surely that makes sense for everybody. I hope that the Leader of the House will consider that suggestion.

Chris Grayling: First, on the Scotland Bill, I can only reiterate that the Government are fulfilling our obligation and implementing the Smith commission's report. The hon. Gentleman will have plenty of opportunities to bring forward amendments if he so chooses and to question Scotland Office Ministers about the content of the Bill. However, as the Prime Minister said clearly yesterday during Prime Minister's questions, we are fulfilling our obligation to the Scottish people by delivering

the package of devolution that we set out before them. They looked at it and chose to stay within the United Kingdom, and I am very grateful that they did. We are fulfilling the agreement we made at the time, and that is what the Bill does.

On English votes for English laws, I can only reiterate that we will bring forward our proposals shortly. They are measures that both the Labour party and the Scottish National party should support—the Labour party because it no longer has a presence in Scotland, so it should understand the need for fairness in this country's devolution settlement, and the SNP because, as a champion of devolution, it should understand the need for fairness. I hope that when I bring forward the proposals shortly they will welcome them and see them as an important part of solidifying our constitutional arrangements.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about the recess arrangements. The Chief Whip and I will always think carefully about how best to structure the parliamentary calendar. It is not always easy to provide a solution that satisfies everyone, but we will always try to make this place as child and family-friendly as possible.

Finally, although there are still some terrible conflicts around the world, which we hope to see resolved, I have to report to the House that one conflict close to home appears to have been resolved. The morning race for the Front Bench below the Gangway on the Opposition side has stopped, peace has broken out and an agreement has been reached between the two parties on where they will sit in future. That is good news for this House, although perhaps bad news for the bookmakers.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. As I mentioned earlier, a statement by the Secretary of State for Transport will follow these exchanges, and thereafter there is to be a very well subscribed debate. Therefore, there is a premium upon brevity. I am looking for single, short supplementary questions, preferably without preamble, and the Leader of the House's characteristically pithy replies.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Yesterday I initiated a well attended Westminster Hall debate on superfast broadband. Does the Leader of the House agree that that matter is vitally important to all our constituents and should be debated more fully?

Chris Grayling: I commend my hon. Friend for initiating that well attended debate. We have now established the new Committee structure, and the Backbench Business Committee will be able to meet shortly. I encourage him to talk to the Committee members with a view to trying to secure one of the Back-Bench business days for that purpose.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): May we have a debate on the role of the National Crime Agency in preventing harm to children? I have been raising my concerns about a substance called Miracle Mineral Solution, which is being promoted particularly to parents of children with autism as a cure for that condition. I have been asking the National Crime Agency why this is not considered a direct threat to children. It is being promoted as something that can be given orally in a baby's bottle or even as an enema. May we have a debate to ensure that the National Crime Agency is on top of issues like this?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. I was not aware of that particular substance. We have Home Office questions on Monday week, and I hope he will take advantage of the opportunity to raise this issue with Home Office Ministers. We should clearly take it very seriously.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): I do not have a pink T-shirt or even the use of a pink bus, but this weekend hundreds of thousands of people will be celebrating the diversity and equality that we all cherish in this country. Unfortunately, in about 80 countries people cannot do that because it is illegal. Mr Speaker, few people have done more than you to promote LGBT rights in this Parliament. Will the Leader of the House please have a word with the Foreign Secretary about the displaying of the rainbow flag over the Foreign Office and high commissions and embassies throughout the world? That would send the important signal that we stand by the side of those who are oppressed, and indeed, in some cases, those who fear death for the crime of being born gay.

Chris Grayling: I am happy to communicate the issue to my right hon. Friend. I am very sympathetic to the work that has been done to address this around the world. As I said earlier, it is shocking that many countries still regard homosexuality as illegal. All of us in this House should work to end that.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): May we have an urgent debate on the Government plans to sell off a majority stake in the Green Investment Bank—a move that will damage investor confidence, set back the low carbon economy, and, crucially, undermine the very reason for setting up the bank, which was to lever private investment by de-risking it?

Chris Grayling: I am not surprised to hear the hon. Lady's concerns given her views. I believe that it is far better for an organisation like the Green Investment Bank to be able to stand on its own two feet. If it can function as an effective organisation without the need for taxpayer support, that is surely a good thing. It is a sign that investment in green business, green industries and green technologies is becoming more and more mainstream in the investment world.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate about the provision of healthcare across south Gloucestershire, especially the long-awaited and much anticipated community hospital on the old Frenchay hospital site, which has been delayed for long enough?

Chris Grayling: I commend my hon. Friend for being such a powerful advocate for his constituency. He has campaigned on this issue for a long time. My colleagues in the Department of Health will have heard what he said. A lot of this is now down to local decision making, so the influence that he has locally will play a big part in it. Health questions will take place in 10 days' time, and he will have the opportunity to restate his point then.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): As we see the dangerous situation in Kobani in Syria, is it not time that we had a full debate in this House about our

strategy towards Syria and the region, and what we can do to help the brave Kurdish fighters who are fighting against the horrible Daesh cult and its misogynist, homophobic, murderous policies?

Chris Grayling: I endorse the hon. Gentleman's concerns about the dreadful things happening in parts of Iraq and Syria. It is absolutely right and proper that the international community should stand against this and be supportive of those who are resisting that terrible regime, and of course we are playing our part as a nation in doing so. One of the reasons we are having next Thursday's debate on international affairs is that over the past few weeks I have listened carefully to the comments made by Members on both sides of the House on the need for this and similar issues to be debated. That opportunity will be available this time next week.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Although investigatory powers in Britain and international security are undoubtedly important topics, it is also important that this House debates what everybody else in the country is talking about. Night after night we see on our television screens the wave of human misery coming to our shores from the middle east and north Africa and the problems being caused at Calais. That is what everybody is talking and concerned about, so may we have a full day's debate on the Floor of the House about Britain's immigration policy and how we are going to tackle both legal and illegal immigration being too high?

Chris Grayling: I recognise that this is a matter of great concern to the public and, indeed, the Government. My hon. Friend will be aware that my right hon. Friend addressed the issue in the House yesterday. What is happening in Iraq and Syria and the crisis in the Mediterranean were two of the key reasons for ensuring that there is a full day's debate next Thursday—I hope my hon. Friend will take advantage of that—to discuss what we all regard as a crucial issue. What is happening in north Africa and the Mediterranean is frankly shocking.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): May we have a statement on what steps are being taken to prevent companies funded by the Department for International Development from pursuing policies and contract terms that lead to systemic food wastage?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady raises an important point. I will make sure that her concerns are passed to DFID and I suggest that she look to bring an International Development Minister to the House through an Adjournment debate, in order to raise the issue directly. I know she will continue to ask questions about the issue.

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): At their school assembly yesterday, the pupils of Cheam Park Farm junior school gave me several messages in support of the Send my Friend to School campaign. May we have a debate to discuss how this Government can help in the objective of making free education available to more children around the world?

Chris Grayling: I commend the teachers at Cheam Park Farm junior school for their work in raising awareness and helping their pupils to raise their concerns.

[Chris Grayling]

My hon. Friend can look those pupils in the eye and say that this Government have an excellent record in providing financial support through our international aid budget to those parts of the world where young people do not have adequate access to education or, indeed, other basic needs in life, such as clean food and water. We are doing everything we can internationally to help the development of those communities, and those young people should feel proud to be part of a country that is doing its bit in the world.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): Two years ago a constituent of mine used Safestyle UK to fit windows throughout her property. Two years on, the windows still rattle and leak water, but Safestyle UK denies any responsibility. May we have a debate about consumer rights and how we can improve them so that people are not ripped off by cowboys?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman is performing one of the most important functions of a constituency Member of Parliament, which is to put pressure on organisations that are simply not delivering for the people we represent. I am sure that merely by having raised the issue today, he will have stirred some people outside this place. He will have another opportunity to do so in BIS questions on Tuesday and I hope he will continue to do so. It is right and proper that we pressure on organisations that fail to deliver for our constituents.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): When the Leader of the House referred to the European Council summit and that he expected the Prime Minister to report back that the European Union had agreed to the fundamental reforms, I think I saw, for the first time in 10 years, some flying pigs looping and laughing. I do not know whether you caught that, Mr Speaker. Will the Leader of the House confirm that the Prime Minister will make a statement on Monday about the European Council?

Chris Grayling: I was not necessarily commenting on the outcome of the negotiations, but merely that the negotiations are starting. My hon. Friend will form his own view about whether there are flying pigs around, but I assure him that there will be a statement on Monday. The Prime Minister will appear before this House and take questions in detail not only about this issue, but about the Mediterranean, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) referred.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): This week North Yorkshire police held a summit on the sharp increase in antisocial behaviour fuelled by excess drinking in York city centre at weekends. When will this House have an opportunity to debate an increase in police levels linked to licensing legislation, to ensure that city centres can be safe, family friendly and good for business?

Chris Grayling: One of the things we have always believed is that it was a mistake for the last Labour Government to go as far as they did on the road towards all-night drinking. I think it had an effect on

antisocial behaviour and put extra pressure on police. We have taken a number of measures since then that will contribute to easing that problem. The hon. Lady will always have the opportunity, at Home Affairs questions and through the Adjournment debate system, to raise concerns related to her constituency when she feels the existing powers do not go far enough.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Following the brouhaha over the Crown Estate, the Scotland Bill and the Sovereign Grant Act 2011, will my right hon. Friend make time available for a debate to allow our friends in the Scottish National party to reaffirm their loyalty to our and their sovereign?

Chris Grayling: I note the welcome nods from Scottish National party Members. I am glad that the First Minister has clarified the situation this morning in no uncertain terms. I think that we, on both sides of this House and in all parts of the United Kingdom, should be absolutely proud of our monarch. We value her and are amazingly grateful for everything she has done for us. The fact that she is in Germany today, representing this country again, is an example of how well served we are by her and by our royal family.

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): The Leader of the House has announced that we will have a debate next Thursday on international affairs in Government time. May I suggest that the House should have the opportunity to discuss some domestic issues, notably the proposed £200 million cut in public health budgets, £3.6 million of which is to be cut from Durham County Council in my area? It flies in the face of all the evidence and expert opinion, will damage preventive healthcare and is extremely short term. Members from all across the country would like the opportunity to discuss it.

Chris Grayling: I simply remind the hon. Gentleman that we, both in coalition and in Government, have continued to increase funding for healthcare, somewhat against the wishes of the shadow Health Secretary, who argued that we should reduce funding for healthcare and that it would be irresponsible to continue to increase it in the way we have. I am very happy with our record.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): My constituent, Mohamed Kalefa Aisa, is currently studying in Salisbury on a visitor visa. There are no flights back to Libya because of the turmoil and my constituent is stranded here. The border agency expects him to travel to another country to reapply for a visa. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on our immigration rules in the light of the impractical and unrealistic advice my constituent has received?

Chris Grayling: I understand the difficulty that my hon. Friend's constituent faces, given the very difficult situation in Libya. My advice is to approach the relevant Minister directly. I know that Ministers try to be flexible when there are exceptional circumstances, although, of course, given the immigration pressures upon us, they have to be pretty rigid in upholding the rules, otherwise we would be opening the door to very large numbers of other people who wish to come here.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): May we have a statement on why the Ministry of Justice is still paying G4S and Serco millions of pounds every month to supply electronic tagging equipment more than a year after both companies were barred from running the contract?

Chris Grayling: G4S and Serco do not run the contracts—Capita does.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): With the Davies commission about to report any day, do the Government plan to have a debate on the commission's findings before the summer recess, and will the Government put them to a vote?

Chris Grayling: I assure my hon. Friend that the Secretary of State for Transport is well aware of how important the issue is in this House. Once the report is received by Government, he will certainly come to the House and take questions, before deciding how to proceed.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): The roll-out of universal credit has begun in my constituency, with it having been available to single new claimants since April. It has enormous implications for very vulnerable people, many of whom do not have access to the internet and now have to get used to managing money differently. Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on access to universal credit for the most vulnerable people in our society?

Chris Grayling: Labour's policy has been, I think, to be supportive of universal credit, so I am not sure how the hon. Gentleman's comment fits in with that. The reality is that universal credit creates a new structure that means that people are better off in work than sitting at home on benefits doing nothing. If people are going to get away from the benefits environment that many of them live in and get into the workplace, as we all want them to, they will need knowledge of, access to, and the ability to use technology, which is available through jobcentres, public libraries and other facilities. I think we have got this absolutely right and that universal credit will make a transformational difference to people's lives.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): My constituency has a growing problem of heavy goods vehicle drivers parking overnight on industrial parks and in neighbouring residential areas, such as Coleshill. They are predominantly drivers from eastern European countries. Hams Hall distribution centre is seeing up to 70 trailers a night. As a result, there is an increase in accidents and antisocial behaviour. May we have an urgent debate on the provision of adequate lorry parks and on the need for consideration to be given to this matter when granting planning on industrial parks?

Chris Grayling: By coincidence, the Secretary of State for Transport has just walked into the Chamber, so he will have heard my hon. Friend's remarks. I understand the nature of the challenge and there are things that could be done to address it. I would like service station providers to cater more for this need, which is clearly present. It should not be imposed on local communities and estates. I know that the Department for Transport will be happy to listen to his comments.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): In the last Parliament, the Government established, at considerable cost, the post of police and crime commissioner, which they argued was vital for democratic accountability. The post is now to be subsumed into the office of metro mayor, which will be imposed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with an additional precept, whether local people want it or not. May we have a debate on what the Government mean by democratic accountability?

Chris Grayling: I think that police and crime commissioners have made a real difference by providing a focal point for those who are concerned about local policing. Of course, the two posts are combined in London. I know that the Labour party has always been sceptical about police and crime commissioners, but that does not seem to have stopped a large number of former Labour Members of Parliament standing to be police and crime commissioners.

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): Exactly a year ago today at Prime Minister's questions, I raised the tragic case of 17-year-old James Goodship, who had tragically drowned just days before in Lake Burwain in my constituency. As this week is drowning prevention week, may we have a debate on how we can reduce the rate of such drownings and tragedies across the UK?

Chris Grayling: That was a tragic event and our sympathies are very much with James Goodship's family. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for taking up the mantle of this issue and for working intensively in Parliament to raise awareness of the risks. His comments will be heard in this place and outside it. An Adjournment debate might provide a valuable opportunity to discuss the issue with Ministers and to allow other Members of Parliament who have experienced similar tragedies in their constituencies to contribute.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I have received many emails about the case of Andargachew Tsige, as I suspect has the Leader of the House and every other Member of the House. He is a British man who is being held under a death sentence in incommunicado detention in Ethiopia. Has the Leader of the House had any requests from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to come and debate the matter? If he has not, will he follow the matter up with FCO Ministers?

Chris Grayling: I, too, have received a number of emails on the matter, as I suspect have many Members. I deprecate the death penalty wherever it is in place around the world. I have always opposed it and I oppose it in this case. This is clearly a worrying case. I will certainly pass on the concerns to the Foreign Office, so that it is aware how many Members have had constituents raise these concerns with them.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Steel production is a crucial employer in Corby. As vice-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group for steel and metal related industries, I know that Members from all parts of the House want to come together to secure the future of the industry. May we have a debate in Government time on carbon taxation and the steel industry, with a Treasury Minister at the Dispatch Box?

Chris Grayling: It is enormously important that we support key industries like steel. It is an important part of the local economy in my hon. Friend's constituency and in many other parts of the country. Ministers from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills will be before the House next week. I hope that he will take that opportunity to raise his concerns with them. Of course we have a challenge ahead in tackling climate change and bringing down carbon emissions, but we also have to be smart when it comes to looking after our industries.

Mary Glendon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Two weeks ago, the Leader of the House kindly offered to pass on a request to the Prime Minister to meet Muscular Dystrophy UK and six young boys with Duchenne muscular dystrophy who need Translarna. The decision on the drug is imminent, but the boys have heard nothing. Will the Leader of the House kindly do something to hasten the response from No. 10?

Chris Grayling: I will duly apply a nudge. The Prime Minister is well aware of the issue, because as I said previously he met one of the boys back in January, but I will make sure that the message is passed to No. 10 for the hon. Lady.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): At a meeting I hosted this morning with higher education sector leaders, concern was once again raised about the damaging impact that the inclusion of students in the Government's net migration cap is having on one of our most important export industries. Will the Leader of the House arrange a debate about that? There is concern about the policy in all parts of the House and beyond.

Chris Grayling: I do regard it is an anomaly that students are contained in some of the migration figures, but that is not a matter for this country. It is set by international statisticians and statistical rules. A large number of students come to this country, and we have taken appropriate steps to make sure that those who come here are legitimate. That is right and proper. We have a thriving higher education sector, but we must also have a system that is careful in ensuring that people who come here should be here.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Joseph Gleave and Son, an SME based in Stretford that has supplied the Ministry of Defence for many years, reports chaotic tendering practices, onerous timescales and contracts being extended or awarded without proper competition.

That is good for neither the business nor the taxpayer. May we have a debate in Government time on defence procurement?

Chris Grayling: Of course, we will have Defence questions again early in July, so I encourage the hon. Lady to raise the issue with Ministers at that point, but I will make sure that I pass on her concerns on behalf of the company in her constituency to my colleagues at the Ministry of Defence after this session.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): During the passage of the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013, Rev. Melvin Tinker in Hull told me that if I supported it, he would instruct his congregation not to vote for me. That might have something to do with why my majority went from 641 to 12,899. However, this weekend he has equated homosexuality with paedophilia and put it in the same category. May we please have a debate in Government time about the responsibilities of the established Church of England on community cohesion and not inciting crimes of hate?

Chris Grayling: First, let us be absolutely clear: there is absolutely no connection whatever between homosexuality and paedophilia. Paedophilia is a crime; homosexuality is a reality of our society and something we have moved to support through same-sex marriage and other changes in recent years. It is never acceptable to equate the two.

I would also say that it is important to be sensitive about these issues, as we were during the passage of the Act, particularly in relation to those with strong religious views. We are, and we should be, but there is never any justification for equating homosexuality and paedophilia.

Mr Speaker: The misguided Reverend is obviously rather a blinkered fellow, to put it mildly.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): It was announced yesterday that my local authority in St Helens is having a further £23 million cut from its budget, meaning that by 2020 it will have suffered a 50% reduction in funding under this Government. May we have a debate on the crisis in local government funding and its impact on critical services?

Chris Grayling: Local government has certainly faced budget reductions in recent years, as have many parts of government, but it has also been noticeable how well most councils across the country have adapted to the changes and sustained their services. If the hon. Gentleman's council, which I have a sneaking suspicion may be a Labour council, has not been able to do that, maybe it is time for a Conservative council in St Helens.

Network Rail

12.8 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement about Network Rail following today's publication of its annual report.

In September 2014, Network Rail was reclassified as a public body as result of an accounting decision by the Office for National Statistics. Since then the Government have had greater direct oversight of the company. I want to report to the House on Network Rail's performance and the actions that I am taking to hold it to account.

Some things are working well. Our railways are carrying more passengers than ever before, and journeys have more than doubled since privatisation—they went up on average by 4.2% in the last year alone. Safety has improved, and the reliability of assets on the railways is up. Network Rail reopened the line at Dawlish after the horrendous storms in the time expected. It has opened a new station at Reading ahead of schedule and under budget, and a modernised Birmingham New Street complex will be fully open later this year.

I do not pretend that everything is perfect, however, because it is not. Where performance has fallen below the standards I expect, I want it sorted out. What we saw at Kings Cross at Christmas and at London Bridge earlier this year was unacceptable, and I said so at the time. Since then, Network Rail has demonstrated that it has learned those lessons. I pay tribute to the significant programmes of work it delivered over Easter and the May day bank holidays, but to improve performance we need to invest and we need good management. The truth is that much of this work should have been done decades ago. Successive Governments failed to invest the sums necessary in our rail network, and that is why we find ourselves in the current situation.

When faced with a choice between building the infrastructure our country needs and our railway becoming a brake on growth and opportunity, the Government choose to invest for the future, in projects such as Crossrail in London and HS2. In 2012, the Government set out the most ambitious rail investment programme since the Victorians: a £38 billion programme on enhancing, operating and maintaining the current network. That means hard work and good design; and thousands of people working night after night, sometimes in very difficult conditions. On the 216 miles of the Great Western line alone, Network Rail needs to alter about 170 bridges, lower parts of the track bed, install 14,000 masts of overhead line equipment and electrify parts of the railway constructed by Brunel in the 1830s, so that new British-built fast trains can speed up services and provide more seats and services. Members and their constituents want these improvements, and I am determined that they will happen.

In parts of this programme, Network Rail's performance has not been good enough. Already, the chief executive and the board are responding. Since joining Network Rail in 2014, the chief executive Mark Carne has reviewed the organisation's structure, performance and accountability. He has strengthened his team and he has a structure for improvement. I want to see him drive that forward, but there are still challenges. Important aspects of Network Rail's investment programme are costing more and taking longer: electrification is difficult; the UK supply

chain for complex signalling works needs to be stronger; construction rates have been slow; and it has taken longer than expected to obtain planning consents from some local authorities. That is no excuse, however. All those problems could and should have been foreseen by Network Rail, so I want to inform the House of the action I am taking to reset the programme and get it back on track.

First, none of Network Rail's executive directors will receive a bonus for the past year. The current Chairman, Mr Richard Parry-Jones, is stepping down. His replacement will be the current transport commissioner in London, Sir Peter Hendy, someone of huge experience who helped to keep London moving during the Olympics. I am asking him to develop proposals, by autumn, for how the rail upgrade programme will be carried out. Secondly, I am appointing Richard Brown as a special director of Network Rail with immediate effect. He will update me, and report directly to me, on progress. Thirdly, I intend to simplify Network Rail's governance by ending the role of the public members. I thank them for their commitment, but the reclassification of Network Rail has changed the organisation's accountability. Fourthly, it is important that we understand what can be done better in future investment programmes. I have therefore asked Dame Colette Bowe, an experienced economist and regulator, to look at lessons learned and to make recommendations for better investment planning in future. I will publish her report in the autumn.

I know that Members on both sides of the House value the improvements that are planned to the railway in their area. Network Rail's spending should stay within its funding allowance. Electrification of the Great Western line is a top priority and I want Network Rail to concentrate its efforts on getting that right. On the midland main line, better services can be delivered through works such as speed improvement. Electrification will be paused: I want it to be done and done well; it will be part of our future plans for the route.

Meanwhile, the next franchise for the trans-Pennine route between Leeds and Manchester will bring modern trains and additional capacity. Current work on electrification will be paused, because we need to be much more ambitious for that route, building a powerhouse for the north with a fast, high capacity trans-Pennine electric route. We are working with businesses and cities in the north to make that happen. We have seen electric trains introduced this year between Liverpool and Manchester, and between Liverpool and Wigan, and the work that will see them spread to Bolton and Blackpool is under way.

In the south-east, Crossrail and Thameslink are well under way. In Anglia, we will bring about modern, faster trains to Ipswich and Norwich in the next franchise. For passengers in the south-west, the new contract with First Great Western will provide significant extra capacity. I hope to be able to announce news on further new trains for the region soon.

We will keep commuter rail fares capped in real terms for the whole of this Parliament. People's earnings will rise more quickly than rail fares—the first time that this has happened since 2002. Passengers want a railway that is better, faster and more reliable than today. Powered by a huge increase in investment and ambition right across the country, that is what they will get. I commend the statement to the House.

12.16 pm

Michael Dugher (Barnsley East) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement.

Let us be absolutely clear: the Government's total failure to deliver a fit-for-purpose railway has today been completely and damningly exposed. First, the publication of the latest national rail passenger survey—I note the Secretary of State did not mention it—shows that passenger satisfaction has dropped once again. Now we have the Secretary of State announcing that vital investment projects, such as electrification of the midland main line, which he promised to deliver, are being shelved due to his repeated failure to get a grip of Network Rail. The electrification of the trans-Pennine express railway line between Manchester, Leeds and York has also been shelved—so much for the northern powerhouse—and we remain concerned about the future of the electrification of the Great Western line.

The Secretary of State spent the election campaign repeating promises that he knew he would break after the election. That is what has been revealed today. The truth is that passengers have had to endure a catalogue of failure on our railways by Ministers since 2010. There was the Christmas rail chaos, which the Secretary of State referred to, although he neglected to mention that Ministers had been warned about that and failed to act. While delusional Ministers talk about “fair fares” and “comfortable commuting”—which is a world away from the misery for commuters at London Bridge—there have been inflation-busting fare rises of on average more than 20%. We have also seen the collapse of the west coast franchise competition, which cost the taxpayer £50 million. Ministers may try today to shift all the blame to Network Rail, but this happened on the Government's watch and the responsibility for the mess lays squarely with the Government.

Let me turn to a number of specific questions. Will the Secretary of State confirm that when the Government placed the development of key Network Rail projects on hold for up to two years after the 2010 election, important preparation work was not undertaken, and therefore, as the rail regulator has said, they committed to the projects in 2012 based on “limited development work”? We know that Network Rail started to put together a list of projects that would be axed back in November. Why has it taken so long for the Government to reveal them to the House and to be honest with the travelling public? Crucially, can the Secretary of State confirm that he received a report on 1 September last year on the state of those programmes from Network Rail, his Department and the regulator? He has refused to publish it. Why did he sit on the report and pretend to the public that everything was fine until after the election?

Labour first raised the issue of delays to the Great Western project in the House more than a year ago. Why has it taken so long for the Government to admit that there were fundamental problems with the project? Why did the Secretary of State not listen to the Transport Select Committee six months ago when it warned that key rail enhancement projects had

“been announced by Ministers without Network Rail having a clear estimate of what the projects will cost, leading to uncertainty about whether the projects will be delivered on time, or at all”?

Why did he not raise the alarm when the estimated cost of electrifying the midland main line rose from £250 million

to £540 million and then to £1.3 billion; or when the cost estimates for Great Western electrification rose from £548 million to £930 million and then to £1.7 billion?

Just two weeks ago, the Secretary of State refused to answer my questions about the need to tackle the failures at Network Rail and whether he was planning changes to Network Rail. Will he explain why he has dithered for so long when he has had the power to exert more ministerial responsibility over Network Rail, including by appointing a special director, since September last year?

The Opposition have warned time and again that fundamental change in how our railways are run is needed, that Ministers need to get a grip, that passengers should have a proper voice and that more public control is needed. We welcome the appointment of Sir Peter Hendy as chairman of Network Rail, and we will look carefully at some of the other announcements that the Government have made.

The news today exposes a catalogue of failure by Ministers, and it deals a fatal blow to the Government's claim that they are delivering a better railway for passengers. Is it not clear that the Government's real legacy is one of rail fare hikes, plummeting passenger satisfaction, ongoing disruptions and delays, major projects running years behind schedule, promises of vital investment betrayed, and a railway that is not fit for purpose, and all the while out-of-touch Ministers sat in Whitehall overseeing a complete and utter shambles?

Mr McLoughlin: It is true that I have been Transport Secretary for two and a half years. Despite the catalogue of terror that the hon. Gentleman has outlined, over those two and a half years there have been only two occasions on which the Opposition have chosen to debate transport on Opposition days. One was a day after I was appointed, and the other was on the day that the hon. Gentleman's predecessor was sacked as shadow Transport Secretary. With regard to their warning us and wanting the subject lifted up the political agenda, we have heard nothing from the Opposition, because they are truly embarrassed by their record, whereas we have invested in the railways, lifted them and given encouragement to the railway industry.

Today I have made no cuts whatever to the rail investment strategy—the largest rail investment strategy that has ever taken place. The amount of money invested is exactly the same as it was last week—the budget within which the strategy has to be delivered. I will take no lessons from a Labour party that in 13 years electrified 10 miles of railway lines; we have electrified more this year than it did in all that time. Then there is the £895 million project to rebuild the railways around Reading and to remove major bottlenecks; the £750 million transformation and upgrade of Birmingham New Street station; the refurbishment of Nottingham station, with all the investment going into it. There has been more investment in Nottingham in the last five years than was seen in the 13 years of the last Labour Government. Then there is the new station built at Wakefield; the completed Ipswich Chord and the Doncaster Chord; phase 1 of the £6.5 billion Thameslink project; the completion of Crossrail tunnelling. I could go on a lot more, Mr Speaker. I will take no lectures. I am determined to get on top of, and see the delivery of, those programmes, which are so important for our constituents.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend accept that my constituents are fed up to the back teeth with points and signalling failures that, through the failings of Network Rail, have too often disrupted their services, and that it is the same with the electrification and upgrading of the track? They will warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's initiative to seek improvements, and to pin Network Rail down to deliver and to maintain the £38.5 billion investment. Can he confirm that the new franchise for Anglia, which will be warmly welcomed in Chelmsford, includes the new rolling stock and will cover inter-city trains and, more importantly, the vast majority of trains that my constituents use—the commuter trains into Liverpool Street?

Mr McLoughlin: Let me first congratulate my right hon. Friend on his well-deserved inclusion in the recent honours list. I am looking forward to receiving the invitations to tender for the franchise and the results of the franchise competition for the Greater Anglia line. I think we need improvements on that line so that Ipswich and Norwich can be reached in 60 and 90 minutes. As my right hon. Friend well knows, the inclusion of new rolling stock will score very highly on the franchises that are currently being tendered.

Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): I note the change in the structure of Network Rail announced by the right hon. Gentleman today. Given that Network Rail still plays a part in Scotland's rail network, will he consult Scottish Ministers before implementing those changes? Most of the changes in railways refer only to England, and I have no real comment on them, but when HS2 was announced, it was said that it would not be extended to Scotland because of the increased journey times through the rest of the network. Will he assure us that none of the changes will jeopardise journey times to Scotland?

Mr McLoughlin: I spoke to Keith Brown last night to outline what I anticipated saying this morning, and I shall meet him again on Monday, when we will discuss a number of these issues. On HS2, as soon as it starts to operate, I believe Scotland will benefit. Anyone travelling on the Javelin train from St Pancras down to areas in Kent that are not served completely by the high-speed line will get the advantage of using that line. I hope that that answers the hon. Gentleman's questions.

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): Is my right hon. Friend aware that perceptive travellers on the West Anglia and Great Eastern lines will recognise that his statement shows that he has listened to and responded to all the various pieces of advice he has had from all different quarters, and therefore this statement is particularly welcome? It will be enhanced if the more reliable journeys that we hope these changes will bring about will be on new trains as well.

Mr McLoughlin: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who has never lost an opportunity to impress on me the importance of train services for his constituency or indeed to press for extra investment in the railways. I come back to the point I made at the start of my statement: this Government are fully committed to huge investment on our railway network. When we announced the £38 billion, it was beyond the expectations

of many people in the railway industry, and I want to ensure that it is delivered efficiently and effectively—for the part that is paid for by fare-paying passengers, as well as for the part that is funded directly by the taxpayer.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Network Rail certainly has many good achievements, but last January the Transport Select Committee warned that escalating costs and poor planning jeopardised the investment programme and, indeed, questioned whether that programme was ever realistic. Will the Secretary of State explain precisely what his statement means for the pause in electrification in the north and for the midland main line service?

Mr McLoughlin: I congratulate the hon. Lady on being elected unopposed as the Chair of the Transport Select Committee. The pause is exactly what I said—a pausing of that particular scheme until I receive the report from Sir Peter Hendy. I made it clear that the midland electrification would always follow the Great Western, which would always be the priority. When people see some of the challenges facing the Great Western electrification, they will certainly understand that.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): My constituents will warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment on commuter rail fares, but will he reassure them that his getting to grips with Network Rail will help to resolve all the outstanding issues in the southern region?

Mr McLoughlin: I can give that reassurance. Let me add that the railways Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), has been particularly good at keeping all local Members in touch, especially those who have experienced problems. I must, however, say to my hon. Friend in all fairness that there will be occasions, during what will be a major refurbishment, when passengers will be caused discomfort and inconvenience. I am afraid that that is part of our legacy of having to catch up with all the under-investment that was happening for so many years. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher) mentions London Bridge. I am the first to admit that some of the conditions faced by people there have been unacceptable, but some of the conditions faced by me at St Pancras were unacceptable, and it is now a fantastic station that is almost a destination in its own right.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I am the chair of the RMT parliamentary group.

I assume from his statement that the Secretary of State has resisted some of the calls from the wider elements of his party for the breaking up and privatisation of Network Rail. The fourth point that he made in his statement was,

“it is important that we understand what can be done better in future investment programmes.”

May I suggest to him that one of the key elements of that would be to start listening to some of the workers on the front line? May I also suggest that Dame Colette

[John McDonnell]

Bowe's review should include a mechanism for ongoing consultation with the trade unions about how those programmes can be improved?

Mr McLoughlin: I am certainly willing to consider the hon. Gentleman's suggestions. Some of those workers on the front line do an incredibly difficult job, sometimes in the most horrendous conditions and often in the middle of the night. That is one of the lessons on which we should draw when considering what happened at King's Cross over Christmas.

Sir Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): My right hon. Friend and I are regular users of the midland main line from St Pancras through Market Harborough to Leicester and, in my right hon. Friend's case, beyond. Our experience, I suggest, is fairly satisfactory. This morning, however, local government leaders in the east midlands, and in Leicester in particular, expressed a fear that the so-called pausing of the electrification might have an effect on development in the east midlands. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that it will have no effect whatsoever on the commercial and economic development of the area?

Mr McLoughlin: As my right hon. and learned Friend says, both he and I use that line regularly. The priority for the route is to improve capacity and speeds, so that there can be six rather than five trains an hour from St Pancras. We will press on with the rebuilding to speed up and straighten the track at Market Harborough, and with the rebuilding of the Derby track layout. That will mean faster services soon, and it will enable us to make the most of the electrification and new trains that will result from future franchises.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): Eight months ago, when the Secretary of State appeared before the Transport Committee, I asked him whether he was satisfied with the governance arrangement for Network Rail whereby it was, in effect, marking its own homework. He said then that he was completely satisfied with the arrangement, but today he has come to the House and changed it. Does he not regret that decision? In his statement, he blamed Network Rail for not having foreseen these problems, but if he had taken action then, would he not have been able to foresee them and do something about them?

Mr McLoughlin: As I said, the reclassification took place in September. When I appeared before the Transport Committee, I was asked to give my opinions on matters as they were at the time. Since then, owing to the greater accessibility and more direct control from which we have benefited, I have had a chance to think a bit more about what ought to be done, which is why I have made my statement today.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): May I urge my right hon. Friend to work positively with the new management of Network Rail, the Solent local enterprise partnership and local stakeholders in my constituency to accelerate the development of the Chicken Hall Lane link road?

Mr McLoughlin: I shall be more than happy to look into what my hon. Friend has suggested, and respond to her in due course.

I was a junior Transport Minister some 25 years ago, and in those days railways were not talked about. Today, however, it is clear that they are very important in providing connections for all our constituents, and that they are benefiting from investment as a result of what this Government and the last Government have done.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): There will be a great deal of anger in Sheffield today about the decision on the midland main line, especially among businesses. There will also be some cynicism about the fact that the electrification which was on track before 7 May has been abandoned so soon after that date. Will the Secretary of State confirm that, contrary to what he has just said, Ministers gave clear commitments—both in the House and in writing—that it would be completed by 2020? He has reneged on those commitments today, and he really has no idea when, or if, electrification will actually take place.

Mr McLoughlin: It is wrong to say that I have reneged on those commitments. What I have said is that the Great Western railway line was always a priority for electrification, but that I want to see electrification on the other lines as well. A fair amount of the work that is required, such as bridge building and replacement, has already been done on the midland main line, and I hope very much that the line will be electrified, but at present it is right for us to ensure that we secure the best value for money on the railways.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): My right hon. Friend is right to say that electrification is difficult. I know that he has spent a great deal of time in the past year ensuring that Network Rail bears down on its costs. I warmly welcome his statement, particularly what he said about governance measures. May I urge him, however, to take all necessary measures to ensure that Network Rail stays within its spending and funding allowances? I think that, and only that, will enable passengers to see the benefit of the Government's long-term commitment to rail investment.

Mr McLoughlin: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. The level of our investment in the railways is unprecedented in comparison with that of recent Governments, but it is also important for us to secure best value for our investment. That is one of the tasks with which I have charged Sir Peter Hendy, and I look forward to receiving his report later this year.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I am glad that the Secretary of State has confirmed that the electrification of the Great Western line is a priority, but can he confirm that the pre-election promise made to the people of the west of my country that the line would be electrified as far as Swansea by 2018 will be honoured?

Mr McLoughlin: What I can tell the people of Swansea and the hon. Gentleman's constituents is that they will experience the benefits of the new intercity express programme in—I think—2018. I will clarify the exact

date in a letter to the hon. Gentleman. As for electrification all the way to Swansea, it is part of the programme that, as I have said, is a top priority.

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): My constituents will welcome, as I do, my right hon. Friend's clear commitment and determination to improve our railways, and his strong track record on tackling issues that the Labour party left unaddressed for so long. They will, however, be a little disappointed by the pause in the electrification of the midland main line. I shall not labour the point, but can my right hon. Friend reassure me that it is just that—a pause, not a cancellation—and that he remains committed to the electrification? Will he, or the railways Minister, agree to meet me to discuss the rail services that are used by my constituents in Leicestershire?

Mr McLoughlin: Either the railways Minister or I will certainly meet my hon. Friend to discuss that issue in more detail. As I said earlier, the priority for the midland main line is still the provision of six trains an hour from St Pancras, which we can achieve by rebuilding and straightening the track at Market Harborough and remodelling the track at Derby station, but I still want to see the electrification of that line.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Secretary of State was generous in describing Network Rail's performance at London Bridge as "unacceptable". I think it was an absolute shambles and a disgrace, and passengers suffered the consequences for months afterwards. I am pleased that he has cancelled any bonuses and hope that if, in the next financial year, Network Rail's performance is just as diabolical, it will not get any then, either. Will he consider whether passengers should be compensated if trains are delayed by just 15 minutes, and encourage the train companies and Network Rail to publicise on every delayed train, and at every station at which delayed trains arrive, how passengers can claim compensation?

Mr McLoughlin: I accept that what passengers had to put up with earlier this year at London Bridge was unacceptable; I do not think anybody would argue with that for one second. I will certainly look at the right hon. Gentleman's suggestions on how passenger services can be improved, but the refurbishment taking place at London Bridge means that passengers will see a hugely better-built station with more capacity. It will be a great enhancement to passenger services once it is finished, but I accept that some of the delays and the way in which information was given out was absolutely unacceptable, and both Network Rail and we have learned lessons from that incident.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): A pause in the electrification project for the midland main line is not good news from my Kettering constituents, especially when the rate of return on the project is greater than that for the Great Western electrification, where all the delays and problems have occurred. What effect will that have, if any, on the timing of the franchise renewal for the midland main line? Given that my right hon. Friend has just told the House that better services can be achieved before electrification, will he do his best to reinstate either before or in the

franchise renewal the half-hourly service north from Kettering, which was halved under the previous Labour Government?

Mr McLoughlin: I will certainly look at what my hon. Friend asks for and see if it is possible. The extended franchise that I have set out, and which we will look at, for East Midlands Trains is on target, but when we go out for re-franchising there will be an opportunity to look in greater detail at some of the improvements that my hon. Friend has just called for.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): The Secretary of State knows that his deliberate decision to choose to de-prioritise electrification for the midland main line means that talk of a northern powerhouse will be seen as empty words in Sheffield, but he also said that the line improvements will continue. Will he confirm that that means all the line improvements, including Market Harborough, and will he say when the work will be completed?

Mr McLoughlin: I have just confirmed to many of my hon. Friends that the Market Harborough work will go on. I find it a little hard to take from Opposition Members that we have done nothing for the northern powerhouse. Labour did nothing in 2004 when it let the previous franchise to Northern Rail on a zero-growth plan. That was its ambition in 2004 for the north: zero. We have a great ambition for the north and there will be improvements, as we see the roll-out of the electric services that I referred to in my statement. Anybody who goes today to Sheffield's Victoria station will see a station that has been rebuilt as a result of this Government's investment.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): We have at the Despatch Box one of the very best Ministers in the Government, but my constituents will be very disappointed about the midland main line news. That could be corrected, however, by the improvements he has described. The real problem with the line is capacity and train numbers. If we get that sorted, we will see that my constituents are quite happy.

Mr McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; it is fair to say that I get more support from him in this job than I did in my previous one. The point he rightly makes about trains and their increasing frequency from St Pancras is very important, and I am glad to say that—although not a direct link as far as his constituents are concerned—I was able to attend the opening of a new station in Northampton, and also to see lots of road investment in Northamptonshire.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): My constituents will be alarmed at the pause in the electrification of the route between Manchester and Leeds, and not just those who use it. What consequences will there be for improved train services on other lines that depend on electrification for the release of rolling stock?

Mr McLoughlin: I went some way to say what we have done as far as the northern area is concerned and the northern powerhouse. For the first time we are seeing electric trains from Manchester to Preston and from Preston to Blackpool, and huge investment in the Manchester Victoria line. I have talked about the release

[Mr McLoughlin]

of rolling stock as far as the Great Western main line is concerned, and that is one reason why I chose that area to take priority.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for continuing the investment in the Great Western main line, but having visited my constituents recently he will be acutely aware that they take longer to get to and from the capital than they did in 1910. Can he reassure me that nothing in the statement will delay the pressure on First Great Western to deliver a two-hour service between Worcester and the capital, or the delivery of Worcestershire Parkway station?

Mr McLoughlin: I can confirm that nothing in the statement will impact on the improvements that my hon. Friend wishes to see.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I welcome the assurance that the Great Western main line will remain a priority, but as we have heard, the cost of the scheme has more than trebled to £1.7 billion, and the rumours are that it has already been delayed by more than a year. What reassurance can the Secretary of State give people travelling on that line from Bristol to London that there will not be any further pain and misery in the months and years to come?

Mr McLoughlin: When the hon. Lady says “further pain and misery”, I note there may be occasions when, because of ongoing work, trains will be altered and timetables changed. We cannot carry out this huge electrification programme, as I outlined earlier in my statement, over the length of track and through some of the tunnels we are talking about, without there being some big engineering challenges, but it is absolutely right that the Great Western main line takes priority, and that the new trains that will run on the line from 2017 to 2018 are there and used.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State’s statement on Network Rail. As someone who has worked with Sir Peter Hendy in London government, I know he is a world-class transport executive and will make a better job of delivering major projects like London Bridge than that which my constituents have had to put up with so far. Will my right hon. Friend to keep up the pressure started by his rail Minister on existing franchise holders such as South East Trains? I can top my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker): Napoleon III chose to live in exile in Chislehurst because it had a fast and reliable train service to London. My constituents are now selling their houses and moving out because it is so bad on a daily basis, as I know.

Mr McLoughlin: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments about Sir Peter Hendy. My hon. Friend the rail Minister needs no encouragement from my hon. Friend or anybody else to keep up the pressure on those services.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What does pausing trans-Pennine electrification mean for the privately funded initiative put forward to electrify the line from Selby to Hull—which was, of course, missed out in his Department’s original plans?

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Lady is not being quite fair, because I made some extra money available to take that route to the next GRIP stage. To say that we missed it out is slightly unfair, but leaving that to one side, I hope that the plans being developed will be acted on.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): The pause in electrification of the midland main line has a potential impact on the selection of the route to complete the east-west rail link—a crucial issue for my constituents in Bedford and Kempston. Will my right hon. Friend show his characteristically robust and decisive approach, write to the head of Network Rail and ask him to stop dawdling and decide which of the two routes from Bedford is the right one to complete the link? Will my right hon. Friend also ask my hon. Friend the rail Minister to visit Bedford and speak to me and the Mayor of Bedford about this very important issue?

Mr McLoughlin: I am sure the rail Minister will be more than happy to meet my hon. Friend in his constituency to discuss the problems being faced. I will certainly feed in what he has said to Sir Peter Hendy as he completes the review that I have asked him to undertake.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): My constituents will also be disappointed by the pause in the electrification of the midland main line. They want to know whether it is a pause or a cancellation, so will the Secretary of State say when he might expect that electrification to happen? Is it by 2025 or might it be a bit earlier than that?

Mr McLoughlin: If my hon. Friend will allow me, I will allow Sir Peter to do his report before I start saying what will be in it. I usually find that that is the best course of action on these occasions, rather than anticipating what will be in a report that I have just commissioned before I have received it. As I have said to other colleagues on the subject of the line that my hon. Friend and I both use regularly, getting to the position where we have six trains an hour from St Pancras will be an improvement.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and I am pleased that the largest investment in the Great Western main line through Bath since the Victorians is a top priority—I am sure that has nothing to do with the fact that Sir Peter Hendy comes from Bath. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is shameful that the Opposition are making political capital out of this statement, given their appalling record when they were in government?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend will soon find out, as he is here a bit longer, that the Labour party just taking political opportunity and making political capital out of something it failed in all its time in government to do anything about is nothing new. I walked with my hon. Friend through the park area in Bath where some of the electrification of the railway will take place. One problem we face is that going through huge heritage areas and great conservation areas such as his constituency is more problematic, but we are determined to meet the challenge.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Along with my constituents in Corby and east Northamptonshire, I am very frustrated about the content of today's announcement in relation to the midland main line electrification. I know what they will ask me when I return to the constituency tonight. They will say, "How can you justify spending billions of pounds on HS2 yet delay the progress of this electrification?" What reassurance can the Minister give to my constituents?

Mr McLoughlin: The reassurance I give to my hon. Friend's constituents is that HS2 is about improving and increasing the capacity on our railways because of the growth we are seeing. If we did not improve that capacity, we would have even greater problems down the line in providing the kind of extra services he wants for his constituents, not only on passenger services but on freight, which has grown hugely on our railways—by more than 100%. I would say that to his constituents, and that our Government are committed to the infrastructure investment that I know he is keen to see in the rest of his county, not least on some of the roads around his constituency.

Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement. As a Cardiff Member, I particularly welcome the commitment to the Great Western line as his top priority—the biggest railway investment going on in Wales for some time. Have the under-investment problems been compounding Network Rail's skills shortage? I am thinking in particular of the huge under-investment by the Labour party in 13 years.

Mr McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that. A huge amount of investment will be going into Wales, in terms not only of the track, but the new trains. They are on order and are being built at this moment.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend please say a few words about what he is going to do in the southern area? A lot in this statement addresses the midlands and the north, but a lot of my constituents, whom I have the honour to represent, rely on Southeastern and Southern rail, which are not mentioned at all in the statement. Network Rail's efforts would be greatly appreciated in improving the service there, too.

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend's area does get the advantage of the 115 new train sets—1,140 carriages—for the Thameslink programme, which will have a massive impact on his constituents. I accept that there is growing pressure for more services right across the country, but huge amounts of investment are already being made and what I am doing today is making sure that both the fare-paying passengers and the taxpayer are getting the best value for the money that they are investing in our railways.

Mr Speaker: I am most grateful to the Secretary of State and to colleagues. Before we embark on the next business—the general debate—I should mention in passing that by my calculation no fewer than half a dozen hon. Members who will be seeking to catch the eye of the Chair in the course of the debate are not yet present in the Chamber. [Interruption.] The Secretary of State rightly, as a parliamentary veteran, looks duly shocked by that, and I hope that at this very moment they are beetling along towards the Chamber. It is worth gently making the point that it is a very well-established expectation that a Member who wishes to speak in a debate should in almost all circumstances, and certainly unless he or she has given notice otherwise, be present at the start to hear the opening speeches.

Reports into Investigatory Powers

12.55 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): I beg to move,

That this House has considered reports into investigatory powers.

When I made my statement on the publication of the Anderson report two weeks ago, several right hon. and hon. Members requested a full debate in this House. As I said then, and as I have said many times in the past, these are serious and sensitive matters. They require careful deliberation of the evidence, to ensure that the legal and privacy framework governing the use of investigatory powers is properly accountable and as robust as possible. These principles—accountability, transparency and a robust legal framework—are underscored by the report by David Anderson, QC. His report was preceded by the Intelligence and Security Committee's "Privacy and Security" report, which was published in March and which examined the appropriate balance between the need for security and respect for privacy.

Today, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has laid two further reports before the House: the annual report of the Chief Surveillance Commissioner and the annual report of the Intelligence Services Commissioner. Later this summer, a panel co-ordinated by the Royal United Services Institute and established by the former Deputy Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), will report on the legality, effectiveness and privacy implications of the UK's surveillance programmes and assess how law enforcement and intelligence capability can be maintained in the face of technological change. Together, those reports represent substantial independent review of the frameworks and oversight governing the use of investigatory powers.

In addition, last year, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister appointed Sir Nigel Sheinwald as his data envoy. Sir Nigel has submitted his report to my right hon. Friend and although, for obvious reasons of sensitivity, it cannot be published, a summary has been placed on the Cabinet Office website. Sir Nigel focused both on short-term and longer-term co-operation, and on the need to create an international framework between democratic countries. That would ensure that, where necessary and proportionate, data can be accessed even when they are held outside the requesting country's jurisdiction.

As I have said before, and as the Anderson and other reports make clear, the use of investigatory powers by the police and the security and intelligence agencies is essential for national security and for the fight against crime. If the police are to investigate serious crimes such as murder and rape, if our law enforcement agencies are to track down criminals that operate online and if we are to protect the vulnerable and stop those who mean to do us harm, the police and the security and intelligence agencies need access to these powers when appropriate.

As this morning's figures show, the threat from terrorism is serious and it is growing. In 2014, 289 people were arrested for terrorism-related offences, an increase of 30% compared with the previous year. We know that investigatory powers are important for tackling terrorism, and that communications data have played a significant

role in every Security Service counter-terrorism operation over the last decade. Since 2010, the majority of MI5's top-priority UK counter-terrorism investigations have used intercept capabilities in some form to identify, understand or disrupt plots seeking to harm the UK and its citizens.

Although the Anderson report and others recognise the necessity of investigatory powers, just as important is having the right regulatory framework, the right oversight and the right authorisation arrangements governing their use. As David Anderson has said, he regards it as imperative that the use of sensitive powers is overseen and fully declared under arrangements set by Parliament. It is therefore entirely right that Parliament should have the opportunity to debate those arrangements. Just as the Anderson review was undertaken with cross-party support, I am committed to ensuring that we take forward these arrangements on the same basis.

I want to turn first to David Anderson's report. It is, as I have said before, a comprehensive report, covering the full range of sensitive intelligence capabilities, and there are 124 recommendations. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members have now had the opportunity to read it for themselves, and reflect on what David Anderson has said. David Anderson makes it clear that there is a need for investigatory powers—within an appropriate framework—in the fight against terrorism and serious crime. He notes the significance of communications data in prosecutions and that sensitive interception powers are not used routinely. He said:

"Interception is therefore used only in the most serious cases... But interception can still be of vital importance for intelligence, for disruption, and for the detection and investigation of crime."

He also agrees with the Intelligence and Security Committee and others on the importance of bulk data, saying that "its utility, particularly in fighting terrorism in the years since the London bombings of 2005, has been made clear to me."

But David Anderson is also firmly of the view that the system needs updating, and he supports the need for a new legislative framework, noting that the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 was enacted 15 years ago. He makes a number of recommendations regarding transparency, oversight and authorisation.

On the legislative framework, David Anderson makes the point that legislation is currently spread over several different Acts, and recommends bringing it together in a single law. On oversight, he recommends the merging of the three oversight commissioners—the Interception of Communications Commissioner's Office, the Office of Surveillance Commissioners and the Intelligence Services Commissioner—into a new single independent surveillance and intelligence commission. On authorisation, Anderson comes down on the side of judicial authorisation of warrant, although the ISC takes a different view and has endorsed the existing system. Anderson points out the care with which Secretaries of State approach the task and makes it clear that European Court of Human Rights jurisprudence does not require a system of judicial authorisation, but he is of course mindful that requirements may change in the future.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Shortly after the right hon. Lady spoke in the House two weeks ago, *The Guardian* reported that Downing Street was indicating that the Prime Minister is unlikely to agree to David Anderson's recommendation for a judicial

authorisation of warrants. Does that mean that she is effectively ruling out judicial authorisation of warrants at this early stage?

Mrs May: Perhaps the hon. and learned Lady will let me read the very next sentence in my speech, which says that, on these recommendations, the Government have not yet reached a decision. These are important matters and we must consider them carefully. Today's debate will inform our view.

The ISC's review into privacy and security also supports the agencies' need for investigatory powers, but recommends that the legal framework needs updating and calls for increased transparency, strengthened safeguards and improved oversight. The review involved a detailed investigation into the capabilities of the intelligence agencies and contained an unprecedented amount of information about how they are used and the legal framework that regulates their use.

The Committee found that all the surveillance activities of the intelligence agencies are lawful and proportionate. It concluded that the agencies do not seek to circumvent UK law—including the Human Rights Act 1998—and do not have the resources, capability, or the desire to conduct mass surveillance. It commended the agencies for the care and attention they give to complying with the law.

None the less, it concluded that the current legal framework is “unnecessarily complex” and should be replaced with a single Act of Parliament, governing everything the agencies do to increase transparency. Going further than David Anderson, the ISC's recommendations include replacing the legislation that underpins the agencies as well as the legislation relating to interception and communications data. Its recommendations include allowing Secretaries of State to disclose the existence of warrants where that can be done without damage to national security; increased checks, scrutiny and use of the warrant process; and more resources—and more checking of the agencies' activities—by the Intelligence Services Commissioner and the Interception of Communications Commissioner. As with David Anderson's report, debate on these issues will inform the Government's view.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): My right hon. Friend is making an important point. On informing the Government's view, I welcome her concession that the Government will think carefully about the Anderson review on judicial oversight. She also mentioned earlier the importance of cross-party working on parliamentary oversight, where appropriate. Will she undertake to include the relevant Select Committees of this House in that cross-party approach?

Mrs May: First, may I congratulate my hon. Friend on his election to a chairmanship of one of those Select Committees? I suspect that he is thinking of the Justice Committee. Of course it is not for the Government to indicate to Select Committees what business they should be undertaking, but I have every expectation that relevant Select Committees will wish to look at this matter. The Government will take all representations and consider them in the round in their response to the reports.

In addition, as I mentioned earlier, the Prime Minister has today published the annual reports of the Chief Surveillance Commissioner and the Intelligence Services

Commissioner. I commend both of those reports to the House. Both demonstrate the value of rigorous independent oversight and provide reassurance on the work of the agencies and the powers that they oversee. I thank the Chief Surveillance Commissioner, the Intelligence Services Commissioner and their staff for their excellent work, their dedication and public service.

I appreciate that Members of the House will not yet have had time to study the reports in detail, but I would like to draw their attention to the findings of the Intelligence Services Commissioner, who is clear about the seriousness with which these powers and the granting of warrants are approached by the agencies and Government. He says:

“The agencies take great care to seek other less intrusive means before undertaking this level of intrusion and often consult their lawyers to ensure the legality of their submission.”

He goes on to say that great care is carried out by the warranting units at the Foreign Office, Home Office and Northern Ireland Office, which

“will question the agencies concerning the use and applicability of the suggested activity.”

The final check in the process is the oversight provided by a Secretary of State, who can refuse a warrant and who he says

“are aware that they are ultimately accountable for the operation.”

As I have already said, the Government have not yet taken firm decisions on particular recommendations in David Anderson's report, or indeed on any of the other reports we will discuss today. There are many voices both inside and outside the House who have important views that need to be heard. We must consult with those, including the police, the security and intelligence agencies, law enforcement agencies, and the telecommunications companies, as they are most directly affected. We also need to hear what Members of this House have to say.

I am clear that, whatever legal and privacy framework we propose, it will need to be agile and capable of responding to urgent cases. It will need to be clear and accountable, to be capable of commanding public confidence, and to ensure that sensitive powers are available in a way that will stand the test of time.

The reports that we are discussing today provide a firm basis for consultation, and today's debate—the second time this House has discussed this matter in two weeks—will be an important contribution to that process. As I have said previously, the operation and regulation of the investigatory powers used by the police and the security and intelligence agencies is a matter of great importance to the security of this country and an issue of great interest to many Members.

The Government are committed to introducing a Bill on investigatory powers early next year, so that it can receive Royal Assent before the sunset clause in the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act comes into effect at the end of 2016. In order to meet that timetable and allow the full parliamentary scrutiny, we intend to bring forward a draft Bill for consideration in the autumn, which will be subject to full pre-legislative scrutiny, including by a Joint Committee of both Houses.

As we move forward in our discussions, it is important that we remind ourselves about the very serious nature of what we are debating, because these powers are about protecting and saving people's lives. In any debate about the right balance between security and privacy, it is important that we remember the full context of the

[Mrs May]

threats we face. They include the threat from terrorism—both from overseas and home-grown in the UK. Since the attacks on 7 July 2005, the Security Service believes that around 40 terrorist plots have been disrupted. Around 700 people have gone from the UK to Syria and Iraq to fight or support terrorist organisations—a number of them to join ISIL or Daesh—and around half have returned. ISIL have made it clear that it wants to strike us here in Europe, and we know that it uses sophisticated propaganda and modern technology to spread hatred and in some cases advocate or facilitate acts of terrorism.

We also face other threats from organised criminals and the proliferation of cybercrimes such as child sexual exploitation, and threats from hostile foreign states and from military and industrial espionage.

Without the use of investigatory powers, it would be difficult to investigate, prosecute and prevent not only terrorist-related activity but crimes such as murder, rape, human trafficking, child sexual exploitation, cybercrime and kidnap. We know that communications data are used in 95% of serious and organised crime investigations handled by the Crown Prosecution Service. Similarly, intercept has played a significant role in investigating crime and preventing terrorism. In 2014, 2,795 interception warrants were issued. Of those, the majority—68%—were issued for serious crime, 31% for national security and 1% for a combination of serious crime and national security.

In the face of such threats, the Government would be negligent if we did not ensure that those whose job it is to keep us safe have the powers, support and capabilities they need. I am committed to ensuring that. However, security and privacy are not, as I said before, a zero-sum game. We can only enjoy our privacy if we have our security, just as we can only be free to live our lives as we wish, enjoy the many benefits that this country has to offer and go about our lives unimpeded and free from threats because security underpins our way of life.

Too often in the debate about investigatory powers, we are drawn into arguments in which privacy is prioritised at the expense of security or security at the expense of privacy, but it is possible to have a proper balance between the two. We must consider these issues in the round. Through parliamentary scrutiny, we must ensure that we have a framework set by Parliament that delivers as it is intended to and that can command public confidence. That framework must be underpinned by thoughtful and constructive debate, and I look forward to hearing what right hon. and hon. Members have to say in what I believe will be a well-informed and interesting debate.

1.11 pm

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for her thoughtful speech and for scheduling the debate so swiftly after the publication of David Anderson's report. I called for the debate in response to the statement two weeks ago and it has been swiftly delivered.

I should also apologise to the House, as I already have to the Home Secretary and to you, Mr Speaker, for the fact that I cannot be here for the closing speeches. It is my daughter's school graduation, so I hope the House will forgive me for being there instead.

This will be a good debate and it is an opportunity to debate the right legal framework to protect our liberty and security in the digital age. I join the Home Secretary in paying tribute to the quiet heroism of our intelligence services, agents and counter-terror police. Their work is necessarily secret and their successes are rarely reported, but their success is measured, bluntly, by a lack of column inches and TV headlines. We are rightly all proud of them.

There is also no doubt that as the world becomes increasingly connected and as we increasingly rely on smartphones, tablets and other technology to communicate and organise our lives, that has repercussions for the fight against terrorism and serious and organised crime. David Anderson's report contains the startling fact that in 1975 there were 1 billion connected places, that by 2010 there were 5 billion connected people and that by 2020 there will be 50 billion connected devices.

Our lives are increasingly online, and with that opportunity come great challenges. For example, we know that Twitter is a lot of fun for many people, including many Members of this House—although, perhaps, not yet the Home Secretary—but it has also been used to connect extremists and recruiters with young people in the United Kingdom, including the young girls who left for Syria from Bethnal Green earlier this year. New devices, mail services and apps are used to help us all keep in touch, build amazing new businesses and organise our lives, but also by some to commit crimes and abuse. Online crime has risen exponentially and we have also seen awful cases of online child abuse that we are still failing to address as a country.

We have also seen growing problems with organised cyber-attacks for major companies, infrastructure and the Government. The operations of the police and intelligence agencies need to be able to keep up with these new forms of crime and national security threat, but at the same time the checks and balances, safeguards and oversight that are needed must keep up with new technology. We have a long and proud tradition in Britain of having those checks, balances and safeguards for our liberty and our privacy. We must ensure that action by the state is proportionate, so those checks and balances must keep up with the fast-moving changing technology.

We have argued for some time that the legal framework is out of date. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act is, in David Anderson's words,

“incomprehensible to all but a tiny band of initiates”

and in the long run that means that it is “intolerable”. Its interaction with previous legislation, including the Telecommunications Act 1984, is baffling, too, and even after being briefed on some of the work that the agencies do and having studied the legislation over seven years—often with a wet towel wrapped around my head, which was the only thing that enabled me to get my head around it even temporarily—I still find it hard to be clear about what is possible and what is not under the law as it stands and about the extent of existing safeguards. That is unsustainable as a framework for legitimacy for the vital work the agencies do, which is why we have called for some time for a review of RIPA, why we argued for it in the debates last summer and why we have welcomed the Government's agreement to ask David Anderson to produce this report.

The report is extremely thorough and ranges from ideas of privacy in ancient Babylonia to what Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of a rather different kind of empire, thinks of the topic. It provides us with an opportunity for Parliament, civil society, the intelligence community, law enforcement, communication providers and, crucially, the public properly to consider the powers and safeguards we need.

As David Anderson recently said:

"The threat that I see of not accepting my recommendations, or recommendations along these lines is that people become disenchanted with the whole business of intelligence gathering. They believe some of the wilder allegations...that the state is reading into people's emails the whole time when patently it isn't. If this sense of disillusionment and disenchantment is perpetuated and spreads further then I think both law enforcement and intelligence lose the public confidence that they actually need if they are going to do an effective job."

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is making a good and comprehensive speech. Is it not appropriate that David Anderson's report is entitled "A Question of Trust"? Surely that is one of the most important things in bringing the public with us on this issue.

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is exactly right. There is strong support for the work of the intelligence agencies and the work they do in Britain, which has historically always been the case, but we should never take that for granted. It would not be fair on the intelligence agencies to take it for granted, so maintaining that sense of trust and confidence across the whole of society and not simply across the majority of people is extremely important for the work that they do. If we are to protect both our liberty and security in a democracy, we need to achieve consent for and understanding of the law and it is not just those who are concerned about surveillance who value greater clarity. It is also an essential mission of our intelligence agencies as part of defending democracy and protecting liberty and security.

The Home Secretary has been clear that there is no doubt that investigatory powers are vital in confronting terrorism, child abuse and other serious and organised crime. During the Home Secretary's statement two weeks ago, I mentioned the awful case cited in David Anderson's report in which communications data were used, rightly, to stop the abuse of three children who were all less than four years old. There are other cases. For example, Operation Overt dealt with the largest and most serious terrorist plot we have ever faced. Between 2008 and 2010, 10 individuals were convicted of plotting to blow up multiple transatlantic airliners. A key part of the evidence that brought the plotters to justice was coded conversations by email between the conspirators and extremists abroad in which they discussed the preparation for their attacks and the selection of targets.

It is clear from the review and other evidence that the powers passed through the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014 last summer are essential and must be renewed, and will need to be renewed in good time before the sunset clause at the end of next year. It is also right, however, that we ensure that the legal framework that governs them is updated so that it properly reflects the needs of security and the need for safeguards.

In 2012, the Home Secretary made proposals in the draft Communications Data Bill that would have gone much further than the current legislation. I argued at the time that there were serious problems with the Bill, because it put too much power in the hands of the Home Secretary. The Joint Committee set up to scrutinise the draft Bill also, rightly, raised substantial concerns. David Anderson's report makes it clear that he does not think that the draft Bill was the right approach. He noted that the first clause was "excessively broad". The important question of IP addresses, which was encompassed in the draft Bill, has now been dealt with in other legislation. On weblogs, which the Home Office said at the time it wanted to pursue, David Anderson concluded that he

"was not presented with a detailed or unified case"

on the viability, practicalities or legal considerations. On perhaps the most significant and the most controversial measure in the draft Bill—requiring internet service providers to hold huge amounts of third-party data—he commented:

"I did not get the sense that this was judged to be the priority that it once was, even within law enforcement",

and he concluded:

"Accordingly...there should be no question of progressing this element of the old draft Bill until such time as a compelling operational case has been made, there has been full consultation with CSPs and the various legal and technical issues have been fully bottomed out. None of those conditions appears to me to be currently satisfied."

Experts have also expressed substantial concerns about encryption and the cost and proportionality of the proposals.

Where David Anderson and the agencies confirm that there is a problem is in ensuring that companies whose headquarters are overseas comply with UK law, particularly for data and communications that involve those who are living and operating in the UK and those who pose threats to the UK. The Home Secretary referred to the report by Nigel Sheinwald, whose work is vital because, as the agencies and the Home Secretary recognise, UK law is only part of the answer; legal and diplomatic arrangements with other countries are immensely important. In fact, there is a growing range of views that the proposals in the draft Communications Data Bill were not the right way to deal with that genuine and significant problem in relation to companies based overseas.

On that basis, I ask the Home Secretary to confirm that she has dropped the original draft Communications Data Bill and is starting with a fresh approach. I think it would help our debate in this place and the development of future proposals that should balance the appropriate powers and the appropriate safeguards. Will she confirm that that draft Bill has been dropped and a new approach will be taken?

Mrs May: After the Joint Committee that scrutinised that draft Bill had done its work, we made it clear that we would take on board in principle the various recommendations the Committee made. Obviously, David Anderson's report refers to some of the issues in the draft Communications Data Bill, so we will have to look at that in the context of subsequent proposals. We were clear that we would accept all the principles that that Committee set out, including that the original draft Communications Data Bill, which was an attempt to future-proof our legislation, was too wide ranging.

Yvette Cooper: I thank the Home Secretary for that reassurance that the Government agree that the old draft Bill was too wide ranging. We look forward to the replacement proposals and hope they will meet the assessment test set out by David Anderson, whose report is pretty comprehensive and well judged on these matters.

I also warmly welcome David Anderson's recommendations for a fundamental overhaul of the commissioner system and the establishment of a new body, the independent surveillance and intelligence commission. The current commissioner system, although undoubtedly staffed by excellent people who have taken their roles forward, is too low profile and not substantial enough in performing a vital oversight role. It is hard for the public to assess where oversight properly lies. When one considers that we regulate our TV channels in a more high-profile and systematic way than our intelligence agencies, it is clear that reform is needed.

The new body would have supervisory responsibility and aim to build public trust. I would like it also to have a role in working with the Home Secretary on a suitable process for transparency, where that is possible in line with operational requirements, about both the law and our country's capability. David Anderson's report calls for greater public avowal and transparency about capabilities and legal powers. While everyone understands that many national security operations need to be secret to be effective, I know the Home Secretary will consider that recommendation closely, because sufficient transparency is of course needed if we in Parliament are to be able to take responsible decisions and get the legislation right.

The report recommends transforming the system of authorisation for interception warrants. The proposals on judicial authorisation are among the most significant reforms to the framework that David Anderson proposes. There is precedent: a system of judicial approval by commissioners exists for the police in relation to property interference, intrusive surveillance and long-term undercover operations. Also, as the report notes, the UK is an outlier amongst the "Five Eyes" states—the others are Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA—in not having prior judicial authorisation of interceptions of communications.

Importantly for the safety and security of our country, such a provision could go some way to solving one of the most significant challenges our agencies face: getting co-operation from communications companies based in the United States. In his report, David Anderson states:

"One major company went so far as to suggest that if the UK introduced judicial authorisation, more cooperation would be forthcoming, though I was not left with the impression that this was a universal view."

He adds that

"US companies... find it difficult to understand why they should honour a warrant signed by the Secretary of State"

when the US has a system of judicial authorisation of warrants. So there are pragmatic considerations as well as constitutional considerations for us in determining what impact increasing judicial authorisation might have on that greater co-operation involving overseas companies.

Of course the detail must be right and reforms should not adversely affect the relationship between the Executive and the judiciary in relation to other aspects of Government

powers. They should also recognise the importance of the Home Secretary's role in determining what the threats are to national security, rather than leave such an important task to the judiciary. However, it should be possible to make those reforms, and I believe that now is the right time to introduce judicial authorisation into the process. Clearly, there are different ways of doing it—for example, it would be possible to have different frameworks for different kinds of warrant. David Anderson recognises that there would be differences in relation to sensitive missions that affect other countries and our relationships with them. Clearly, rather than leave such cases to a purely judicial process, such cases would require decisions to be made by the Foreign Secretary, who is accountable to Parliament for those sensitive relationships with other Governments.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): How does the right hon. Lady reconcile the need to take account of the wider political construct with the duty of the judiciary to act according to the law? Surely she is making a powerful argument for the status quo.

Yvette Cooper: No, I am not. I am part way through an argument that there are different kinds of warrant and different circumstances. In cases involving foreign affairs, where sensitive relationships with other Governments may be at stake, the Executive clearly have an important role to play; they cannot be seen simply as judicial matters. However, there are other kinds of warrant—for example, intercept warrants for the purposes of tackling serious and organised crime, where if the action was not intercept, but was instead knocking down someone's door and breaking into their home, authorisation would be an entirely judicial process. There are significant questions about why intercept in the interests of pursuing serious and organised crime should have no judicial authorisation, whereas knocking down somebody's door should have judicial authorisation.

That is why I think there is a strong case for introducing judicial authorisation to provide a clearer system of separation of Executive and judiciary and to introduce clearer checks and balances into the process. It does have to be done in the right way and there will be different considerations around crime and national security and foreign affairs, but I believe it is possible because other countries manage it. If we were the only country in the "Five Eyes" that did not have a process of judicial authorisation, even though we have similar intercept arrangements, that would pose a big question for us. Those who simply defend the status quo need to explain why they think the arrangements in all those other countries are inadequate and worse than ours, given the added legitimacy that some judicial authorisation processes should bring.

I recognise the complexity here; that is why it is wise that we hold this debate now, in advance of the Government making their final decisions on the issue and setting out their proposals. It is also wise that we have a period of consultation on the draft legislation, so that people can table amendments and have these debates. However, I do not see why judicial authorisation need threaten or jeopardise the work of the agencies—quite the reverse. If it is a way to provide greater legitimacy, and support from overseas, for this work, it could add strongly to the process, and to agencies' work.

On the legislative process, I welcome the Home Secretary's proposal for a period of proper reflection and discussion on the detail before final votes are taken in Parliament. That is the right approach. We are keen to continue discussions with her on this subject, and I welcome the briefing that she provided for me to enable us to do that. When the Snowden leaks first appeared in the media, there was a sense that Parliament was not debating these issues, that the Government were not responding, and that other countries were having a more informed and up-to-date debate about the response and the processes.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): On the subject of having a more informed debate, does the right hon. Lady agree that the Sheinwald report, redacted if necessary, should be published? Many believe that its proposals, including on international treaties, would do away with the need for some of what is proposed for any investigatory powers Bill.

Yvette Cooper: I have not seen the Sheinwald report or had prior briefing on it, so I could not say how much redaction would be needed, but the right hon. Gentleman is right that the more transparency we can have in this debate, the better, so I urge the Government to consider allowing maximum transparency in this regard, to the extent possible, given the operational sensitivities and our relationship with the US Government on this. Clearly, the more we can look at the detail of alternative ways of providing the powers, safeguards and legitimacy needed, the better, and the better informed the parliamentary debate will be.

The initial debates and the response from the Government were not sufficient. However, we have since had reports from the Intelligence and Security Committee and David Anderson, and we have another forthcoming external report from the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies. This is the opportunity for Parliament to make sure that we have a proper updated response on the complexities of the digital age and how we maintain our security and liberty in it. More safeguards and checks and balances are needed, but it is also important that our intelligence agencies can deal with the serious and growing threats that the Home Secretary talked about. We need to make sure that our talented men and women in the agencies can face those real and serious threats, but also have legitimacy for the work that they do, and the continued confidence of the public. That is in all of our interests.

In a democracy, our liberty and security are the targets of terrorists who seek to harm and divide us. Liberal democracy will triumph over extremism and tyranny, but for it to do so, we need to strengthen ourselves by renewing our security and our liberty. The Anderson report helps us to have a debate about how best we do that to protect our democracy.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. It might be helpful for the House to know that approximately 20 Back-Benchers are seeking to catch my eye. At this stage, I am not imposing a formal time limit, but a certain self-restraint, or self-denying ordinance, would be helpful. We can be led in this important mission by Mr Dominic Grieve.

1.34 pm

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I think we can indeed be led in it by me, for this reason: notwithstanding my wholehearted thanks to the Home Secretary for the speed with which she enabled this debate to take place, a consequence of that speed—I hope she will not take this as a criticism—is that the material in our possession is now of such infinite complexity and depth that to do justice to all of it in this debate would be impossible. Indeed, one of the clear advantages of starting the legislative process in the autumn is that those of us who would like to participate properly in it have time to do a lot of holiday homework before we come back to the House then. I have always felt that one of the problems with the subject is that most of us in Parliament labour under a state of extraordinary ignorance, and have great difficulty getting to grips with some of the issues.

I spent four years and two months in the Government as the Attorney General, and without betraying state secrets, it may come as little surprise to the House to hear that I had some involvement with issues surrounding the lawfulness of Government. Of course, lawfulness extends to the interception of communications, and communications data, just as much as it does to everything else. It is possible that in that time, I had the wool pulled over my eyes—by the agencies, for example. However, my impression of the agencies from my dealings with them, particularly on surveillance and interception—this point is properly made in the ISC report—was of an absolutely rigorous desire to maintain legality; a willingness to get legal advice on areas of difficulty, as was mentioned earlier; and a very high standard of ethics. That standard of ethics went beyond legality to an understanding that in trying to protect us and prevent crime, they had to do a difficult job that could intrude into the privacy of the citizen, and that at all times they had to act in a reasonable, necessary and proportionate way. That was the clearest impression that I took from them. I left office with considerable admiration for the work done in that field.

That is not to say that everything can simply be left as it is, and that we can adopt a Panglossian view of the current state of affairs. As I mentioned in a previous intervention on this matter since the election, I think that there is complete unanimity in the House on the view that the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 is not fit for purpose. I hope I may be forgiven for saying this: it has been described as almost incomprehensible, except to initiates, but I think even the initiates sometimes found it incomprehensible. I have a little lurking suspicion that because there has always been an anxiety that the legal framework will betray the level of operational capability, certain aspects of the Act were made deliberately opaque, even when it was drafted. We can hardly be surprised if, 10 years down the track, it appears even more incomprehensible than I suspect it was to those parliamentarians whose unhappy lot it was to scrutinise it when it was first being enacted.

The Act clearly is not fit for purpose. It clearly needs replacing. How we craft that replacement will—David Anderson's report says this will be key—determine whether we can build trust. I will not get too carried away on the subject of distrust. David Anderson's report rather highlights that notwithstanding Snowden, trust in the work of the

[Mr Dominic Grieve]

agencies in this country on matters of surveillance and interception are rather high, and I have no reason to think that the public are hoodwinked. They seem, on the whole, to regard the institutions as benign and there to protect us, and I think they are right.

The question is, therefore, how we go about that process. I want to make only one point about this. We have had—let us face it—the complexity and the problems to which the Snowden revelations led. I have little doubt that those revelations have done very considerable damage in many cases, as has been cited, to the operational capacities of the agencies involved and their ability to protect us. On the positive side, that provides an opportunity for a more informed discussion so that the issues surrounding predictability in relation to what we legislate on can be better established for the future, and we do not end up with, or we have less of a problem with, people arguing that the legislation does not mean what it says.

That will be one of the great challenges for my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. I wish her well in it. Those of us who have some inkling of what this is about will endeavour to help her as much as we can so that we can succeed in bridging the two requirements—that the legislation is open, transparent and understandable, and at the same time that it preserves operational secrecy, which will be a particular difficulty. I look forward to doing that aspect of the work in this House when the legislation comes back.

I turn to a number of the broad recommendations in David Anderson's report, which is an amazing piece of work. I was delighted when he was appointed as independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, and the rigour with which he has delivered the report has entirely vindicated my right hon. Friend in trusting him to do this work. For the purposes of today's debate, I shall centre on two or three points.

The first, which I suspect will be one of the big issues, concerns judicial authorisation. I am conscious that it may be argued, and I have heard it argued, that because our system broadly seems, particularly to the Executive, to function quite well, we should stick to the ISC report and continue with the current warrant system. Against that, the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) was right to make the point that we are very unusual in having our current system of warrant. In other "Five Eyes" countries with high levels of intelligence capability and responsibility, a judicial system has been operated successfully. It is clear to me that a judicial oversight system, with possible exceptions where complex issues of policy may be involved, would probably enhance trust, although I would not get totally carried away with that. One must always bear in mind the potential problem that if the judiciary is seen to be turned into a rubber stamp for the Administration, that slightly removes the judiciary from the key work that it normally does: the arbitration of disputes, which is a different issue.

Nevertheless, my broad approach is that—if I may put it this way to the Home Secretary—the burden of proof is a little bit reversed. It seems to me, in the light of David Anderson's report, that if the Government wish to maintain the current system, they will have to make a case why it is markedly better than that which

would replace it. Beyond that, I am open minded. One argument I have heard is an anxiety that flexibility would be lost, and that it would not be possible to get warrants authorised quickly. I am not persuaded by that. I have seen injunctions obtained from judges in the middle of the night—indeed, judges signing injunctions in the bath and handing them out through the bathroom door—so that is not necessarily an overwhelming obstacle to involving judicial commissioners. They would necessarily be judges, though ex-judges and others might be able to do this work, and it would produce a measure of independence. If the Home Secretary concludes against David Anderson's recommendation, I am quite prepared to listen, but she will have to make the case as to what would be lost by shifting the system to that which he has suggested.

Linked to that is the question whether we should have a single commission. The two probably go together. A single commission makes a lot of sense. I am not sure about cost—it might cost no more, but it would certainly enable people to perform slightly different roles within one organisation. Again, I shall be interested to hear the Home Secretary's views on that.

Other matters that have cropped up could be looked at today. Some anxiety over legal professional privilege has been expressed by both the Law Society and the Bar in the light of David Anderson's recommendations. I am not entirely persuaded by that. One problem is that we need to preserve legal professional privilege, but the great difficulty has always been how to decide whether legal professional privilege applies if both the lawyer and the client are in criminal collusion with each other and legal professional privilege does not apply to the material that must be examined to decide whether that is the case. That will be another thorny subject, and I hope we can come back to it and craft legislation that provides the reassurance that lawyers undoubtedly need, preserves the principle of legal professional privilege, and also ensures that the material can, if necessary, be accessed if there is good reason to believe that what is taking place is not covered by legal professional privilege at all.

To conclude, I have covered only a number of very broad topics. There is so much more in the report that we will have to look at. I hope we have time before and during legislation to do justice to an immensely complicated issue. Of one thing I am convinced: we have been very well served by our agencies in this area hitherto, both in maintaining the very standards that we should be proud of in a democratic society, and in carrying out a difficult job that sometimes involves a difficult balancing act between privacy and the necessity of serving the wider public, all done in a spirit of which this House and the public should be proud. That was absolutely the impression I was left with. I would like to see us succeed in putting in place a framework for the future that ensures that in 10, 20 or 30 years people can still say the same thing.

1.47 pm

Mr Nick Clegg (Sheffield, Hallam) (LD): I speak as someone who, as the Home Secretary knows, had a hand in the commissioning of this excellent report. The right hon. Lady will remember with fond, misty-eyed nostalgia the debates that she and I had on this complex, fraught and all-important area of public policy. One of the consequences of those debates and disagreements

was that a number of reports were commissioned, including David Anderson's. We look forward, as the Home Secretary said, to the publication of the report by RUSI. I strongly endorse her compliments to David Anderson and to the authors of the other reports, and I join in all that has been said in complimenting the professionalism and integrity of the work of the agencies—professionalism and integrity that I found on display daily in my work with them in government. As I will explain, my quibbles were invariably with proposals emanating from the Home Office about what new power should make its way on to the statute book, rather than with the day-to-day conduct of our highly effective intelligence agencies.

On the back of this excellent report from David Anderson, we have an unusual opportunity to try to reset the balance between privacy and liberty on the one hand, and safety and security on the other, in a digital age. As the Home Secretary rightly pointed out, all too often this debate is falsely caricatured, as if people who worry about security do not worry about liberty, and people who worry about liberty do not worry about security. In this area, as in so many other walks of life, it is necessary to strike the right balance. To somewhat misquote Benjamin Franklin, if we give up our liberty to gain a little security, we will deserve neither and lose both. As the shadow Home Secretary said, we should be striving to strengthen both liberty and security in tandem.

I am certainly no slouch when it comes to introducing new surveillance powers on to the statute book when it is demonstrably the case that doing so makes us safer and is necessary in order to keep up with new technologies. That is one of the reasons, as the Home Secretary is aware, why I always advocated legislating, as we have done, to enable enforcement agencies to match IP addresses to handheld devices, and why we legislated in the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014—the acronym is DRIPA, unfortunately—to improve data sharing between UK and US enforcement agencies. However, I have always drawn the line—I did in government and I do now—at proposals that I feel are either not based on proper evidence or not adequately proportionate and transparent. It is in that light that I would like to turn to a few of the points made by David Anderson.

I will not dwell on the points that have already been made about introducing a judicial role in the issuing of warrants, but I want to underline the shadow Home Secretary's point that David Anderson made his case on the basis not just of principle, by pointing out that our practice is significantly out of line with how warrants are issued in other analogous jurisdictions, but of his observation—this was surprising, at least to me—that there might be operational value in introducing a judicial element in the issuing of warrants, as it would enable us more readily to secure data from American communications service providers, which are used to that kind of system.

I want to dwell on David Anderson's comments on the draft Communications Data Bill—the so-called snoopers' charter. David Anderson is scathing in his report about the proposals in the Bill to force UK network providers to collect and store third-party data relating to services operated by companies based overseas. He says quite unambiguously that,

“there should be no question of progressing this element of the old draft Bill until such time as a compelling operational case has been made”.

It is worth reflecting on that for a moment. I was told categorically and repeatedly in government that that was absolutely necessary for the safety of the public; that public safety would be in jeopardy if I did not endorse it. David Anderson has now found that no operational case has been made for that. Echoing an earlier question to the Home Secretary, I seek clarity from the Government on whether the forthcoming Bill will contain third-party data provisions, which David Anderson has said it should not.

In the light of that, I think that we should treat other proposals that do not have a clear evidence base or rationale—most importantly, the Home Office's proposal to require CSPs to store so-called weblogs—with an equal amount of healthy and considered scepticism.

Tom Brake: Is my right hon. Friend aware of any reason why the Government should be intent on joining Russia as the only liberal democracy in the world that captures weblog information?

Mr Clegg: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention, which I will come to in a moment, because David Anderson has made some specific recommendations on how we compare with other jurisdictions.

David Anderson has managed to do something that I certainly did not manage to do in government: to get the Home Office to define the somewhat nebulous term of weblogs. Weblogs, according to his report, are

“a record of the interaction that a user of the internet has with other computers connected to the internet.”

The House should take a long, hard look at that definition. It encompasses just about everything someone is likely to do on an internet-connected device—every step they take, every app they open, every edit they make to an online document—and that would be stored for the entire population for 12 months. David Anderson says that, remarkably, at no point was he presented with a “detailed or unified case” for such sweeping powers.

David Anderson also makes it clear—this relates to the point my right hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) has just raised—that we would be seriously out of step with the rest of the world. He states:

“I am not aware of other European or Commonwealth countries in which service providers are compelled to retain their customers' web logs for inspection by law enforcement. I was told by law enforcement both in Canada and in the US that there would be constitutional difficulties in such a proposal.”

The House will also be interested to know that the new Australian data retention law specifically excludes the collection of weblogs precisely because the Australian police told their Government that it would be a disproportionate invasion of privacy.

It is entirely reasonable for law enforcement to want to identify how a known suspect is communicating online, but that is a completely different proposition from the one that the Home Office has now been putting forward in one form or another for eight years. David Anderson sets out a strict process, including using existing powers better but less intrusively than planned by the Home Office, and the presentation of a proper operational case before any detailed proposal is put forward by the Government. I am obviously keen to know from the Government whether that reasonable approach that he advocates will indeed now be pursued.

[Mr Clegg]

Finally, I welcome the Home Secretary's announcement today that the Bill will be published for pre-legislative scrutiny, which will allow further debate on its undoubtedly complex and important provisions. The Bill must be as comprehensive as possible. Both the Intelligence and Security Committee and David Anderson have argued that it should incorporate all the powers that exist in different statutes at present. In that spirit, I hope that the Government will undertake to avow all undeclared surveillance capabilities and major programmes as part of that process.

I have come to the view that the Government's standard blanket position of "neither confirm nor deny" is simply no longer tenable. Recent disclosures mean that the public are able to read detailed accounts of alleged surveillance capabilities, but Government Ministers are unable to explain or defend the need for them in this House or in public. I believe that undermines public trust, feeding a suspicion that there are parts of the system that somehow operate beyond proper scrutiny and transparency. Although we cannot and should not reveal details of operations and specific investigatory techniques, will the Home Secretary ensure that large-scale programmes, such as those referred to in recent revelations, are properly avowed at some point in the near future?

In conclusion, it seems to me that, as has already been said, and as the Home Secretary herself has suggested, we have a big opportunity. The deadline of December 2016 is approaching, when the current data retention powers will fall. Decisions must be taken—they simply cannot be ducked any longer—and they must be taken as consensually as possible, and on the basis of clear principles of necessity, transparency and proportionality. Surveillance powers are a necessary part of a liberal society, as we must have the ability to prevent criminals curtailing the liberty of others to live their lives free from crime, but those powers must be based on evidence that they are both necessary and proportionate to the threat we face. I suggest that this House should not entertain proposals for significant, intrusive new laws based on assertion and rhetoric alone.

1.58 pm

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): It would be remiss of me not first to apologise to you, Mr Speaker, and to the Home Secretary for my absence for the earliest part of this debate; I had a long-standing constituency engagement—an occupational hazard of representing a central London seat. Actually, I am having to miss my daughter's end-of-term ballet show, so I suspect that I will have rather fewer brownie points in my household than the shadow Home Secretary will have in the Balls-Cooper household.

This is anything but routine and uncontroversial business. As someone who served throughout the previous Parliament on the Intelligence and Security Committee, I am fully aware of the intensive work that went into at least one of the reports that we are discussing today. Naturally, it was the Edward Snowden revelations in *The Guardian* that first led to allegations in the US—we have a close intelligence relationship—that UK Government agencies were engaged in blanket surveillance on the internet. The inherent tension between the individual's right to

privacy and the collective entitlement to security referred to by the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) set the context of all these inquiries.

We looked first at interception. The agencies conduct two types of interception depending on the information they have and what GCHQ, MI5 and MI6 are charged with trying to achieve. The first type can be used as an investigative tool only where there is specific knowledge of a threat, allowing agencies to intercept a specific individual's communications. That is known as targeted interception. However, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) said, the watchwords of necessity and proportionality lie very much at the heart of everything that our agencies wish to do. If the target is in the UK, the activity must be authorised by the Secretary of State under RIPA. Even the most ardent of privacy campaigners accept that principle of targeted interception.

The second sort of interception arises as a discovery or part of an intelligence-gathering tool. This allows the agencies to use targeted interception only after they have discovered that a threat exists. Such separate capabilities are required in order to uncover threats in the first place so that the agencies can determine patterns and associations that can generate the leads and obtain the information used to target individuals under suspicion. Bulk interception is primarily used as a discovery tool. This capability attracts the most controversy, as we have seen. It has helped to create an impression—misguided, in my view—that GCHQ is monitoring the communications of everyone in the UK. I should make it clear that, if that were the case, GCHQ's actions would be illegal.

Our Committee rightly scrutinised in great detail the agencies' capability to intercept internet communications, and we had a number of key findings. First and foremost, bulk interception involves three stages: filtering, targeting, and selection. The first of those involves choosing which communication links are to be accessed. It is worth pointing out that each and every minute the internet carries some 4.1 million Google searches, 6.9 million Facebook messages, 350,000 Twitter posts, and 204 million emails. Most of those communications are carried out through fibre-optic cables that carry bearers, of which there are only about 100,000. GCHQ can theoretically access only a tiny percentage of those bearers. It is therefore misleading to use the phrase "blanket surveillance" for what it does.

The second stage that GCHQ has in mind is to select which communications to collect from the very small number of bearers that it is accessing. A decision is then made on how it collects the communications to read. For communications collected under the first processing system, GCHQ undertakes a so-called triage process to determine which messages have the highest intelligence value. Even when GCHQ knows that communications relate to a known national security target, it does not have the capacity to read them all and must therefore, even within that context, prioritise. This all means that only a very small proportion of collected messages are ever read.

When we scrutinised those arrangements, we found that GCHQ will search for and select communications to examine only on the basis of a selector relating to an individual here in the UK, if—and only if—it first obtains a specific authorisation from a Secretary of State naming that individual. It is unlawful for our security

services to search for and examine the communications of someone in the UK without a targeted additional authorisation. Our Committee found that the regulations and safeguards in place were, on the whole, pretty reassuring. That said, as Members will be aware, we made a number of recommendations in order to address concerns about transparency. This was very much mirrored in much of the Anderson report. Anderson was critical about some of the legal framework, of which I will say a little more later, but ultimately he gave the actions of GCHQ very much a clean bill of health.

We also examined the concerns that have been expressed over how the agencies use communications data—the “who, when and where” of a communication. This debate is increasingly complicated by a widespread confusion as to what information is classed as communications data and what is classed as content. There is a grey area involved. For example, looking at information that would not usually be classified as content, but has the potential to reveal a great deal about someone’s private life, should be placed in a special category where more scrutiny is placed on it than there ordinarily would be merely on the basis of its being communications data.

On the other rather intrusive capabilities potentially used by the agencies, the ISC report contains a number of detailed recommendations primarily in relation to specific statutory oversight and greater transparency, where that is possible without damaging national security; that must always be at the forefront of our minds in these matters. The most significant finding in our report, and in the Anderson report, relates, as other Members have rightly pointed out, to the legislative framework that governs the use of all these intrusive capabilities. At present, no single piece of legislation governs the powers and responsibilities of our intelligence and security agencies. The current framework is, as we have heard, complicated and unwieldy. Consolidation is now essential to maintain or sometimes—dare I say it?—to re-establish public confidence.

While we saw no direct evidence that the agencies were in any way seeking to circumvent the law—in truth, their constant watchwords are necessity and proportionality—I am afraid that the lack of clarity in the existing legislation has understandably fuelled suspicion that our security agencies are, on occasion, able to arbitrage the plethora of statutes to choose the easiest route in seeking authorisation. That cannot be a satisfactory situation. I therefore believe that the purposes, functions, capabilities and, importantly, obligations of our security agencies will need to be set out clearly in a single Act of Parliament. Like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield, I have some sympathy for the plight that the Home Secretary will face in having to get such a Bill through Parliament. It will be essential, but it will be a complicated matter. It will have to include issues such as privacy constraints, transparency arrangements, targeting criteria, sharing arrangements, and other safeguards that apply to the use of the security agencies’ capabilities.

The single most profound impact of the Snowden revelations has been felt by the global communications service providers. Exposing the hitherto cosy—perhaps over-cosy—relationships that existed between many household-name internet giants and security services and Governments across the world has resulted in a furious insistence from the CSPs that such co-operation must in future be governed by a clear legal framework.

That has potentially very serious implications, especially if there is any demand by globally run CSPs that such protocols should also operate on a global basis. This is, not least, because we have in this country a different culture regarding the security services, with a different framework and understanding of the way in which they operate within our Government compared even with other members of the “Five Eyes”. There is a glaring difference between the average UK citizen’s acceptance of the work of the secret intelligence agencies and the cultural approach taken to such matters in the USA, where there is a great sense of the individual being up against an all-powerful state, and in much of continental Europe. That is understandable. One need only look to my mother’s homeland. For six years of her life, she was brought up in Nazi Germany under the rigours of the Gestapo, and then under the Stasi in East Germany between 1945 and 1954. That has had a very strong bearing on these cultural differences. There is a danger that we in this country, after Bletchley Park and the glamour of James Bond, could be a little complacent about the way in which we view how the security services operate. It is very different in other parts of the world. If there were to be a push towards such global protocols, it would be more difficult to make the case for our exceptionalism.

Mr Grieve: My right hon. Friend makes a powerful case. This is one of the factors that we will have to take into account when we consider whether there might be advantages to judicial warrant systems because they are likely to command more acceptance internationally even if they do not necessarily seem to be required in this country.

Mark Field: I do not entirely agree with that, but I will touch on it in my concluding comments, which I will move on to fairly shortly.

There are potentially serious implications for the operational capabilities of our security services in their counter-terrorism operations. I am struck, however, by the clear irony that the business models of most internet service providers hinge on the exploitation of knowledge from their own user customers, which can then be sold for profit to third party advertisers. The protection of privacy obviously has its limits.

Snowden’s impact has also revolutionised the demand for and the creation of ever more effective encryption, which further and seriously depletes the capabilities of our security services. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 2001 and, more recently, the attacks that took place on the streets of London almost exactly 10 years ago, the conventional wisdom was that public safety could be protected only by ever more sophisticated targeted internet surveillance. The events of recent times mean that it would be unwise to neglect the future importance of developing more traditional security tradecraft. Our security services will need to invest extensively and prudently in agent expertise on the ground, rather than simply relying on ever more sophisticated electronic surveillance expertise.

May I make a final observation on the highly contentious issue of the authorisation of warrants? As has been pointed out, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation contends that all warrants should be subject to judicial authorisation. I also accept that, in the

[Mark Field]

interests of promoting public confidence, it is now probably necessary that the regime of judicial oversight applying after the event will need substantial bolstering.

We need to remember, however, that it is senior Foreign and Home Office Ministers who are answerable to this House and to Parliament in the event of a major terrorist incident, which invasive surveillance is, of course, designed to prevent. It will be elected politicians, not judges, who will ultimately be accountable to the court of public opinion. Ultimately, therefore, I stand by the ISC's view that Ministers should authorise warrants. Nevertheless, it is important that senior judges will need to be given a more significant role in scrutinising the operation of the process.

Our intelligence agencies do a very important, and increasingly very challenging, job in what are very difficult times. I believe that the UK public have good cause to maintain confidence in what they do, but I also contend that only greater transparency and scrutiny of their work will improve public understanding and reinforce that sense of confidence.

2.12 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Scottish National party welcomes the publication of the Anderson report, which, as others have noted, is very thorough, and one can have only admiration for the job David Anderson QC has done. The SNP wants to work constructively with Members of Parliament across the Chamber to make sure that when the new Bill to which the Home Secretary has referred is introduced it takes adequate account of civil liberties and human rights issues.

The SNP recognises the need for law enforcement and security services to have access to the information they require in respect of the threat not just of terrorist offences, but of serious crime, such as the significant evil posed by child sexual exploitation. However, the SNP will always be vigilant to ensure that appropriate safeguards are put in place to balance the need to keep our communities safe with the need to protect civil liberties.

Although we have some concerns about the report's recommendations, we welcome many of its aspects. We welcome in particular the call for a comprehensive and comprehensible new law to be drafted from scratch, to replace the multitude of current powers and to provide for clear limits and safeguards on any intrusive power that it may be necessary for public authorities to use.

We also very much welcome David Anderson's recognition of the need for the new law to comply with international human rights standards and to be subject to the visible and demanding safeguards reflecting the central importance of both the European convention on human rights and the Human Rights Act.

We welcome the fact that the report urges much stronger oversight of the activities of the police and security services. We support the recommendation that interception warrants should be granted by judges rather than politicians. That properly reflects the separation of powers between Executive and judiciary, as applies in democratic countries across the world that pay more than lip service to the importance of the rule of law.

In that respect, I wish to associate myself with the insightful comments of the shadow Home Secretary and the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve).

The SNP also welcomes David Anderson's recommendation that the Investigatory Powers Tribunal should be able to make declarations of incompatibility under the Human Rights Act and that its rulings should be subject to appeals on points of law.

Finally and most importantly, we welcome David Anderson's statement that no operational case has yet been made for the compulsory retention of third party data. He has also questioned the lawfulness, intrusiveness and cost of the proposals of the draft Communications Data Bill in 2012. His comments are a serious blow to previous Government attempts to introduce what was in effect a snoopers charter. David Anderson notes that no other European Union or Commonwealth country requires the blanket retention of weblogs and, as the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) has noted, Australia recently prohibited that in law—and for very good reason.

When the report was introduced to the House two weeks ago, the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) noted that both the European Court of Justice and David Anderson have now made it clear that blanket retention of data is unlawful. The SNP hopes that the UK Government will take serious cognisance of that.

The director of Liberty, Shami Chakrabarti, has noted:

"It's striking that—despite a five-year campaign by the Home Secretary to convince us of its absolute necessity—David Anderson concludes that no operational case for the snoopers' charter has yet been made."

The SNP hopes that David Anderson's report will be the death knell for the snoopers charter.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): My hon. and learned Friend, who has enjoyed a distinguished career as a lawyer, has rightly welcomed large parts of Mr Anderson's report. Does she, like me, but perhaps unlike the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), share the concerns of many lawyers across the UK that the rule of law and, indeed, the proper administration of justice may be undermined if the protection offered by legal professional privilege is not fully respected by investigatory powers legislation?

Joanna Cherry: I share that concern and note the comments of the English Bar Council and the English Law Society, and I know that the Scottish Bar, of which I am a member, and the Law Society of Scotland also share concerns that legal professional privilege ought not to be interfered with. It is important to note that insisting on proper protection for legal professional privilege is not special pleading on behalf of lawyers; the privilege is that of the client, rather than the lawyer, and the underlying rationale is the public interest in ensuring the proper administration of justice. I share the concerns of legal bodies in that respect.

I will now turn to the Scottish angle on these matters. When I spoke in this House on the occasion of the publication of the Anderson report, I asked the Home Secretary to commit fully to engaging with her Scottish Government counterparts in so far as there will

be measures in the new Bill that impinge on the devolved competences. Her response was that national security is a reserved matter.

That is simply not good enough. The Bill will touch on issues beyond national security, including particularly serious crime. Crime is a devolved matter and the new Bill will clearly include measures directed against the investigation of serious crime. I and others have already mentioned child sexual exploitation as an important example of that. Much of what is to be covered in the new Bill may impinge on areas of Scots law that are clearly devolved and under the jurisdiction of the Scottish Government or Scotland's law enforcement agencies, including the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service.

I would like to give the Home Secretary at least two examples of proposals, which, if taken forward, would have implications for Scottish Ministers and Scottish legislation. The first is a return to judicial authorisation of interception warrants on serious crime grounds. At present, interception for the purpose of preventing or detecting serious crime in Scotland is authorised by Scottish Ministers. On the basis of David Anderson's recommendations, that will, in future, be in the hands of members of the Scottish judiciary.

A second proposal that may have implications for Scotland is the recommendation that the three existing commissioners for interception, surveillance and intelligence services be replaced with a single independent surveillance and intelligence commission. A number of provisions in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 place duties on the Office of Surveillance Commissioners in respect of surveillance and the use of covert human intelligence sources. Any change in that area would almost certainly trigger the requirement for a legislative consent motion from the Scottish Parliament. Accordingly, I hope that the Home Secretary will stand respectfully corrected and now accept that there is a need for her to commit to engaging fully with the Scottish Government, insofar as any legislation introduced later this year and at the beginning of the next year will impinge on the devolved competences.

I mentioned that, although the Scottish National party welcomes the Anderson report, there are areas of concern about its contents. We are particularly disappointed at the suggestion that bulk collection of external communications should continue subject only to what are described as "additional safeguards" and at the recommendation that existing compulsory data retention capabilities under the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014 be maintained. The Anderson report offers six agency case studies in an attempt at justifying mass interception. However, as others, including Liberty, have noted, the information in these case studies is vague and limited, so it is impossible to assess whether the security outcomes could have been achieved just as easily by using the wealth of targeted and operation-led intrusive surveillance powers at the agencies' disposal.

The Scottish National party does not dispute the use and value of targeted and proportional intrusive surveillance. We believe, however, that the mass speculative interception of communications and data retention is unlawful, unnecessary and disproportionate. We are pleased to see that Liberty is currently challenging the lawfulness of mass interception in the European Court of Human Rights and representing Members of this House in their legal challenge to DRIPA.

Mr Grieve: I appreciate the hon. and learned Lady's concern—and I appreciate, too, that this is one of the issues we will have to look at during the passage of the Bill—but I wonder whether she is right in her belief that a sort of mass trawl of a speculative character is taking place. I do not think it is, and listening to what my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) was saying, which I think correctly reflected what has been taking place, I do not think the way in which she has described it is the correct way of identifying what has been going on. It may be, therefore, that she can get some reassurance on this as the Bill goes through.

Joanna Cherry: I clearly defer to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's experience, as he has been a Law Officer in England and has direct knowledge of the issue. I cannot speak from direct knowledge, but I can say that there is significant public perception and concern that what is at stake is mass, speculative trawling. The House must take that concern very seriously, and it is perhaps backed up by recent revelations.

When the Anderson report was first introduced to the House on 11 June, the Home Secretary, in her statement, did not commit to the root and branch reform recommended by Anderson. I am not sure whether she committed to it in her contribution today, but clearly we will have to wait and see the draft Bill that is introduced in the autumn. The SNP wishes to see that Bill bringing about the comprehensive and comprehensible reform recommended by Anderson, as well as achieving the appropriate balance with civil liberties and the recognition of international human rights norms.

The last time we spoke about this matter, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) invited the Home Secretary to look hard at the recommendation for judicial warrants, but I am afraid that I found her response on that—both two weeks ago and today—decidedly lukewarm. However, I note her assurance that no decision has been taken as yet. This is a matter of serious concern for the SNP, and I very much support what the shadow Home Secretary said in that respect.

Cross-party co-operation in this Parliament has already forced the Government to backtrack on their plans to repeal the Human Rights Act, at least for the time being. Everything about David Anderson's report emphasises the need for human rights to be protected under internationally recognised norms. The SNP will seek to defeat any Government plans to curb civil liberties in the forthcoming Bill. In particular, we are concerned that the mass collection of data, without any suggestion of criminality or wrongdoing, impinges on civil liberties, and we are committed to opposing any snoopers charter that sanctions mass spying on the public at large. I mention that, because it is a matter of huge public concern. In opposing any snoopers charter, the SNP will do so secure in the knowledge that both the Anderson report and the Court of Justice of the European Union agree that such a charter would be unlawful.

We support the targeted and proportionate use of lawful intrusive powers, but the Snowden revelations of 2013 and subsequent litigation brought by Liberty and others show just how far we have moved from a model whereby those under suspicion are targeted and

[Joanna Cherry]

the innocent are left free from state intrusion. Even more worrying is the fact that prior to recent revelations, the public and many politicians were unaware of the nature and extent of blanket surveillance.

In order for trust to be restored, this Parliament must assert its democratic function and set clear limits on the use of intrusive powers and prohibit their use on a mass scale.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Before I call the next speaker, may I point out that a very large number of Members still wish to catch my eye? I do not want to impose a time limit, but if we can keep speeches to eight minutes, we can be sure of getting everybody in.

2.27 pm

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I start by paying tribute to our security services, whose work I have seen at first hand over many years. They are superb professionals, who, unspoken and silently, keep us safe every day on the streets of Britain in a way that we want and is emulated across the world.

I pay tribute to David Anderson's report. From its very wisely chosen title to annexe 18, 373 pages later, it is truly magisterial. If I had a criticism, it would be that there are too many acronyms, but stand fast that it is a truly superb work. The Intelligence and Security Committee report, too, in its own way, is also worthy of very close attention and provides a backdrop for the consideration that this House will be engaged in as we run up to autumn and the much anticipated consideration of the draft legislation.

We heard today, from my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), about his daughter's ballet. We have heard about the shadow Home Secretary's child's graduation. A feature of this point in the academic year is that we are concerned about our children and their achievements. At the weekend, I had the very great pleasure of being at my daughters' sports day. What impressed me most, apart from the athletic prowess of my daughters, was the camera overhead, monitoring this business, with the full consent of the school, the children and—I think probably implicitly—the parents for posterity. At first glance, it looked a fairly benign exercise, but I do not think that I was the only one who felt slightly uneasy. In my recollection, it was the first time I had come across this particular piece of technology—a great cumbersome, burdensome thing, very obvious and very noisy. In 10 years' time, it will be replaced—I have no doubt—by a thing the size of a small insect, and at that point, it will become far more sinister. If I had one plea, it would be this: as we consider the draft legislation towards the end of this year, we must make sure that we future-proof the Bill and the Act that eventually transpires. That measure must be good for many years to come, and at a time when we will be faced with technology that most of us can only imagine at the moment.

My interest in this matter stems from my experience as the Minister for international security strategy and a Minister in the Northern Ireland Office, and as a Member

of Parliament who represents a large number of people who are engaged, in one way or another, in the security services. Of course, all of us in this place are intimately involved with the product of the security services, since all our constituents are affected by it in one way or another.

I am very impressed by the National Crime Agency's statistics on what it has done as a direct result of material that has been intercepted: the 750 kg of heroin and 2,000 kg of cocaine that were intercepted in 2012-14; the 2,200 arrests; the 140 firearms that were intercepted; and the £20 million of illicit loot that was seized. I note Operation Notarise and the resulting 600 arrests for suspected child abuse. All of that represents a great well of human misery. Such things will not be dealt with unless we invest in our security services the powers they need to intercept material in a fast-evolving electronic space.

Clearly, the balance needs to be struck between our need to keep people safe in a complex world and privacy; between the extremes of Big Brother and the anarchy and lawlessness of *laissez-faire*. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary touched on that in her remarks. To be honest, I do not know where on that Likert scale between Big Brother and *laissez-faire* we need to pitch our legislation. That is a matter for debate in the months ahead.

I was alarmed that the Intelligence and Security Committee report from earlier this year reported that organisations such as Big Brother Watch, Justice, Liberty and Rights Watch UK felt that the security environment was having a "chilling effect" on society. I do not believe that that is the case. I think that my constituents would be "chilled", however, if we were not able to interdict and intercept the sorts of villains who would do them down and create havoc on the streets of this country. My constituents would be "chilled" in the event that we accepted, as those organisations appear to do, atrocities on the streets of London like the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby. That is the consequence of not giving our security services the powers that that they need. It is as straightforward as that, notwithstanding my remarks about balance.

There are many matters to be considered in the autumn. I welcome the opportunity this House will have for pre-legislative scrutiny. In the short time available to me, I would like to touch on one or two of those matters. Right hon. and hon. Members have commented on the need for public awareness and education to avoid confusion. I do not agree with the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) in so far as she suggested that there was widespread concern about snooping. There is not much evidence to sustain that. However, it is our duty, as we approach this legislation, to do our best to educate the people in whose name we act to ensure that they have the sort of understanding that is needed in a civil society to have confidence that the powers invested in the security services are appropriate, necessary, proportionate and legal. It is the job of Members of this House and, if I may say so ever so gently, the re-formed Intelligence and Security Committee to inculcate that understanding among the public, as far as is possible.

Snooping is a complete misnomer and, as we have heard this afternoon, there is nothing to sustain that description. That does not mean to say that we should

not put in place the mechanisms that are necessary to ensure that our security services do not, wittingly or unwittingly, abuse the position of trust in which they are invested.

We need to be conscious that technology is proceeding apace. Quantum computing, probably in the next 10 years, will provide a double-edged sword, because it will increase the ability to encrypt data and thus the ability of villains to do bad stuff, but it will also improve the ability of our security services to survey bulk data, which brings significant implications for the legislation that we will consider in the autumn. As well as the requirements that the collection of material be necessary, proportionate and legal, the fourth hurdle is the impossibility of surveying the great bulk of the data. It is simply not possible for the security services to snoop in the way that has been suggested, because there is so much data and the technology does not exist to spy or snoop on people or invade their personal liberty in the way that some people seem to think is routinely possible. That may change, however, and we must ensure that the legislation we consider in the autumn is up to the task of dealing with this stuff as it evolves, as it surely will, over the next decade.

There are various things that we can do to mitigate that risk. We can insist on a time limit for the retention of data. We can be wary of allowing internet service providers to hold bulk data that are capable of being mined—so-called “big data”. I am persuaded that there is a distinct possibility that, in the near future, agencies will be able to profile people and predict not what they have done, but what they might do in the future on the basis of the profile that they have built up. That is extremely sinister.

Although it would be illegal to do that as things stand, if we could no longer rely on the fourth hurdle that I mentioned, namely the physical inability to tap the data because of their extent, it may just be possible with quantum computing and the changes in technology over the coming years, providing a sort of electronic version of Dixon of Dock Green that eyes up wrong ‘uns who might get involved in criminality or worse in the future. We need to future-proof the legislation to avoid that.

I am aware that other Members want to speak, so let me say very quickly that we need to be careful about the status of communications data—the who, where and when. Given the increasing importance of the data, the sophistication of them and the profiling that is capable of being built up on the basis of them, we need to look at the status of the designated person. I am not convinced that it is proper to vest those powers in a middle-grade person. We need to look at whether that needs to be changed in order to preserve the liberties that we have discussed today.

I want to comment briefly on who signs warrants for intrusive activities, because that is an important part of the material that we are discussing. Sir David Omand and the Home Secretary are quite clear on that point and I agree with them because of my ministerial experience, although I was at a far lower level than my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve). I am less persuaded—indeed, my right hon. and learned Friend was not persuaded—by the immediacy argument. That seems to me to be superficial and easily dealt with. I am persuaded about the need to consider the wider political context. That is an important

point. I am also persuaded on the point about accountability. We in this place are elected to represent real people. Nobody ever put a cross by the name of a member of the judiciary.

Mr Grieve: The accountability argument is, without doubt, the most powerful argument for Ministers doing the warrantry process. Of course, there remains the problem that, due to the nature of the work, accountability to this House can sometimes be difficult to achieve in practice because, inevitably, it is not made public. That is a tension that the House will have to debate and resolve.

Dr Murrison: As one would expect, my right hon. and learned Friend puts his finger on it. The mechanism that my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster described so well may be a remedy for that, but nevertheless my opinion is that the power has to remain with Ministers. We need to guard jealously the power vested in our politicians, who are accountable to the House and the people for the extraordinarily important things that they do.

At the heart of the matter lies an improvement in public understanding. In the months before December next year, we have to do everything we can to inculcate in the public a far better understanding of these sensitive issues. Each of us has a job to do in that respect, and I hope that the Intelligence and Security Committee will play its part in improving public understanding. Our civil society will be in a much better place as a result.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. If Members insist on putting their own interpretation on what is eight minutes, I will unfortunately have to impose a time limit. I would be grateful if Members kept to eight minutes or less.

2.40 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I may speak very quickly to get through everything I want to say, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I will refer to the reports by the ISC and the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, not the two later reports, which we have not really had an opportunity to read or consider properly. The report by David Anderson, QC, aptly entitled “A Question of Trust”, has rightly been complimented in the House for its thoroughness and rigour. Perhaps we should give a warning to those who might want to read it, though—do not drop it on your foot. Anderson’s recommendation that the law on investigatory powers should be made both comprehensive and comprehensible has also been widely endorsed, and it is surely right. If it is unintelligible to a lay reader, it will seem esoteric and inaccessible to all and will therefore not inspire public confidence.

I would like to focus on the main bone of contention, which is who should have authority to grant permission for access to the content of people’s private communications. The ISC’s report, for all its strengths, offers an insider’s view. The Home Secretary no doubt found much more to agree with in that report than in others, not least because she found herself extensively quoted in it. After hearing evidence that, in my view, was heavily weighted

[Emily Thornberry]

towards Ministers and officials from the security services, the ISC came down squarely on the side of the status quo. It concluded that the current system of ministerial authorisation of interception warrants should be maintained. I listened with some interest to the comments of the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) on that issue.

The Committee appears to have reached its conclusion based almost wholly on the recommendations of Ministers themselves, with the concerns of civil liberties groups being given comparatively short shrift. In concluding that Ministers were better equipped than judges to make decisions on warrants, the Committee relied on arguments some of which, in my view, were based on flawed logic. I will give one example. It argued that,

“Ministers are able to take into account the wider context of each warrant application and the risks involved, whereas judges can only decide whether a warrant application is legally compliant.”

The example that the Committee provided by way of support for that rather extraordinary claim was the diplomatic fracas following the allegations in 2013 that the US National Security Agency had tapped the German Chancellor’s phone. The ISC’s less than subtle implication was that whereas a Minister would have the wisdom to reject such an application, judges would be too clueless to understand the requirements of international diplomacy and could not possibly be trusted to understand the diplomatic implications of such a decision.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Does the hon. Lady not accept that Ministers and judges have a different role? The report recognises that the role of a Minister is to represent Her Majesty’s Government across a broad swathe of areas, including international policy, and the role of a judge is to adjudicate on a question of law.

Emily Thornberry: Yes, of course, but it underestimates the subtle role that judges have come to play in recent years. For example, the development of administrative law has meant that judges have to be able to balance a number of factors. Are we essentially saying that the only way for Ministers to have some form of oversight of the security services is by giving permission for intercepts? There must be greater oversight than that. For example, if there was a suggestion that—I am plucking an idea from the air—we should tap the phone of the President of France, are we saying that the Home Secretary would not be aware of it if there were a system of applying to the court? If that is our current system, we need to examine it carefully. We need to ensure that our Ministers have some form of oversight of the security services, but that does not preclude the need for judges as a back-up. Surely Ministers would welcome the idea that they can not only make their own judgment but have it backed up with the authority of a judge.

The caricature of judges as being completely out of the world does not bear up, in my experience. I have to declare an interest at this point—I am married to a judge, and there have been times when my husband has been duty judge. Although the phone has not necessarily been passed to him while he has been in the bath, it is quite right that judges are flexible and can move quickly to make decisions as and when necessary.

Tom Tugendhat *rose*—

Emily Thornberry: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman, and I want to try to keep to your strictures, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am not doing very well—I have only three minutes left if I am to do so. I suspect that I might not, but I will go as fast as I can.

Judges do not live in a vacuum. Their job requires them to have some form of judgment. There have been great challenges to the establishment, and the public have great scepticism about not only politics but all sorts of pillars of the establishment. I find it interesting that the judiciary is one of the few areas that are not challenged in the same way. Whenever a difficult issue needs to be decided on or there has been a crisis, it does not take people long to call for a full judicial inquiry. When we are talking about trust in the highly contentious field of investigatory powers, it seems to me that it would be a mistake for Ministers not to call for the back-up of the judiciary. When we are considering a radical overhaul of the legislative and regulatory framework, we need to be bold.

There is great sense in David Anderson’s report. He talks about the establishment of a new body, which is the backbone of his recommendations, not just one of many proposals that he has put forward. It is absolutely essential, and last time we discussed the matter in this place I was a little alarmed to hear the Home Secretary refer to it as being only one of many recommendations. Actually, the body features in about 50 of the recommendations, so I hope that it is not pushed aside as being a peripheral issue. Clearly, it is not.

Transparency is another important part of David Anderson’s report. The new commission would not only take on responsibility for approving warrants but would incorporate the retrospective audit functions currently exercised by the interception of communications commissioner and the intelligence services commissioner. Those officers currently fit into what I see as a deeply foggy regulatory arrangement, which in many ways is reminiscent of Wall Street before the crash, when not a single one of the half a dozen or so agencies that were given the job of regulating and supervising the banks seemed to be able to exert its authority sufficiently or even know what was going on under its nose, let alone have the power to stop it.

The Home Secretary said to the ISC at that stage that it was important for the decision to be taken by somebody who is democratically accountable to the public. I understand that, but the reality is that thousands of warrants for interception are issued under RIPA. We do not know what proportion of applications the Home Secretary does not approve when they appear on her desk, because both she and successive Governments have refused to say. The current Home Secretary admitted in evidence to the ISC that the proportion of applications she approves is very high. That is not surprising, given that reviewing such applications takes up such a significant proportion of her day and it is not as though she does not have lots of other things to do. She relies heavily on the judgment of her officials—we would, of course, expect her to do so—but we have to be careful that it is not a rubber-stamping exercise. I am sure it is not, but we have to be mindful about what it looks like when we are considering a question of trust. Let us look at the reality before deciding whether a change would be a bad thing.

Taken together, David Anderson's proposals represent a radical overhaul of the existing framework. I do not believe they are the worse for that. When looking at the report, we must go back and say to ourselves that, in the end, we need a radical overhaul. We need to bring the public with us. We need to be unafraid to bring in additional expertise. A clearer framework in which we can have traditional oversight of such sensitive things as intercepts must be a good thing.

2.50 pm

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): I am honoured to be called, after such distinguished speakers and in such an important debate, to give my maiden speech.

For me, paying tribute to my predecessor is more than a convention; it is something I do with real affection. Sir Tony Baldry has served our area since I was a little girl. In the 32 years he spent in this place, he helped, as a Minister, to privatise the energy industry, served as Chairman of the Select Committee on International Development, and, more recently, sat on the Government Benches as Second Church Estates Commissioner. He acted as the voice of God in this place and was responsible for everything from bats and bishops to blasphemy. Sir Tony believes in God, but he also believed in Mrs Thatcher. In his first political job as a young man, he was proud to act as keeper of the hairspray. He is loved locally as our very own "Sir Cumference", but it is his loyalty, decency and sheer hard work that will make him so hard to follow.

There is another former Member, now in another place, to whom I must pay tribute. I owe to my father my lifelong knowledge of, and love for, our area and its people. I am one of the very fortunate band of Members able to represent their home-town.

North Oxfordshire is a beautiful place to live. I am sure many Members can picture our river valley, rolling hills and medieval churches encircled by villages. It is true that at home I make cider and keep ferrets.

Four generations of my family have the soil of north Oxfordshire under our fingernails, yet this is only partially a rural constituency. The vast majority of my constituents live in one of our two major thriving and substantial market towns: Banbury and Bicester.

Business is booming. Thanks to the long-term economic plan and the impressive industry of my constituents, we have almost no unemployment. That is not something my predecessor was able to say until the very end of his term here. We excel at food production and engineering, often with agricultural roots; town and country balanced to provide the perfect setting. The Bicester hunt meets in a factory that produces engines for lawnmowers. The diversity of commerce found in converted barns is extraordinary. We have high-end technical businesses, hospitality and national charities where once we had cowsheds.

Many of those businesses now operate internationally. Whatever the result of the referendum, our businesses need an easily accessible market for trade in Europe and strong global trading connections. Bicester village is the most visited attraction outside London for Chinese tourists and is known to many well-dressed Members of this House. All this is, in part, down to our very fortunate geographical position. We benefit from superb road and rail links, with which I am, as a commuter who lives in

the middle of the constituency, very familiar. We also have the excellent Horton general hospital, where I was born, which now boasts more consultants than ever before.

It does not surprise me that so many people want to move to our area and join us. The challenge facing us over the next few years is how to manage unprecedented expansion across the area and to ensure that Bicester can blossom into a garden town. We must provide new infrastructure and work hard to ensure that we preserve what matters to us while building for the future.

Although I love my home, I am not blind to its problems. I am proud that this summer, for the first time, students in all our secondary schools will finally be able to take A-levels, but we must raise aspirations much higher. Child sexual exploitation has been a problem for us, but it is being recognised and tackled at all levels, not least by the changes I hope we will make following today's debate.

As the mother of two girls, I am acutely aware of the pressures now heaped on our children in the social media age. Creative measures to build their self-worth and to protect them must be a priority for us all this Parliament. Only by tackling these difficult issues can we create the one nation we have pledged to deliver. Compassionate Conservatives, such as my predecessor and my father, know that the marginalised and vulnerable must be protected for society to thrive.

As a Conservative, I am committed to standing up for the rights of the individual. I am fortunate to have had a front seat in courts for the development of human rights law over the last 20 years. When I started out as a young Government lawyer, protecting issues of national security, we used to joke that we represented "the powers of darkness". Since then, battle-hardened by so many inquests into the deaths of servicemen killed fighting for us, those who died in the 7/7 bombings and, more recently, Alexander Litvinenko, it has become ever clearer to me that our Security Services are nothing of the sort. They have been proved repeatedly to be both efficient and decent, and a great example of the values we hold so dear in this country. They, and others in our civil service, get on with the business of protecting us for modest salaries and little public recognition. We are lucky to have them.

We face a grave combination of threats. We must not allow those who mean to harm us to exploit any credibility gap in our regulation of investigatory powers. Checks and balances are welcome, but the process must not become so burdensome as to result in delays that mean we cannot respond to threats as quickly as we need to. As a lawyer, married to another lawyer, I am of course very comfortable with the idea of judicial oversight! This is precisely what judges are trained for and able to provide and they are very good at it, but the system must retain sufficient flexibility to enable us to act at great speed when necessary.

I am indebted to my pupil master, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), for his support throughout my legal career. I was amused to note that he, and several of the initiates on the Opposition Benches, were happy to admit that they find the existing regulatory framework somewhat difficult to understand. I share their concerns, but at this stage of my parliamentary career, I am not going to make any such admissions! Going forward, I would add that we

[Victoria Prentis]

must make sure that the language used is wide enough to encompass threats that have not yet materialised—whether or not they be at a school sports day. Technology is moving faster than regulatory drafting.

Our regulation of investigatory powers should be seen in the wider context of protections that we are fortunate to enjoy in the United Kingdom. As a nation, we should be proud of our record on human rights. In the 800 years since the signing of the Magna Carta, our perceptions have quite rightly evolved. The greatness of the common law is that it has evolved with them. The European convention on human rights is a masterful document, and we must remain a signatory to it, but it is very much a product of the cataclysmic events that it was designed to prevent from re-occurring. In this country, the courts are unable to quash an Act of Parliament. It seems we need to re-state that, while our courts should have regard to the decisions of the ECHR, these are on the same footing, and Parliament is sovereign. I am pleased that the Government are consulting wide legal minds in a variety of venues on how to take this forward.

We can now, if we wish, formulate rights for today—including, for example, parental rights and those of children—and we can discuss sexuality and disability rights in a way that would have been unthinkable 65 years ago. I hope that, in so doing, we can deal with some of the more unwieldy aspects of the Human Rights Act. I have seen how the principle of extra-territoriality adds to the burdens on the soldiers whom I was so proud to represent, and how the interpretation of the investigative obligation under article 2 has benefited lawyers rather than bereaved families. I have seen those who face the enemy with bravery quail at the idea of a significant disclosure exercise. We must not allow excessive requests for paperwork and over-burdensome oversight to become themselves deadly weapons.

I am, as I said, battle-hardened, but not battle-weary, and I look forward to fighting hard to represent the people of north Oxfordshire in the years to come.

3 pm

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): I commend the hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) on her maiden speech. Listening to her description of her constituency, I thought that in many ways it sounded much like my own. I must try to visit it at some point during the years ahead.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my own maiden speech. I look forward to undertaking the duties with which my constituents have entrusted me, and I shall seek to use every possible opportunity to promote the issues that are most important to the communities that I represent. I thank Members in all parts of the House for the warm welcome that I received on my arrival here, and I especially thank my induction buddy, David Nicholas, who got me off to the best possible start of my tenure.

I also pay tribute to my predecessor, David Hamilton. Many Members will know David of old, as he was a Member of Parliament for 14 years. I am fortunate in that I have known David for a large part of that time, and have always found him very easy to get on with. I do not know whether that is due to the fact that we

have never actually stood against each other, but it has certainly made things a lot easier. I welcomed the warm comments that David made to me about my successful election. While we may disagree on many matters, I think it safe to say that we are very much in agreement on the importance of representing our constituents in the House of Commons.

I am the first SNP Member to be elected to this House from Midlothian, and the first non-miner for decades to represent it. In many ways, that reflects the wider changes that we have seen in Midlothian over the years. Ten years ago, there was not a single elected SNP representative there. Nine and a half years ago, I was elected to Midlothian council in what became a process of gradual growth. In 2007, there was a group of six on the council. In 2011, both Members of the Scottish Parliament returned as SNP members. In 2012, the SNP took the lead in Midlothian council, and at the time of the general election I was its leader. It has been quite a journey over those 10 years.

Today, Midlothian is one of the fastest growing parts of Scotland. The growth of world-leading animal science at the Bush, the reintroduction of the Borders railway—or the Waverley line, as we in Midlothian call it—and the blossoming of a multitude of smaller businesses have all helped to make Midlothian the destination of choice for many. I understand that more people are employed on the site of the old Bilston Glen colliery today than were employed there at the height of the mining industry, which shows how things have moved on. However, Midlothian is still very much a community, with a strong identity which each of our towns defends vigorously, loudly and often.

I am sure you have noticed, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I am wearing a Midlothian tartan tie. There is a very good reason for that. In many ways, it helps me to paint a picture of Midlothian for the benefit of Members. The green represents the large rural landscapes and agricultural nature of the county. Although Midlothian is only a short drive from the centre of Edinburgh, people certainly know that they are there when they see the sweeping green spaces at the foot of the Moorfoot, Lammermuir and Pentland hills. The Pentland hills are, of course, the home of Europe's longest dry ski slope. It now includes tubing runs, and those who are brave enough can try their hand at a “rolling haggis”.

The blue represents the reservoirs in the surrounding hills, while the twin pale blue lines represent the rivers of the North and South Esk. The gold thread represents the grain that made Midlothian the breadbasket of Edinburgh, and today we certainly have a flourishing food and drink industry, boasting internationally recognised brands such as Macsween Haggis and Stewart Brewing, which I confess is a personal favourite of mine.

Of course, there is also the black—who could miss the black? This represents the coal, first mined by the Cistercian monks of Newbattle abbey, founded by them in 1140. Coal formed a key part of the history of Midlothian until the late 1980s, which is also when I moved there, and Newbattle abbey is the home of the Declaration of Arbroath—the very place where it was drafted by the Abbot of Arbroath. That is certainly something I wish to take forward in the years ahead. My county is deeply proud of its heritage, and I invite all Members to visit many of its tourist attractions, from the National Mining Museum to Rosslyn chapel, made famous by “The Da Vinci Code.”

I am not the first person to be elected to this Chamber from Midlothian in such a stunning political landslide. In 1878 Midlothian elected W.E. Gladstone, following his decision not to stand again for Greenwich. He decided to challenge the incumbent, Lord Dalkeith, and his Midlothian campaigns of 1879 and 1880 engaged the population in a way that was uncommon for the time. In 1879 Gladstone was reported to have given some 30 substantial speeches, said to have been heard by almost 87,000 persons. I cannot claim to have had anything like that number at the hustings in which I participated, but there are similarities in our general approach. I, like colleagues, was very keen to get out, to have meetings and discussions with people—not simply to have invited audiences at closed-door meetings—and to engage the population. Gladstone was determined to take his message to the people, which I shall look to continue and drive forward as I undertake my new role as the MP for Midlothian. Gladstone’s foresight in that regard leads me to wonder what he might have made of today’s social media. No doubt he would be one of the top Twitterati, with thousands of followers hanging on his every word, and perhaps some of us treated to a description of what he was eating for his tea every night.

As I look to follow in the footsteps of those who have come before me, I will do so in my own way. I am not here to settle down; I am here to make a difference to the community that has placed its trust in me. I therefore ask hon. Members to consider what Gladstone might have thought about the investigatory powers Bill, which will be presented in draft form in autumn 2015, followed by a substantive Bill in 2016. In line with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), I welcome much of the Anderson report, but I have some real concerns about some of its content and strong feelings, as my hon. and learned Friend does, about any potential snoopers’ charter, thought police or mass spying on the public at large. We need to be very careful about how we take these issues forward.

My predecessor, David Hamilton, was himself a victim of snooping during the miners strike, an action that was rightly referred to in this Chamber, with a call for a full inquiry and the release of suppressed papers and a public apology to the miners and their communities. Sadly, such actions, along with blacklisting, are still issues today, and we need to ensure we do everything we can to tackle them. I urge Members to bear that in mind when we consider the findings of the Anderson review.

My predecessor said in his maiden speech that

“as we meet the new challenges, I hope that we will not forget the values for which many of us came into politics—free education, a free health service and support for the weak in our society”.—[*Official Report*, 12 July 2001; Vol. 371, c. 1014.]

I wholeheartedly agree with Mr Hamilton on those points, as I hope many in this Chamber do, and I look forward to working towards those goals.

3.9 pm

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): May I say what a pleasure it is to follow the maiden speeches we have just heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) and the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson)? Given their contributions, I am sure they are both embarking on very solid parliamentary careers.

One of the most striking things about the Anderson report was the early chapters describing the technology landscape that we face across the world and that is faced by our security and intelligence services. That landscape is changing almost daily in its innovation and capabilities: new applications are emerging; new methods of encryption are being developed as we speak; and more and more data are travelling around the world, connecting people together and often connecting our enemies together. In the past 25 to 30 years, technology has provided massive opportunities for our society, but it also represents a profound threat to our future national security. It provides opportunities for our enemies—for countries operating and wanting to develop cyber-attacks against our infrastructure; it enables terror groups to communicate below the radar in encrypted chatrooms on the dark web; and it allows networks to develop which are difficult to detect and to analyse.

Before I came to this House, I worked in the IT and technology industry for 20 years and I have seen the changes taking place. Our enemies are very skilled in the use of this technology. They use it to disseminate their message through social media and through other networks. They are very skilled at creating methods of cyber-attack and at avoiding detection, and they are becoming increasingly skilled in collaborating across the world. The key challenge facing us, therefore, is: how do we respond to that ever-changing and complex landscape, and how do the Government and the state respond?

As other hon. Members have said, David Anderson’s review is an excellent, magisterial piece of work, which really sets out the landscape. He focuses on the fundamental principles we need to be following to ensure that our security and intelligence services have the tools necessary to do the job, within a legal framework that not only protects privacy and the freedom of the individual, but, as other hon. Members have said, is integrated under a single new law which is comprehensible. Our enemies can use technology flexibly and innovatively, and can respond to new trends without constraint, so the Government and the state face a challenge because we cannot afford to be static and unresponsive in the light of the new challenges we face, as ultimately our citizens will pay the price.

The Anderson review is therefore right to call for a new set of laws—or a new law—that consolidate the myriad different pieces of legislation that have built up over time; clearly articulate the correct balance between enabling our security and intelligence services to do their jobs and having the necessary transparency; are written in a language that a layman can understand and which is comprehensible; and that ensure that we have a framework where not only can the security and intelligence services operate, but where the police and other public bodies are clear about their legal responsibilities and operate proportionately.

The freedom of the individual and freedom of expression are absolutely fundamental to our democratic society. But a mature democratic country such as Britain, with all the connections that we have around the world, needs to have the capability and the framework to combat its enemies, wherever those enemies may manifest themselves.

As David Anderson says in his report, it would simply not be acceptable for a modern democratic society to allow paedophiles, for example, to operate on the

[James Morris]

dark net with guaranteed impunity, or to allow terrorists to render themselves undetectable simply by selecting an application that encrypts their communication history so that it is inaccessible. It would not be acceptable for a modern democratic society and Government to cede responsibility, and say, “All this is too complicated and we will allow our enemies or criminals to act with impunity.” But we do not have to become a totalitarian society to achieve our goal. As David Anderson also says, if the UK is to set an example to the world, it will be not by withdrawing from those dark spaces that we see emerging on the web, but by demonstrating that our democratic society has the ability to patrol those spaces in tightly defined circumstances and with sufficient safeguards against abuse. That is one of the fundamental underlying principles that needs to drive our thinking when we come to debate the new legislation that will be introduced in the autumn.

As the Government consider the recommendations made by Anderson, the challenge for us all is to enable a debate to take place, so that the state can engage in the complex battle against very intelligent enemies, especially those operating in this newly emerging dark space on the internet. That dark space has the danger of allowing our enemies to act with impunity. Fundamentally, we need to create the appropriate legal framework to ensure that our enemies are held accountable for their activities, because that is what a democratic society demands.

3.17 pm

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my maiden speech as the newly elected Member for Falkirk. It is an immense privilege to follow the hon. Members who have set such an incredibly high standard today and in the recent weeks. I thank the staff in the House and my buddy, Charlotte Every, for their unending patience in showing us around these buildings. Some of us have blisters on our feet having lost our way so often.

The constituents of Falkirk elected me by a large majority, for which I humbly thank them. However, nice though it would be, I do not believe that that was down to any personal qualities that I may have. [HON. MEMBERS: “Ah!”] Well, I am not exactly tall, thin and good looking, but I do the best with what I have. My majority speaks to the desire for change that we have seen expressed so passionately by many people, both last year in the referendum and in our recent general election. It will be my honour to represent every individual in my constituency regardless of how they voted. I will endeavour to work on their behalf, to the very best of my ability, now and throughout the years ahead.

As is customary, may I offer my best wishes to my immediate predecessor in Falkirk, Mr Eric Joyce? He is an able man who has been through some difficult times. In the words of Oscar Wilde, it is worth remembering that

“Every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future.”

I wish him peace and success in his future endeavours.

Before Mr Joyce, Falkirk’s representative in Parliament was Mr Dennis Canavan. Dennis served the constituency tirelessly and was respected across the House. When he announced his retirement before the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections, he had completed a combined

33 years in Westminster and Holyrood. Particularly close to his heart was his determination to end complacency in politics and remind us that those elected to serve the public should remain hungry for social justice and civil liberties. I draw inspiration from his desire to tackle all forms of inequality.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe that if you want to change the world, you get busy in your own little corner. At a grassroots level in Scotland, people have become very busy. People are involved in politics as never before, with public meetings and community activism. Some are just accidental activists and we, the SNP, are largely supportive of the Anderson report, which protects those civil liberties.

The Scottish National party has a soaring membership with more women members than men and a wonderful strong and honest leader, a lawyer herself, who has helped the democratic renewal we have seen since last year’s referendum. That should warm the hearts of all in this House, regardless of the political tribe to which they belong. I believe that our voters tired of “politics as usual”. Too often, they see empty promises and stale rhetoric in place of principle and action. There were lofty thoughts and lofty words, but we also need deeds. The sense of this House as remote from the lives of ordinary people and disconnected from the challenges and difficulties they face every day is real, should concern us all and must be addressed. The introduction of a snoopers charter would make politicians ever more remote from those who they represent.

What we saw in Scotland in May was an appetite among voters to be represented by people like them, who have lived and worked in the communities that send them to this House. I have not only served as a local councillor since 2005 but have run a barber shop in the village of Denny and Dunipace in my constituency for nearly 50 years—do not say that I do not look my age. Shortly after being elected, while having a wee blether in my barber shop, one customer pointed out that I should perhaps replace the shop’s red bench with a green one. I asked why, and he said that people might think that I was getting a wee bit overly ambitious. I am referring to the place next door.

I understand only too well the pressures and constraints of running a small business in good times and bad. There are more parallels between being a barber and an MP than anyone might imagine—[*Interruption.*] Let your imagination run wild. Both require listening closely to public opinion and, where possible, acting on it. There is also a great deal of hot air and we have to do our best, sometimes with not very much to work with—although none of my hon. Friends has that problem. Cuts are also a key part of my daily routine, but I can assure you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that they are not the ones that the Chancellor favours.

Falkirk is situated in the beautiful central lowlands of Scotland and lies almost midway between the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. It has a proud history, having been at the very centre of the industrial revolution and of Scotland’s iron and steel industry. The days of producing cannons for the Royal Navy and beams for the early steam engines might be behind us, but over the past 50 years Falkirk has emerged from some hard days to become a modern cultural delight. There is an ongoing transformation in which art, industry and innovation have combined to create a powerful magnet for tourism.

The Kelpies are towering steel statues that represent a mythical Scottish water spirit held to possess the strength and endurance of 100 horses. They are the largest equine sculptures in the world and dominate the skyline, speaking to the animals that pulled the wagons, ploughs, barges and coal ships that shaped much of my constituency. They also epitomise the endurance of a community that is finding its voice and can be optimistic about its future.

The Falkirk wheel is a marvel of modern engineering that ties together the present technical innovation with the history of Falkirk's incredible canal systems and waterways. My constituency is also an area of outstanding natural beauty peppered with historic gems, including the Antonine Roman wall.

The Falkirk constituency, its villages and towns, has suffered due to the austerity measures pursued by the Conservative party. It is austerity and its harsh consequences that I am here to fight every step of the way. Anything that threatens the wellbeing of my constituents and their communities will be absolutely, totally opposed by me. Why should society's poor pay for the mistakes of society's rich?

We have a threat to my area and across Scotland: principally, shale gas fracking. Scotland has a worldwide reputation for the purity of its water and a huge and growing food and drink industry that relies on that reputation. Nothing should jeopardise it. Fossil fuels cannot last forever in Scotland. We can make the transition from fossil to renewable energy through investment, research and development, but we need control of our own energy resources. Those powers need to be transferred to the Scottish Parliament now.

The next five years that I serve here are for the Falkirk bairns. I can assure this House and the community of Falkirk that I will be very busy in my own little corner.

3.25 pm

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech in this important debate. It is a real pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally)—a small business owner like myself, who I am sure will make a great contribution to this House—and the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson). I am proud also to be following my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), who made an excellent speech. I think my hon. Friends will agree that she will be an asset to this House.

I feel truly honoured to be standing here today, charged with the privilege of representing the very constituency in which I was born and bred. I follow a line of representatives who were of an independent nature and character—[*Laughter.*] My immediate predecessor, Mark Reckless, worked hard to win back the seat for the Conservatives in 2010. His steadfast position on Europe will be remembered in this House. He gave his constituents a chance to have their say in a by-election dominated by that position, in which he was victorious, but he also gave me an opportunity that I never thought I would have: the chance to stand as a candidate to represent my home towns.

My wonderful constituency and my fellow constituents have been thrown somewhat into the spotlight in recent months, with the eyes of the nation and numerous news

agencies watching us. To some, it felt like our towns were experiencing a mini-invasion. To use a phrase coined by the BBC, this was the start of the battle for Rochester and Strood. The people of my constituency are resilient, forthright and determined, and I am immensely proud of the way they had their voices heard and how they dealt with the focus put on us in that period. However, after a short interlude, they decided that the leadership and the future prosperity of our country were more than a single issue—something that the people of Rochester and Strood were not prepared to gamble with.

My constituency is steeped in maritime, military and industrial history, and has a diverse landscape and community. It forms part of the Medway towns and includes Strood, Chatham, the old city of Rochester and numerous surrounding villages. The area is named after the tidal River Medway, which meanders through them. Over the centuries, that natural resource has shaped the development of the landscape and the lives of the people who live there.

In Rochester, our magnificent Norman castle and cathedral have been well documented, but the House may not be aware that we are also blessed with Upnor castle—an Elizabethan fort built to defend warships moored on the river, where in 1582 Queen Elizabeth I reviewed the fleet—on the opposite bank of the river to the Royal Chatham dockyard, which in its heyday was the most important shipbuilding and repair dockyard in the country.

It is a lesser-known fact that it was on the River Medway that one of our most famous 16th-century seafarers, Sir Francis Drake, learned to sail. He went on to circumnavigate the world, defeat the Spanish armada and become a Member of Parliament. Given that I, too, learned to sail on the River Medway, and have become a Member of Parliament, one does wonder where this path will take me.

There are many subtle reminders of past industry in my constituency, none of them greater than the chalk cliffs that show themselves to us every now and then—a reminder of when cement works were scattered across the towns of Medway. That cement was shipped by barge to grow an expanding London, and was most notably used in the reconstruction of San Francisco after the great earthquake of 1906. There is also the old slipway at Borstal, where the Short brothers would launch their seaplanes, built at the factory, and the car park in Strood, where Aveling and Porter once stood—the company that became the largest manufacturer of steamrollers in the world.

The ingenuity and entrepreneurship of the hard-working people of my constituency have created a local economy where small enterprises thrive and grow. Since Labour was in power, unemployment has fallen by 46% and 6,200 apprenticeships were started; there are over 10,000 across the Medway towns. Our future economy is intrinsically linked to the provision of education and skills to our future generations.

I congratulate this Conservative Government on their determination to challenge all educational establishments that are not delivering for our children. As a Medway councillor, I held the educational improvement portfolio. Outcomes for our young people have not been what they should. Often I have seen the interests of the adults involved in underperforming schools put before the outcomes for the young people they served, and being a

[Kelly Tolhurst]

barrier to prompt improvement. Our schools community must be led by inspirational professionals who have high expectations and aspirations for the young people of my towns. I am a local comprehensive school girl from a working-class background who has worked hard, run her own business and become a Member of Parliament.

[*Interruption.*] My journey is one that every young person in my community should feel is possible for them, with the values, skills and experiences they receive, which should prepare them to be the next generation to see Rochester and Strood through changing times.

I welcome today's debate. We live in a technologically advanced world, and it is right that our security services and police should have the tools to tackle the threats that we face. I have a sister who is a talented social worker, and through that connection have had the honour of working with some wonderful children who have come into our care system. All too often, our young children have been pushed from pillar to post for long periods while decisions are taken about their future care plans, with further lengthy waits to be matched with new parents. I know one young person who had the system and the time scales fail her at a young age. That is simply not good enough, and it is right that Ministers are looking at ways to address this.

My sister and I have taken very different paths, but we have both thrived because of the love and stability of our mother and father. It was our parents who gave us the tools to succeed. I want every child to be as lucky as I was to experience the love and stability that a permanent family can bring, so that our children can thrive, and their future life chances are no longer uncertain. The safety of our young people is of paramount importance, so we must have powers to investigate and tackle criminals who target and exploit our vulnerable young people; they must be thwarted and brought to justice.

I have much to focus on over the coming Parliament—supporting my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in his renegotiations on Britain's future with Europe, working with colleagues and leaders at Medway hospital to build on the improvements we are now starting to see, protecting our beautiful Hoo peninsula, the fine agricultural land, marshland habitats, and our villages from overdevelopment, and continuing to make it quite clear that we are not an extension of London and no airport is wanted in Rochester and Strood. As mentioned previously, we, the people of Medway, are determined and we like to win our battles.

Finally, I would like to bring it to the attention of the House that it is 45 years since the previous Conservative woman was elected to represent the constituency that preceded Rochester and Strood. Dame Peggy Fenner was first elected to this House in 1970, a formidable woman, remembered for her fierce opposition to the closure of Chatham dockyard in the 1980s. She asked the Defence Secretary of the time:

“Does my right hon. Friend believe that the people of Rochester and Chatham elected me to support a Government that would do what has just been done to their dockyard? My right hon. Friend need not reply. I shall tell him the answer: they did not, and I will not.”—[*Official Report*, 25 June 1981; Vol. 7, c. 391.]

Sadly, she passed away last September at the age of 91. I hope I can follow in her footsteps, being also a strong Conservative woman, and be a formidable defender of the needs of the people in my constituency, Rochester and Strood.

3.36 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst) on an excellent and forthright maiden speech, and I pay tribute to all Members who have made maiden speeches this afternoon, which were among the best that I have heard.

I welcome the debate this afternoon and David Anderson's report. These are important issues and they have become pressing. I was the Director of Public Prosecutions for five years, had a great deal of exposure to the exercise of investigatory powers and recognise the background that David Anderson sets out in his report. There has been a long-term shift from telephone communications via UK service providers towards internet-based communications through overseas service providers. Encryption capability has changed and the law, as I discovered, is not as clear or as comprehensive as it should be.

The Snowden revelations have given us a line of sight on this important issue. There will be tension in this debate that is picked up in this House. It is laid out in David Anderson's report. As the volume of electronic communications grows, the authorities, on the one hand, understandably fear the emergence of new channels of communication which cannot be monitored, and thus they seek new powers. Privacy advocates, on the other hand, raise the spectre of a surveillance state. That tension is not unfortunate. It is welcome and necessary in a democratic society and should play its part in our debates. Striking the balance in the new draft Bill will be critical.

As the Home Secretary said when she last spoke on this issue on 11 June, it is impossible to have that debate without first considering the threat that we face as a country. This is not the place for me to detail that threat, but when I was DPP I was asked about the importance of communications data in prosecuting terrorist offences and I provided that information to the Government in a letter. David Anderson's report provides an update on the information that I provided and quotes the Crown Prosecution Service evidence as of 1 October 2014. That gives a snapshot of the recent prosecutions.

The CPS evidence shows that, in 26 recent terrorist cases, of which 17 have thus far concluded with a conviction, 23 could not have been pursued without communications data, and in 11 of the cases the conviction was dependent on those data. One of the cases that I oversaw as DPP has already been referred to, Operation Overt. That was the operation that involved thwarting a co-ordinated suicide plot to bring down seven transatlantic flights at the same time, using liquid explosives. The plot was thwarted by the careful and painstaking work of the police and security services, and the case was then prosecuted by my staff in the counter-terrorism team. The ability to access communications data was vital to the successful outcome of that important case.

However, it would be wrong to conduct this debate on the basis that it is only in terrorist cases that communications data are relevant, because they are used widely in cases of serious organised crime, online fraud and child sexual exploitation. That is why I have always argued that investigators and prosecutors need to maintain the capacity they have, and that any reduction in their capability might jeopardise future prosecutions.

Proportionate surveillance and interception are vital to saving lives and to the successful investigation and prosecution of serious crime. That is why I and others have listened carefully to the case for change made by the police and the security agencies, and why I think that there is now near consensus that reform and extension of investigatory powers is needed. But—and it is a big but—as the case for greater powers for our police and security agencies becomes more powerful, so too does the case for strong checks and balances. The guiding principles that must take us through that are clear.

First, the powers to intrude on privacy must be provided by accessible and foreseeable laws. In that regard, we must be clear that sensitive powers need to be fully declared before the law is enacted. Secondly, such powers should be used only when their use is necessary and proportionate. The burden is on the Government to establish necessity and proportionality when they bring forth the draft Bill, and it is on the police and other agencies each time they exercise their powers. Thirdly, authorisation and oversight must be clear and comprehensive. Fourthly, there must be an effective remedy for individuals whose rights might have been infringed.

Against that background, I welcome David Anderson's recommendation that the existing authorisation and oversight regime should be replaced by a system of judicial authorisation, as has been touched on in this afternoon's debate. It is a step change, as it will change the practice that has been in place for many years, but I believe that it is the right step. David Anderson sets out the arguments for and against the change. It is not a question of whether the Secretary of State or the judges can do the function, because they can, and it is not to call into question the good faith in which the powers have been exercised until now; it is a step change that is needed for the reasons set out in David Anderson's report.

On the vital question of accountability, David Anderson sets out why, in truth, the argument about accountability does not really stack up, for some of the reasons that have been alluded to this afternoon, because ultimately the limitations on looking at the material are such that, whoever exercises the power, the real accountability is with the Investigatory Powers Tribunal. I think that is a step in the right direction. I recognise that it is a big step and that it needs to be carefully debated, but it adds considerably to the oversight and is in keeping with the extension of powers that is sought.

I also welcome David Anderson's recommendation that there should be no question of progressing proposals for the compulsory retention of third party data before a compelling operational case has been made. It is now for that case to be made by those who want to make it. Those recommendations are consistent with the guiding principles that I have just set out.

In my view, those guiding principles also need to be applied to the difficult and possibly more controversial areas where David Anderson left room for further debate, recognising that his was not necessarily the last voice. They relate to the distinction between content and communications data.

In the first instance, David Anderson recognises that there needs to be a review of the borderline between content and communications data. That review needs to be open and inclusive, and it needs to be carried out

urgently, because this matter crops up in an operational context. When the review is complete, a final decision can be taken on whether the current distinction is maintained. However, I am acutely aware of the ramifications for authorisation and admissibility of evidence if there is any alteration to that distinction.

Secondly, there is bulk data collection; I do understand how this works. David Anderson acknowledges that the question of whether the current section 8(4) regime is proportionate for the purposes of article 8 of the European convention is yet to be authoritatively determined by the European Court of Human Rights, but I am not sure that this House can duck the issue on that basis. The guiding principles have to be applied. Bulk data collection is a huge power, and if it is to be included in the draft Bill, then a compelling case has to be made for its necessity and proportionality. That is the ongoing challenge on bulk data collection.

As for the treatment of journalistic material and legal professional privilege, both of those rightly attract special protection. David Anderson has said that there must be no no-go areas, and I am inclined to the view that he is right, having myself seen material that falls into both categories. If he is right, and if that is the position under the draft Bill, then there must be very close scrutiny of the provisions to ensure that the protection that is rightly in place for journalists and for clients of lawyers is properly protected according to the guiding principles.

3.46 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), who brought to bear his experience of the absolutely vital nature of communications data to securing the prosecution of those who are serious threats to our nation. I thank him for that.

The homework for this debate was "A Question of Trust", the Anderson report; and "Privacy and Security", the ISC's report. The third bit, the report by the Royal United Services Institute, has not come out yet, so we are having the debate before all the homework is available to us.

I want to focus on the element of threat covered in the Anderson report. His remit was to focus on the threats, the capabilities required to deal with them, the safeguards on privacy, the challenges of technology, and issues relating to transparency and oversight. Two of those five issues relate to threat. Interestingly, the responses by groups and organisations interested in this subject—I have read at least two, including one from Liberty and one from Big Brother Watch—hardly alluded to the threat element at all; they focused entirely, and perhaps understandably, on privacy. To some extent, Mr Anderson gave them some cover for that, because, to quote him directly,

"claims of exceptional or unprecedented threat levels—particularly if relied upon for the purposes of curbing well-established liberties—should be approached with scepticism."

However, he did not go on to spell out what those well-established liberties were, particularly in relation to the internet and communications data, which are still new to our society. He went on to ask what are the uniform views of the law enforcement community.

[Richard Graham]

The Government could help him in establishing what those views are. The Minister might well want to comment on that.

The threat is of course enormous, and it is not just terrorism, alarming as that is. Members have alluded to at least two other elements: they include internet pornography and, perhaps most emotionally, the whole business of sexual exploitation of children. It is hard to believe that after everything that has happened in Rotherham, with all the reports on that, and in other cities across our land, anyone could imagine that that threat is not serious.

I therefore share to some extent the amazement of Lord Carlile, the Liberal Democrat peer, who, after a decade as the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, was shocked when his own party leader vetoed the Communications Data Bill in the last Parliament. He implied that the veto was a political decision rather than one based on the merits of the case. I hope that the Minister, who is perhaps not renowned for his libertarian instincts, but who is renowned for his staunch support of the liberties of our people, will touch on how vital that Bill is as part of our armoury to face the threats.

There is a lot of agreement between the Anderson report and the Intelligence and Security Committee's report. First, on the complexity of the existing number of laws, when my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) says that the laws are virtually incomprehensible, it is surely time for a single, united Bill. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) says that he has his own concerns as a member of the ISC about the way in which different agencies might be able to "arbitrage" between different Bills, I think we can all agree that the Government are surely entitled to conclude that it is time for one overriding umbrella Bill.

Secondly, the two reports were not exactly the same on the issue of reform of the commission system, but it seems to me that everyone agrees that it would be simpler and clearer to have a single commissioner with overall responsibility.

There was a difference of opinion on warrants and whether they should be subject to judicial authority or continue to be the responsibility of Ministers. Mr Anderson raised two interesting points. The first was that, whatever the system is, it must have public confidence. I am not really aware that the current system does not have public confidence, but perhaps that should be explored. Secondly, he intimated that a system of judicial responsibility would make co-operation with US technology companies easier. I had not heard that before. It seems slightly improbable, but perhaps the Minister will comment on it, because it is clearly an important issue.

Thirdly, the Anderson report—and possibly the ISC report—mentioned the domestic right of appeal. I am sure that the Minister will want to say something about that. Instinctively, I feel that it is a good idea, and others probably do, too.

There was less agreement between the reports on some of the other elements. I have touched on the Communications Data Bill. Clearly there is a need to make a strong operational case, but none of us should be in any doubt about the critical role that such data

play in the prosecution of serious threats. I hope that elements of the Bill will be incorporated into the eventual law.

There was also a question mark over whether the framework for interception of external communications needs to be compliant with the European convention on human rights. That is an interesting question in itself and in relation to other activities the Government are pursuing. The Minister might want to comment on that.

There were areas of agreement in the two reports we were invited to study that the Government can take forward. There were some queries of the Government's own responses, which they may wish to mull over and respond to. Mr Anderson also raised other question marks and issues that will need to be considered further before the final Bill emerges.

There is clearly a significant lobby group focused on liberty issues, which we all understand and all think are important. However, I want to finish by emphasising that, when we consider the details of the new law, the new commissioner, the right of appeal, the collection of third party data and so on, I hope that this House and the Minister will bear it in mind that, if a terrorist blows someone or something up, or if young girls are groomed, exploited and damaged, it is not the libertarians who will clean up the pieces, but the families of those physically or mentally scarred, the emergency services and the communities around them. It is that threat that our agencies strive against. Our task—balancing the privacy, carrying the quiet majority with us—is surely to give our agencies the tools to do the job. Those tools, by common consent, are currently not in the best shape, and in reshaping them let us never forget the vital task for which we must design them.

3.55 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I am chair of the cross-party National Union of Journalists parliamentary group, and for the last two years, with Government co-operation, we have gone through the highways and byways of each piece of legislation—ranging from the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 to RIPA to DRIPA, then on to the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015—to see how we can best protect journalists and their sources. I thank the Government for their co-operation throughout. We have had detailed consideration of the codes of practice to each piece of legislation, and with our lawyers meeting on a regular basis, and with the Society of Editors, we have tried to move the debate forward.

On the protection of journalists, I say to the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) that an issue of confidence was raised in this House by all parties. As he may recall, that stemmed from the introduction of PACE procedures, whereby there was an understanding in Government that journalists and in particular, their sources, should be protected as an inherent part of protecting our democracy. Under PACE, there was a protection whereby, if there was an application for seeking information, a journalist would be notified. They would have their day in court and be able to represent themselves, and there would be a right of appeal. That process was generally accepted by all, except some authorities.

Many of us were shocked 18 months ago when we received reports that to avoid the use of PACE, a number of authorities—the police, the intelligence services, and even local councils—had used RIPA to avoid the due process of applying, judicial overview and the right of appeal. The scale of the use of RIPA by individual authorities was immense, and I think it shocked us all when that was exposed. Local councils were using it to spy on their own staff or even people who were making applications for local schools, and so on. There was shock on both sides of the House and a feeling that that was inappropriate use of the legislation.

We then went through discussions about DRIPA. Through the NUJ and the Society of Editors, we met the Government and applied our minds to getting some protections within the codes of practice, and eventually, under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Bill. Throughout the continuing theme was the same as in today's debate—that there was a need to rationalise the legislation, so that not only was it effective and understandable, but that it had protections in place for those with privileged or confidential information.

Anderson has been welcomed by the NUJ and others, because it goes some way towards doing that. The NUJ's position was straightforward: it wanted an independent judicial process. In addition, it wanted automatic and mandatory prior notification of requests for accessing information, and it wanted mechanisms to challenge an application with the right of appeal. Anderson goes some way towards doing the first, and in recommendations 67 to 69, he makes special consideration with regard to journalists. He clearly states that the designated person “should be obliged either to refuse the request”—

when it comes to identifying a journalist's information or confidential source, and then automatically—

“refer the matter to ISIC for a Judicial Commissioner to decide”.

The NUJ welcomes that process, but I speak briefly to make a couple of appeals on the matter. Anderson recommends that there is a code of practice or ISIC guidance that specifies:

“the rare circumstances in which it may be acceptable to seek communications data for such a purpose, and...the circumstances in which such requests should be referred to ISIC.”

I say to the Minister that it would be really helpful, if the Government are going down the route of further guidance, to start the consultation process now. Again, the NUJ would welcome access to officials to commence those discussions in advance of the publication of any such guidance.

The Minister for Security (Mr John Hayes): Given the brevity that I will no doubt be obliged to adopt at the end of this debate, I am more than happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss the specific point that he is making.

John McDonnell: I am grateful to the Minister; I thought that would be his response.

May I ask that, this time round, any draft guidance is published in advance of the primary legislation, so that we are fully conversant with the implications of the primary legislation in detail when we discuss it? We were not capable of doing that in the past because of the rush of emergency legislation, but it would be helpful.

One issue that is not addressed effectively by Anderson is prior notification. I accept that there are circumstances in which prior notification becomes difficult, some of which have been mentioned today. However, there needs to be wider discussion of this issue and it must not just be dismissed in the way that it was in the report. There also needs to be further discussion about the right of appeal in respect of any decisions by the judicial commissioners in addition to those that are set out in the Anderson report. I would welcome further consultation on those elements.

I will make one final point because I know that I must be brief and that others wish to speak. Anderson does, to give him his due, stress the importance of the protection of journalists and their sources, and quotes Liberty on the issue. We must remember that those are the journalists that we sometimes do not hold in great affection. They are the journalists who exposed the MPs expenses scandal and who expose corruption. They do so on the basis of information that is brought to them by sources that need to be protected. The word “chilling” was used earlier. We said in the debates about the movement from PACE to RIPA that any undermining of the protection of sources would have a chilling effect and they would not come forward, thereby undermining the democratic accountability of administrations at all levels.

I am grateful that David Anderson quotes Liberty and bases his proposals on its principles, which state that a

“free press and the right to free speech is dependent on respect for private correspondence”.

If we establish those principles in the legislation that is brought forward, it will lay the basis for firm legislation. That will also inform the debate that we eventually have on the Pitchford inquiry into surveillance more generally.

4.2 pm

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this fascinating debate. As someone who used to be involved in the media, I found the comments of the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and the point that the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) made about there being no no-go areas extremely interesting.

I am not a lawyer or a legal expert. I come to this debate as someone who was pregnant with their first child at the time of the 7/7 bombing. I remember the bewilderment and fear at the barbarity on the streets. I, too, have pressing school engagements to head to, which I am sure cameras will be recording. The debate about taking suitable pictures at such events has been had many times, because the impact of the surveillance society pervades all levels.

It is a pleasure to follow such barnstorming maiden speeches by my hon. Friends the Members for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) and for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst).

I pay tribute to the vital work of the men and women in the intelligence and law enforcement community. Their success is often unrecognised as it is not always known about, but they keep this country safe, day in, day out.

[Mims Davies]

I will make some specific points about vital areas of this key topic. This debate is a useful first step ahead of the draft Bill and the coming into effect of the sunset clause of the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014. I welcome this opportunity to re-evaluate our arrangements in the face of the changing circumstances.

Clearly, we must balance our right to privacy with the need for greater national security. I am sure that no one here believes that to be an easy balance to strike. This country has always been the strongest proponent of freedom around the world. From being the last bastion of European freedom in the second world war to our dynamic, modern, free economy today, it is this United Kingdom that represents all that is best about a free society. Today we have the challenging task of creating a balance whereby our freedoms are not only preserved but protected from those who wish to do us harm. I am reassured that the foundation of the privacy and civil liberties board will provide an additional safeguard on our security policy.

I welcome the Anderson report, which is broad and wide-ranging and has certainly given me an insight into the work that needs to be done on the draft Bill. The modern world presents new challenges for our security—challenges from terrorism at home and overseas, from cyber-attacks, from criminals and from gangs seeking to commit evil acts such as child sexual exploitation.

The importance of investigatory powers can be seen in the fact that 95% of all serious and organised crime prosecutions include the use of communications data. Skype, FaceTime, Twitter and Instagram provide immediate access to direct communications systems, and the Anderson report represents an assessment of how we must meet the new challenges in the pursuit of our future security. It is a comprehensive and independent investigation that will give us greater insight as we prepare to build the investigatory powers Bill, which I hope will ensure that there is appropriate oversight and provide stronger safeguards while updating the capabilities of our intelligence services so that they can intercept what terrorists and criminals are saying, doing and planning.

As a mum of two daughters, I want to focus on the issue of child sexual exploitation. I am proud of the work that the Government have undertaken to find and bring to justice those who seek to do harm to our children and exploit them. The men who groomed young girls in Rochdale were prosecuted using mobile phone call evidence, which showed that they had contact with their victims and association with each other. I look forward to the opportunity to contribute to the Bill and strengthen our services' capacity to protect children from such heinous individuals.

Just last week I met in my constituency a senior member of Hampshire police, who reported to me that it is using its full investigatory powers to examine child exploitation concerns. It is fully investigating those who may have been, or continue to be, at risk. That is sleepy Hampshire, so it would seem.

I welcome the Government's commitment to a full debate on the new arrangements, and I welcome the fact that the Home Secretary is promising to ensure that we examine the powers and responsibilities properly and do not undertake the creation of the Bill lightly. On such a critical issue, the Government have clearly shown

that the combined experience of the House will have a key role in forming the new legislation, and I will welcome the further chance to scrutinise and reflect on technological changes and the full range of safeguards that we need to keep our country safe.

4.8 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): It is a great honour to have listened to two maiden speeches today, by the hon. Members for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst) and for Falkirk (John Mc Nally). It is clear that at least the former is a significant improvement on her predecessor.

I am pleased to be able to speak in today's important debate. It is clear that there is agreement throughout the House that surveillance is necessary to protect the public from the serious threats that we as a country face. However, in recent years we have gradually become aware that there is also surveillance of perfectly legitimate activity. For instance, just this week the Investigatory Powers Tribunal revealed that GCHQ had spied on two international human rights organisations: the South African Legal Resources Centre and the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights. Both are entirely legitimate civil liberties organisations, and are co-claimants in a legal challenge against GCHQ, alongside Privacy International and Amnesty International, brought after the Edward Snowden revelations.

The IPT ruled that GCHQ's mass surveillance systems violated the Egyptian NGO's fundamental rights by intercepting, accessing and then unlawfully retaining material for longer than permitted. For the other NGOs that took the case, including Privacy International, Amnesty International and Liberty—all UK-based civil society organisations that are leaders in their field—no statement was made by the IPT as to whether they were spied on. The court's finding of no determination means either they were not spied on, or, more worryingly, they were but the spying was done in line with GCHQ's internal rules and so, under the current inadequate law, the spying was done lawfully.

It is not just perfectly legal NGOs that have been put under surveillance, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell). The intelligence services routinely intercept legal privileged communications between, for example, lawyers and their clients in sensitive security cases, according to internal MI5, MI6 and GCHQ documents. We also now know that the Metropolitan police used RIPA to access the phone records of journalists to expose their sources. A number of leading civil liberties lawyers believe they have been put under surveillance by the Metropolitan police. Former undercover police officer, Peter Francis, even disclosed that Scotland Yard had a special file on the leading London human rights firm, Bindmans.

As Anderson notes in his report, there can be no fairness in litigation involving the state if one party to it has the ability to monitor the privileged communications of the other. Anderson's report, as we have already heard, makes a serious recommendation that could help to prevent abuses of power such as these, namely his call for judicial commissioners to approve surveillance warrants. This recommendation is critical and I hope the Government take heed of it in their deliberations. Introducing impartial arbiters into the process of authorising surveillance would put us in line with the

practice undertaken in other democracies, and make the system more rigorous and accountable. Clearly, this should be taken by the independent judiciary.

I also hope the Government listen to Anderson's recommendation that legislation should not be brought back to Parliament until a strong operational case has been made. Anderson is clear that so far the Government have failed to do so.

We need targeted surveillance against those suspected of breaking the law, but the case for mass untargeted surveillance against entirely innocent British citizens has simply not been made. We need to ensure that journalists, lawyers and human rights activists can go about their lawful democratic activities without the chill from surveillance that is enabled by an overly broad law and too few legal safeguards. Both Anderson's report and the ISC's make the case for fundamental legal reform. I hope the Government do this in a way that respects the recommendations of both reports.

4.12 pm

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): It is with some trepidation, as a non-lawyer and a technophobe, that I intrude in this debate.

I have read the Anderson report. There seems to be general support and a very clear argument for merging all the various competing commissioner offices to create the independent surveillance and intelligence commission. That should provide clarity and certainty. I have a concern, however, regarding the creation of the chief commissioner, not by dint of the creation of the position but the definition of qualification that Anderson attaches to the post. He or she

"should be a person of unquestioned professional distinction and independence",

and yet he or she is to be appointed by the Prime Minister of the day. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, with the best of intention, has had a difficult job finding somebody to chair the inquiry into child sex abuse. It would be a very difficult job if we were to adopt fully the definition of that commissioner, as far as Anderson has it, to find that person. Frankly, I am not entirely sure that he or she exists. Those are my two specific observations on the report.

I have been very encouraged by the debate. I had rather expected it to be a flag-waving exercise of civil libertarians who believe that, somehow or other, prior to the enactment of the Human Rights Act, we lived in a country that could easily have been mistaken for being Nicaragua or pre-apartheid South Africa, where gangs of police roved our streets, taking people off for questioning and so on, with a very corrupt judiciary and the like.

It is worth pointing out, as have other hon. Members, that we have a proud tradition in this country of an independent judiciary and of championing freedom and liberty, which is to be encouraged. Pretending that any changes to, or repeal of, the Human Rights Act will reduce us to a banana republic is, I think, very far from the mark.

One of the more inspired appointments made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was the appointment of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes) as the Minister for Security, as he entirely understands the job that needs to be done.

Mr John Hayes indicated assent.

Simon Hoare: My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) clearly said that balances and judgments will always have to be made. As we see the proposals evolve through this Session and as we have our Divisions and debates, I would urge all hon. Members to keep one thing in mind. Yes, we must always maintain the checks and balances to ensure that things have not gone too far out of kilter, but we should always have at the back of our mind this one salient point. If we have another atrocity such as the one we had a few years ago in central London, or indeed in any other towns and cities, we should not have to look into the eyes of grieving relatives and communities and say, "We could have stopped that; we could have broken the chain of terrorism, but we were unable to do it because we were too concerned about the maintenance of the 'virgo intacta' of civil liberties." I hope that is not an unparliamentary term to use, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We are accountable to our electorate; that is our duty. If the first duty of Government is the protection and defence of the realm, the vital role played by the security services within that must be taken into account, as other Members have made abundantly clear. In a changing landscape where technology changes every day and the terrorist or person who wishes our country ill is moving forward faster than we think they are, we must ensure that we are fleet of foot and that there is scope within the regulations to ensure that we respond to the threats.

Finally, because we are accountable to our electorate, I am not persuaded by the argument put forward in the Anderson report that the final decision should be taken by a judge. I think that power should rest with the Home Secretary, who is, after all, accountable to this House, accountable to Cabinet colleagues and accountable to senior Committees. Yes, there should be judicial review and judicial oversight, but to put the responsibility for taking away democratic accountability in the hands of judges would, I think, be a step too far.

4.18 pm

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): People in the UK face a range of threats to their liberty and security from terrorists and criminals on a daily basis. The police and the Security Services, in whom we put our faith to keep us safe, are not assisted in their task by the fast pace at which communications technology is advancing. Devices and applications that have become features of everyday life for our general use and pleasure have routinely been exploited by those who mean us harm.

RIPA was enacted in 2000, shortly before I went to university to study law. At first flush, RIPA looked very straightforward. It governed large proportions of the law on surveillance and interception of communication, and did not require eager students to resort to vast swathes of case law in the way that the laws of tort or equity did. On further examination, however, RIPA was indeed one of the most impenetrable pieces of legislation with which a law student could possibly have to grapple.

What is worse is that RIPA was out of date almost as soon as it was enacted. In 2000, about 27% of us in the United Kingdom were internet users, and most of us used static devices. By 2013 the figure had climbed to

[James Berry]

90%, and most people were using mobile rather than static devices. As a result, RIPA and associated regulations and guidance have been repeatedly amended, and, while that process may have introduced necessary changes that have brought the law up to speed with changes in technology, it has not made the law in this area any more penetrable for either the layman or the lawyer. It is incumbent on the House of Commons to pass laws that can be applied, and applied straightforwardly, by those on whom we call to keep us safe. I therefore endorse David Anderson's recommendation that RIPA and other related legislation should be replaced by one—and this time, hopefully, one straightforward—piece of legislation.

Simplifying the law in this area is important for another reason, and that is public confidence. When applied properly, RIPA offers safeguards against the unlawful infringement of article 8 of the European convention on human rights, which confers the right to privacy. While there are cases at the margins in which the courts can rightly be accused of stretching the proper interpretation of article 8 beyond its natural meaning, the interception of communications is certainly not one of them. It is a classic infringement of article 8, and one that will be lawful only when the infringement is both necessary and proportionate.

It is right for the law in this area to be reformed so that it commands the confidence of the public, but that will happen only if the face of the law is plain, if there are clear avenues for challenge, and if the overall system of surveillance and interception of communications is transparent. With that in mind, I commend the Anderson proposal for the oversight commissioners to be merged into one. The role of the unified commissioner should, in my view, involve producing clear and accessible guidance for the public on the whole issue of surveillance and interception of communications, as the Information Commissioner has done.

The proposals for reform of the Investigatory Powers Tribunal are also interesting, and worthy of careful consideration. In my limited professional experience of the tribunal, it has striven to ensure that hearings are conducted on an *inter partes* basis. That said, however, it deals with an area of our law that is little understood. Its procedures need to be streamlined, and that should be done through clear procedural rules to avoid the need for the public—and, indeed, lawyers—to pick through its published judgments.

Section 17(1) of RIPA prohibits absolutely the use of intercept evidence in criminal prosecutions and proceedings. That prohibition is strict, and extends even to mention of the fact of the interception. It does not just prevent intercept evidence from being used in criminal proceedings; it also prohibits its use in cases of serious misconduct by police officers, and cases in which state agents, including the police, are being sued for damages or challenged by judicial review. While I entirely understand the basis of the section 17 rule, it does little for public confidence to know that relevant, important and perhaps even decisive evidence cannot be adduced in cases in which it would have ensured the conviction of a dangerous criminal or avoided a payout to a claimant that was entirely unmeritorious. Clearly a balance would have to be struck—in some cases, it would be impossible to disclose the facts or the products of interception because it would compromise a covert tactic or put life at

risk—but I think that the relaxation of the absolute terms of section 17(1) so that it can be approached on a case-by-case basis is worthy of careful consideration.

I shall not touch on the issue of judicial oversight, which has already been covered by other Members, and which will no doubt be the subject of a wider debate involving human rights organisations, lawyers, Members of Parliament and, of course, the public. Let me end by saying that, while the public do need to have confidence in the system of checks and balances that regulates our interception and surveillance system, they also need to feel confident that the state has the powers and capabilities to keep us safe from the ever more technologically adept enemies of our freedom.

4.24 pm

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): There is a natural and proper tension between the desire for personal privacy and the need for national security. In this afternoon's debate, both sides of that argument have been discussed with the calmness and clarity that the issue merits. Absolutist positions, whether libertarian or on the side of state security, are unhelpful. They may be fun in university or school debating societies, but in this place we have to think about the practical implementation of our discussions, so it is welcome that Members in all parts of the House have taken pragmatic and logical positions.

I do not pretend to be an expert on security matters, but I was part of the Metropolitan Police Authority, at City Hall in London, for a number of years. I sat on its scrutiny committee, which looked into the counter-terrorism and protective services work of the Metropolitan police, so in a small way I had some exposure to the security work that we demand our public servants conduct. I was, in small part, one of those people who watched the watchmen.

The speed of change in communications is both exciting and frightening. There was a time when communications interception meant snaring a carrier pigeon or steaming open a letter; those days are long passed. We are now in a world where state-of-the-art encryption technology exists not just on traditional desktop or laptop computers, but on every mobile phone and tablet that we carry around—and in forms that people do not normally think of. My sons regularly play on a games console and are able to communicate with their friends across the globe using encrypted communications technology. I am pleased to say—I am fairly sure—that they do so with entirely innocent motivations, but it does not take much of a leap of imagination to understand that people with much more sinister intent use such encrypted technology with ease. So it is not enough for people to say that the current state of affairs is good enough, and I welcome those parts of the Anderson report that highlight the fact that communications technology is moving apace. The status quo is not good enough. We are either at least trying to keep up, or being left badly behind.

I was on the Metropolitan Police Authority when the student riots that afflicted Westminster took place, and I remember how those protesters were able to move with great speed through London and, in particular, the time when they attacked the car carrying the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall. The protesters

were able to stay ahead of the police in a way that historically has not been possible. For most of the recent history of the police, they have been alone in being able to utilise peer-to-peer communications technologies; the bobby's radio gave them a significant strategic advantage over those whom they sought to apprehend. Those student protesters, using BlackBerry Messenger, which, let us remind ourselves, is five to six years out of date, were able to stay well ahead of the police officers who were trying to do their duty.

I look at that incident as a very real and credible indicator of the challenge we now face at a national level. The situation where the security services are potentially behind the curve is worrying and it needs addressing. It is essential that we give our security services the tools they need to protect us, but the counterbalance of that is also ensuring that there is proper scrutiny of the work they do.

In conclusion, I suggest that our aim in this House and in this debate is to ensure that those who watch the watchmen are able to do so effectively and with real teeth, but this should not be to prevent the watchmen from watching.

4.30 pm

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Let me start by welcoming the Minister to his place and paying tribute to the excellent report we have been discussing this afternoon: "A Question of Trust—Report of the Investigatory Powers Review", written by David Anderson, QC. He has a formidable reputation as the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation. The report ranges far wider than the areas the independent reviewer is usually required to look at. It tackles matters such as the use of the internet by paedophiles, an issue that the hon. Members for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris), for Gloucester (Richard Graham) and for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) mentioned in their contributions. It deals with the use local authorities have made of powers under RIPA, a matter discussed by my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell). It also deals with the growing threat from cybercrime and cyber-attacks. It is a very good report and, as the former Attorney-General, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) said, it is an amazing piece of work. It contains 124 recommendations, five guiding principles and more than 300 pages, giving us a lot of holiday homework over the summer in this immensely complicated area. It is detailed and thorough, and it is a report that will assist us in the coming months in our deliberations when we start to consider the Government's specific proposals for legislation relating to the security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies' use of investigatory powers.

We know that the Government will be bringing forward the draft legislation in the autumn, well ahead of the sunset provisions in the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014, which take effect on 31 December 2016. Of course the Anderson report was commissioned on the basis of an Opposition amendment when Parliament was asked to legislate very quickly to introduce DRIPA in 2014. We proposed that it was the right time for a thorough review of the existing legal framework to be conducted, as we no longer felt, alongside many others, that the current arrangements were fit for purpose. That statutory obligation was then set out in section 7 of DRIPA.

I thank the Government for finding time for this afternoon's debate, which my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary requested when the Home Secretary made her statement to Parliament at the publication of the report on 11 June. As my right hon. Friend said in her opening remarks, it has indeed been delivered "very swiftly", and for that we are very grateful.

This debate is important because, as my right hon. Friend said, we need to ensure that Members of all parties may discuss the report fully and to foster a wider public debate to get the widest possible debate and legitimacy for the new framework. The hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) referred in his contribution to that need to engage in the public debate.

I also pay tribute to the work of the Intelligence and Security Committee, which produced the "Privacy and Security" report in March. That was a review of the intelligence agencies' capabilities and the legal and privacy framework that governed their use. We are still awaiting the third report in this area from RUSI, a report established by the former Deputy Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), who also spoke in today's debate.

The Opposition accept the need for reform. Obviously, we need to wait to see what is in the draft legislation, which will be introduced shortly, but we are grateful to the Government for bringing this matter forward with cross-party agreement and discussions. We want a robust and up-to-date legal framework and the protection of liberty, as well as security and democracy. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) referred to that point in her contribution.

We want strong powers with strong checks and balances and strong oversight of how the system is to work. The five Anderson principles will be a key part in the development of law and the practice of investigatory powers. Those principles are: minimisation of no-go areas; limits on powers; rights compliance; clarity and transparency; and a unified approach.

Let me mention some of the contributions in this very good debate. I will start with the maiden speeches, which were of an exceptionally high standard. The hon. Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) told me something that I did not know about her predecessor, Tony Baldry. She said that he was the keeper of the hairspray for Margaret Thatcher. She also told us that she makes cider and keeps ferrets. I agree with her recommendation of the Bicester outlet shopping experience.

The second contribution was from the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) who painted a fine picture of his constituency. He talked about the importance of coal, his role as leader of the council and, rather intriguingly, the rolling haggis. Then we had the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) who gave a very generous tribute to his predecessor. He talked about running a shop for 50 years as a barber, and about the similarities between being a barber and a politician.

Finally, we heard from the hon. Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst) who represents her home town. She talked about the similarities between herself and Francis Drake, learning to sail locally, and becoming a Member of Parliament. I just wondered how *Hansard* might record the parliamentary wobble that she gave as part of her maiden speech.

[Diana Johnson]

We also had some learned contributions from experienced and senior Members of the House: the former Attorney-General, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield; the former Deputy Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam; the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), who was a member of the ISC in the previous Parliament; the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire, with his ministerial responsibility; the former shadow Attorney-General, my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry); and the former Director of Public Prosecutions for five years, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), who spoke about the practical application of the current law with great knowledge. Many Members paid tribute to the intelligence and security services and the law enforcement agencies, which work day in, day out to keep us all safe. I wish to add my tribute to the vital work that they do.

As time is quite limited, I will refer to two particular areas that many Members raised today. The first was the proposal by David Anderson on merging the current commissioners and setting up the new office of the independent surveillance and intelligence commission. My right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary had talked about that previously, and we welcome the idea. It will increase transparency, strengthen the role of the commissioners, raise the public profile and help to build public trust. I note that the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (James Berry) also spoke about that matter.

The second issue was the proposal on judicial authorisation. The Opposition welcome that proposal from David Anderson, but we do not want to see a delay or detraction from the Home Secretary's wider responsibility, which is to assess risk to national security and be answerable to Parliament. As my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary said, the reforms will strengthen the legitimacy of our long-term framework, and I urge the Home Secretary to agree to them.

There was a mixed view in the House this afternoon. The right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield talked about the burden of proof being reversed in this case and said the Government needed to make the case for not accepting the Anderson recommendation. The right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam mentioned his surprise about the operational benefits that might arise from judicial authorisation. The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster reminded us about political accountability and how important it was, but spoke about the benefit that could be gained from judicial involvement. The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) also supported the proposal on behalf of her party. My hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury gave her first-hand experience of the workings and worldliness of judges in balancing competing interests if they were to carry out this task. The hon. Member for Gloucester also talked about the need for public confidence in whatever system is going to be introduced. The hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) talked again about accountability.

In conclusion, we look forward to the publication of the draft Bill and to the pre-legislative scrutiny. The balance between security and liberty should always be

struck with great care and constant scrutiny, including in this complex sphere of surveillance and data communication. Whatever the difficulties, we should aspire to achieve both objectives and never one at the expense of the other. We do so in the certain knowledge that the enemies of this country want to destroy both.

4.41 pm

The Minister for Security (Mr John Hayes): May I say what an honour it is to conclude such a measured, informed and significant debate? I am grateful to all hon. and right hon. Members who participated. It has been both in tone and content—as typified by the shadow Minister's speech just a moment ago—dignified, reflective, measured and determined to do the right thing. There is a determination across the House to get this right.

That is not surprising, given that we are dealing with very serious matters relating to the security of the nation and its citizens. That is at the heart of the national interest and essential to the common good. My hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) made that absolutely clear in a powerful speech, made all the more powerful by his tribute in it to me. That is why I chose to mention him first.

Most powerful, however, were the maiden speeches we heard today. As the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), generously said, we had maiden speeches from a variety of places in the country and in this House. I congratulate all those who made their maiden speeches, but, as Members would expect, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) and for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst). Even in this non-partisan debate, I cannot help but reveal just a slight prejudice in favour of those on this side of the House.

Keeping people safe, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset also said, is the primary responsibility of Government. It is a responsibility on which all else depends and it transcends partisan politics. That is an axiomatic point; there should not be party divisions about the security of our nation and its people. We must stand together, as this House at its best always does, in the national interest and for the common good. It is also important, as my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (James Cleverly) argued, that we consider these matters in a measured way. I was pleased that those on the Opposition Front Bench acknowledged that the Government are doing just that. We wanted to have an early opportunity to explore these matters in this debate and we are determined to proceed on a consultative basis, listening to all arguments. These are not simple matters and they must be considered in that way, and they will be—make no mistake about that.

The right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg), whom I have known and worked with in all kinds of guises over some time, always speaks with great conviction on these subjects. He made important points about the considerations that dictate the extent to which the agencies' capabilities may be made public. As ever, we will ensure that we make information available where it can be made available, and in that respect we are considering the recommendations in the Anderson report carefully. I understand the right hon. Gentleman's perspective and we take that seriously.

The right hon. Gentleman and many others raised the issue of third-party data. It is essential that we understand that David Anderson did not say that one thing or another should be introduced; he said only that the case should be made for that capability. I think we all agree that to legitimise the exercise, a case should be made to this House and more widely. I do not think there is any difference between us on the need to explore these matters properly and to make the arguments persuasively, precisely as he asked us to do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) made it clear that it is right to consider the issues of domestic appeal. I will not say more than that at this stage, but I note what David Anderson said about that and I note too that my hon. Friend amplified it.

Others made the point repeatedly, and rightly so, that the environment we are working in requires nothing less than that consultative and measured consideration, because it is such a challenging environment. The House should be under no illusions that the UK does not face serious threats from home and abroad. Reasonableness must be tested against reality. It was Hegel who said—it is a pity the Speaker is not in his place, Madam Deputy Speaker, because he likes it when I draw on Hegel, but I know you do too, and I am coming to one of your favourites later—

“What is reasonable is real; that which is real is reasonable.”

Matching our response to the reality of the threat we face is, in that sense, a test of its reasonableness. Recent attacks on allies around the globe show us that there must be no complacency, but that we must always be alert and ready to act. We will shortly mark the 10th anniversary of the 7 July attacks in London that resulted in the deaths of 52 innocent people and injury to 700 others. Those terrible events are seared on the memories of us all, I think—a heart-wrenching reminder of just how real the threat we face is.

As the shadow Home Secretary said, it is not only terrorist threats that our intelligence agencies thwart in exemplary fashion. Daily in each of our constituencies lives are touched, and sometimes ruined, by serious crimes such as murder, rape, child sexual exploitation and trafficking. The hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) made the highly pertinent point that investigations into all those subjects require scrutiny of all sorts of information, including historical information. We know that in some of the recent and most notable cases, that has been vital to bringing people to justice. I thought that was a powerful argument about not just dealing with now or what might be, but dealing with what has been in the terms that he described.

There are certainly no grounds for complacency. As well as dealing with what has been, we have to be aware that the threat we face is highly dynamic. My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) said that the adequacy of our response will be tested by its capacity to deal with that very dynamism. The ability of our enemies, those who want to do us damage, to move quickly must be matched by our ability to respond with just such alacrity. It is true that, as the shadow Home Secretary and others have said, although the internet has undoubtedly served many virtuous purposes, we cannot ignore the fact that it has also created opportunities for criminals and terrorists, which they have been fast and keen to exploit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) drew our attention to the dark web, and some of the things that happen in that place. In a digital age, our laws must be framed to give our law enforcement and intelligence agencies the tools and capabilities they need to perform their essential work, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) made clear. As he said, those services will look at only a tiny fraction of the multitude of activities that take place in that area. He drew our attention to the report of the Committee on which he so ably serves, which has looked at these matters in considerable detail.

We are clear that there is a need for new legislation on the subject of investigatory powers. We note and take very seriously David Anderson’s remark, repeated in this Chamber, that there is a need for coherence and clarity in all we do. We have heard many hon. Members repeat his claim, including my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), the former Attorney General, who was very bold in admitting his ignorance. He suggested that that ignorance applied to us all; I am only prepared to admit to bliss. He said that the nature of what we were dealing with was so complex that it was almost incomprehensible, and that that would have an effect on faith, belief and confidence in the system for all involved. He made a powerful contribution to our debate, and I know that he will continue to do so as we consider these matters over the coming weeks and months.

We hear clearly the message that David Anderson broadcast, which has been repeated today: coherence, clarity and, to some degree, simplification have merit of themselves in assuring people about what we do and why. As the House knows, the sunset clause in the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014 provides a clear deadline. Legislation is needed, and David Anderson’s report provides a clear starting point for constructing that legislation. His report is complemented by the report on privacy and security that the Intelligence and Security Committee, which I mentioned, published in March. As the shadow Minister said, we also look forward to receiving the Royal United Services Institute report in the coming weeks. Together, those reports will form a firm basis for considering legislation, but I make no apology for repeating the point that this is a consultative process. Not only do we intend to discuss these matters in the House, as we have done today, but we will publish a draft Bill precisely to facilitate pre-legislative scrutiny of the kind that was called for in this discussion. Today’s debate has been held in that spirit.

I have listened carefully to the many and varied speeches made. Some very specific contributions, including that of the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) and the shadow Home Secretary, require careful consideration and will no doubt form the basis of further discussions.

We have heard many tributes paid to our security and intelligence agencies; I want to amplify those remarks. The work they do every day to keep us safe—at great personal risk, as the Home Secretary has often said—is by necessity undertaken in secret, and is consequently unknown and often unheralded. Like her, I applaud what they do. As Security Minister, I am now able to see in person just how impressive those charged with protecting

[Mr John Hayes]

us are, and I welcome the opportunity to place on record the House's appreciation for their determination, dedication and diligence.

There has been considerable discussion, not unanticipated, of who issues warrants. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield raised the issue with his usual style, and made some interesting remarks about the impact that changes might have on operational effectiveness. Others argued that the system could be affected detrimentally by what would be a more bureaucratic and possibly less responsive approach. Those are matters to be explored and discussed; I make no definitive remark on either position today, but those are certainly likely to be the sort of things that we will consider in considerable detail over the coming weeks.

What is absolutely clear is that wherever that consideration leads, the system must have two fundamental attributes at its core—first, that it is practical and workable, for as hon. Members have repeatedly argued, the price of failure is almost unimaginably horrible. Secondly, it should reflect where functions should reside in our parliamentary democracy. There has been something of a fashion among politicians in recent years, perhaps because of a certain degree of insecurity—a lack of confidence, which of course I do not share—which has led to the giving of powers to others which might more properly rest in this House. That was the case made by my hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison) when he talked about the accountability to the people through the power—“sovereignty” was the word used—of this House. I do not want to exaggerate the case, but it must be taken fully into account.

The Executive, answerable to this House, and through this House answerable to the people, plays an important role in safeguarding our democracy. The argument that others should be involved must not be allowed to erode public confidence. There has been some confusion about public confidence. I do not mean to be unkind to the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry)—I will become more unkind to her when she has been here longer because I will feel more right to be so, but at present it would be excessively harsh—but I do not agree with her about public confidence in the system. The facts do not support her argument. She must know that all surveys of public opinion suggest a very high level of confidence in our intelligence and security services. They suggest that the public support the work they do in keeping us safe, and I do not hear a clarion call for change or the radical spirit that she

conveyed reflected in the views and sentiment expressed to me, but perhaps we move in different places in different circles at different times.

We have heard a lot said today about bulk collection of data. Let us be clear. Both the ISC and David Anderson have examined what happens at present and suggested that those capabilities are required, are properly used and are not subject to abuse. Just as clear is the need to address the so-called snoopers charter. I am sorry that it was raised in those terms. There was never a snoopers charter. David Anderson's report puts that canard back in its nest once and for all.

Despite what some have suggested, David Anderson does not say there is no case for the capabilities that were to have been included in the former Communications Data Bill, though I accept, and the Home Secretary made it clear, that we are taking a step back, thinking afresh and taking into account all that has been said and done. Clarity and coherence are frequently the hallmarks of understanding and almost always the prerequisites of confidence. I acknowledge and accept that and will look at legislation very much in that spirit.

What a valuable debate we have had today. As I thought about our intelligence services, the guardians of our freedom, I thought of C. S. Lewis, who I knew you would want me to say a word about, Madam Deputy Speaker. He said:

“Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point.”

Our intelligence services are tested regularly. This is vital legislation because it affects the safety of the British people. It must be right and fit for purpose for many years to come—no small challenge, given that we are dealing with fast-moving and ever-changing technology, as many hon. Members said. Parliament will, of course, be fundamental to that process, both in the pre-legislative scrutiny to which the draft Bill will be subjected, and in the rigorous scrutiny which I fully expect will be applied to the Bill. That is how it should be.

We must act with the certainty epitomised by my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst), tempered by the care recommended by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield. We must proceed with the confidence illustrated by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), coloured by the honest assessment of the scale of the challenge we face, made clear by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), but most of all we must act with the determination personified by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, who knows that we must do what is necessary, but fundamentally we must do what is right.

National Gallery Industrial Dispute

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Jackie Doyle-Price.)

5 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): I want to draw to the House's attention the dispute taking place at the National Gallery, which has been the most extended period of industrial action at the gallery in the history of British cultural institutions. It is time for the Government and all those who want to see the dispute brought to an end to intervene so that we can bring both sides together before further damage is done to the gallery, its staff and its reputation.

There have now been 45 days of strike action since February by staff who have a reputation for loyalty to their service. It has been caused by plans by the management to privatise two thirds of the workforce—400 of the 600 jobs—which would be so damaging to the gallery and to the service provided to the general public. The dispute has disrupted the gallery's functioning and damaged its reputation. During the period of industrial action, most of the rooms are closed to the public, talks and educational events are cancelled and much of the gallery cannot function as normal.

Staff morale at all grades is at rock bottom, and that has been intensified by the gallery's decision to dismiss Candy Udwin as the senior Public and Commercial Services Union representative at the gallery. The gallery has so far refused to reinstate her, despite a ruling by an interim relief hearing that it is likely that she was unfairly dismissed for trade union activities.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am seeing a distressing trend across the public services of trade union activists being dismissed in the course of their duty of raising concerns about their services. Does my hon. Friend agree that the trend seems to be escalating? I am thinking of the situation in Barts hospital, where the occupational therapist Charlotte Monro was also dismissed, although she was just reinstated in March.

John McDonnell: There have been a series of examples of what can only be described as victimisation, and I fear that this is one of them.

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): As the hon. Gentleman knows, the National Gallery is in my constituency. I have received a number of representations and am very concerned about what is said tonight. I am afraid that I will have to leave shortly, but I will read the full *Hansard* report of the debate. This is particularly regrettable because the gallery was one of the first employers in central London to pay the living wage, which we should all support. I hope that he will give at least some credit in that regard, although I accept that there are some very worrying specifics in relation to the case to which he refers.

John McDonnell: I certainly will, because it was a campaign by PCS that achieved the living wage, but it was intervention by Ministers and others, as the right hon. Gentleman will recall, that urged the employers to give the living wage in London. That shows that interventions by Ministers and others do work in these

cases. All that I am asking for today is that we all recognise our responsibility to try to bring both sides together to resolve the dispute, because the gallery is a national institution of great significance.

Some 22,000 have already written to Mark Getty, who chairs the gallery's board of trustees, calling for Candy Udwin to be reinstated. The gallery's argument on the matter is that cuts in its grant aid require it to organise a greater number of fundraising events, and that it therefore requires greater flexibility from its workforce. The gallery claims that the staff and PCS have

"refused to agree any changes"

or to agree greater flexibility and that, therefore, it had no choice but to outsource them to a private company. That is simply untrue, as has been shown in the evidence I have seen directly from the union and in meetings with the staff. The union has put forward an alternative plan that proposes a new flexible contract that would guarantee the gallery all the flexibility it needs, as well as being supported by the staff. The union has persistently asked gallery managers and trustees for the opportunity to discuss the alternative plan properly, which it believes has never happened.

PCS tried to engage in talks at the gallery last year, and at ACAS earlier this year, and it continues to call for talks. The union has even carried out its own scoping exercise, which confirms that there would be support from the staff for its plan and that its proposals would guarantee the flexibility that the gallery requires. The union will shortly present its detailed proposals to ACAS and invite it to organise an independent scoping exercise to confirm the union's findings with regard to the flexibility of working that will meet the gallery's demands. Interestingly, as recently as this week, in *Newsweek* magazine, the outgoing director, Nicholas Penny, was reported as

"voicing a preference to keep visitor services in house."

There is a responsibility on all of us, including the Minister, to encourage a resolution to this dispute to help get both sides back to talks before further damage is done to the gallery and its reputation. If we can help to encourage the gallery and the union to find an agreeable solution, that would give the incoming director, Dr Gabriele Finaldi, and the new chair of trustees, Hannah Rothschild, who take up their posts in August, an opportunity to heal the wounds of this dispute and the damage done by it and take the gallery forward with the staff in support of them.

I know that Ministers are loth to intervene in arm's length bodies, but the National Gallery is funded by the taxpayer and has national significance, so it is a special case, where ministerial involvement is required. As the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) said, everyone was pleased when the intervention took place that helped to ensure that the gallery overturned its previous refusal to pay the London living wage, which will now be paid from 1 July. It would be possible for all of us present in the House, including the Minister, to make a statement to encourage the gallery to attend talks at ACAS in an attempt to resolve this dispute. That has happened before in past disputes and should happen again today.

The crux of the issue is that the National Gallery is arguing that it needs to raise additional funds through out-of-hours fundraising events—an important part of

[John McDonnell]

its strategy to cope with the reduction in grant aid. However, everyone is now saying that that should not be at the expense of the quality of the service that the gallery provides to those who visit it for free. In November 2013, the gallery and the board of trustees agreed with this, arguing that privatisation would not be in the interests of the gallery in terms of the quality of service or financially. A document published by the trustees said:

“A well trained and committed workforce in-house, with a good understanding of the Gallery’s specific circumstances”

will provide the best quality of service for the National Gallery, its 6 million visitors, and all those who access its collections for education and enjoyment.

There is no evidence that that does not remain the case. In fact, all the evidence shows that so far the privatisation and outsourcing is leading to reductions in the quality of terms and conditions for staff and of the service that those staff provide. There is some evidence for this at the National Gallery. CIS, the private company that has been brought in on a temporary basis to provide visitor services and security, has told its staff that it is not their job to answer questions from the public about the paintings. This is a gallery! PCS believes that there has also been an increase in the number of complaints from members of the public about the behaviour of the staff working for CIS.

Let us contrast that with the National Gallery’s own staff. They are extremely knowledgeable about the collection and see it as part of their duties to inform the public about the paintings, where they are located, and if they are off-show for any reason, as well as giving information or advice if asked. That is a crucial service provided at the gallery, especially for those visiting for the first time or those without specialist knowledge of the collection. Staff who are planned to be outsourced include those in the information service, those who deal with school bookings and support for school visits, and those who deal with complaints and freedom of information requests. The process of privatisation is going on apace, threatening all the expertise that has been built up over generations.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is long overdue that the Government intervened in this dispute in one of the jewels of our heritage? Does he also agree that it is extremely shortsighted of the management of the National Gallery to seek to privatise public sector jobs in this way, because what will happen is what always happens—permanent, stable staff, who are invested in their work and in the museum, are replaced with non-permanent, insecure, privatised staff, and that must, over time, lead to a diminution of the offer to the general public?

John McDonnell: It is interesting that the shortlisted companies bidding to take over two thirds of the staff jobs are security companies: CIS and G4S. These are companies with specialist knowledge of security, not of art, the gallery itself or its history, and certainly not of dealing with people who want to see and enjoy artistic talents going back centuries.

The National Gallery managers claim that they are only doing something that has already happened in other museums and galleries, but that is just not true:

no large gallery or museum has introduced an across-the-board outsourcing of two thirds of its workforce, including all the front-facing staff, which is what the National Gallery proposes to do. The National Gallery is therefore proposing an experiment in the face of widespread opposition from not only the staff, but the general public: 45,000 people have signed a petition against the proposals.

The costs already involved in the employment of CIS are shocking: £1 million has been spent on this private company, effectively to use it as a strikebreaking force during this dispute and to avoid the current legal restrictions on the use of temporary staff to replace striking workers. The company was introduced when outsourcing was first announced in July 2014. The stated reason was the need for additional events during the Rembrandt exhibition. However, the gallery’s own staff have covered all other exhibitions, including the Leonardo exhibition in 2011-12, which was even busier, with more extended opening. To be frank, if there was £1 million to spend on the National Gallery, it should be spent on ensuring that it operates more effectively and to redress the 20% fall in the number of visitors over the past five years.

What has made this dispute even more bitter is the victimisation that I mentioned earlier. The management has refused to engage seriously with the union on the alternative plans, but it has also gone further and victimised a PCS representative, which, to be frank, is despicable. Candy Udwin was a PCS representative involved in helping lead the union’s campaign against the privatisation plans. She was dismissed. What for? For sending an email to a union representative which included an estimate of the CIS costs and suggesting he request information about the costs from the head of human resources. Even though the head of human resources replied that the figure was entirely wrong, Candy Udwin has been dismissed for gross misconduct, since sharing that estimated figure was deemed to be a breach of commercial confidentiality. This would be farcical were it not for the effect it is having on this PCS representative.

An employment tribunal recently awarded Candy Udwin interim relief and ruled that it was likely that a full hearing would find that she had been unfairly dismissed on the grounds of her trade union activity. The judge’s ruling stated that it was likely that her actions would be found

“not to be blameworthy let alone gross misconduct.”

I urge the Minister to encourage the National Gallery to review its decision to dismiss Candy Udwin and to allow her to return to the job she loves and to represent PCS members at the gallery.

The National Gallery has failed to carry out an equality impact assessment of part of the proposed changes and to meet its public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010. This has been raised with the gallery and with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Government’s Equalities Office works from within the Minister’s Department, but his Department claims that the provisions of the Equality Act and the public sector equality duty do not apply and can be ignored. Staff protected under the Act, such as the disabled and the aged, are to be told that they have to stand all day, and women with childcare and caring responsibilities could have flexible working practices imposed on them. The union has pressed for six months to work constructively in this area with the Minister’s

Department, but without success. Is the Minister comfortable with the equality duty being ignored in that way, and will he review the Department's decision?

Why is this happening? To be frank, I think there is a crisis of management at the National Gallery. If the director still claims, as has been quoted in *Newsweek* this week, that he would prefer the staff to remain in-house, and if the executive committee and the trustees still believe, as they did up to the beginning of 2014, that outsourcing would not be in the best interests of the gallery, it might be instructive to understand why there has been such a change of heart. I think it is because of the crisis of management there.

Over the course of two years, nearly all the senior managers left the gallery, whether voluntarily or otherwise. Ten National Gallery directors and senior managers resigned, were dismissed or left with a compensation package between 2012 and 2014. The gallery's leadership style in response to the problem that they are now experiencing appears to be to remove and replace personnel, rather than to tackle any of the issues that they have to confront.

Once removed, staff have often been replaced by temporary advisers. Where do they come from? For example, there is the employment of David Commins—previously G4S security manager for the Olympics—as the gallery's security adviser, who was then responsible for the introduction of CIS and the development of the privatisation proposals. A new head of human resources, RoseMarie Loft, was also employed at that time. This appears to reflect an absolute crisis of management at the gallery. I think there is concern right the way across the piece that, actually, unless the issue is resolved, it will sour the introduction of the new director and the new chair of the trustees.

There has been a huge campaign on this issue. Only a few weeks ago, Trafalgar Square was filled not just with strikers, but with their supporters. Artists turned up to read speeches and poems and to present artwork expressing their concern about this overall dispute. An alliance has developed right the way across those who receive the services of the National Gallery and enjoy them and those who provide them, so there must be a way forward before further damage is inflicted on the staff, the reputation of the gallery and the future of the service. This dispute is not going away, because there is such a sense of grievance among the staff themselves, particularly with regard to the victimisation of their trade union representative. There is a view that constructive talks could be held immediately that would find a resolution to the problem on the basis of the alternative plans proposed by PCS. It would not take much to get both sides together to resolve the dispute.

I suggest that we agree some proposals today, and I urge the Minister to back them. First, from this House, we should set a deadline for management and unions voluntarily to come together within 10 days. We should urge them both to get round the table and negotiate. At the end of that 10 days, however, if management and unions have not entered into talks, I believe that the Minister should intervene. His Department funds the National Gallery, and his Department will be held responsible if the National Gallery's reputation and service is damaged beyond repair as a result of the dispute. Therefore, if there is a lack of willingness from the National Gallery's management at the end of the

10 days voluntarily to meet with the unions, I believe it is up to the Minister to force them to come together, to convene the meeting, to be at the round-table discussions and, at least, to plan out how the dispute can be resolved. This is too important a dispute for Ministers or individual MPs—particularly London MPs—to stand on one side.

As has been said, this is one of our national treasures—the National Gallery—with 6 million people visiting it every year. We have cherished it over generations, but its reputation could now be severely damaged. I urge the Minister to intervene at this stage. All of us who have looked at the issue think there is a resolution to the dispute if there can be serious negotiations. The onus falls upon all of us to ensure that those negotiations take place.

5.19 pm

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): I am grateful for the chance to respond to the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and I thank him for securing this debate on this important issue. It is obviously a very sensitive matter and it has caused some emotion. He referred to the rally that was held at the end of May in Trafalgar Square. I had the privilege of watching his speech on YouTube today, and I certainly recommend it to all other hon. Members. It was an impassioned and passionate speech in which he talked about how he would bring this issue to the Floor of the House. He described the trustees of the National Gallery, in respect of this dispute, as “philistines”. He used another word that I do not think I would get away with passing off as parliamentary language, but you can watch it on YouTube, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I am sure you will after the debate.

As the hon. Gentleman has pointed out, although the National Gallery is funded by Government, it operates at arm's length from Government and is responsible for its own staffing arrangements. This debate is really about the National Gallery's much-needed plans to modernise its arrangements. There is an ongoing modernisation programme and I think that the National Gallery is doing what is needed to provide a service that meets the needs of the public today.

At its heart, the National Gallery has a duty to protect, preserve and curate its priceless collection, and to preserve free access to its galleries. I am pleased that the Government have been able to maintain free access to the permanent collections of our national museums. However, the gallery also has to provide a relevant service to the public—a public whose demands have changed over the years. Visitors have different and high expectations of the gallery, and I want those expectations to be met.

As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, the gallery is a great success story. It is the third most visited museum or gallery in the world, after only the Louvre and the British Museum. As he mentioned, more than 6 million people come through its doors every year. The National Gallery needs to meet that huge demand and to provide a good offer to the people who visit it that matches their expectations on security and facilities.

The current staffing arrangements mean that the National Gallery cannot provide a guaranteed level of service outside the restrictive set of standard hours.

[Mr Edward Vaizey]

That limits what it can offer the visiting public. The management of the gallery have decided that the ability to extend opening hours is necessary, and I agree with them. Under the current arrangements, there is no contract to guarantee the availability of staff for evening openings, meaning that for its Friday evening openings, the gallery has to employ a completely separate workforce. On occasion, an insufficiency of in-house staff has led to the contracting in of external staff to cover even exhibition openings and other evening events. I understand that staffing costs at the gallery are projected to increase by almost a third over the next five years, with no extra provision of service. That is a wholly unsustainable situation.

As has been mentioned, the National Gallery engaged with its staff and the unions for five months, in an attempt to increase flexibility, introduce new working patterns and guarantee a minimum level of service at all times. As part of that process, a basic salary above the London living wage was offered as a minimum for all staff. After that extended period of negotiation, no agreement was reached. With the lack of an agreement, the gallery was keen to move ahead with the necessary changes. I have been assured that engagement with the union has continued, via ACAS. More recently, the union was again invited to offer an alternative to the provision of services by an external provider.

Any move will see the 315 staff transferred to an external provider via TUPE, meaning that all their terms and conditions of employment will be protected. There will be no redundancies as a direct result of the transfer.

John McDonnell: The union has come up with its alternative plans, which the management have not yet considered. It wants the management to go to ACAS to look at those plans. Would the Minister welcome that initiative, because it would bring them back round the table?

Mr Vaizey: That is new information to me. My understanding is that the National Gallery has made it clear to the unions that it would look at any alternative offer. I am not sure what the status of the offer that he mentions is and I have not had a chance to hear the National Gallery's perspective. However, the gallery is at quite a late stage of the procurement process and, in theory, contracts for outsourcing the service will begin later in the year.

John McDonnell: Can I get this clear? As a matter of principle, the Minister would welcome the management and the unions going to ACAS together.

Mr Vaizey: As a former lawyer, I am cautious about making commitments on the Floor of the House that go beyond the general principle that I do not think it is appropriate for the DCMS to interfere in the negotiations between the National Gallery and the unions. Given that there have been five months of talks, I would say that it is, in principle, for the National Gallery to decide whether it thinks the unions have come up with something that is qualitatively different from offers that have been made before and whether it is therefore appropriate to re-engage in any talks. I would say that—

John McDonnell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Vaizey: No, I will not give way for a third time at the moment. If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I will make a couple of extra points, and then perhaps there will be time for me to give way again.

If the modernisation programme goes ahead, the gallery will be able to extend its opening hours and guarantee provision for extended evening openings on Fridays and at weekends, which is when a lot of people now wish to visit galleries, and for special events. That will lead to increased income for the gallery, but even more importantly it will make it relevant to a whole new group of visitors. Late events attract more and more people—I believe that as many as 5,000 visitors attend some of them. The gallery has also introduced a great new membership scheme, with 20,000 members, so it is making great strides to increase its income, which will allow it to be more resilient.

It is my understanding that staff will benefit from the modernisation programme. The previous Culture Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), worked with the National Gallery to ensure that it was in a suitable situation to supply the London living wage to all staff. That will start next week, and we should all welcome it. I believe that the National Gallery is the first national museum to introduce the London living wage for all its staff.

I understand that the incoming director, Gabriele Finaldi, and the new chairman of trustees, Hannah Rothschild, are aware of the situation. Ms Rothschild was of course a member of the board that took the decision to outsource staffing services as part of the modernisation programme. It is important to make the point that I do not believe the process is being rushed through.

I think this would be an appropriate point at which to give way to the hon. Gentleman for a third time.

John McDonnell: I just want to get the Minister's view clear. Surely he would welcome a resolution through negotiation and talks, and would therefore urge all sides to get together for those talks at this stage.

Mr Vaizey: At some point the National Gallery has to take a decision to move on, and my understanding is that it asked the unions to come up with an alternative offer by 8 June. That deadline, which I understand was an agreement between ACAS, PCS and the National Gallery, was not met. As I have said, it is not my intention to tell the National Gallery what it should do. The process has not been rushed and there has been a great deal of engagement with the union during the process.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the individual who has left the gallery. As he made clear, there is a legal process, and the National Gallery has acted in line with the judge's orders to this point in ensuring that no detriment is suffered pending the tribunal in October. Of course, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on a case that is effectively sub judice.

I think we can all agree that the National Gallery is a fantastic institution with a truly world-class permanent collection owned by the public of this nation.

John McDonnell: The Minister has received his briefing from the National Gallery, and I will happily provide him with a briefing from the union so that he can get a more balanced view. As far as I am aware, the management have not considered the alternative plan. He tells us that there was a deadline of 8 June. I know of no such deadline, but we are talking about a matter of a fortnight. The staff have put forward alternative proposals that could resolve the dispute. Does he not think that in the long-term interests of the gallery, the management and the union should be urged to get together to consider that alternative plan? That would at least give the new director and the new chair of trustees a way to take the gallery forward to a long-term future in the interests of all those who cherish it.

Mr Vaizey: As I think I have made clear a number of times during this important debate, from what I know of the dispute the National Gallery has engaged extensively with the union to seek a way forward. We know what its aim is—to modernise its working practices to take account of the desires and needs of visitors in the 21st century. As I have said, I support its modernisation programme, and I think the National Gallery is a fantastic institution. I particularly support the introduction of the London living wage next week.

Question put and agreed to.

5.29 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 25 June 2015

[ANDREW ROSINDELL *in the Chair*]

Older Industrial Areas: Economic Disparities

1.30 pm

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered economic disparities in older industrial areas.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time in this Session of the new Parliament, Mr Rosindell.

I take this opportunity to thank the Chairman of Ways and Means, who I understand has allocated the time for this important debate. It is significant not only to my constituents and other people living in some of the older industrial areas in England but to similar areas in Scotland and Wales.

Older industrial areas make up a substantial part of Britain. According to the definition used in the report that I will refer to extensively, 96 of the districts in England, Scotland and Wales account for 30% of the population of Great Britain, and these areas have been hard-hit by many years of job losses. I place on record my thanks to the Industrial Communities Alliance for helping me to prepare for today's debate, and for its informative report, "Whose Recovery?", which shows how the upturn in economic growth is leaving older industrial areas behind.

I draw the Minister's attention both to that report and to early-day motion 171, "Industrial Communities Alliance report on the Economic Disparities in Older Industrial Areas". That was tabled only yesterday, but it has already attracted more than 30 signatures.

The report provides an insight into the challenges faced by former industrial communities in the English regions, Scotland and Wales. It shows that the economic gap between London and former industrial communities continues to widen, not only during difficult economic periods, such as the one that we experienced after the global financial crisis in 2008, but throughout the recession, and even today, as the UK returns to modest growth.

I hope that during this debate the Minister will provide more details regarding the northern powerhouse initiative, which is of special interest to my constituents. In particular, will it be tasked with reducing the immense economic disparities between the north-east and London and the south-east? I welcome the Prime Minister and the Chancellor's intention to create a northern powerhouse, but I must point out that good intentions will not get us very far. We need the political rhetoric to be translated into practical policies and targeted support for the poorest regional economies.

We need a strong voice in Cabinet as an advocate for our regions. I fear that such a voice is missing, particularly when I read comments by newly appointed Ministers, such as the Secretary of State for Communities and

Local Government, who questions the existence of the widening economic inequalities between the regions and London, despite the fact that the evidence is absolutely clear and presented very concisely in the report that I have referred to. The first step on the road to recovery is acknowledgement of the problem.

That problem has been evident in the lack of support for my area, and in particular the lack of support from the DCLG for Durham County Council, which is my local authority. The rhetoric about the northern powerhouse has not been reflected in the council's budget allocation, which has been cut by £250 million—or 40% of its total budget. That situation is mirrored in other local authorities, where there are huge pressures, in other older industrial areas in England, Scotland and Wales. They are experiencing similar problems to those in my area. That reduction in the council's budget is despite the fact it is providing services and support to some of the most deprived communities in the country, including some in my own constituency of Easington.

The lack of support for the council is not only felt in terms of budget cuts. The recently published County Durham plan outlined ambitious targets to create 30,000 new jobs, build 31,000 new homes and create 500 hectares of space for business, warehouses and office development by 2030. Indeed, the scope of Durham County Council's ambition has been welcomed by the local business community, and I also welcome it as we seek to promote economic development and prosperity in my constituency and throughout County Durham and the north-east.

However, the plan was dismissed by the Planning Inspectorate for being too ambitious and, despite our best efforts, Ministers refused to intervene to support its bold proposals. We had a debate here in Westminster Hall in the last Parliament on this subject, but it was not until Durham County Council filed legal papers with the High Court for a judicial review that the Government listened and became involved in the issue. My current understanding—perhaps the Minister can give an update on events—is that there is a 30-day stay to Court proceedings, but I am disappointed that the only way to get the Government to engage in economic development plans in County Durham seems to be to seek legal redress, which could have been avoided altogether if the Minister for Housing and Planning, who responded to that debate on 3 March, had been more forthcoming when we originally discussed the matter.

The report, "Whose Recovery?", by the Industrial Communities Alliance found that the economic upturn since the recession had been much weaker in Britain's older industrial areas than in London and the south-east. Whereas the number of jobs in London and the south-east was 540,000 higher at the end of 2013 than in 2009, in the older industrial areas the number of jobs was 70,000 lower. Similarly, the rate of growth in private sector employment in older industrial Britain during this period was just a 10th of the rate in London and the south-east.

When I am sitting in the main Chamber and listening to Government Members reciting examples of economic success and private sector employment, I often think that that is not reflected in the area that I represent, or indeed in many of the other older industrial areas, and part of the purpose of this debate is to draw these inequalities and problems to the attention of Government, to hold them to account, and to seek some redress.

[Grahame M. Morris]

Between 2010 and 2014, employment in older industrial areas rose by 230,000, or 2.9%, but during the same period employment in London and the south-east rose by 440,000, or 5.8%. When we look a little deeper at the figures, we see that there is not only a widening gap between the total number of jobs but a higher reliance on part-time work in the older industrial areas. In London and the south-east, virtually all the job growth since 2010 has been in full-time employment. By contrast, in the older industrial areas such as mine, almost a fifth of the increase in jobs has been in part-time jobs. In London and the south-east, the ratio between new full-time jobs and new part-time jobs is 16:1; in areas such as mine, in the older industrial areas in Britain, the ratio is just 4:1, so there is a considerable difference.

Another feature of job growth in older industrial areas has been the rapid rise in the number of people who are self-employed, which accounted for almost 40% of the increase in employment. An impartial observer might think that is a good thing, but I will drill down into this figure. A rising level of self-employment can be an indication of a vibrant economy, but it can also mask fundamental weaknesses in the labour market. This seems to have been confirmed by evidence gathered by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, in its self-employment evidence base, which found that in the south a higher proportion of the self-employed are in professional and higher-skilled occupations, whereas in much of the rest of the country, particularly the older industrial areas, more people are self-employed in elementary or low-skill occupations.

I am concerned that self-employment in older industrial areas, along with the expansion of zero-hours contracts, is creating a low-wage, insecure economy that is leading to the further casualisation of the labour market. Disparities in regional economies are deep rooted. In its report, “Northern prosperity is national prosperity”, the Institute for Public Policy Research North noted that “regional inequalities date back nearly 150 years”—this is not a new phenomenon—but “despite some narrowing of the disparities between north and south in the post-war period, since 1985 the UK has had a higher rate of regional divergence than France, Germany, Italy and even the United States.”

It suggests that regional inequalities and disparities, far from being addressed, as they have been in many of our competitor countries in the European Union and in the United States, are getting worse in the United Kingdom.

We have allowed the north and south to pull apart. We should all be concerned about this, because it has led not only to an economic loss but to a loss of life chances for people in the poorest economies, in terms of education, health and income. I say respectfully to the Minister and the Government that there is also an impact on quality of life in London and the south-east, due to overcrowding and congestion.

Addressing the regional economic gap would provide significant benefits for the national economy. Halving the gap between the north and the national average would increase national economic output by £41 billion. If we are to achieve these gains, we need real commitments from the Government, but these are lacking.

I have some figures on transport investment that highlight the problems that we face. IPPR North found huge disparity between infrastructure spending in London

and the north-east. London receives £5,426 per resident in capital investment, compared with just £223 per resident in the north-east; and a single project, Crossrail, is earmarked to receive nine times more funding than all the rail projects from the north’s three regions combined.

We are told of the benefits and economic importance of new projects such as High Speed 2, but I suspect that these will have little impact on vast areas of the north. The north-east has been entirely overlooked, with the line ending at Leeds—which many of us who live in the real north believe, with all due respect, is actually the midlands. We think HS2 will offer little practical benefit to the north-east or my constituents. It may have the opposite effect. A Network Rail consultation document suggested that the benefits to my constituents would be a cut in journey times from Durham to London of just 11 minutes by 2033, with the loss of direct services to the capital and slower journey times to major Scottish cities. At a cost ranging between £50 billion and £80 billion, I can think of few policies that are so expensive and likely to deliver so little to my community. A tiny shift in spending to constituencies like mine in east Durham would have a transformative impact on our transport infrastructure, as we seek to achieve our aim to improve connectivity to major lines and increase rail services.

In my constituency, I continue to work towards a new rail station at Horden, on the Seaview site. If the Government had shown the same commitment to my area as they do to London, I could press for an integrated public transport system, the extension of Tyne and Wear Metro and improvements to our bus network, which would expand access to a wider labour market for residents. There would be huge economic benefits to the area locally and to the wider economy.

Another matter of great importance in my constituency is housing. Other hon. Members wish to speak, so I will say less about this than I intended. The villages and towns that make up my constituency were established specifically to serve local collieries in this coal-mining area. The mines have gone, but investment to transform and redevelop the local communities has not followed. This is as true in terms of infrastructure spending on transport and economic development as it is in respect of housing. These issues have recently come to a head in the villages of Horden and Blackhall, following a series of problems experienced by Accent homes, a registered social landlord with properties in these villages. This situation was the subject of an Adjournment debate just before the old Parliament was dissolved. Accent cited the introduction of the bedroom tax as a cause of the fall in demand for its properties. As tenants vacated their Accent properties, the housing associations decided not to let them but to board them up.

It is soul-destroying to watch your community suffer. I invite the Minister and any of her colleagues to Horden and Blackhall to see at first hand the situation in the numbered streets as these properties fall into decay and disrepair. Many former tenants have vacated the area. Homeowners are trapped, unable to sell their property as there is no demand, and they have to live on streets with boarded-up properties, which are a target for antisocial behaviour, vandalism and crime. This situation is replicated elsewhere in the constituency, particularly in areas where private landlords have bought

up properties at low cost and are seeking a return, mostly at the taxpayers' expense, funded through the housing benefit system.

Local residents do not accept the situation. I commend the work of the Horden residents' association, which has been engaged in meetings and discussions with Accent housing, the Homes and Communities Agency and the Coalfields Regeneration Trust, and other private and public sector partners and agencies, to find a way forward. Local councillors do not accept the situation, but the cuts to local authority budgets and the lack of any national housing regeneration fund is holding back the redevelopment of east Durham. This is disappointing, particularly given the level of funding that is available but seems to be diverted almost exclusively towards London and the south-east.

There is immense potential for redevelopment in older industrial areas, including my own in the north-east, especially as the properties that I mentioned are located in an area of immense natural beauty bordering the award-winning east Durham heritage coast—a newly declared nature reserve—and tracking one of the first stretches of the England coast path. These areas of natural beauty are at the forefront of our efforts to promote leisure and tourism on the east Durham heritage coast, but the Minister must accept that these efforts will continue to be hampered due to the deteriorating situation in the villages. Poor, derelict housing will also undermine our efforts to bring forward economic development, which is the only way to create jobs. We need to ensure that local people have skills and training and that those who acquire skills are not forced to move away from the region to find work.

We need to deliver a complete package of housing, transport investment and education if we are to attract new business and industries that will sustain our communities in the future and bring forward the economic development that is needed to narrow the wealth gap between the regions and London. We need a redistribution of economic activity to provide a new purpose for communities such as the ones I represent in east Durham, which have lost their core industry over the past 30 years.

We have had some recent successes. Only last weekend, I was delighted to attend a groundbreaking—a ceremony to mark the start of work on Dalton Park phase 2, which is a £45 million investment that we hope will deliver up to 1,000 new jobs in my constituency—500 during the construction phase. The new retail and leisure facilities will be very welcome in east Durham and the wider region, after nearly two decades of campaigning by the local community, supported by the local council, to secure the investment.

We need greater economic diversification in east Durham and to grasp all of the opportunities available. We need new industries to sustain my constituency in the future. There is a rare opportunity in Easington to secure significant private sector investment for the proposed centre for creative excellence to be built on the east Durham heritage coast. The project would deliver more than £200 million of private sector investment and could create 2,000 jobs and training opportunities in a ready-made global film and media communications market. Our regional development agency, One North East, was supporting the project until it was abolished. I sought to discuss the importance of that

project with Ministers in the previous Parliament, but I am afraid that I received little support from the Government.

In view of the Government's conversion to a northern powerhouse, I will welcome the Minister's input on any direct support that they are prepared to offer to that unique and potentially transformative project in my constituency. Unfortunately, I am yet to witness the positive impact of my local enterprise partnership, and the Government's other flagship policy designed to support business development, the regional growth fund, which I feel has a misleading name. It should be called a national growth fund, since it is open to all regions. Widening economic disparities between the various regions, especially between the older industrial regions and London and the south-east, are proof of that fund's failure. That is why I advocate direct Government intervention for the centre for creative excellence.

If the northern powerhouse is anything other than rhetoric, we need a real development fund that is targeted specifically at weaker regional economies to bring in developments such as the one in my constituency and to address the employment and skills imbalance between the regions. There is a moral duty on the Government to close the gap and address regional inequalities that damage our national economy and leave generations of people in the poorest economies behind, as well as reducing their life chances. There are development opportunities if the Government want to seize them.

The modest return to growth in the last quarter has not been a recovery for all. In older industrial communities, the recovery is in fact reinforcing existing economic divides. If we are to rebalance the economy and deliver a sustainable recovery, the Government need to back up the rhetoric. We need to ensure that the same level of resources and development that is directed towards London and the south-east is targeted at the weakest regional economies. Delivering those practical policies would give us an opportunity to narrow the economic gap and deliver much-needed jobs and growth to the former industrial communities that have been ignored by the Government for too long.

I have made a number of practical suggestions, and I hope that the Minister will reflect on them. They are opportunities to take forward the Government's vision of a northern powerhouse in a practical, meaningful way that would benefit the region. I will be interested to hear her comments on my proposals.

1.54 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) for securing this important debate. I represent a constituency that includes several older industrial areas and bounds other areas in Glasgow and South Lanarkshire with a huge industrial legacy. The legacy comes with real, long-standing issues of contaminated, vacant and derelict land that prevent economic initiatives from happening and private capital from being invested, because the cost of cleaning up the land is astronomical.

Clyde Gateway is an urban regeneration company in my constituency that covers Glasgow and South Lanarkshire. It is a partnership with Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Government. In the seven years since its establishment, Clyde Gateway has made ready for

[Alison Thewliss]

use 200 hectares of previously derelict and contaminated land, some of which had been derelict for 50 years and a serious blight on the area. Clyde Gateway found that the derelict land was contaminated with, for example, chromium, which is hugely toxic. It had to develop techniques to extract the chromium before it could do anything with the land.

When power stations in other parts of my constituency were taken out of production, they were simply demolished and the land was not cleared or made ready for use. Clyde Gateway's contractors found sluices, underground works and all kinds of things when they examined the land. No private industry could ever have taken on the cost of cleaning that up. It therefore falls to agencies such as Clyde Gateway, to local authorities and to Government to invest in the land and make it ready for use, so that jobs can be brought into the area.

Unless we tackle such long-standing issues within communities, nothing else can happen. That is true of my own area and of many other parts of post-industrial Scotland. The area in Motherwell where Ravenscraig steelworks used to stand had serious contamination to deal with before anything else could happen.

Clyde Gateway's work over the past seven years has brought £100 million of public and private investment into the area, as well as jobs, and it has created 40,000 square metres of business space in the east end of Glasgow and Rutherglen. That is absolutely amazing. It is key that such work in post-industrial communities is seen as an investment, because if we do not invest, nothing will happen and the neglect will continue. In Scotland, the latest vacant and derelict land survey figures show that there are 10,874 hectares of vacant and derelict land in cities and rural settings, causing a serious issue for those communities, who have no means to deal with it. Serious investment is needed to overcome the huge problem of post-industrial legacies.

The Scottish Government's regeneration capital grant fund works with local communities on what they would like to see in their areas and what projects could bring investment, new life and jobs to industrial areas. That fund has been a real success. Despite having an annual budget of only £25 million, it has been very popular and was quickly oversubscribed. Twenty-two projects across Scotland are already being supported. It is absolutely right to ask local communities, "What would you like to see? How can we help?"

In my constituency, there have been changes over time to the fabric of the area. I say "fabric" because the area's street names—Muslin Street and Cotton Street, for example—reference its former industries. There were dyeworks and the famous Templeton carpet factory in the area. All those heavy industries have now gone. Some of the land has been filled with housing, while other parts lie empty and are waiting to be dealt with. The industries have not failed to leave scars.

Something more positive in the Glasgow and Clyde valley area is the city deal that was negotiated with local authorities, the Scottish Government and the UK Government under the previous Administration. The deal has the potential to bring huge benefits, with local authorities working together across the areas that bear the scars of past heavy industry. We need to collaborate and find ways to work together to deal with such long-standing issues. Many people viewing things from

outside just see that there is derelict land; they do not see what is underneath. There is a need for investment to create jobs and overcome the barriers. It is not as simple as saying, "There is a post-industrial area; throw some money at it." The land must be made ready for use by private and public industry. It means investing a huge amount of money in holes in the ground, but that must be done before the areas in question can move forward.

I thank the hon. Member for Easington for securing this important debate. We should learn from each other about what is happening in different areas, and about what we can take back to our constituencies to tackle long-standing issues.

2 pm

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I apologise, Mr Rosindell, for being slightly late for the debate. It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) for securing the debate. He has done much over the years to champion communities that have suffered decades of neglect and decline. I also congratulate the Industrial Communities Alliance, which has published an excellent report.

In my brief speech I shall share experiences from my neck of the woods in Sheffield—a beautiful city with a thriving cultural and music scene, a proud sporting heritage and a strong sense of its industrial and political history. I am sure that hon. Members will see similarities between its challenges and those that all former industrial communities face; the pattern is all too familiar.

Much was done in the 1980s to undermine the skills and extinguish the expertise that working-class men and women of my city built up over centuries. They led the world in forging steel, unmatched in brute strength and unrivalled in craft. Pockets of that skill remain in Sheffield. Companies and Governments from across the globe still flock to Sheffield Forgemasters in search of the best there is. Thirty-one thousand people are still employed in manufacturing in my city, in no small part thanks to the fantastic work being done by the former Member for Sheffield Central, Richard Caborn, and the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre. However, there is no doubt that we are still scarred by the legacy of Thatcher—not only in my community, but, as we have heard, in communities across swathes of the country. The legacy of that Government and their most misguided industrial strategy casts a dark shadow.

The sanitised management-speak term "de-industrialisation" is shorthand for a set of complex issues, which we have heard about, and which my community faces to this day. Generations of families relied on the manufacturing base of Sheffield to make a living. Generally it was well paid, long-term skilled work. However, the legacy of decline is that those jobs have been replaced largely with low-paid work, if there is work at all. The figures bear that out. Wages have flatlined over three decades for all but the super-rich, and the number of people in low-paid work, barely able to afford the basics, has risen from 13% in the late 1970s to 21% today.

Even more alarmingly, the number of people who may not be low-paid now but who have experienced low pay in the past four years is at a shocking 33%—some

8 million people. That is the living, breathing legacy of industrial decline. It is what we mean when we talk about insecure work and low pay, and that is why Labour Members will continue to raise the subject time and again in this place and outside it.

The heart of the debate is about the make-up of the economy. The report by the Industrial Communities Alliance rightly highlights the fact that London and the south-east have pulled away from the rest of the country—not just during the current recovery, but in the past three decades. The trend towards de-industrialisation has gone hand in hand with the financialisation of the economy, which began with the deregulation of the financial system. We witnessed the all too real consequences of that in the 2008 crash: our communities, having been hit once in the 1980s, were forced to pay the price all over again. That will continue unless we fundamentally reform the economy, tackling the short-termist, risk-taking culture that continues apace in the City of London and Canary Wharf and redirecting investment towards the productive, high-skilled and green industries that we need to secure a sustainable future.

The short-termism of our economic system is a major factor in the failure of many communities to recover, as capital is driven towards sectors and activities that provide an immediate return rather than those that can build up jobs, productivity and growth in the long term. Because of that, we have a recovery that is anything but shared. For all the talk of a jobs miracle, in Sheffield there are still 6,000 fewer people in work than just before the crash. The Government have, unfortunately, learned nothing, and they seem determined to repeat the mistakes of the past—mistakes that, we admit, the last Labour Government made in failing to draw in the financial system and rebalance the economy.

Finally, we cannot have this discussion apart from the continuing debate about devolution. The Government's much-vaunted strategy of pursuing a "northern powerhouse", however welcome, should not be simplified into a focus on the great cities of Leeds and Manchester. If investment does not reach Sheffield, Copeland, Barnsley and Falkirk, it cannot be a success. Only today the Government have abandoned their plans to electrify the midland main line linking London to Sheffield. That will be incredibly disappointing to small businesses in my region. I welcome the findings in the Industrial Communities Alliance report about the need for the Government to put forward resources and tax breaks to encourage investment in manufacturing, research and development across older industrial communities; I and colleagues in Sheffield have been talking about that for some time.

It is evident from the debate that there is a determination to put an end to three decades of economic illiteracy, during which inequality has increased and opportunity has been stifled in communities throughout the country. Financial services continue to enjoy a boom while a rich seam of opportunity is overlooked in the older industrial communities that many Members represent. We need a strategy fit for the 21st century and this debate is a good place to start.

2.5 pm

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) for securing this important debate. I am

pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this matter, which is of paramount importance to my constituents in Neath, a truly beautiful part of Wales.

The Neath constituency has a long and proud industrial heritage. However, since the beginning of the 1980s the British coal industry has lost more than 250,000 jobs. That finally signalled the end, after decades of decline, of the industry across most of the country. Unemployment soared and with it household incomes plummeted, taking with them aspirations and hope. The closure of the pits ripped the heart out of the valleys communities and left a scar that is still felt and seen today.

Prior to the global economic recession, there was some progress in generating new jobs in coalfield areas, but former coal mining areas continue to suffer from a legacy of unemployment. Current statistics show that many areas of the Neath constituency are well below the national average. The Office for National Statistics figure for the rate of economic activity for working-age people in Neath Port Talbot local authority area is 70.6%, but in the Dulais Valley the figure falls to just 35%—more or less a third.

Ill health is part and parcel of that legacy. Residents of coalfield areas across the UK report levels of ill health and limitations on day-to-day activities that are double those of the more prosperous region of south-east England, according to the Coalfields Regeneration Trust 2014 report, "The State of the Coalfields". Neath Port Talbot as a whole has the highest percentage of respiratory illness, the second highest incidence of strokes and diabetes, the third highest incidence of obesity and the fifth highest death rate from chronic heart disease in Wales. As we know, there is a strong correlation between economic disadvantage and ill health, and that is clearly and sadly reflected in my constituency.

The combination of unemployment and poor health has led to a higher reliance on welfare benefits in many communities. The effect of the Welfare Reform Act 2012 is another blow to us, and we are braced for a further £12 billion of cuts yet to come from the Conservative Government, on which we are yet to see the fine detail. Although losses will widely vary depending on personal circumstances, it was estimated by the Welsh Government last year that the changes will constitute an annual loss of £500 per working-age adult in Wales. Neath Port Talbot is expected to be among the hardest hit in Wales, with losses closer to £600 per year per working-age adult. Likewise, a report from Sheffield Hallam University in 2014 identified the south Wales valleys, with their higher proportion of people reliant on benefits, as being hit harder by the reforms than anywhere in Britain. The valleys as a whole are expected to lose about £430 million a year when the reforms have come to full fruition. Those losses far exceed the flow of funding for economic development that the area receives from sources such as the European Union.

Large reductions in income have an obvious knock-on effect on local consumer spending, straining local businesses and communities and supporting fewer jobs in the local economy, with ensuing detrimental effects on our communities—a vicious cycle. Spending cuts have also affected many voluntary and community organisations and reduced the level of services delivered by local government.

Critically, the Sheffield Hallam report, despite the rather gloomy statistics, had some good news: regeneration does work and, pre recession, progress was clearly being

[Christina Rees]

made in the UK's coalfield areas. Moreover, the report found that raising economic growth would deliver similar levels of savings for the UK Treasury, which is the impetus behind the welfare reforms. The anticipated savings for the Treasury of £1 billion a year once those reforms are implemented could be made with the creation of 100,000 new jobs, which would both reduce the number of people reliant on benefits and provide higher tax revenues.

Initially, the UK Government's response to the collapse of the mining industry was poor, with token gestures that had little impact. In Wales, it was really only from the late 1980s, with the launch of "Community Investment: An Initiative for the Valleys" and the establishment in 1989 of the European regional development fund, alongside initiatives by the Welsh Development Agency, formed in 1976, that the momentum began to bear fruit. That has accelerated since 1997 with the establishment of the Welsh Assembly Government, who now have responsibility for regeneration and development. Since then, UK, Welsh and European funding, working in partnership with the third sector, has supported a series of initiatives aimed at regenerating the Welsh valleys. Efforts have rightly focused on retraining and the development of skills for the workforce and on diversifying the economy beyond traditional industries.

The Coalfields Regeneration Trust, created by the Labour Government of 1997 and working in Wales since 1999 with the support of Welsh and local government funding, has a mission to champion coalfield communities, generating resources to respond to their needs and delivering programmes that make a positive and lasting difference. In the past 14 years, it has invested more than £14 million in community regeneration in Wales, working with and within the community.

The partnership between the EU and the Welsh Government has been critical in regenerating the Neath constituency. The European regional development fund and the Welsh Government regional area programme, plus contributions from Cadw and the Heritage Lottery Fund, have funded the £9.2 million restoration of the Gwyn Hall in Neath town centre. That has re-established a centre for arts and culture in the locality, as well as providing much-needed employment. The £1.4 million renovation of the Victoria Gardens has also been funded. That beautiful and historic green space in the town centre provides residents and visitors with meeting and leisure opportunities—the opportunity to relax. The redevelopment of Neath town centre itself will encompass new retail units, 600-space multi-storey car parking and housing, including flats above shops that will provide the necessary increase in footfall for the shops and businesses in the locality.

In Neath, we have a very strong community spirit and social networks, but that is not enough. If we are to solve the complex economic and social legacy that our coalfield communities have inherited, financial support and targeted measures are needed. They must be designed in a collaborative spirit with the communities, not imposed.

Organisations such as the Bevan Foundation—an independent social justice think-tank in Wales—and the Industrial Communities Alliance have looked closely at these complex issues and identified a number of important factors. We are talking about measures such

as low interest rates to encourage investment; rebalancing the economy towards industry and the regions; a more measured approach to deficit reduction; investing in infrastructure such as strategic transport links and fast broadband; and job creation programmes targeting those areas where need is greatest. Communities First, a Welsh Government programme, has invested in excess of £500 million in the poorest communities in Wales, working with communities on the design, development and delivery of community regeneration programmes and job creation.

As has been mentioned, key to our economic redevelopment has been European funding and the EU's partnership with the Assembly in Wales, which has made and is making a real difference locally and demonstrates why, for my constituents in Neath, continued membership of the EU is critical. Through a collaborative, creative, constantly evolving and co-ordinated approach, it is possible to sow seeds of renewal and long-term recovery in our communities and to move towards a new model whereby we can provide opportunities for everyone, creating the vibrant, viable communities that we all want and deserve.

2.15 pm

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell, for what I think is the first time. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on securing the debate and on his extensive and incredibly important contribution. As we have heard in the other contributions in what has been a one-sided debate, the issues that he raises about his community are felt in many other communities in older industrial areas.

My hon. Friend quoted extensively from the Industrial Communities Alliance report. That is an important piece of work by a very important organisation that ensures that these issues are brought before the Government and that the Government are forced to consider the legacy that exists in our older industrial areas and cannot close their eyes to the poverty and deprivation that have resulted particularly from the collapse of the mining industry, but also from post-industrialisation—the attack on the manufacturing sector that happened, as others have said, under the Conservative Governments of 1979 to 1997. Therefore, the work of the Industrial Communities Alliance is incredibly important, and my hon. Friend reflected its report very well.

My hon. Friend spoke many times about the northern powerhouse and whether that was a real thing or simply a chimera—an illusion—or possibly just a press release. I think that he is on to something there. We have all seen in the past few months the Chancellor of the Exchequer suddenly discovering the north after many years of policies that have made life in northern communities much more difficult. I am talking about huge cuts to local government in the north and the huge increase in inequality that we saw under the previous Government. Suddenly, he arrived in his hard hat and high-visibility vest and announced that we had a northern powerhouse or, if not, he was going to create one.

Grahame M. Morris: This is a very important issue, worthy of the Government's full attention, not just a photo opportunity with a brightly coloured jacket pre election. As my hon. Friends have said, many of the problems faced by coal closure areas, such as mine, are

multifaceted. The legacy is not just joblessness, but an environment impact, derelict land, substandard former colliery housing, despoliation and ill health. It requires the Government to take a co-ordinated approach, beginning with a recognition of the particular problems of not just coalmining areas, but steel areas, textile areas and, indeed, many of the old industrial areas that face similar problems.

Toby Perkins: I could not agree more. My hon. Friend's contribution was speaking to many of the partnership approaches that were taken under the last Government. These problems are complex. He is absolutely right to talk about the combination of poverty, historical benefit dependency and ill health that results from what people have put their bodies through while working in heavy industry and from the link, which other hon. Members referred to, between poverty and ill health more generally.

A co-ordinated approach and a Government who take the situation seriously are required. The Government must prioritise the regeneration of our industrial areas and recognise that the situation is not easily resolved. The situation cannot be resolved with a press release or a photo opportunity; substantial partnership and cross-agency work between all organisations—central Government, local government, the business community, the voluntary sector and health authorities—over a considerable period is required to alleviate the situation.

My hon. Friend will be aware that my constituency of Chesterfield features in the Industrial Communities Alliance report. The area had a significant history of coalmining and manufacturing, much of which has now gone. Chesterfield was once a town in which five or six employers employed 3,000 or 4,000 people each; and now it is a town in which 3,000 or 4,000 employers employ five or six people each. The changing face of our economy poses significant challenges, including inequality.

Grahame M. Morris: I take issue with my hon. Friend's suggestion that we have had a long-term dependence on benefits. Historically, Easington had a long tradition of almost full employment when the pits were working. We are in our current predicament because of the difficulty of attracting inward investment due to the complexity of the problems, which are compounded by various aspects of Government policy, including this week's announcement of a £200 million cut in public health funding. Indeed, £3.5 million will be cut from Durham County Council's budgets. That funding is used to address the long-term issues of ill health and poor diet in some of the poorest communities. The Government need to end their short-term approach and take the long-term, co-ordinated approach needed to address the problems in Chesterfield, Easington, Neath, Sheffield, Glasgow and all older industrial areas.

Toby Perkins: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am referring to what happened in such areas, particularly after the closure of the coalmines and manufacturing sector. The irony of the Government's approach to welfare—they suggest that there is a group of people who want to live on welfare—is that that was precisely Mrs Thatcher's approach when she shut all the pits. She went to all these people, shut down entire communities and threw them out of work. She put huge numbers of people on incapacity benefit and parked them there for

a long time. Inasmuch as there was a history of welfare dependency, it was Mrs Thatcher who caused it, and my hon. Friend is right to clarify that point.

My hon. Friend also spoke about local enterprise partnerships, and I will speak in more detail about their role and the previous role of regional development agencies and how the Government's decisions prevented them from being as effective as they could have been, particularly when their help was really needed. He raised a couple of issues that I want to explore. He talked about the insecurity that goes with the increase in self-employment. I was self-employed for six years before first coming to Parliament, and I know that self-employment is an insecure line of work, but we should be encouraging self-employment, which is a great thing. Simultaneously, we must recognise that some people set up their own businesses because there are no other options. Self-employment is sometimes a sign of a local economy's weakness; and at other times self-employment should be welcomed. It is important to recognise such insecurity in the workplace. He may also have been referring to bogus self-employment. Some people who appear to the majority of us to be self-employed are actually in insecure employment.

Grahame M. Morris: My hon. Friend is being generous in giving way. It is important to challenge the accepted logic that an increase in self-employment is necessarily a good thing. We need to consider where it is happening. The Union of Construction, Allied Trades and Technicians and other trade unions that organise in the construction sector are concerned about the increase in casualisation and the use of umbrella companies by unscrupulous employers to decrease job security and drive down terms, wages and conditions on building sites, and there are other such examples. A number of people who were directly employed in the offshore industry are now classed as self-employed not by choice but because they have been forced down that route. Self-employment is not necessarily a positive thing for local economies. I accept that we want to encourage small businesses to grow and to take on employees, but that does not necessarily translate in the figures that have been quoted on the growth in self-employment in areas such as mine.

Toby Perkins: This is a multifaceted issue. I feel like I have been responding to my hon. Friend's speech for longer than it took him to deliver it, so I will move on. [*Interruption.*] He rightly says that we have a bit of time.

There were other important contributions. The hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) reflected on the extent to which industrial jobs have gone from her constituency. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), she represents a city that has seen huge regeneration and positive change, but there is still the legacy of industrial decline in such older industrial communities. When listening to the hon. Member for Glasgow Central, I was struck by the similarity between the experiences of her constituents and the experiences described by other hon. Members. After hearing Glasgow and Sheffield Members reflecting on the challenges in their cities and hearing my hon. Friends the Members for Easington and for Neath (Christina Rees) talk about the impact on former mining communities like mine in Chesterfield, I am struck that

[Toby Perkins]

there is a lot more that links us than divides us in the industrial areas of England, Scotland and Wales. We should consider that as we think more broadly about the direction in which our country is going. A huge number of issues affect us all. We have shared experiences and new opportunities, but we have also endured and shared painful legacies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley said that the legacy of Mrs Thatcher has cast a dark shadow over older industrial areas, and she reflected on the importance of rebalancing our economy. My hon. Friend the Member for Neath said that the scar of mine closures is still felt today, and she spoke powerfully about the impact of ill health and its link with poverty. She also made an important point about the impact of spending cuts on local government and the knock-on impact on the voluntary sector. We all know that, over many years, the voluntary sector was incredibly powerful and important in the Labour Government's approach to regeneration. Ironically, a Conservative Government who came to power promising us a big society and a revolution in the voluntary sector have achieved the absolute opposite: a weakened voluntary sector that is unable to pick up the pieces in many of the ways that it did previously.

Many issues raised in the report, complex and long-standing as they are, were being addressed under the Labour Government. We saw huge regeneration of our great cities. On the motorway in my area we have the new junction 29A, which is still known as "Skinner's junction" after the campaigning of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner), and next to it is a huge new industrial estate. The Industrial Communities Alliance report says that there are 4,900 extra jobs in Bolsover, which is one of the most successful older industrial areas in terms of employment growth precisely because the Labour Government made the decision to invest in such communities. So we can get results if we invest. The Coalfields Regeneration Trust did so much work and was strongly supported by the Labour Government.

The Labour Government made huge investments in health promotion, which my hon. Friend the Member for Easington mentioned, and recognised the massive challenges that face older industrial communities. We recently saw the announcement of a £200 million cut in health promotion, which will have a significant impact. The powerful contributions to today's debate have expressed the importance of this issue.

In terms of earned income, the United Kingdom is the fourth most unequal of the 30 countries in the OECD; only the USA, Israel and Mexico are more unequal than we are. My right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) was absolutely right to say that inequality is one of the huge challenges facing our country, although not only our country. The Labour party will give considerable thought to it over the next five years as we attempt to put together a programme that can again win the support of the British people.

Income is spread unequally across the UK's regions and nations. The average household income in London is massively higher than in the north-east. In addition to income, overall wealth is unevenly spread across the

UK—the average household in the south-east has almost twice as much wealth as an average household in Scotland—and different regions of the country have a different percentage share of UK gross disposable household income: London and the south-east have 32%, and the north-east has just 3.5%. Those disparities exist. It is important to recognise that poverty is not the preserve of the north. Areas throughout our country face substantial challenges: for example, Cornwall, which we might have expected to be represented here. None the less, a specific challenge faces the older industrial areas, and it is important to reflect that.

Many Members have discussed why we are in this position. There are three or four key reasons. The first is the failure to invest in retraining and vocational skills for the forgotten 50%, leaving people in the older industrial areas vulnerable to falling into a life of low pay. Far too many people in the UK today do a hard day's work and still live in poverty and visit the food bank on the way home. The Prime Minister continually tells us that a job is the route out of poverty, but increasingly, people in poverty are also in work. Under this Government, work alone no longer pays enough to allow people the dignity of being able to feed their family.

More than 5 million people are now in low-paid jobs, and more than 250,000 are estimated to earn less than the national minimum wage. The problem of low pay has got significantly worse under this Government. Not only has the national minimum wage fallen in real terms since 2010; the official figures show that without action to tackle low wages, spending on tax credits for people in work is set to rise by an estimated £2.5 billion over the course of this Parliament. Only this Government could think that the response to that environment of low pay, and to all those people who work hard all week and still do not have enough money at the end of it to put food on their table for their kids, is to cut tax credits.

What an appalling legacy this Government will leave in terms of that increase in child poverty. We already hear that this Government are thinking of repealing the Child Poverty Act 2010, so that they will no longer be held to account for that increase in child poverty, but in communities throughout our country, people sitting around the kitchen table know the reality of life under this Government.

There has been a huge increase in the productivity gap. Professor Van Reenen, head of the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics, has said:

"By Thursday lunchtime the other"

major countries in Europe

"have produced as much as it takes us to produce by Friday afternoon... So basically, we could take every Friday off if we could be as productive as those other countries and earn the same amount of money."

The productivity challenge is partly linked to the lack of investment and the short-termism that other colleagues have mentioned. For too long, the British economy has taken a short-term approach to matters of research and development. There are far fewer people involved in R and D in this country than in many of our European competitors. Likewise, although we have waited an age for a final decision on a new runway for London, Charles de Gaulle airport outside Paris has had four

runways for years. There are many reasons why the endemic challenges in the older industrial areas have not been addressed.

The Government are exacerbating problems. The policies of a truly one nation Government would help overcome regional disparities, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Easington discussed, spending on infrastructure increases such disparities. Spending per head on London is 24 times higher than on the north-east of England. He quoted statistics that bear repeating; I also have them. The amount spent on Crossrail alone is nine times more than the amount earmarked for rail projects in the whole of Yorkshire, the north-east and the north-west.

There is a substantial gap in the ability of businesses in older industrial areas to access finance. The access to finance market is much less competitive there, so the amount of money lent by the banking sector to our businesses is substantially different depending on location: £2,647 per head of population was lent to businesses in London, but less than half that was lent to businesses in the north-east and the east midlands. Entrepreneurs in areas with huge growth potential are crying out for support but finding that unless they live in an area that is already coping better than most with the post-crash world the Government's door is shut to them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Easington referred to the closure of One North East and the local enterprise partnership's ineffectiveness in his case. Many local enterprise partnerships are working hard to make a contribution, but it was a strange decision at a time when the economy was desperate for growth—we should remember that we already had growth then, in 2010 at the end of the last Government, but we still needed a great deal more—for the Government to shut the regional development agencies and set up those fledgling agencies with limited resources and an unclear role. They have all attempted to the best of their ability to find a role, but they have been inconsistent in their ability to do so. Only now, five years after they were desperately needed, are some of them starting to come to fruition. That is another Government measure that has had a negative impact.

Strengthening local enterprise partnerships so they can provide greater capacity and stronger services is an important part of the solution, as is strengthening local authorities. We welcome steps to strengthen the combined authority in Greater Manchester, but we want more combined authorities to tackle the chronic problems of poor skills, infrastructure and economic development. We need reform of our business rate system, which has worked against business development in older industrial areas. If we had had the business rate re-evaluation counselled by the last Government, business rate bills for people in my hon. Friend's constituency would be hundreds if not thousands of pounds lower and business rate bills in central London would be higher. That would have made a big impact on our local communities.

We believe that local areas and local authorities should be supported where they are succeeding in attracting and supporting businesses by retaining more of the business rate revenue generated by growth to invest in building further success. We also need greater decentralisation of Government infrastructure, so that more Government money is spent in the older industrial areas.

We support a Government with a commitment to a high-wage, high-skill workforce; devolution to English city and county regions that puts local councils at the heart of building up the older industrial areas; dealing with the huge increase in the productivity fall under this Government; an access to finance system in which money goes to businesses in our older industrial areas; expanding the capacity and strength of the local enterprise partnerships; fair funding for local authorities in the poorest areas; and a reform of business rates that supports small businesses in our communities. That is the kind of programme that will start to support and improve our older industrial areas.

This debate has been important in putting the issues before the Government, but we need them to stop the rhetoric and start the action; if they did, our communities might get the support that they deserve.

2.39 pm

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame M. Morris) on securing this important debate on economic disparities in the older industrial areas. I want to make it clear from the outset that the Government's economic ambition is to create a fairer and more balanced economy by supporting policies that grow the economy as a whole and generate new jobs and higher wages for everybody.

The debate has been interesting. I must confess that, as I was listening to some of the speeches by Opposition Members, at times I thought I had stepped back in history and returned to my old student union days in the 1970s. I am slightly concerned about the memories of some hon. Members.

Grahame M. Morris *rose*—

Anna Soubry: One moment. I have not even finished this particular insight. With few exceptions, Opposition Members all seem to have completely forgotten that for 13 years we had a Labour Government. They now complain about things that they might have put right—but did not—during the 13 years of Labour Government. The policies, notably towards the end of that Labour Government—a Government that failed to save and fix the roof when the sun was shining, and continued, as some now recognise, to overspend when the world economy had suffered a crash—exacerbated things.

Grahame M. Morris: Will the Minister give way?

Anna Soubry: Obviously, I will take interventions, but may I give some advice to hon. Members? If they do not learn from the experience of what happened in May, they will be out of office not only for five years, but for a generation.

Grahame M. Morris: I am familiar with the standard response that Labour is to blame, but my job as the Labour MP for Easington is to hold the Government to account. I have specific suggestions that would help my area and the areas represented by my hon. Friends who are suffering similar problems. For example, the Government's policy on further education college funding

[*Grahame M. Morris*]

has had a huge, negative impact on East Durham College, because it concentrates on apprenticeship training for young people and does not provide funding for older workers to retrain. Specific proposals are identified in the report. Without being disrespectful, rather than a lecture about what happened years ago, addressing the issues in the report, which we raised in the debate, would be really helpful.

Anna Soubry: Of course, I am going to deal in detail with the situation in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and in the constituencies of all those who have spoken, with the exception of the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins). I am more than happy to write to him to tell him about the advances that have been made in the past five years in Chesterfield. I want to put this matter into context. I, too, have had to sit listening not only to a lecture, but to a rewriting of history that even the most red historians would struggle to produce.

I want to talk about the industrial communities in the alliance's report. Since the beginning of the 1970s, UK cities have experienced an ongoing historical shift in economic orientation, driven on the one hand by a process of sustained deindustrialisation, as we have heard, and on the other by a progressive rise in service and tertiary activity. The report focuses on old industrial centres that have been slower to replace declining industries. Former industrial centres that have moved on, such as London—we often forget that London used to be a heavily industrial city, but it moved on—do not appear in the list. Therein lies an important point: there is nothing pre-ordained about past or current trends continuing into the future.

Over the past three decades, some cities have experienced positive shifts of direction, or positive turnarounds, in their differential growth paths. Oxford is an example, as are Brighton, Ipswich and London. I recognise—I am an east midlands MP, as is the hon. Member for Chesterfield—that those cities are in the south of England, and much will depend on how different older industrial centres are able to attract and develop the growth sectors of the future.

Toby Perkins: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Anna Soubry: In a moment. I want to turn to the economy in Easington, because the hon. Member for Easington is a champion for his constituency. We have all witnessed tremendous technological change in our lifetimes. I am certainly old enough to say that, given that I come from Worksop in north Nottinghamshire where there was a coalmine. The whole town depended on the success or otherwise of the Manton colliery and surrounding collieries, so I am familiar with pits.

Industries that did not exist 20 years ago are now the most productive in the world. In the constituency of the hon. Member for Easington, this change has been more apparent than most. Since the closure of the dominant coalmine in 1993, the area has undergone a tremendous change. The legacy of coalmining is still being dealt with, but great progress has been made in remediating the industrial pollution, for example. The Durham coast, as the hon. Gentleman has told us, is now home to one of the most stunning coastal walks in the United Kingdom, with the Durham heritage coast highlighting the great

natural, historical and geological interest of the area with dramatic views along the coastline and out across the North sea, framed by magnesian limestone cliffs. I have not been to the area, but I would love to go to the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and I hope to arrange a visit.

A former slag heap is now the site of one of the country's most dynamic retail centres, with more expansion about to start at Dalton Park.

My officials have provided me with a note about the regional growth fund's investment in Easington. We might think from the hon. Gentleman's speech that there had been no investment in his constituency. On the contrary, eight projects in Easington have been awarded a total of £13.4 million. They are contracted to lever in a further £81.6 million of private sector investment and to create or safeguard 1,189 jobs. I hope the hon. Gentleman will welcome such great investment of taxpayers' money.

Grahame M. Morris: I congratulate the Minister on an excellent brief and on the description of the Durham heritage coast. It was absolutely perfect; I cannot fault it. The problem is that we are not able to access the coast because of the lack of transport infrastructure and railway halts. On the regional growth fund awards, much of that is linked to the automotive supply chain, so doubts about our continued membership of the European Union cause considerable concern. Yes, there are positive things in relation to support for businesses, but my concern is that they are not as comprehensive as the support and expertise given by One North East. The reorganisation, as always happens whether it is in local government or health, caused a huge hiatus and a delay in taking forward investment for projects that would have benefited the area considerably.

Anna Soubry: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is saying that the investment in his constituency is considerable and great. I have read out the figures. They are substantial. As I have said, the money is part of a contract, so it relies on securing the features that I have identified. I am more than happy to respond to what the hon. Gentleman has said in more detail in a letter, or by meeting him. I would also like to meet his local enterprise partnership, because I strongly suspect that it might have a different view of the situation in his area from the one that he has given us today. The projects include, for example, NSK Bearings Ltd, which was awarded £3.45 million in round three to assist with business expansion. The award by the regional growth fund was part of a £19.9 million investment that helped to safeguard 265 jobs. Again, I hope the hon. Gentleman welcomes that.

It should also be noted that unemployment in the constituency of the hon. Member for Easington continues to fall. There are 6,400 more people in work today than in 2010. Those people would otherwise be at home and on benefits, but they now have the benefit of a job. I find it difficult to understand why hon. Members do not welcome the fact that people are going into the world of work. Surely it is better to be in a job than to be sat at home on the dole.

On the northern powerhouse, the hon. Member for Chesterfield seems to have forgotten that the Chancellor has represented the northern constituency of Tatton in

Cheshire for many years, so the idea that he is new to the north of our country is nonsense. The northern powerhouse has not been imposed on northern councils. On the contrary, councils of all political persuasions—I give them full credit, especially the Labour-run councils in Liverpool and Manchester—have not only trumpeted the northern powerhouse, but led the way on its creation. I am concerned that hon. Members in this place are not supporting their colleagues in those great councils, who have come together and are championing the northern powerhouse.

Louise Haigh: Opposition Members are, of course, in favour of the northern powerhouse. We welcome the discussions on devolution, but they have to lead to resources and investment going to the north. Does the Minister not understand why we are sceptical about the northern powerhouse when there are announcements such as today's on the scrapping of investment in the electrification of the route from London to Sheffield?

Anna Soubry: May I correct the hon. Lady? She said that investment has been scrapped and that the electrification of the midland main line had been abandoned, but she is absolutely wrong. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady is shaking her head, but I was in the Chamber when the Secretary of State for Transport made his announcement—I do not know whether the hon. Lady was there—and I heard exactly what he said. The process has been put on hold because of problems and failings in Network Rail. It has not been scrapped or abandoned. I remind the hon. Lady that in the 13 years of her party's Government, 10 miles of rail were electrified in this country. We have not turned our back on investment; the £40 billion in railway improvements will continue.

Like the hon. Lady, I travel on the midland main line. Beeston station, in my constituency, lies on it. I assure her that the improvements that will be made to it mean that six more trains per hour will leave St Pancras. I am afraid that the hon. Lady is misleading people and her constituents when she says that the investment has been abandoned or scrapped.

Toby Perkins: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way on the subject of misleading constituents. She is a representative of a marginal east midlands town, and up until the election a few weeks ago all her constituents believed the Government were going to deliver electrification of the midland main line. The truth is that, as soon as the election was over, the Government said, "Actually, we are not going ahead with it". It may be a pause, or it may never happen. The Minister ought to be careful when she accuses other people of misleading their constituents.

Anna Soubry: This is not the debate we are meant to be having. I sat in the Chamber and heard what the Transport Secretary said. He made it very clear that it has not been abandoned or scrapped. He deliberately used the word "pause".

Toby Perkins: Why did he not say that before the election?

Anna Soubry: There is no point heckling from a sedentary position. It does not advance the debate, and it does not address the complaints of the hon. Member for Easington or his constituents' concerns. The Transport

Secretary said it had been paused because of the failings of Network Rail. The improvements to the rest of the line will certainly continue.

Let me return to the constituency of the hon. Member for Easington and the fact that a new economy is beginning to grow in the wider north-east. In Peterlee alone, Caterpillar employs 1,000 people in a global centre for research and development that produces Caterpillar's articulated truck range. Caterpillar is one of the United Kingdom's largest heavy equipment manufacturers, with annual exports worth more than £1.5 billion. Some 85% of the United Kingdom's production of construction equipment is for export. That is something to be championed in this place by the hon. Gentleman.

Nissan's Sunderland plant secured £250 million of investment to manufacture the Infiniti Q30, creating up to 1,000 new jobs, 300 of which are being recruited now. It is the first new volume manufactured brand in the United Kingdom for more than 20 years. Production starts later this year. I am often reminded that more cars are now being produced in Sunderland than in the whole of Italy. The Sunderland plant currently employs just under 7,000 people on two lines, and it produced just over half a million cars in 2014—the equivalent of one in three of all cars made in the United Kingdom. The northern powerhouse regions—the north-east, the north-west, Yorkshire and the Humber—account for 25% of the UK's automotive sector, and the work of the newly created North East Automotive Alliance should build on that strength.

Science and innovation also play a considerable part. NETPark in Sedgefield is an outstanding example of how world-class science and innovation can be partnered with great facilities and business support to continue their significant growth. It is now a significant employment site, with plans to expand and to employ more than 3,000 people in the next 10 years. Last week, NETPark announced that it has nearly 160 active collaborations with universities, illustrating its existing global position and helping to translate first-class research into products that have a real social impact and create jobs and prosperity.

The Government recognise the continuing historical challenges facing the local economy in Easington. Similar challenges face many former industrial communities across England, but the solutions to the challenges are not the same. A one-size-fits-all solution from Whitehall will not work. For Britain to prosper, every part of the country needs to fulfil its potential. That is why the Government are so committed to devolving power not only to the northern powerhouse but to great cities such as Sheffield, where the number of people in jobs has risen by some 700, and where there are two outstanding universities and £11 million-worth of technical incubators. Those are just some of the great things that are happening in Sheffield, where £23.8 million of funding is going into skills and 4,000 apprenticeships to be created by 2016. None of those things were mentioned by the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh).

I have some details about the city deal in Glasgow, in reply to the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss). I will write to the hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees) about the investment that the Government are making in her constituency and in her part of Wales.

I will be brief, because I think I have to finish at 3 pm.

Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair): The Minister may be aware that the proposer of the debate wishes to have a short summing-up period.

Anna Soubry: Thank you for that guidance, Mr Rosindell. I will bring my remarks to a close.

I will write to the hon. Member for Easington with all the other statistics I have not only about Easington but about his part of the north-east. He and other hon. Members can be assured that, because of the Government's long-term economic plan, which has already proved successful in growing our economy and creating jobs—hon. Members too often sneer at it, rather than praising it—success and growth will continue not only in the south but throughout the country, right into the northern powerhouse, which includes the north-east and the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

2.58 pm

Grahame M. Morris: I thank the Minister for her response, although I take issue with her geography and a number of the points she made.

I thank all Members who participated in the debate. In particular, I thank the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) and my hon. Friends the Members for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), for Neath (Christina Rees) and for Chesterfield (Toby Perkins) for their contributions. They highlighted some important issues about contaminated land, the need to address skill shortages, industrial decline and the need for diversity. They spoke about having a multi-agency approach, the importance of European funding and of our membership of the European Union, particularly for the automotive supply chain. There are many issues that require a co-ordinated approach from the Government, and I hope that the Minister will reflect on the report and the representations from the Industrial Communities Alliance, which has come forward with some solid proposals that will benefit areas such as Easington, Wales, Scotland and the other older industrial areas that need an impetus and initiative from the Government.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered economic disparities in older industrial areas.

School Transport

[MR CHARLES WALKER *in the Chair*]

3 pm

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered the cost of school transport.

It is a delight to start the debate under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. It is also a delight to see the Minister for Schools in his place. He is known as a champion of parental choice in education. I look forward to his response to this debate on school transport costs.

In many ways, this is not a partisan debate; it is all about parental choice and whether people should be, in essence, fined or taxed for sending their youngsters to the school that they prefer. That could be a faith-based school or a grammar school to which someone who has managed to pass the 11-plus or admission exam has been admitted. The child and parents might prefer a single-sex school. I will focus on the Ribble Valley, but I understand that the problem is happening increasingly in other areas now.

We know that a lot of local authorities are under financial stress; they must live within their budgets and must look for savings, but irrespective of the colour of party control of authorities, they are picking on school transport costs because they have, in the main, an element of discretion on them. Youngsters who are on free school meals or working tax credit will get support paid for irrespective of where they live, but the vast majority of everybody else in Lancashire could find themselves having to pay more than £500 per child simply because the school that they wish their child to go to is a bit further than the next nearest school. Later in my speech, I hope to pick at least one absurd example where that happens: the schools back on to one another and yet parents are asked to fork out £500 a time simply because they want their child to go to a Catholic school.

I am not being partisan. The hon. Member for West Lancashire (Rosie Cooper), who would have liked to be here today but has had to return to her constituency, emailed me to say that she strongly opposes the county's stand on education transport costs. She said:

“Those who exercise their right to religious education where the school is more than the specified distance from home are forced to pay transport costs if there is a state school closer. Outrageous! You have my full support on this issue”.

She said that she would be delighted if I shared that with the Chamber today.

A number of parents have contacted my office over the past 12 months about their youngsters and the fact that they found that their choices came with financial strings. A lot of people who are just above the income level for free school meals or working tax credits find themselves being stung for up to £500 of taxed income. Parents from Mellor, one from near Burnley, which is just outside my patch, Lango, which is inside my area, Samlesbury, Chipping, Bamber Bridge, Wilpshire, Lostock Hall and several parents from Waddington, Dunstop Bridge and surrounding districts contacted me just before the general election to say that they were outraged by one particular instance. The local authority was edging them towards a school, suggesting that it was the school—Bowland high school—that it wanted them to

take, because it was in the catchment area and was where all the youngsters tended to go. The parents who got in touch with me said, “We put the school down as No. 1, Mr Evans, and we were delighted when we got it.”—maybe it was where the child’s siblings or friends were going—“but then the bombshell happened.” They received a letter from the county council saying, “You’ve been given the school that was your first preference, but we have to tell you that as the crow flies your nearest school is in Clitheroe. You are now going to be charged £500 per child for sending your youngster to the school we wanted you to send them to.” That is absolutely outrageous. Of course, once a parent has made a choice, there is nothing they can do. If the parents had known that in advance, they could have put Clitheroe down as their first choice, and would more than likely have been turned down, because the school would have been full of youngsters from the area. The local authority would then have said, “You now have to take your second choice, which is Bowland high, and because it is your second choice, we will pay.” A huge anomaly has resulted from the fact that the council wants to save money and thinks that it can do so by scorching parents for £500 a child.

I wrote to the chief executive of Lancashire County Council to say that the situation was appalling and ask her to do something about it. She wrote back to me in September 2014:

“The Council has no statutory duty to provide transport assistance in circumstances where pupils do not attend their nearest school or academy. Granting assistance to pupils who attend faith schools and academies which are not the nearest establishments to a home address is a discretionary element of the Council’s policy.”

The “discretionary” bit is what it is all about. Council after council throughout the country are deciding, “It’s easy pickings. We’re going to ignore the discretionary bit and we’re not going to give it.” Even on appeal, when people write to say that they are finding it hard to provide £500 per child, they still get turned down. If they want their youngster to go to the school, they have to pay.

In the olden days, when deciding where to put the Catholic school in Clitheroe, many people thought that it should be in the centre. They were told, “No, we have some land out in Billington, so that is where it’s going to go. Don’t worry, there will be school transport for the youngsters to be ferried from Clitheroe to Billington at no cost.” Therefore, no protest was made about the siting of the school. It is a very good school. Lots of Catholic parents in Clitheroe want to send their youngsters there. They have to pass at least two schools in some cases, if not just one, before they get to the Catholic school. If they want their youngsters to go to the Catholic school and they are from Clitheroe or outlying villages, they have to pay the full cost. Call me old fashioned, but I think that is discrimination. We are saying to the parents, “If you want a faith-based education, you’re going to have to pay, but if you want to go to the non-faith-based school, you’ll get it for free.” That cannot be right. I know that the Minister believes in parental choice; he is a champion of parental choice. Surely we should ensure that if people wish to travel a reasonable distance—perhaps a distance that they prescribe themselves, which could be up to 15 miles—they should

be eligible for free school transport. I am not saying that someone should be able to travel 40 miles down the road to a school.

In her letter, Jo Turton, the chief executive of Lancashire County Council, explained how much money the council had to cut, and requires difficult decisions. I looked at it and decided to find out how much the chief executive of Lancashire County Council earns. It is a package, including pensions and all that sort of stuff, of £206,000. That is a bit eye-watering; it is rather high. Why does she not make some difficult decisions there? Cut it back. The salary bit is £169,000, so she could make a difficult decision and cut it to below what the Prime Minister earns, which as we know is £147,000, if he took it all, which he does not. That would be a nice, difficult decision for her to make. Indeed, seven salaries on Lancashire County Council add up to over £1 million. Make a difficult decision there; cut it back. Lead from the front. That would be courageous. No, they will not do that, but they expect parents to dip into their own taxed income to pay £500 a child, and that cannot be right.

One area where two schools back on to one another is Longridge. There is Longridge high school and the Catholic school St Cecilia’s just behind. I have 30-odd wonderful, lovely villages. If parents want their child to be educated in Longridge, which is where the nearest secondary schools are, and they happen to be Catholic, the bus stops outside Longridge high school first. The schools back on to one another and the youngsters can—and do—get out at Longridge high and walk through a ginnel to get to St Cecilia’s. That is fine, but the Catholics get charged. It is only those who go to Longridge high who do not get charged. That is clearly absurd.

Woe betide those who decide that they want the education that is offered by the grammar school and manage to pass the admissions exam. If they pass another school that is non-grammar, they have to pay. That seems like a tax or penalty on academic success. I am really lucky that I have some very good schools. There is not a single school in my constituency that I would have reservations about sending my children to, if I had any. If I decided that I wanted them to go to the grammar school, the Catholic school or another faith-based school, I do not see why I should be penalised for taking my parental choice.

I mentioned Bowland high school, which is smaller than Ribblesdale school in Clitheroe. Some parents decide, if they have a sensitive child, that they would prefer him or her to be educated in a more rural setting. It has a brilliant and relatively new sports centre and they might prefer their child to be at that school. It may be that a school specialises in the arts or sciences. If parents choose that school, they will be penalised because the local authority, while it has discretion, has decided that it is not going to use it.

I am delighted to see the newly elected Chairman of the Education Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael)—a popular choice. I took the opportunity to raise this issue with him as soon as the jubilation at his success had died down, and suggested that his Committee might like to conduct an inquiry into this policy. We all believe that education should be free at the point of use. Parents have the choice, if they wish, to pay for their youngster to go, for

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example in my constituency, to Stonyhurst. That is a private school and, if parents want to pay the fees, their child can go there; it is a fantastic school.

I do not think anybody would quibble with parents paying transport costs to get their youngster to that private school. They have made that firm decision. If parents wish their child to go to a school within the state sector and decide that it should be a single-sex, faith-based or grammar school, I do not believe that they deserve to be caned. If they have two or three children, it can be incredibly expensive. Mr Walker, you might find that people are making choices based not on what is in the best interest of the youngster but, sadly, on what is in the best interests of their wallets or purses, simply because they have difficult financial decisions to make.

I have also received correspondence from the Association of Colleges, which pointed out to me that, of course, parents now have to pay anyway after their child is 16. We have moved into a different era now, when—in the main—people are expected to go to college between 16 and 18. Local authorities have not caught up with that, and it can be incredibly expensive for parents to send their 16-year-old to a specialist college a few miles away, but they have to stump up for them.

This problem hits people irrespective of their constituency, but it hits people harder in rural areas, where the grammar schools or secondary schools tend to be further spaced out than in urban areas, and of course people in rural areas often live in villages that are miles away from schools. In many cases, rural transport is inferior to urban transport, so it may well be that parents have to make a decision about whether they themselves ferry their youngsters to school as they go to work. It is particularly galling for parents when they see the bus coming into their village, youngsters going to the nearest school getting on for free, and spaces on that bus, and yet they have to take their child to school themselves because they cannot afford the £500 or so each year for school transport.

What is even more surprising is that the county council has already stated that each year the cost to parents will go up by 5% above inflation. We are delighted that inflation is as low as it is, thanks to the long-term economic plan, but a 5% rise, year on year, and compounded, can be incredibly expensive.

I would like the Minister to do something. I have raised this issue several times in the House, and I know that it is the responsibility of another Government Department, but I dearly want that Department to back up parental choice and not to fine parents; not to penalise academic success; and to allow parents living within a reasonable distance of a school to get their youngsters ferried to that school. In some rural areas, it is very dangerous even to attempt walking or cycling on the roads.

I want the discretion removed. I want every youngster to be put on the same level, so that parents can choose a school within a reasonable distance in their own best interests without being penalised. I do not want the local authority to use them as cash cows to make up the shortfall because it will not make difficult decisions in other areas.

I plead with the Minister not to let this situation drag on. Let us help the local authorities to make the decision by removing the discretion, and let us ensure that people have full parental choice about where they send their youngsters.

3.18 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker.

I have a great interest in this motion and I thank the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) for securing this debate. In Glasgow this afternoon, there are people outside Glasgow City Chambers protesting at the cuts to bus services within the Glasgow city area. Glasgow City Council has decided to raise the qualifying distance for free bus passes in the city from 1.2 miles to 2 miles for primary school pupils, and from 2.2 miles to 3 miles for secondary school pupils. Those are quite considerable distances, especially for primary one pupils who will be starting school, aged five, come August.

I may not be able to refrain from being partisan in my comments today, because that choice has been made as a result of austerity programmes and cuts being made here, then passed to the Scottish Parliament and down on to councils. Councils have a difficult choice to make in coming to these decisions.

In Scotland, we also have a slightly less complex picture of schools, with fewer choices for pupils. Although Glasgow has catchment areas that can be complex, by and large children go to local schools of their choice in the catchment area; they do not often have to travel past a school they want to go to, to get to the one they have a place at.

Glasgow City Council's decisions on changing the cost of bus passes—putting that back on parents—could cause serious difficulties for parents who cannot afford to pay for one. If their parents cannot afford it, children will have to walk significant distances, across busy roads and perhaps through industrial estates and derelict areas. If that is a daunting prospect in our glorious Scottish summer, what will it be like in winter time? In Scotland it is often dark on leaving the house in the morning and dark when coming back in the afternoon. It is a pretty grim thought.

Parents are advised by Glasgow's education department that children should be accompanied—and of course, young children should be accompanied. But that causes serious difficulties for parents with more than one child who have to take their children to different places in the morning. There may be drop-offs at a nursery in one area, at a primary school in another and perhaps even at a secondary school, too. It is practically impossible for parents to make all those journeys.

The level of car ownership in Glasgow is low, particularly in deprived areas, where there is greater reliance on bus services. In 2012, only about half of households in Glasgow had access to a car. Bus transport is important for families and a lot of people without access to a car, because there is no other option for them other than using public transport.

The Labour council administration has made several attempts to introduce the proposal I have mentioned, but it has been rejected by the people and eventually rolled back on by the council; I hope that this time the council sees sense and finds the money elsewhere. More significantly, the proposal means that Glasgow City

Council is renegeing on promises it made during city school closures in the past, when lots of schools were closed or merged: parents were reassured about transport costs and told that school bus passes would be provided so that children could get to the schools. That was in 2008. Now parents find that the council has renegeed on that promise and they are facing serious costs for school transport. That is unfair and will lead to further disadvantage for children in many parts of the city—areas with food banks and areas of multiple deprivation—who are already suffering from significant poverty. People trying to get several children to school face a disproportionate cost. It is deeply unfair that the cost of transport is falling on families at this time.

I understand that some rules about qualifying distances come from a House of Lords ruling in 1986. If that is so, it is time for that to be revised; something decided so long ago that is affecting people now is surely ripe for revision. Things have changed—far more cars are on the road and our cities are much busier, with heavier goods vehicles moving across them. We need to be mindful that young children, some of whom may want to walk to school, will find a great deal of traffic on the roads.

I support this debate. There should be further action on and consideration of this matter, particularly in respect of Scotland, where we have a slightly different situation, with children trying to go to their local schools and parents trying to get them there. We could do a lot to help parents in this situation, including looking again at the qualifying distances to find out whether something better could be put in place.

3.24 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) on securing the debate. I endorse all the remarks he made in his eloquent, articulate speech. His debate is timely: only this morning, I received an email from a parent in my constituency asking for my views on the school transport proposals. I should explain that Warwickshire County Council has, like Lancashire County Council, embarked on a consultation on changes to the supply of school transport for children whose parents do not choose their closest school. The consultation opened on Tuesday and runs until 17 September. If the proposals are adopted, children who enter secondary school this year or in September 2016 will not be affected, but those who start in September 2017 will be—by exactly the changes that my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley spoke of.

In Rugby, the issue is grammar schools. My hon. Friend spoke about the impact on parents who wish their children to attend faith-based schools, single-sex schools or grammar schools. In Rugby, we have retained a selective system and in that respect are relatively unique in east Warwickshire. We have spectacular grammar schools in Lawrence Sheriff school, of which I am proud to be a product and therefore have a vested interest in, and Rugby high school, where my daughter is a pupil. We also have a bilateral school, Ashlawn school, which has a grammar stream alongside the secondary modern stream. Those schools are very popular with parents. An enormous number of children sit examinations to secure places there, and some parents move to Rugby simply to gain access to its schools.

The email I received this morning is from a parent who lives in the village of Binley Woods, to which I also have a connection because I grew up there. I travelled from Binley Woods to Lawrence Sheriff school in Rugby every day—a journey of about 8 miles. The email says:

“My son is due to attend Lawrence Sheriff School in September.”

My constituent’s son will not be affected by the proposals because they will not take effect for her son’s entry. However, there might be a concern if Warwickshire County Council makes changes similar to those that Lancashire is considering. What would happen if her son goes to the grammar school in September and a change is made thereafter? If any county council makes such a change, I hope that children who entered schools before the change will continue to get discretionary support.

My hon. Friend drew attention to an absurd example in his constituency, and I will give the Minister another. My constituent tells me that the allocated non-selective school for children who live in Binley Woods is Bilton school. That is a very good school that I visit regularly, but it is 8 miles away. Lawrence Sheriff school is just as far away. We have an absurd situation where a child who does well in a selective exam and goes to the appropriate school for their abilities—the school that will bring them on best in life—will have their travel paid for if they choose to turn down a place at the grammar school because the secondary modern, Bilton, is closest. However, if the child, having worked hard, takes the place they have secured at the grammar school, their transport will not be paid for. That is absolutely crazy and cannot happen.

My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the issue of students from low-income backgrounds. Warwickshire County Council’s policy states that the discretionary payment would continue to apply to families with relatively modest means, whether or not Warwickshire makes the change, but my concern is the parents who fall short of that category. There is something of a cliff face here. For a parent, the cost of paying for transport to a grammar school is conceivably a reason for their child not to take up a place there.

I attended a grammar school and am a great supporter of retaining our grammar schools. I sat in a class with fellow pupils from ordinary backgrounds, with parents who were engineers, electricians or worked in cement factories. Those pupils took advantage of their grammar school education and went on to do well in life. There is a grave danger of putting a barrier in people’s way by denying them the opportunity to access the excellent education that our grammar schools provide. I join my hon. Friend on this issue. I have made my views clear today and will make my own representation to the consultation.

Will the Minister consider extending the statutory requirements to include parents who wish their child to go to a school other than the nearest one? Will he also comment on the absurd situation where two schools are almost exactly the same distance away and transport is paid for a pupil going to one but not the other?

Mr Nigel Evans: Is my hon. Friend somewhat suspicious, as I am, of such consultations? Lancashire, too, had a consultation. There is no doubt in my mind that the vast majority of people would say, “We prefer the system to carry on as it is and that the county uses its

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discretion.” Irrespective of how persuasive I know that my hon. Friend and his constituents can be, my suspicion is that the consultation will end up saying, “Well, I’m sorry, we have to save the money. They do this in Lancashire and several other places, and we’re going to force people to pay.”

Mark Pawsey: My hon. Friend makes a fair point about consultations. I will, however, be making representations and I will encourage the parents whom I come into contact with in my constituency to make representations to Warwickshire County Council in the same way. We understand the pressure on local government finance and it is entirely right for local authorities to look wherever they can to avoid excessive expenditure—to get more for less and to spend taxpayers’ money wisely—but not in a situation such as this. I am horrified on behalf of bright and capable children from households just outside the category eligible for support; the measure might act as a disincentive against such youngsters coming forward, putting their name in for the selection exam and getting an education that could enable them to do well later in life.

I will take the consultation at face value, and I will continue to lobby county councillors in Warwickshire so that they know and understand the possible consequences. I am pretty certain about our representations during the consultation.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): I apologise for being late to this excellent debate. The Select Committee on Education has not yet been formed, but I suggest that this issue is one that it might well consider in due course, in the context of proper choice of schools and ensuring value for money.

Mark Pawsey: It is encouraging to hear that the Select Committee will consider the subject.

I will sum up by reading out my constituent’s question regarding her son:

“Why is he potentially being discriminated against for passing his 11-plus?”

3.33 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Walker. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) on securing this important debate. I doubt whether a single Member has not at some time or other come across the vexed issue of school transport, usually at some kind of advice centre.

I will quickly cover what I understand to be the duties and powers of the local authorities in England to provide home-to-school transport under the Education Act 1996, as amended; I am sure that the Minister will confirm this. The “Home to school travel and transport guidance” for local authorities provides further clarification. The guidance was updated recently—only in July last year—and it covers the statutory duties that a local authority must abide by when making home-to-school arrangements. It also provides local authorities with advice on discretionary powers to make provision for children where there is no statutory obligation; the hon. Member for Ribble Valley focused on that point.

The guidance applies to the vast majority of schools—community, foundation, voluntary, non-maintained and special schools, referral units, maintained nurseries, city technology colleges, city colleges for the technology of the arts, academies, free schools and university technology colleges. An independent school can also be covered if that school is named in the child’s education care and health plan, so the guidance is pretty comprehensive.

Three main issues affect the arguments about the provision of school transport. First, there is the cost. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley and I might not have identical views, but we all heard his point about that issue. I am concerned that the cost is borne increasingly by impoverished local authorities. Secondly, there is the allocation and provision of school places, which seems to be resulting in an ever-increasing number of children in some parts of the country having to travel substantial distances to school. Finally, there is the question of safety and the emphasis on motor transport rather than walking or cycling. That point was alluded to by the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss).

As the pressure on public spending intensifies, many local authorities have found themselves facing funding reductions of about 37% over the period 2010-11 to 2015-16. Many hon. Members will recognise that those cuts are not applied fairly across the board, with reductions that can vary from 5% to 40%. Needless to say, councils with the greatest needs and deprivation, such as my own in Birmingham, are required to take the largest share of the cuts. It is hardly surprising in those circumstances that local authorities are finding it harder to provide school transport. The Public Accounts Committee report of 28 January this year warned that further cuts might undermine the viability of not just optional services, but even some statutory ones.

When it comes to school transport, that is exactly what is happening. It is often a case of local authorities tinkering with the distance rules as a means of excluding people. In essence, there is an attempt to save costs. Schools have plenty of other pressures, not least the pensions issue that is looming for the Minister, but they are sitting on quite large reserves. The Department for Education’s figures show that 4,400 academies, as of March 2014, had reserves of £2.47 billion; some way behind are the 18,700 local authority maintained schools, which had reserves of £2.18 billion.

I meet plenty of local authority leaders who ask me why schools, given that they are sitting on these reserves, should not pay for or at least contribute to the transport costs, while local authorities are facing such cuts.

Mr Nigel Evans: I am a former school governor and I was on West Glamorgan County Council. In many cases, schools save that money for capital projects, some of which can run into millions, so that money would not be available to spend on other projects.

Steve McCabe: I am also a former school governor. I acknowledge that there are other pressures in schools. I was pointing out that they are sitting with reserves. Local authorities have largely been encouraged by the Secretary of State to use up theirs.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the problem, with which I totally sympathise, of parents being asked to pay £500. I do not know whether he saw the recent article in the *Bournemouth Echo*; I am sure he is an avid

reader of it. It highlighted the plight of parents whose children attend the Parkfield free school. The school was set up and is now having to move to a more satisfactory base. Unfortunately, its new location is not particularly well served by public transport. There is a business willing to provide a school bus service, but at a cost of £650 to the parents. Neither the school nor the local authority feels able to subsidise that transport cost. When I read about that and as I listened to the hon. Gentleman, I wondered whether he was simply describing the shape of things to come.

Given the importance of getting children to school safely, I wonder whether the Government need to look again at the guidance, even if it was reviewed only last year, and at the funding arrangements. As to the suggestion that we might perhaps extend the travel distance or cut some local authority officers' salaries, that might be one approach, but perhaps the Minister could also consider whether it is right for the duty to rest solely with local authorities.

We all tend to look a bit nostalgically back to the time when many of us would have walked to school, but at that time, of course, the concept of a local school was common. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley referred to problems of choice and locality, and the confusion over preferences and allocation of places. I certainly recognised what he was describing, but I suggest that the pressure on school places results largely from the imbalance in current provision, which results directly from Government policy. It has resulted in additional capacity in some areas and insufficient places in others, often in areas with the highest numbers of children.

Some Members, including the hon. Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey), have spoken of the barriers to children's attendance at grammar schools and other schools of their choice, and that is certainly happening. In other cases, the capacity argument means that children are sometimes forced to travel great distances to school.

I know that the Minister is fond of reading the *Daily Mail*; in March, it reported on a mother from south London who complained that she was forced to drive her son 25 miles to his current school because she cannot obtain a place at the local school, which is down the road and round the corner. We hear stories repeatedly about children who must make journeys involving several buses, after they fail to get a local place. That pressure is added to by admissions policies that often result in children in the same household attending different schools. Again, that is a point to which the hon. Member for Glasgow Central drew our attention.

Every year at around this time, I am inundated at my advice centres with parents who have experienced the problem of not getting the school of their preference. Can it be right that a five-year-old is expected to make a two-and-a-half mile taxi journey to school, because he cannot get a place at the school nearest to where he lives? What assessment has the Minister made of the pressure on school places and the distance that children must travel? Does the situation mean that, whatever the arguments about academies or free schools, we need a more rational planning arrangement so that we have more school places where they are needed?

It is worth noting that, under the guidance, local authorities are obliged to provide free transport where there is no safe walking route, however close to the school the child may live. There cannot be many of us

who have not witnessed the traffic problems around local schools at the start and end of the school day—traffic problems largely generated by parents who not only want to drop off and collect their children, but want to park as close to the school gate as possible.

I was told recently about an incident at one school in my constituency. A parent managed to knock down a child as she attempted that manoeuvre. Fortunately, no serious damage was done, but the stressed driver, rather than apologising immediately, got out of her car and castigated the child for not paying sufficient attention while she was trying to park. That pressure around the school gate is making life far too difficult for too many children.

I note that more than 27% of parents now automatically drive their children to school; 23% of cars on the road at peak times are taking children to or from school, despite 19% of school journeys being under a mile—a distance that I am told people can comfortably walk in about 20 minutes, even if they are not trying very hard.

Clearly, we need to give much more thought to how to create a safer environment in the immediate vicinity of schools and what the Government can do to help to deliver a sensible cycling and walking strategy, as proposed by the Living Streets charity. At a time when we are rightly concerned about childhood health and obesity, it is remarkable how few children walk to school. I am very impressed by Brake and other road safety charities, which have been calling for safe travel zones around our schools. That approach covers speeding traffic, crossings, inconsiderate parking, and cycling and walking. In that context, I welcome the Government's target of 55% of five to 10-year-olds walking to school, but we will not achieve that without deliberate and specific action. Can the Minister say what he has in mind?

I conclude by asking the Minister to look again at the guidance and whether schools, local authorities and others could be encouraged to share the burden of the cost of school transport. I have given up hope of local authorities getting fair funding deals, but his own Back-Bench colleagues are now asking him to look at this issue. Can he look at the provision of places and the possibility of a more rational planning framework and tell us what parental choice means in this day and age if parents are not able to send their children to the school of their choice, for the reasons that his hon. Friends state? Finally, can the Minister tell us what steps he has taken regarding safer, healthier alternatives for getting children to and from school?

Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair): The Minister has a lot to get his teeth into, and the debate is due to end at 4.30 pm. Actually, that is quite a long time, but if he is minded to take up most of it, could he leave a couple of minutes at the end for Mr Evans to respond?

3.47 pm

The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I will try to squeeze my remarks into the remaining time.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) on securing the debate and on his excellent and compelling opening speech. He is a strong advocate for his constituency on a range of issues, and this is another example of that advocacy. I also congratulate

[Mr Nick Gibb]

my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) and the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) on their contributions, in which they cited their own constituency issues.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) was unwise to talk about school places planning, given that the previous Labour Government eliminated 200,000 primary school places when it was absolutely clear that the birth rate was increasing. One of the first things that the coalition Government had to do was to double the spending on creating new school places at a time of enormous constraint on the public finances. Over that period, we have spent several billion pounds on providing more school places to make up for the backlog that we inherited in 2010.

Steve McCabe: In case the Minister misunderstood me, I point out that I am not disputing whether the Government are creating more places; I am talking about the problem that they are creating by giving us over-capacity in one area and insufficient places where children are living. That is the difficulty; it is about the planning, not the number.

Mr Gibb: But of course the planning is easier if we do not have to catch up on a huge deficit in school places.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley has consistently championed the practical importance of school transport to children and their parents in his constituency. Where schools are beyond reasonable walking distance, parents should be entitled to expect the local authority to support transport arrangements. That rightly remains a statutory duty on local authorities. This afternoon, my hon. Friend has highlighted the impact of local authorities' decisions, in the context of a tight fiscal position, to consider the availability of transport to schools that are the parents' first choice but that the local authority deems are not the nearest suitable school.

The Government are committed to securing a good school place for every child. Today, more than 1 million more children attend good or outstanding schools than in 2010, and 260 new free schools set up by local charities, trusts and groups of parents are offering education that meets the needs of their communities. Additionally, in the previous Parliament, the Government spent more than £5 billion in funding local authorities to create new school places, and we have announced a further £3.6 billion over the next three years. The sponsored academies programme has turned around 1,154 underperforming schools over the past five years, ensuring that more pupils benefit from the highest standards of education.

Parents make few choices for their child that are more important than the choice of which school they attend and, thanks to our reforms, in many cases it will increasingly be the nearest and most conveniently located school. Some parents, however, might decide that their child's education would best be served by attending a school further away from home because the performance of the nearest school is not yet good enough or because of considerations about a school's specialism, ethos, faith status—my hon. Friend alluded to that—or, in some areas, whether it is academically selective, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby.

Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide free transport for pupils in compulsory education at their nearest suitable school if it is beyond the statutory walking distances. Those thresholds, as has been said, are 2 miles for children under the age of eight and 3 miles for those aged eight and above. Under the universal statutory duty, "suitable school" is taken to mean the nearest qualifying school with places available that provides education appropriate to the child's age, ability and aptitude. If a child has passed a grammar school entry test, for example, the local authority would not necessarily deem other, nearer schools unsuitable.

All local authorities have an additional duty to enable children from low-income family backgrounds to access a wider range of schools, including faith schools. That duty is known as "extended rights" and attracts national funding worth almost £20 million in this financial year. The extended rights policy helps children from low-income groups for whom a lack of affordable transport might act as a barrier to choice, thus enabling some of the most disadvantaged pupils to secure fair access to a wider range of schools. Children are eligible for extended rights if they are entitled to free school meals or if their parents are in receipt of maximum working tax credit. Where those criteria apply, pupils are given additional financial support towards school transport.

The policy amends the statutory walking distances, so that local authorities must provide free transport for such pupils where the nearest suitable school is beyond 2 miles if the pupil is over the age of eight but below the age 11; beyond 2 miles but within 6 miles for pupils aged 11 or over and there are not more than three suitable nearer schools; or beyond 2 miles but within 15 miles for pupils aged 11 or over who are attending the nearest suitable school on the grounds of religion or belief. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley said, the policy does not apply to children whose parents do not qualify for extended rights. Although parents do not enjoy a specific right to have their children educated at a school with a religious character or at a secular school, or to have transport arrangements made by their local authority to and from such a school, the extended rights policy includes the nearest suitable school on the grounds of religion or belief up to 15 miles, as there are often fewer faith schools within a reasonable distance. Even if children do not have a statutory entitlement to free home-to-school transport, local authorities have a discretionary power to provide free or assisted transport if they believe it necessary and local funding is available.

Lancashire County Council has historically provided free home-to-school transport to catchment area schools in Ribble Valley, regardless of whether they are the nearest school. Nationally, expenditure on home-to-school transport currently totals some £1 billion, and approximately £600 million of that is spent on transport for pupils with special educational needs. The total figure has remained broadly consistent over the past three financial years, although the proportion allocated to special educational needs transport shows a gradual increase over that period.

Lancashire County Council's total expenditure on home-to-school transport has remained broadly consistent with the slight reduction in the amount spent on special educational needs over the three-year period. I understand that from September 2015, as my hon. Friend has explained, Lancashire County Council will introduce a

package of measures to reduce its home-to-school travel costs, one of which is to remove the county-wide discretion to pay travelling expenses to catchment area schools when there is a nearer school. For new pupils starting this September, the local authority will fund transport only to the nearest school. Those changes are being phased in, and a child who started at a school under one set of arrangements will continue under those arrangements. For some parents who wish to send their child to a religiously designated school, their chosen school may not be their nearest. In that case, Lancashire County Council requires parents to contribute towards the overall cost of transport.

Where possible, I urge local authorities, including Lancashire County Council, to consider preserving discretionary school transport support for disadvantaged pupils and to consult widely about any plans to change arrangements. Good practice suggests that when parents are asked to pay all or some of the costs of non-statutory transport provision, low-income families who are not eligible for the extended rights should not have to pay. That is good practice, although it is not compulsory under law.

My hon. Friend asked about schools that back on to each other, citing the example of the Catholic school along a ginnel—I think that was the word he used—from the school whose students were entitled to free school transport. I urge the local authority to be reasonable and consider the issue in the context that my hon. Friend so ably explained. I make the same point to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby about the example that he cited from Binley Woods, with the Lawrence Sheriff school and the grammar school under Warwickshire County Council. I know that he has responded to the consultation, which is ongoing.

The Government encourage more pupils to cycle or walk to school, particularly in urban areas. We have set an ambition to increase the percentage of schoolchildren aged five to 10 who walk to school to 55% by 2025, and we have made a long-term funding commitment of more than £400 million for cycling and walking available to every local authority in the country until 2021. To cite one example, Darlington Borough Council has encouraged a shift away from cars to more sustainable methods under the brand Local Motion. Central Government have provided funding for the project since 2011. It ensures that schools, young people and their families receive relevant information to enable them to choose sustainable travel options to get to and from school. As a result, the cycling rate among secondary school pupils in that local authority area has increased from 1% to 7%.

Steve McCabe: I am interested in what the Minister is describing. Am I right in thinking that local authorities are not obliged to tie that funding to travel to school plans and that some local authorities can choose to spend it in other ways? If so, would it not make more sense to require them specifically to take the travel to school issue into account when spending the money?

Mr Gibb: We believe in local discretion. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley argued that we should remove that discretion and the hon. Gentleman is hinting that he would like to remove some of it, but the Government's philosophy has been that local authorities should have discretion to spend that money as they see

fit, to respond to local circumstances. That has been the policy for many years. We believe that they are best placed to determine how resources should be used in the areas that they serve and to balance the demands of a broad range of discretionary travel against their budget priorities. If we were to remove this discretion from local authorities' responsibilities, it would hugely increase the number of eligible children at a substantial cost to the taxpayer. Therefore, it is much more practical and helpful to allow local authorities to continue to make these important decisions locally, but they still need to make the right decisions locally.

Many authorities are doing some very good work, for example, by encouraging schools to collaborate with one another and to use some of their own resources to fund transport. For instance, many academies are collaborating with other stakeholders and providers to offer discretionary transport to their schools. Hertfordshire, for example, will save between £5 million and £6 million per annum as a result of schools doing that. From September 2012 onwards, that local authority has only provided statutory home-to-school transport. It wanted to build capacity locally to encourage schools, community groups and commercial operators to provide home-to-school transport, and from September 2013 onwards, 130 routes to schools have operated without a financial subsidy from the council. So creative ways to provide transport are being used by innovative local authorities around the country. I urge both Warwickshire County Council and Lancashire County Council to look at such examples and at Darlington Borough Council to see whether they can learn from them.

The Government recognise that rural areas face particular transport difficulties. Therefore, the Department for Transport has provided £7.6 million in funding for 37 schemes to deliver improved local transport in rural and isolated areas. That funding will provide the essential first step for local authorities to implement service integration. People living in those areas will be able to benefit from integrated public transport, and local authorities will work with schools, hospitals and other local organisations to deliver local services more efficiently and at lower cost.

In conclusion, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising these important issues on behalf of his constituents. A good local school within easy commuting reach is something that every parent has the right to expect for their child, and even as we continue to reduce the deficit, local authorities will continue to have a duty to provide school transport in many circumstances. And I share his view that discretionary services should be protected, wherever possible.

4.2 pm

Mr Nigel Evans: I thank the Minister for the generosity of spirit with which he has treated this debate. The way that we are praising one another sounds like a bit of a love-in, but I know that he is dedicated to ensuring that every parent is given choice, where possible, and that every child has a decent education, which is what we all want. Part of that, clearly, is the ability to choose.

I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby (Mark Pawsey) for illustrating some of the anomalies that exist in his own constituency, including the absurdity of the eight-mile range. I wonder whether anyone has

[Mr Nigel Evans]

measured it; one school may be an inch further away than another one. However, the fact is that parents are being penalised simply for choosing one school over another. I went to a selective school myself and I believe in a mix, so I am delighted to hear that his selective schools are doing very well.

As I said right at the outset, I am so lucky that all the schools in my patch are excellent. However, we do not want to get into the position, although I know that it is increasingly happening, whereby parents move to ensure that their youngsters can get into certain schools. We want all schools to be good, so that nobody has to move.

I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) for illustrating the problems that face an increasing number of parents in Glasgow. There always seems to be a sense of blame-shifting, whereby somebody else is responsible and it is not really our fault, and people say, "We would prefer not to do it, but we have to. Our hands are tied." However, the real victims in all this are the parents and their children, who increasingly have to put their hands in their pockets.

I am also extremely grateful to the shadow Minister for some of his comments. I would encourage youngsters to walk where they can, but sometimes in rural areas the road system is bad and the distances great, in particular if the school is not a primary—most villages tend to have a primary school, although in some cases they do not. For secondary education, the situation is clearly more difficult.

I was delighted to hear that the new Chair of the Education Committee has now put the subject on his shopping list of inquiries. Perhaps we will make some progress. The Minister talked about his belief that the Government's philosophy is discretion. At the same

time, he wants that discretion to be used to ensure that parents get choice, and therefore local authorities pay for school transport. If, however, in particular in the inquiry, it is demonstrated that local authorities are increasingly not giving any discretion whatever, but seeing the transport as an opportunity to dip into parents' pockets—not supporting parents in their parental choice—I hope that that will be exposed and the Minister will look again.

We give discretion to local authorities up to a point on council tax, but we encourage them to freeze and certainly not to go above a certain rate, otherwise things are punitive for them. Perhaps we could look at that for local authorities if they are ignoring wholesale the discretion that they have and if they are imposing those transport costs on parents with—in Lancashire's case, as I said—a 5% real-terms increase year on year, which can be financially painful for some parents. That is particularly the case for those parents just over the limit, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby pointed out, for tax credits or free school meals, or if they have more than one child.

Clearly, the book is not closed on the subject. I hope that the Minister will keep a beady eye—I trust that he will—on the situation. I will ensure that Lancashire county council gets a report of today's proceedings in Westminster Hall, so that it can see what the Government's intention is and what they want the county councils to do. If the councils do not follow that intention, we will revisit the subject in the coming months.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the cost of school transport.

4.7 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 25 June 2015

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Green Investment Bank

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid): Over the last two years, the UK Green Investment Bank has seen success in unlocking private sector investment in key low-carbon and green sectors. The GIB has helped develop markets and shown that investment in green projects is good business. I want to see this success continue and to see the GIB continue to accelerate investment across the UK's green sectors.

To meet our low-carbon and green objectives, we know that we need to continue to see significant investment. I want to see the GIB continue to play an important role in the transition to a green economy.

Attracting private investment to GIB will, I believe, enable the company to do this. It will allow the bank to grow its business, giving the expert teams we have established within GIB access to a much greater volume of capital than would be the case if GIB were to remain in 100% Government ownership. This will enable the company to have the greatest possible impact in mobilising investment and lead to more green projects getting financed more quickly than would otherwise be the case.

In the debate on the Budget in March, the then Secretary of State for Business updated Parliament about work to explore options for bringing in additional capital into the Green Investment Bank as a way to ensure it is an enduring institution and has the operational freedom for investment across the green economy. We have therefore been exploring options for how best to get that capital and, with my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change and the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, we have concluded that the best approach is to move GIB into private ownership subject to ensuring we achieve value for money. This should bring a number of important benefits, giving GIB greater freedom to operate across a wider range of green sectors in accordance with its green purposes, which are enshrined in legislation.

It has always been our intention that GIB should leverage the maximum amount of private capital into green sectors for the minimum amount of public money. Moving the company into private ownership is a natural development for GIB that further delivers this aim. Our aim is that a transaction should result in GIB no longer being classified as a public sector body. This would mean GIB would be free to borrow capital so as to achieve its business ambitions without this having an effect on public sector net debt.

The detail and timing of any transaction will be set out in due course.

[HCWS54]

CABINET OFFICE

Leveson Inquiry

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock): The cost of support provided to Government witnesses to the Leveson inquiry through the Government Legal Department (formerly Treasury Solicitors) is £287,491.10.

[HCWS55]

TREASURY

UK Debt Management Office (Business Plan)

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin): The United Kingdom Debt Management Office (DMO) has today published its business plan for the year 2015-16. Copies have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and are available on the DMO's website, www.dmo.gov.uk.

It is also available online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>.

[HCWS58]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Sasha Wass Inquiry

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge): It is normal practice, when a Government Department proposes to undertake a contingent liability in excess of £300,000 for which there is not statutory authority, for the Minister concerned to present a departmental minute to Parliament giving particulars of the liability created and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from incurring the liability until 14 parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the statement, except in cases of special emergency. I have today laid a departmental minute proposing to provide an indemnity that is necessary in respect of a Foreign Office-established independent inquiry into alleged child abuse and associated cover-up on the British overseas territory of St Helena. The Government take any such allegations extremely seriously, and the inquiry reflects their commitment to a full and independent investigation into any wrongdoing. Last year (2014), the Foreign Secretary announced the establishment of the inquiry (Hansard, column 13-14WS, on 20 November 2014) to be led by Sasha Wass QC. This indemnity will cover the entire duration of the inquiry's work, from November 2014 until when the inquiry submits its report in the autumn of 2015. The indemnity will cover Sasha Wass QC, the inquiry panel, the inquiry solicitor and one staff member against any liability for any act done or omission made honestly and in good faith in the execution of his or her duty as such, or in the purported execution of his or her duty as such. The indemnity only applies to acts done or omissions made

during the course of the inquiry. If the liability is called, provision for any payment will be sought through the normal supply procedure. The Treasury has approved the proposal in principle. If, during the period of 14 parliamentary sitting days beginning on the date on which this minute was laid before Parliament, a Member signifies an objection by giving notice of a parliamentary question or by otherwise raising the matter in Parliament, final approval to proceed with incurring the liability will be withheld pending an examination of the objection.

[HCWS61]

HEALTH

Arm's Length Bodies (Triennial Reviews)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): I am today announcing the start of the triennial reviews of the Committee on Mutagenicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, the Human Tissue Authority, and NHS Blood and Transplant.

The triennial review programme ensures that all Government Departments review their non-departmental public bodies on a regular basis. In order to ensure that the Department of Health is operating as an effective system steward and can be assured of all the bodies it is responsible for, it has extended the programme of reviews over the period 2014-17 to include all of its arm's length bodies.

The reviews are conducted in two stages. The first stage will examine the continuing need for the function and whether the organisation's form, including operating at arm's length from Government, remains appropriate. If the outcome of this stage is that delivery should continue, the second stage of the review will assess whether the bodies are operating efficiently and in line with the recognised principles of good corporate governance.

[HCWS57]

Health Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): The Health Council met in Luxembourg on 19 June 2015 as part of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO) Council meetings. I represented the UK.

Medical devices

Member states agreed to a partial general approach on regulations concerning medical devices and in vitro medical devices. The compromise brokered by the Latvian presidency represents significant progress on this issue—after almost three years of negotiations—and paves the way for trilogue negotiations with the European Parliament and Commission once remaining work on the recitals (and certain technical aspects of the texts) is completed. Overall it was a very positive outcome for the UK, enhancing patient safety but ensuring pre-market scrutiny remains light-touch and clinically led, and that NHS in-house tests are exempted from most of the requirements of the regulations.

Alcohol strategy

Slovenia requested that the Commission produces a new alcohol strategy, given the growing problems caused by alcohol abuse and the need for EU-level action to support member states' own efforts to tackle it. The UK joined many other countries which spoke in favour of this proposition, highlighting the sharp rise in alcohol-related deaths and the strain being put on vital public services. In response, the Commission—Health Commissioner Andriukaitis—committed to considering the issue further.

Migration

Greece, Cyprus, Italy and Malta introduced a paper on the health aspects of the migration crisis in the Mediterranean, highlighting the strain being put on their health systems. The Commission noted that 60 million euros had recently been allocated in emergency funding to assist them, but reiterated his call to member states to provide bilateral assistance through the EU's civil protection mechanism. The UK acknowledged the health dimension of the crisis, and saluted the efforts of hard-pressed health professionals in front-line Mediterranean countries. Further, the UK emphasised the contribution of our armed forces in saving lives at sea, but also noted that the most effective solution remains addressing the root cause of the problem, and highlighted the work of DFID promoting stability and prosperity in source countries.

Diphtheria

Spain introduced an addition to the agenda concerning the recent discovery of its first case of Diphtheria in 28 years. The main issue is one of access to Diphtheria anti-toxin (DAT), which is now patchy across Europe. Speakers called on member states to work together to ensure that all have access to this treatment.

Luxembourg presidency

Luxembourg set out its priorities for its upcoming EU presidency, which begins on 1 July. These include innovation and personalised medicine, dementia, and cross-border healthcare. As mentioned above, Luxembourg will oversee the finalisation of the Council position on medical devices, and further work will also be undertaken on alcohol and lessons learnt from Ebola.

[HCWS56]

JUSTICE

Judicial Diversity Taskforce (Annual Report)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara): The judicial diversity taskforce has today published its fourth annual report, which details the progress the group has made in addressing the 53 recommendations of the advisory panel on judicial diversity. The taskforce comprises of senior members of the judiciary, the Judicial Appointments Commission, the Bar Council, the Law Society, the Chartered Institute of Legal Executives and the Ministry of Justice.

Our judges are rightly held in high regard around the world, and it is important that they reflect today's diverse society, which is why we are pleased such significant progress was made by members of the taskforce over 2014. In large part this was driven by our collaborative approach to improving diversity and engaging in new ways of working across the legal and judicial professions.

Some of the achievements of the taskforce include:

Successful implementation of the equal merit provision; which allows for a candidate to be recommended for appointment for the purpose of improving diversity within the judiciary in instances when two or more candidates are of equal merit.

Extending the opportunity for salaried office holders to sit part time in the High Court and above.

Identification of ways to improve the selection and recommendation process for judicial appointments through an external review.

Improvements in statistical reporting, and in data collection and management, to better monitor and evaluate progress on judicial diversity.

Arranging a series of workshops and training programmes aimed at encouraging under-represented groups to enter the judiciary.

Increasing the amount of Diversity and Community Relation Judges, who play a key role in outreach events and act as figureheads for diversity and community engagement.

The judicial diversity taskforce held its last meeting in November 2014 and this will be its final annual report.

The oversight function of the taskforce will now be the responsibility of the Judicial Diversity Forum, which brings together most of the parties who were in the taskforce. The forum will continue to review progress against the outstanding and ongoing recommendations listed at the end of the report, and will work to identify new opportunities for action. This will ensure that the goal of improving judicial diversity continues to be embedded in the working practices of the judiciary, legal professions and Government.

Copies of the taskforce's report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The report is also available online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/judicial-diversity-taskforce-annual-report-2014>

[HCWS60]

PRIME MINISTER

Intelligence Services Commissioner and Chief Surveillance Commissioner (Annual Reports)

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I have today laid before both Houses copies of the latest annual reports from the Intelligence Services Commissioner and the Chief Surveillance Commissioner.

The Intelligence Services Commissioner, the right hon. Sir Mark Waller, was appointed by me to keep under review the exercise by the Secretaries of State of their powers to issue warrants and authorisations to enable the intelligence services to carry out their vital functions. The Commissioner also uses his position to check the lawful use of the powers and duties imposed on the intelligence services and the Ministry of Defence by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and the Intelligence Services Act 1994.

The Chief Surveillance Commissioner, the right hon. Sir Christopher Rose, was appointed by me to keep under review public authority use of covert surveillance, covert human intelligence sources (CHIS) and property interference powers. The Commissioner provides statutory

oversight to ensure that public authorities use correctly and lawfully the relevant provisions of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 and the Police Act 1997.

Both reports provide a comprehensive summary of the conscientious inspection, authorisation and oversight regimes that have been undertaken.

The Intelligence Services Commissioner makes it clear that those involved in the authorisation of investigatory powers that he oversees take compliance very seriously. It is reassuring that in all cases inspected by the Commissioner there has been proper consideration of the necessity and proportionality of the proposed action, including careful consideration of the intrusion into the target's and other people's privacy.

I am also grateful for the Commissioner for identifying a number of administrative errors and making recommendations on how these can be avoided in future. While it is reassuring that these errors were not deliberative or significant, we cannot be complacent. Sir Mark also makes some helpful recommendations in relation to amending the legislation which we will consider as part of the future legislation relating to investigatory powers.

Sir Mark's annual report considers the intelligence's use of bulk personal data for the first time as a result of my direction on 12 March 2015. I welcome his finding that the safeguards over the use of, and access to, bulk personal data are satisfactory and that the data is properly used for the statutory purposes for which it was collected.

The Office of Surveillance Commissioners, under Sir Christopher, continues to carry out a thorough and detailed inspection of all public authorities' use of the surveillance powers, looking at both operational usage and management structures. The commission also scrutinises a high proportion of surveillance deployments including those which the legislation requires to be individually notified to the commission and those which require the prior approval of the Commissioners. The report reflects that there continue to be a small number of errors in public authorities' practices in this area, though these are not indicative of any systematic abuse or failing. It shows that public authorities are taking their responsibilities seriously and applying good standards of management and control over their covert surveillance activities. The report highlights, in particular, real improvements in the management of undercover police officers.

I want to thank both Commissioners for the diligence and rigour with which they undertake their oversight roles and commend these reports to the House.

[HCWS62]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Personal Independence Payments

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson): Personal Independence Payment (PIP) is a major reform which is transforming the way we support disabled people to live independently.

PIP replaces the outdated Disability Living Allowance (DLA). PIP focuses support on those who need it most and, unlike DLA, a significant majority of claimants will have a face-to-face assessment as part of the application process. It is a more dynamic benefit with regular reviews to check entitlement remains correct—payments can increase as well as decrease—whereas 70% of those receiving DLA were on indefinite awards. And PIP is a more modern benefit which takes better account of mental health conditions.

I now intend to roll out the final phase of this vital reform, that of the reassessment of all remaining people on DLA for PIP. We have already rolled out PIP across GB for new claimants and for individuals who choose to claim PIP or whose circumstances change or where their DLA award comes to an end, including for children when they reach 16.

My original intention was to start this final phase in October 2015 GB wide. In May departmental statistics confirmed that average reassessment claims for PIP were waiting only four weeks from returning their PIP forms

until an assessment, which is in line with our expectations. This improved performance means I am pleased to announce that we are now in a position to begin the final phase in July, initially at small volumes and in a limited number of areas. We recognise that this will result in some claimants being invited to reassessment earlier than they might have expected. But by operating at a smaller scale initially, this will enable us to monitor the system closely in small volumes to ensure an efficient reassessment process is in place.

It will also provide us with an opportunity to test key parts of the PIP process, such as the way in which we communicate with claimants. This is in line with the previous Government's response to recommendations in the independent review of PIP carried out by Paul Gray in December 2014. My priority remains safe and secure delivery of PIP and we will use evidence from this early roll-out to ensure we are continuously improving the way in which we deliver PIP, offering the best claimant experience possible.

[HCWS59]

Petition

Thursday 25 June 2015

OBSERVATIONS

HOME DEPARTMENT

Downsizing of UK visa and immigration services in India and Bangladesh

The Petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that the Government's decision to downsize the Mumbai Deputy High Commission's visa services will inconvenience hundreds of thousands of people; further that these changes to one of the busiest visa centres in the world will move the majority of decision-making powers to New Delhi; further that in Dhaka in Bangladesh, visa decision-making powers have been removed altogether which de-prioritises the importance of the UK's relationship with Bangladesh; further that the decision was made under 'cost-cutting' measures as it may take longer for decisions on visas for friends and families of British Indians and Bangladeshis to be made and may cause them to encounter numerous problems and further that a local petition on this matter was signed by 196 residents of Leicester East.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to immediately review the decision to downsize visa and immigration services in India and Bangladesh.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Keith Vaz, *Official Report*, 23 March 2015; Vol. 594, c. 11P.]

[P001467]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Home Department:

The decision to move visa processing from Bangladesh to Delhi, which was completed in September 2014, in no way reflects a de-prioritisation of the importance of the UK's relationship with Bangladesh. UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) continues to retain a team of staff in our High Commission in Dhaka and all passports are retained in Bangladesh.

The decision is as a result of the way we continue to modernise how we process UK visa applications to ensure we provide safe and secure decisions, excellent customer service and value for money to the taxpayer.

From as early as 2006, the international operation has been moving towards a consolidated 'hub and spoke' model. As well as reducing costs, making decisions on larger numbers of cases in regional hubs increases resilience and improves security. This model allows flexibility in reacting to changes in demand; and improves decision quality, by standardising decisions and allowing UKVI to share intelligence across regions.

Only a small proportion of applications worldwide are now decided in the same city where they were lodged. Moving work from smaller more expensive locations to more stable regional hubs has reduced the risks to staff and created a visa network that is more flexible and responsive.

There has been, and will be, no change to the process for customers in Bangladesh and Western India applying for a UK visa. Customers are still able to make visa applications in visa application centres (2 in Bangladesh and 4 in Western India) and access a range of premium services such as a 3-5 working day priority visa service. Visa applications will also be processed under the same global customer service standards.

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 25 June 2015

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