

Thursday
16 July 2015

Volume 598
No. 35



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 16 July 2015

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

TRANSPORT FOR LONDON BILL [LORDS]: REVIVAL
MOTION

Motion made,

That the promoters of the Transport for London Bill [Lords], which was originally introduced in the House of Lords in Session 2010-12 on 24 January 2011, may have leave to proceed with the Bill in the current Session according to the provisions of Standing Order 188B (Revival of Bills).—(*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered on Tuesday 10 September.

REVIEW OF POSSIBLE MISCARRIAGES OF JUSTICE

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of a Paper, entitled Review of Possible Miscarriages of Justice: Impact of Undisclosed Undercover Police Activity on the Safety of Convictions, dated 16 July 2015.—(*Charlie Elphicke.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Cross-channel Services

1. **Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): What discussions he has had with the French authorities on preventing disruption to cross-channel services from the port of Dover and channel tunnel in summer 2015.
[901041]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and I have had regular contact with Alain Vidalies, the French Transport Minister, and his predecessor Frédéric Cuvillier, both in the run up to and during the current dispute.

Damian Collins: Operation Stack has been in force on the Kent motorways for 14 of the past 28 days, closing the M20 and causing chaos on Kent's roads. What consideration is the Minister giving at the moment to emergency measures that can be brought in this summer if there are further delays, to alleviate the pressure on the people of Kent and keep our roads open?

Mr Goodwill: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The road situation in Kent has been intolerable for many local people, although it has to be said that because of Operation Stack we have managed to keep the coaches and tourist traffic flowing. A working group led by Kent County Council is looking at all these issues, considering short and long-term mitigation of the problem.

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I am pleased to hear that the Minister is in regular dialogue with his French counterparts, but given that the gangs of people traffickers particularly change their tactics constantly, what measures are being discussed to resolve the problem of traffickers simply moving further away from Calais to attack lorry drivers and get into their vehicles, in order to circumvent the steps that have been taken at Calais?

Mr Goodwill: The Home Secretary made a statement on this problem on 14 July, and I know that measures are being put in place, including fencing, at Coquelles to try to improve the situation. I spoke yesterday to my opposite number in the Republic of Ireland, who expressed the very same fears about lorry drivers being put at risk by migrants, who may engage in aggressive tactics.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I thank the Minister for his update on the action to try to avoid the continuation of Operation Stack. As my fellow Kent MP, my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins), has said, it is causing untold disruption and misery to local people as well as to lorry drivers. Does the Minister consider it an option to continue Operation Stack during the summer? For my constituents, an alternative solution as soon as possible really is a priority.

Mr Goodwill: We continue to keep all options under review. I know that it has been suggested that Manston airfield may be used to store trucks, although that is 43 miles from Dover. One or two issues that can be addressed more urgently include queue-jumping. Queue-jumpers cause congestion on local roads and they also cause problems when they get to the front of the queue, when there is usually an altercation before they are sent back. We are looking at how we can make Operation Stack work more efficiently, but looking at alternatives too.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Tourists going to France are being inconvenienced by delays. Lorry drivers are accosted by migrants in great numbers. There is clearly a lack of confidence in the cross-channel routes at this moment in time. What can the Minister do to reassure tourists and lorry drivers that they can cross the channel without any bother whatsoever?

Mr Goodwill: Obviously, this is a problem on the other side of the channel, of which the French authorities are all too well aware. We anticipate that it will be a continuing problem, but it is of course made worse by the industrial action in Calais. Although Calais is open, it still is not operating at full capacity. DFDS ferries are not able to use the port, and two of the five berths at Calais are occupied by striking workers.

Motorways

2. Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): When he last met the chief executive of Highways England to discuss its programme of repairing and upgrading the motorway network. [901042]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): The Government have an ambitious £15.2 billion plan to triple annual spending on England's motorways and major A roads by the end of the decade, to improve capacity and condition as set out in the road investment strategy. I recently met Jim O'Sullivan, who was appointed chief executive of Highways England at the beginning of July, and there will of course be further meetings between us and with the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones).

Iain Stewart: I congratulate the Government on that long-term investment strategy, which will inevitably entail roadworks. Will the Secretary of State ask Highways England to review its increasing and annoying tendency to cone off vast stretches of motorway and install average speed cameras, sometimes for years at a time, when work is happening only in a very small area?

Mr McLoughlin: Of course, road improvements cannot take place without some disruption to the motorist, but I well understand the frustration that many people who use the M1 feel about the length of roadway that is currently under repair. I have already taken that up with the chief executive.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): May I say that this is a superb question. One way to upgrade a motorway such as the M62 would be to improve existing road links between the north-west and Yorkshire. The Minister recently wrote to me and other affected MPs to inform us of the new strategic road study into a possible tunnel under the Peak district. Can the Secretary of State confirm that that would be in addition to the bypass scheme that has been announced for the Mottram in Longdendale area of my constituency, not a replacement for it, and that the Government's vision is that the two schemes can be complementary?

Mr McLoughlin: I shall pass on the hon. Gentleman's thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), who used to be my Parliamentary Private Secretary, for his superb question, which rightly exposes the huge road investment that the Government are taking forward.

The study that the hon. Gentleman refers to is being done by Colin Matthews. I await his report, and it is in addition to the scheme that has already been announced.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): The Chancellor's Budget last week confirmed the road investment strategy. How many extra miles of motorway and trunk road will it mean?

Mr McLoughlin: I am reliably informed by the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) that it entails 1,300 more miles.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): The A1 north of Newcastle has significant importance for freight and other strategic traffic travelling between Newcastle and Edinburgh. In May 2010, in recognition of the importance of connectivity with Edinburgh, the Government announced that it would be designated a route of strategic national importance. With that in mind, will the Secretary of State advise us of what investment has been made in the A1, and will he provide details of any planned future improvements?

Mr McLoughlin: Much to the credit of the campaign by my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan), we have announced a number of road improvements to the A1. If the hon. Gentleman were to drive around Newcastle at the moment, he would see the extensive work around the Lobley Hill junction, which is a huge investment that will improve flow around Newcastle. Further works on the A1 are planned.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Are the works to improve the M60 and M62 around Greater Manchester on track to be completed on time?

Mr McLoughlin: Yes, as far as I am aware, they are on track. We are delivering the first increase in trans-Pennine motorway capacity since 1971 by upgrading the M62 to a smart motorway. I realise that there is inconvenience for motorists while upgrades take place, but the work is part of the Government's investment not just in the north but right across this country's road infrastructure, which was so badly neglected for 13 years.

Rail Electrification

3. Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of Network Rail's progress in delivering the rail electrification programme. [901044]

4. Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of Network Rail's progress in delivering the rail electrification programme. [901045]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): As I said in my statement, important aspects of Network Rail's investment programme are costing more and taking longer. That is why I have asked Sir Peter Hendy, the new chair of Network Rail, to develop proposals for how the rail upgrade programme will be carried out.

Dan Jarvis: Many of my constituents will now have to put up with slower services because of the Government's decision to halt the electrification of the midland main line. It was revealed this week that in March, Network Rail agreed that joint decisions with the Department for Transport to defer upgrades would be required. Does that not show that Ministers must have known that the upgrades would be shelved, even though they were promising the public that they would be delivered?

Mr McLoughlin: I welcome the hon. Gentleman asking what I think is his first Transport question in the more than two and half years since I became Secretary of State. I am glad that he is taking an interest in the railway that he has not taken before.

The train services in the hon. Gentleman's constituency are operated by Northern, and we will increase overall capacity between Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield by 36% by the end of 2019, providing an extra 200 services each weekday. We will also increase Northern's fleet size by 10% in 2015, delivering an additional 87 carriages—all good news for his constituents, and I am sorry that he looks on the negative side.

Kate Green: The delay in the electrification of the trans-Pennine line means delay in the release of rolling stock to replace the clapped-out Pacers endured by commuters in my constituency. How long will the pause last, and how long do they have to wait for an improvement in the quality of their journeys?

Mr McLoughlin: We have electrified the track between Liverpool and Manchester, replacing the two-car diesel trains with four-car electric trains from April 2015. I would have thought that the hon. Lady would welcome that and, if not, that she would at least welcome the increase in the fleet size of Northern trains by 10% in 2015, delivering an extra 87 carriages. We will double the services between Manchester Victoria and Liverpool, Macclesfield, Chester, Bolton and Stockport by the end of 2017—more done to upgrade those sections of rail in the past five years than was achieved in the 13 years her party was in government.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): As a former resident of Cannock, my right hon. Friend will be well aware of the importance of the Chase line electrification to residents and businesses in my constituency. Will he work with me to minimise any potential delays to the completion of the project?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend is quite right: I know that line incredibly well. It goes from Rugeley to Hednesford, then to Cannock and on to Walsall and Birmingham. As a member of Cannock Chase District Council, I campaigned for the line to be reopened and I am pleased that that happened in 1989. I am also pleased to confirm that as part of the electrification of that line, the new bridges at Hednesford, Stafford Lane and Cannock are already in place. The investment is £78.2 million and it is on target to be finished in December 2017.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): The Secretary of State will know of the great disappointment across the east midlands at the pause in the electrification of the midland main line. While we are waiting for a final decision on that, can he update the House on when we might see the implementation of the other improvements on the line that are still in the plan?

Mr McLoughlin: Those improvements are still going on and, as I said at the time of the statement, the most important thing is to achieve some of the line-speed improvements to allow us to operate six trains an hour from St Pancras, as opposed to the five trains per hour at present. That work is going on as we speak.

Michael Dugher (Barnsley East) (Lab): On 25 June, just seven weeks after the election, the Secretary of State announced that the Government were shelving vital electrification upgrades in the midlands and north—

projects that Ministers repeatedly promised to deliver before and during the general election. Will the Secretary of State say categorically when he first became aware that Network Rail thought a decision would have to be made on the future of those upgrades? Was it before or after the election?

Mr McLoughlin: It is worth noting that when I made the statement the shadow Secretary of State said that it had been well known that the electrification programme was in some trouble. If so, it is interesting that he never asked a question on it at any Transport Questions Time. The first time I was told that a pause was needed was a week before I made the statement to the House.

Michael Dugher: That is not an answer to my question. The Secretary of State says that he was in the dark, but we know that the Government were warned by the rail regulator in November last year, and by the Transport Committee in January, that costs were escalating and big rail projects such as those were in trouble. The chief executive of Network Rail, Mark Carne said:

“People knew perfectly well there were high levels of uncertainty about this, it was widely flagged at the time, and it would not be fair for people to forget that.”

I wonder who he was referring to. Ministers knew all along that they were going to shelve those projects, but they continued to con the public. It is completely shabby. Should not the Government now live up to their election promises, reinstate the electrification work and not pull the plug on those vital upgrades for the north and midlands?

Mr McLoughlin: The last time a major upgrade was done by the Labour party, it set out as a £2 billion scheme and ended as a £12 billion scheme—and then was, I think, scaled back to a £9 billion scheme. It would be wrong of me, therefore, to say exactly what the future course of action will be until I have Sir Peter Hendy's report—he starts work today. However, I am committed to seeing the electrification as laid out, and to the 850 miles that we will be putting in place over this period of electrification, as opposed to the 10 miles of electrification that the last Labour Government put in place in their full 13 years.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Will the Secretary of State ensure that the pre-electrification line-speed improvements on the midland main line, which will be hugely welcomed and increase the number of trains out of St Pancras from five to six an hour, will have the knock-on effect of reinstating the half-hourly service northwards from Kettering which was taken away by the last Labour Government?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend has been forceful in that campaign, and I will certainly look at whether those opportunities will arise as a result of what I hope will be the increase in frequency of services between St Pancras and the midlands.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): The major question mark over the delivery of rail electrification as promised has rung alarm bells for the northern powerhouse, but what does it mean for One

North, the plan worked out by local authorities right across the region to integrate road and rail transport across the Pennines?

Mr McLoughlin: I am appearing before the hon. Lady and her Select Committee on Monday afternoon, where I am sure we will go into a much deeper dive on those points.

I did not manage to finish my answer to the shadow spokesman, the hon. Member for Barnsley East (Michael Dugher). It is worth pointing out that I did say in March and in January, when I was before the Transport Committee, that there were some problems with some aspects of the electrification of the northern Pennine line, and that is why, when the new franchise was issued, it mentioned diesel trains—[*Interruption.*] Sorry, Mr Speaker, these are very big questions and I am trying to be as open as possible with the House. I realise it is frustrating that these responses are so long.

Roads: Worcestershire

5. **Mr Robin Walker** (Worcester) (Con): What plans his Department has to relieve congestion and support growth through investment in roads in Worcestershire. [901046]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): Tackling congestion and supporting local economic growth are key priorities for this Government, and we have plans for significant investment in Worcestershire's road infrastructure to deliver those goals. This includes over £100 million of funding to improve local roads, and a number of upgrades to the M5 in Worcestershire.

Mr Walker: I am very grateful to the Minister for that answer and, indeed, for his response to my recent Westminster Hall debate on the Carrington bridge and Worcester southern link. He will be aware that the Department classifies the southern link as a local road, but in fact it has enormous strategic importance, linking Worcestershire to Herefordshire, and upgrades to it have the support of the Worcestershire local enterprise partnership and the Marches local enterprise partnership, as well as of a large number of local authorities. Will he therefore take into account the strategic importance of that road in any decisions about funding?

Andrew Jones: I do indeed recognise the importance of the A4440 and the Carrington bridge. It is of clear strategic importance to both counties, a point recognised by the county council, by the local enterprise partnership and by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who has visited it personally. That is why we have confirmed we will work with the county council to determine how further stages of the proposal can be taken forward.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con) *rose*—

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: No, no. Rossendale and Darwen and Antrim are a very long way from Worcestershire. This question is about Worcestershire. We will move on.

Rail Electrification: Northern Powerhouse

6. **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the cessation of work on the electrification of the trans-Pennine route and the midland main line on the northern powerhouse initiative. [901047]

8. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the cessation of work on the electrification of the trans-Pennine route and the midland main line on the northern powerhouse initiative. [901049]

12. **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of the cessation of work on the electrification of the trans-Pennine route and the midland main line on the northern powerhouse initiative. [901054]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): Rail services in the north, including trans-Pennine, will see a massive boost from the new franchises that come into effect in April 2016—including a 36% increase in peak capacity into Leeds and Manchester. We are developing plans for even better trans-Pennine links, including electrification, as part of the northern powerhouse.

Rachael Maskell: The challenge with capacity and the slow pace of the TransPennine—so-called—Express, and of the midland main line, have a real impact on York's economy. Can the Secretary of State say when the modernisation and electrification work will now begin, and when it is due to be completed, so we can be confident that the work has not hit the buffers?

Mr McLoughlin: I am very sorry that the hon. Lady cannot welcome the £2.7 billion of investment in Intercity Express, which will mean 65 trains, in five- and nine-carriage formations, introduced and serving her area from 2018 and a 28% increase in morning peak-time seats into King's Cross. The new Northern and TransPennine Express franchises will operate fast, high-quality, inter-urban commuter services with more capacity, and improved local services—all with a strong focus on serving their customers well: more achievements, as opposed to the terrible franchise that the Labour Government re-launched in 2004, based on nil growth for the northern area.

Jeff Smith: In February, the Secretary of State wrote:

“A transformation in transport connectivity between the cities of the north is vital to realising their potential to become a ‘northern powerhouse’ for the UK's economy.”—[*Official Report*, 27 February 2015; Vol. 593, c. 33WS.]

Now that the project has been postponed indefinitely, will he tell the House how we can build a northern house when the north has been left powerless?

Mr McLoughlin: The people who are talking the north down are those resentful of the improvements we have made. They are resentful and bitter about it. We have already electrified the track between Liverpool and Manchester, replacing two-car diesel trains with four-car electric trains from April 2015. That is just one of the many projects under way to re-energise the

northern powerhouse and provide the opportunities I talked about, and we are not backing away from them. It is the Labour party that regrets that it never had the foresight to bring them into operation when it had the opportunity.

Liz McInnes: My hon. Friends are asking so many questions about the northern powerhouse that it has become more of a northern puzzlehouse. Will the Secretary of State confirm that plans were already in place to shelve the electrification project in the midlands and the north before the election, and does he agree that this amounts to nothing more or less than a cynical betrayal of voters?

Mr McLoughlin: No.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): My right hon. Friend has made it absolutely clear that electrification of the line will happen in the future. Does he agree that the hundreds of millions of pounds of investment in Kirkstall Forge and Apperley Bridge stations and the southern access at these stations shows that the Government have put their money where their mouth is? Does it not also show that, unlike Labour, which in government took £350 million out of the city of Leeds to spend on Crossrail—under a Labour council and with the support of all eight Labour MPs for the city—this Government are investing in the north and committed to the northern powerhouse?

Mr McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I visited the site he refers to with him not so long ago. [*Interruption.*] No, it was after the election actually. I am also pleased to say that our investment in Leeds station to provide a new access will be very important for that station.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): While welcoming the huge investment in rail services by this Government over the past five years, may I ask the Secretary of State what implications the pause—I stress the word pause—might have for the York-Harrogate-Leeds line electrification ambition and the important future links with Leeds Bradford airport?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend is right to point out our ambitious programme for the rail industry in this country. Many people have commented that there has never been as much investment in the rail industry as set out by the Government over control period 5. That said, the taxpayer, as well as the travelling public, would want us to get best value for money from our investment, and we will want to consider the points he makes when it comes to CP6.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): The trans-Pennine rail route goes through Slaithwaite and Marsden in my constituency. Will the Secretary of State confirm when he expects Sir Peter Hendy to report back about the pause on electrification, and will he take this opportunity to debunk the myth going around that the Pacers will be replaced by refurbished tube trains, which obviously is not true?

Mr McLoughlin: I can certainly debunk that. It was made clear that once we got rid of the Pacers, they would be replaced by new trains, and that is what is in the invitation to tender, which is being looked at as far

as the returns back to the Department for Transport are concerned. I hope to have more to say about that before the end of the year. This is a pause, and I am very much looking forward to Sir Peter's report. It is his first day today, and I will be finding out shortly when he intends to give me that report.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Network Rail knew that northern powerhouse projects would be paused in March. Either the Secretary of State was told before the election that decisions would have to be made in June, or he was not, which means that one of two men must be guilty of abject negligence and failing to admit the truth to voters—the chief executive of Network Rail or the Secretary of State. Which one is it?

Mr McLoughlin: I told the hon. Lady when I was asked about giving a pause, and that is when I came to the House. Mark Carne has been doing a fantastic job trying to upgrade the railway while at the same time delivering a railway service for the passenger, which is very important. He described it as “open-heart surgery”. I pointed out when I went before the Select Committee back in March that there were problems with trans-Pennine electrification. That is why the ITT for Northern Rail was deliberately worded so that diesel trains would be in service on that particular line, because it was thought that electrification might have to slip.

EU Port Regulations

7. **Stephen Kinnock** (Aberavon) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had on the proposed EU port services regulation. [901048]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (**Mr Robert Goodwill**): I represented the UK at Transport Council when this was discussed last October. I have also met the European Parliament rapporteur, the hon. Gentleman's socialist colleague, Knut Fleckenstein. My most recent discussions were on Wednesday this week at the all-party maritime and ports group chaired by the hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick).

Stephen Kinnock: I thank the Minister for that answer. The previous shipping Minister indicated that the Government would be able to use domestic regulation to counter these regulations if they were passed in Europe, but the details of how it would be done remain unclear. Will the Minister reassure us that he has a clear plan of action to protect the UK's interests and block any regulations that damage port business and threaten workers' interests in my constituency?

Mr Goodwill: Our position is quite clear: competition between ports is the best way to ensure efficient operation within them. I am pleased that the general approach is better than the Commission's original proposal. We have the competitive market exemption and more discretion on issues such as pilotage. I would certainly be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss particular issues affecting Port Talbot, which is one of our most important ports.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): What discussions has the Minister had with the Department for Regional Development in Northern Ireland and what representations

has he had from Northern Ireland ports about these regulations? Can he give an assurance that ports will be prevented from having to disclose the commercial information that these regulations will require so that the commercial operations can remain?

Mr Goodwill: I had unanimous support for our position that this is designed to fix a problem that we do not have in the United Kingdom. However, there are problems in other European ports, and cross-channel business and business across other seaways is important to the UK as an exporting nation. It is important to get a reasonable conclusion to these discussions, which I expect to happen under the Dutch presidency next year.

Bus Services

9. **Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): What assessment he has made of recent trends in bus (a) fares and (b) service use in England. [901050]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): The latest departmental figures show a slight increase in local bus fares in England, while the provisional number of local bus passenger journeys remains unchanged compared with a year earlier. Final figures will be published in the annual bus statistics released in September. The bus market outside London is deregulated and decisions regarding the provision of individual bus services, including setting the level of fares, is primarily a commercial matter for bus operators.

Conor McGinn: Figures from the Minister's own Department show that 121 bus routes in the north-west of England have been cut in the last five years, while fares have risen by an average of 25%. When will the Government give more powers to all communities—whether or not they want an elected mayor—to control fares, set routes and integrate services?

Andrew Jones: The Government support the bus sector, which is the backbone of our public transport sector, in lots of different ways, including through the bus service operators grant of £250 million in England this year. The proposals in the buses Bill will include opportunities right across the country for more local control, including the development of franchising, which the Manchester combined authorities are taking forward. The Bill will be published later in this Session.

Mr Gordon Marsden (Blackpool South) (Lab): Is it not clear that the Government have lost the plot for bus users outside London? Their own latest statistics show that journeys there were down by 11 million and fares up by 3.6% last year. Two thousand bus routes countrywide have been lost through cuts since 2010. London, with franchise powers to set routes and fares, has rising bus use. Why are this Government blocking them for communities elsewhere in England—unless they have an elected mayor, which many do not want, forced on them? Is this not sham rather than real localism?

Andrew Jones: Bus fares in Greater London have, in fact, been rising faster than those in non-metropolitan areas. As for the issue of franchising and local mayors,

it is all about local control and decision accountability. A range of proposals will be published later in the year with the buses Bill.

Low-emission Vehicles

10. **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): What assessment he has made of trends in the rate of take-up of low-emission vehicles. [901051]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): As more models come into the market, businesses and consumers are recognising that low-emission vehicles are cheaper, greener, and a great driving experience. Thanks to a strong framework of Government support, more than four times as many ultra low-emission vehicles were registered in the first three months of 2015 as were registered in the first three months of 2014. Last year, one in four electric cars bought in Europe was made in Britain.

Jeremy Lefroy: The United Kingdom is one of the world's leading producers of low-emission engines. For instance, Perkins Engines, in my constituency, manufactures large engines for power generation, and Jaguar Land Rover, in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Gavin Williamson), manufactures vehicles. What further measures is my hon. Friend taking to encourage UK motorists to start using low-emission engines?

Mr Goodwill: Never mind “one of the world's leading producers”. I think that we are the world's leading producer, given that all the i8 hybrid engines for BMWs are made at BMW's £500 million Hams Hall plant, Donington Park has been chosen as the global headquarters for Formula E, and Geely is investing £250 million to make plug-in hybrid taxis at the new plant in Coventry, thus creating 1,000 jobs. So we are indeed leading the world. As more manufacturers make these models available, more consumers will be given that option at their local showrooms.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The Minister will know of the report that was submitted to the Economic Sub-Committee of the Cabinet which showed that the cost to our economy of air pollution from diesel and other vehicles was between £9 billion and £20 billion. When considering low emissions, will he take into account particulate matter—the PM 2.5—and nitrogen dioxide?

Mr Goodwill: Internal combustion engines produce pollutants which contribute to air quality problems. That is why we need to ensure that more people opt for green alternatives such as electric vehicles, plug-in hybrids, and other technologies that are becoming available.

Stewart McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): A report published in today's *Financial Times* reveals that, in 2010, 9,500 people died prematurely in London alone as a result of pollutants that are commonly found in fumes from diesel trucks, buses and cars. As well as the human cost, such pollutants carry a financial cost of up to £3.7 billion, just in the capital. Will the Government look at that report, and consider commissioning a similar report applying to the whole United Kingdom?

Mr Goodwill: There is a cross-party initiative on air quality. I should add that I came in on my bicycle this morning, so I have not contributed to any of the air quality problems in London.

We need to make further progress in rolling out low-emission vehicles, while ensuring that the electricity they use is produced in a sustainable way.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): Figures published this week show the scale of the air quality challenge that faces London, in addition to the carbon dioxide challenge that faces us all, and other towns and cities have similar challenges ahead. Why, in the Budget, did the Chancellor impose a financial penalty on hybrid and plug-in hybrid vehicles, putting them in the same band as cars with far higher emissions? Is it not time that the Chancellor talked to the Transport Secretary, and that both of them listened to what the industry is telling them?

Mr Goodwill: When consumers are deciding which vehicle to buy, they will consider not only the level of vehicle excise duty that they will pay—which, incidentally, will be zero in the case of the very cleanest cars—but the total life cost of the fuel that they will use. It is pretty much a no-brainer to buy the most fuel-efficient car possible, and to opt for a plug-in vehicle if that suits the consumer's lifestyle.

Bus Services

11. **Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of private investment in the bus industry. [901052]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): The bus market outside London is deregulated, and it is for individual commercial bus operators to determine how best to invest in their businesses. The biggest operators have invested £1.3 billion in new vehicles outside London over the past five years.

Suella Fernandes: Local authority funding for local bus services in Fareham and Gosport has been reduced by £1.5 million, leaving areas in my constituency such as Whiteley, Locks Heath and Warsash with virtually no bus service. I am concerned that private investment is not filling the gaps. What are central Government going to do to assist?

Andrew Jones: I note my hon. Friend's concern, but I believe that decisions about funding to support local bus services are best made at local level. I would say, however, that the Government are continuing to make substantial funding available to bus operators and local authorities through the £250 million bus service operators grant. Additionally, I understand that FirstGroup has made significant investment in local buses in south Hampshire. All the buses in that area are fitted with free wi-fi, and most are fitted with next-stop displays and audio announcements. This is being delivered in partnership with Solent Transport and with Department for Transport funding, and therefore involves a mixture of public and private funding. I share with my hon. Friend a desire to see a strong bus sector.

Mr Speaker: Further copious detail, if required, could always be lodged in the Library of the House.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I do not want to criticise the Minister, but I will. When my constituents go around the country, they, like me, see buses belching filthy black smoke from their out-of-date diesel engines. Cummins in my constituency makes the most advanced turbo-chargers in the world. Why are we not investing in a new generation of buses and getting rid of those that are belching out fumes, killing and shortening the lives of our constituents?

Andrew Jones: Just as the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill) came into work on his bicycle this morning, I came in on a bus. It was a clean bus, and the Government are investing heavily in clean bus technology all over the country. I am not quite sure when the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) was last on a bus, but if he looks around the country he will see an enormous range of clean buses right across the UK.

Mr Speaker: The Minister truly is a man of the people.

Southeastern Railways

13. **Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I he will meet senior management of Southeastern to discuss the reliability of its rail service; and if he will make a statement. [901055]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry): I regularly meet the senior management of Southeastern to discuss their rail services, and I want to assure my hon. Friend that the recovery of reliability on that route is of the utmost importance to Southeastern, to Network Rail, to my Department and to Transport Focus. I now chair the weekly meeting of a taskforce comprising all those bodies and Southern Railway that is dedicated to improving the reliability and performance of the railway for customers travelling on those vital routes.

Robert Neill: I am grateful to the Minister for the steps she has taken, of which I have had experience, but the fact remains that the performance of Southeastern trains is wholly unacceptable. I am getting emails from my constituents saying that their train is five minutes late more than 60% of the time, which tells me that the message is still not getting through. Should we not be urgently considering the introduction of financial penalties? Should we perhaps consider, even in advance of the franchise renewal in 2018, bringing in an operator such as London Overground, which operates its services infinitely more efficiently?

Claire Perry: My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that performance is recovering, from a pretty low point last autumn, and that right-time performance is about 62%. That is still not good enough, in my view, but performance is on the mend. We face a massive challenge, in that we are doing some of the biggest engineering works in the UK around the critical stations that serve that part of the network, but that is not an excuse. We have to get performance better during these times of disruption, and that is what the quadrant taskforce is dedicated to doing.

17. [901059] **Heidi Alexander** (Lewisham East) (Lab): One of the main frustrations of my constituents who use Southeastern trains is the number of occasions on which shorter trains than expected arrive at stations, resulting in acute overcrowding. Will the Minister commit to redeploying some of the Thameslink class 319 carriages to the Southeastern network to ease that problem?

Claire Perry: I commend the hon. Lady, who, unlike some of her colleagues, is an assiduous campaigner on the railways in her constituency. It is nice to see someone who really cares about the railways, rather than someone who simply reads out the Whips' questions. [Interruption.] She is a Whip, as she points out, and this is her own question. She is right to focus on the issue of rolling stock, and she will be pleased to know that we have received a proposal for improving the rolling stock on that route, which we are now considering. I will take her suggestion into account.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): Will the Minister tell us when the feasibility study on the Brighton main line 2 rail project was completed, and whether she will put the study in the House of Commons Library?

Claire Perry: Another person who cares about his local railways. I am hoping the hon. Gentleman will join us at London Bridge on Monday, where we are having a really deep dive into what is going on there and the recovery plans for his route. He will know that the Chancellor has committed further funding to the feasibility study, which will help inform us as to the overall benefits. Of course the hon. Gentleman knows that this line, although very welcome to many, has to be effective in terms of cost and affordability—that is what we will be looking to see.

Peter Kyle: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Not now—we will save the hon. Gentleman up for later.

Roads

15. **Lucy Frazer** (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to improve the condition of roads. [901057]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): Over this Parliament the Government are investing £15.2 billion on upgrading our strategic road network, contributing £6 billion to the local growth fund for local enterprise partnership priorities, including local roads, and just under £6 billion in maintaining our local highways. It is a comprehensive package that will improve the condition of our road network.

Lucy Frazer: In the light of the growth around Cambridge, does the Minister agree that it is time to upgrade the A10 north of Cambridge towards Ely?

Andrew Jones: The growth around Cambridge is encouraging and I hope that my hon. and learned Friend is encouraged by the fact that the Cambridgeshire schemes in the road investment strategy have a budget of more than £2 billion. The A10 is certainly an important north-south link providing access across Cambridgeshire,

but it is for the local highways authority, the county council and the LEP to best decide what upgrades are needed. My hon. and learned Friend is a tenacious campaigner and I am sure they would be extremely wise to listen to her.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): When the Minister next meets the chief executive of Highways England to discuss the condition of the strategic road network, will he also have a word about the litter on that network, because some of the filthiest roads in my constituency, the M60 and the M67, are under the ownership of Highways England and it is clear that its maintenance arrangements are not adequate?

Andrew Jones: I will be having a monthly meeting with the chief executive of Highways England and I will raise that point with him. To be fair to Highways England, they are not the people who deposit the litter in the first place.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Last but not least in this session, I call Matt Warman.

18. [901060] **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): During the election campaign the then roads Minister came to my constituency to consider a new Boston distributor road and the opportunities it might present. It has been on the drawing board for the past 60 years, so will this Minister commit to continue the good work of his predecessor and come to look at that site again to see when we can finally get some shovels in the ground?

Andrew Jones: I will certainly commit to continuing that good work and will be delighted to meet my hon. Friend in his constituency.

Topical Questions

T1. [901031] **Stewart McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): Today, Sir Peter Hendy takes over as the new chairman of Network Rail—he is someone with huge experience who helped keep London moving during the Olympics—to develop the proposals by the autumn on how to improve our vital rail upgrades. That programme will be carried out and will report to me by the autumn. I can also confirm today that Lord Adonis has agreed to become a new non-executive director at HS2 Ltd, bringing his wealth of experience and vision to the project and clearly demonstrating its truly cross-party support.

Stewart McDonald: Can the Secretary of State outline what steps are being taken to improve coastal protection along the west coast of Scotland?

Mr McLoughlin: I might need to write to the hon. Gentleman about that question and look at it in a bit more detail, because of all the things I had prepared for in these Transport questions, that was not one of them.

T3. [901033] **John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): Will the Minister update the House on the schedule for the much-needed improvements agreed for the A303? When will he meet Amesbury Town Council and other local interested parties to discuss the route and when this work will happen?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): As my hon. Friend knows, this Government are focused on delivering a £2 billion package of road improvements to the A303/A30/A358 corridor, and that includes dualling the A303 from Amesbury to Berwick Down, as was announced in the road investment strategy. Highways England will continue to engage with a wide range of stakeholders as it investigates what it is going to be doing in detail. It expects to start a wider public consultation in 2017. I will be delighted to meet Amesbury Town Council to discuss the scheme and to meet other local stakeholders, including local councils in his constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry), the rail Minister.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Over the past few years, many incidents have raised serious concerns over maritime safety in the coastal waters of the highlands and islands. Those concerns have not yet been addressed. Will the Minister agree to meet MPs from the constituencies representing the west coast of Scotland to discuss those concerns and the provision of emergency towing vessels in the area?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): I am happy to do so. I have already had briefings on the issue of emergency tugs in the area. I am pleased that we have recently rolled out our new search and rescue helicopters, which are providing a far better service to people in the hon. Gentleman's part of the world.

T5. [901035] **Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): Junction 10 on the M27 has been identified for vital upgrading to an all-moves junction. Such work is vital to support the strategic development area of Welborne, bringing 6,000 new homes. Can my hon. Friend confirm that those works will be taking place in the first half of this Parliament, and that the funding shortfall of £30 million will come from central Government?

Andrew Jones: The upgrade to junction 10 on the M27 has been profiled to start its preliminary work this year. The Government have contributed £14.9 million through the Solent local enterprise partnership growth deal to make up the shortfall of the scheme. In March, they also contributed £3.4 million in the second growth deal to support the local connections into the junction, and those works will start in 2015.

T2. [901032] **Heidi Alexander** (Lewisham East) (Lab): The Davies commission predicted that 40 million passengers would use Gatwick by 2024, yet Gatwick says that it will reach that number this year. Who does the Secretary of State think is right on that point, and is he concerned that the Davies commission may have underestimated the economic impact of expanding Gatwick?

Mr McLoughlin: As I said when the Davies commission report was published just a few weeks ago, we will be looking at all its implications and recommendations and coming to our view and reporting back to the House by the end of the year.

T8. [901039] **David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): In my constituency, work is under way on building the M6 link road to Heysham port. As phase 2 of the extension, it would be wise to consider carrying out a feasibility study on a tunnel under Morecambe Bay, as the tunnel would link in with the powerhouse and open up the whole of the Furness peninsula. Will my hon. Friend make a statement on that issue?

Andrew Jones: I understand that my hon. Friend is aware that it is for the two local transport authorities of Lancashire and Cumbria County Councils, in consultation with their respective LEPs, to assess whether to take forward the development of that ambitious scheme, which would include any feasibility study. I understand that he has had meetings with both authorities and urge him to continue those discussions and keep me informed of progress.

T4. [901034] **Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): Some 85% of internal and cross-channel freight goes by lorry. A substantial modal shift of freight from road to rail cannot happen unless and until full-size lorry trailers can be carried on trains, which is impossible on the existing network. When will the Government look seriously at investing in new large gauge rail capacity to accommodate lorry trailers on trains and linking the regions and nations of Britain both to each other and to the channel tunnel?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry): I commend the hon. Gentleman for his long-term promotion of this large rail project, the G8 freight project. He will know that I was delighted to renew the modal shift grant. We are very focused on getting freight off the roads and on to trains. One freight train saves 72 HGV journeys. I am happy to meet him on this. I understand that the proposal has been looked at several times and was declined about 10 years ago. If he has new information, I would be delighted to see it.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Potholes in my constituency cause inconvenience, expense and even danger. Does my right hon. Friend agree that technology is a key weapon in the battle against this menace and that councils should look to use the latest pothole resistant coatings during road resurfacing?

Mr McLoughlin: We have allocated a substantial increase to local authorities for mending potholes—it is something like a 50% increase over what was provided in 1997. My hon. Friend is right that potholes are a substantial nuisance and menace, and that looking at new ways of repairing them is also very important. Those ways will mean that potholes are repaired and do not deteriorate so quickly.

T6. [901036] **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Fifty-six cyclists have been killed on our roads this year. Following the meeting with the Prime Minister yesterday, will the Minister seek to expand the cycling cities initiative to more cities to help develop the safe cycling infrastructure?

Mr Goodwill: I had an informal meeting with the Prime Minister immediately after the meeting the hon. Lady mentions, and we discussed what measures can be put in place to try and improve the safety of cyclists, such as looking at how junctions can be redesigned. We are proud of our record so far on investment in cycling, and we would like to see more cities taking up the option of becoming a cycling city and reaching the £10 per head funding which the existing cycle cities have achieved.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): The Secretary of State has just said that potholes are a nuisance and a menace, but they are incredibly dangerous as well, particularly for cyclists. Can he encourage local authorities to use the money that has now been provided to act urgently to repair potholes?

Mr McLoughlin: Yes, I would urge local authorities to act urgently. We have set a budget for local authorities for the next five years so that they can plan their maintenance to get the best service for their constituents and the road user, be it cyclist or motorist.

T7. [901037] **Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op):** A recent report published by the Papworth trust found that one in five stations in England is accessible to disabled people and that two thirds of disabled passengers need to book assistance in advance to travel. Will the Minister commit to making accessibility a condition of future rail franchises?

Claire Perry: I am sure the hon. Lady, like me, welcomes the fact that under the previous Government we spent and now continue to spend an unprecedented amount of money on accessibility. She is right to focus on the fact that the rail industry voluntarily provides an amazing free service for disabled passengers who need to make shift changes. I think we have made good progress. I am happy to look at individual station applications, but it is right that the railway network is accessible for all.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The Sheffield-Gainsborough-Cleethorpes line has many dilapidated stations and a Saturdays-only service. This is a ludicrous state of affairs. People want to visit Cleethorpes seven days a week. Will the rail Minister agree to a meeting with me and the other Members affected?

Claire Perry: Like me, my hon. Friend is an assiduous reader of *Rail Magazine*. That was a cover story two weeks ago. He is right. The problem we have is a system that has pushed money out of the top, rather than pulled money through the bottom, so even where there are services and new trains, the station infrastructure does not always keep up. I would be delighted to meet him and to come to Cleethorpes once again.

T9. [901040] **Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP):** Some 68% of over-70s households have a car and older drivers are more experienced and generally safer road users who make fewer insurance claims, yet often face higher premiums than those of us in our 40s. What, if anything, will the Secretary of State do to

encourage insurance companies to adopt a health-based rather than an age-based approach to insurance premiums?

Mr McLoughlin: The points that the hon. Gentleman makes are very interesting, and next time I meet the insurance companies I will certainly raise that issue with them.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): In a sort of Rossendale remake of "Groundhog Day", Bacup road in my constituency is being dug up for the third time in the past 18 months. Will my right hon. Friend write to Lancashire County Council about the success of London's lane rental scheme in reducing delays?

Andrew Jones: I am aware that the Mayor of London enthuses about the success of the lane rental scheme in London and the positive impact it has had in minimising disruption from roadworks. As my hon. Friend knows, the Government believe these decisions are best taken locally, but I will be happy to look closely at what he says and take it up with the county council.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): A key driver of economic growth in the north of England is Manchester airport, which is in my constituency. It relies on public sector transport for its market penetration. Does the Secretary of State understand that the cancellation of midland main line and the electrification of trans-Pennine routes damages Manchester's economy and our potential growth?

Mr McLoughlin: There has been no cancellation. The hon. Gentleman should look to the fact that, as I pointed out just a few moments ago, we have electrified the line from Liverpool to Manchester and further upgrades are taking place in relation to the whole of the northern powerhouse. It is something to which we continue to be committed.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): I recently travelled from Frodsham station to Liverpool John Lennon airport along the Halton curve. It took 15 minutes. This is a game-changer for commuters in the area. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the £10.4 million investment and reinstatement of the Halton curve is a strong commitment of this Government to Weaver Vale, Cheshire and the northern powerhouse?

Mr McLoughlin: Indeed, and I could reel off a pile of other schemes that have led to improvements in connections and connectivity in the north. My hon. Friend the rail Minister is going with my hon. Friend to visit that site in the not-too-distant future.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Considering the success of the new lower Scottish drink-driving limit, when will England and Wales follow Scotland, and the rest of Europe, in saving more lives on the roads by lowering the blood alcohol limit to 50 mg per 100 ml?

Mr McLoughlin: Obviously we will look at any evidence we see. I am pleased that we have introduced new penalties for drug-driving, and we are one of the first countries to do so.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): As my right hon. Friend will know—he set out his priorities the other week—electrification of the Great Western main line will open up job opportunities and growth for my constituency. Will he confirm that the Government are committed to the largest investment in the railways since the Victorians?

Mr McLoughlin: Indeed. My hon. Friend and I have visited some of the schemes going through his constituency and seen the big challenges of electrifying a railway for the first time in its 130-year history, but they are challenges that we are determined to meet.

Robert Ffello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): When the Secretary of State or his Ministers are next having conversations with their Treasury colleagues, will they urge them to look at the shameful disparity between wholesale and retail prices for petrol and diesel? A review is needed to look into why motorists are being ripped off.

Mr McLoughlin: I am always keen to have discussions with Treasury colleagues, and that might be one of the issues we discuss next time.

Business of the House

10.31 am

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

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

MONDAY 20 JULY—Second Reading of the Welfare Reform and Work Bill.

TUESDAY 21 JULY—Second Reading of the Finance Bill.

The business for the week commencing 7 September will be:

MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER—Remaining stages of the European Union Referendum Bill.

TUESDAY 8 SEPTEMBER—Consideration in Committee of the Finance Bill.

WEDNESDAY 9 SEPTEMBER—Opposition day (6th allotted day). There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the Scottish National party. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 10 SEPTEMBER—Business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 11 SEPTEMBER—Private Members' Bills.

I want to inform the House of two other matters. First, it might be helpful to right hon. and hon. Members, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone), to know that you, Mr Speaker, have authorised a trial during the September sittings in which the alphabetical groupings in the Division Lobbies will be changed. We will not be consigning the Mc's to the outer darkness, but the letter G will move to the A to F desk. That is to try to address the issue, raised by several Members, of long queues at the current G to M desk. The trial will run for two weeks to establish whether the new arrangements improve the situation.

Finally, as is customary, I want to thank all the staff of the House for their hard work, particularly in supporting Members at the start of this Parliament following the general election. I hope that they enjoy a well-deserved break. I hope that all right hon. and hon. Members will also have a well-deserved break as well as spending a lot of time on constituency work—it is not all holidays, of course—before the House returns in September.

Ms Eagle: Let me begin by seconding the Leader of the House's thanks to all the staff and employees of the House for the support they have given us since the general election. As he is trialling the moving of the letter G from one desk in the Division Lobbies to another, perhaps he will explain why we cannot trial his plans for English votes for English laws, because they seem more important.

Yesterday's general debate on the Government's rushed and partisan proposals to introduce an English veto into our Standing Orders demonstrated that there is no support for it outside the Government. The Leader of the House has not announced when in September he intends to force votes to introduce his reckless plan. Will he tell us now on what date he is thinking of bringing the matter back to the House? Will he confirm that, despite the huge doubts expressed yesterday, he intends to force it through with no further concessions?

This week we learned that the Government's plan to pack the House of Lords with 100 extra, mainly Tory, peers has been blocked by the Cabinet Secretary—at least for now. Does the Leader of the House agree that the upper House is already bursting at the seams and that, even without these extra peers, it now has the dubious distinction of being the second largest legislature in the world, beaten only by the Chinese People's Congress? Given that every peer costs £117,000 a year, can we have a debate about how on earth these plans fulfil the Prime Minister's pledge to cut the cost of politics? Why does this Prime Minister think it is acceptable to slash the number of elected Members in this House while allowing the unelected House to expand seemingly indefinitely in his own party's interests?

The summer recess is nearly upon us, and I bet nobody will be more relieved than the Leader of the House. He is just two months into his new job and the Government's business has already descended into chaos. We have had the Prime Minister's doomed attempt to enforce collective Cabinet responsibility over his own EU referendum, which he hurriedly abandoned at the first whiff of grapeshot. In the last week we have learned of the Government's new "dodgems" strategy to pilot their business through the House. Their headlong rush to impose a shoddy and partisan "English votes for English laws" fix was replaced with yesterday's general debate without a vote to manage unease on their own Back Benches. Then we had the absolute farce of their botched attempt to wreck the Hunting Act 2004. The first vote was meant to be today, then it was moved to yesterday to be rushed through in 90 minutes, and then, as most of us learned on Twitter well before the Leader of the House came to the House to announce the change using a point of order, the Government pulled the vote because they knew they would lose. Will the Leader of the House tell us what other chaos he is planning for September?

This week the Government's farcical attempt to reincarnate themselves as some kind of workers' party has been exposed as a sham. Before the election, the Tories had vowed to "transform policy and practice" to help more disabled people into work. After the election, they scrapped the independent living fund, and we now hear that the Prime Minister is considering forcing workers to save up for their own sick pay. The Chancellor's so-called national living wage has been exposed as just a rebrand of the minimum wage, and with his huge cuts to tax credits, millions will be thousands of pounds a year worse off. The Mayor of London has let the cat out of the bag, acknowledging that these changes will not deliver "enough to live on".

Yesterday the Government revealed their real nature with the most vindictive attack on trade unions for 30 years. Despite the Government's spin, this is an attack on the basic freedom to organise in the workplace that any Latin American dictator would have been proud of. If they really were the workers' party, they would be supporting trade unions, not attacking them.

Today we will hear the result of the Liberal Democrats' leadership election. I would like to send my commiserations to whichever candidate is unfortunate enough to win. Since the Prime Minister's pre-resignation, there have been interesting developments in the Conservative party leadership election. Yesterday the Home Secretary poured cold water on the Mayor of London's plans for water

cannon. He has sprayed around public money, buying second-hand German cannons that it transpires he cannot even use. The Home Secretary rejected his business case because it was not watertight. I just hope he bought them on a sale-or-return basis. The Chancellor has also been on manoeuvres. The Treasury sent out an email to lobby journalists that mysteriously read, “Blah, blah, blah.” That is the most sensible thing the Chancellor has said in five years.

We have all been entranced this week by the news that a NASA space probe has made it to Pluto: a cold, desolate, lifeless place, light years away from civilisation. It sounds just like the Tory Back Benches. No doubt we are about to discover that it is a plutocracy run by old Plutonians—a bit like this place.

Chris Grayling: I have a high regard for the hon. Lady as a parliamentarian, but as a stand-up comedian, I would not go there. [*Interruption.*] I think hon. Members laughed in exasperation at how bad, not how good, the jokes were.

The hon. Lady asked about English votes for English laws and, indeed, the trial of the new Division Lobby arrangements. I assure her that the English votes for English laws procedure will last longer than two weeks when we put it into place. It is not customary to announce business further in advance than is normal in the business statement. When we return in September, I will as normal set out the business for the coming weeks.

The hon. Lady made a point about the House of Lords. May I once again suggest that it really is not a good idea to believe everything she reads in the papers? That story was simply not true, and it has rightly been described by Downing Street as “nonsense”. [*Interruption.*] I take it that the Labour party will therefore not nominate any peers in future. I take it that the hon. Lady is giving a self-denying ordinance that there will be no more Labour nominations to the House of Lords.

The hon. Lady talked about reducing the size of this House. I simply remind her, as I keep doing on English votes for English laws, that we believe in keeping to our manifesto commitments.

There was, however, one point on which we agreed—offering our good wishes to the new leader of the Liberal Democrats, who will be announced this afternoon. As the hon. Lady rightly says, he faces a very big and uphill task. We now have a collection of fine Members of Parliament on the Government Benches who will be excellent representatives of their constituencies and will I am afraid freeze out the Liberal Democrats for the foreseeable future.

The hon. Lady talked about chaos. Let me give a simple explanation of chaos. Chaos is a party that claims to represent working people, but votes against a national living wage. Chaos is a party that claims to represent working people and not support benefit-dependency, but increasingly opposes our reform of welfare, as we see in Labour Members’ mounting rebellion at their leadership’s attempt to claim that they support our reforms. Chaos is a party that claims to support an extra voice for the English, but says it will vote against a sensible package of reforms that will do the right thing for the English. Chaos is a party that ends up with its leadership candidates fighting over whether it is good

idea for a party leader to be a parent. Chaos is a party that cannot even condemn the strikes that left millions of people unable to make their normal journeys to work last week.

The hon. Lady talks about supporting trade unions. May I ask her, as one of two preferred deputy leadership candidates backed by a militant boss who says it is okay to break the law, whether that is really what she means by supporting the trade unions? She talks about places that are light years away from civilisation. There is one place close to here where that is definitely the case—in the Labour party.

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): May we have a debate on why British taxpayers’ money should be used in the bail-out of Greece when we are not a member of the eurozone?

Chris Grayling: We are very clear that British taxpayers’ money will not be put on the line as part of the support for Greece. We have huge sympathy with the plight faced by the Greek Government and their people. It is right and proper that action is taken within the eurozone to try to support them, but the reality is that this is a problem for the eurozone and within the eurozone. Britain is not part of the eurozone and we do not want to be part of the eurozone. It is for the taxpayers of the eurozone, not the taxpayers of this country, to put their money on the line to support this bail-out.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing next week’s business. I sincerely hope that it lasts a bit longer than last week’s business and that it will not be hastily rearranged on the back of a point of order, as happened this week.

It seems as though the Scottish National party now has almost a magical omnipotent power. As soon as we announce our intention to exercise our democratic rights in the House and vote on a measure announced in the business statement, it miraculously disappears. Such is this omnipotence that we are seemingly credited for the election result in England, the near-death of the Liberal Democrats and the crisis in Labour, and now we are the saviours of the English foxes.

I am going to try my arm and see whether I can test that omnipotence a little further. I announce to the Leader of the House that the Scottish National party fully intends to vote on the Welfare Reform and Work Bill. Let us see whether we can get that miraculously to disappear and whether we can do the job of protecting the poor, the most marginal and the vulnerable in society from the callous Bill that the Tories intend to introduce. We cannot leave that to the Labour party. I have no idea what Labour Members will do on Monday, but I hope that they join us in the Lobby and vote against this callous Bill. When I look round at my honourable colleagues in the Labour party I have my doubts, but I hope they do the right thing.

The Leader of the House does not like me referring constantly to the Scotland Bill, but he will have to indulge me a little more. This week the Secretary of State for Scotland announced that he is in a mood to accept some amendments, which is good news for my hon. Friends given that we have had four days of debate on the Bill and nothing has been accepted. I appeal to

[Pete Wishart]

the Leader of the House for sufficient time to discuss the remaining stages of the Bill, so that amendments are debated by elected Members of this House and none are taken to the unelected, bloated Chamber up there, where there are no representatives of the Scottish National party. The amendments must be discussed under the full glare of the elected representatives of the Scottish people. Can the right hon. Gentleman assure me that we will get sufficient time to debate those issues properly?

Finally, as is customary as we head towards the recess, may I wish you, Mr Speaker, an enjoyable summer recess? I also wish the staff of the House an enjoyable recess, and on behalf of all new SNP Members—this is practically a new parliamentary group—let me say that the kindness and good grace shown by the staff of the House in assisting all our new Members has been recognised by us all. I also wish the Leader of the House an enjoyable summer recess. He has been kind and courteous to us in our new enhanced position here, and I wish him all the best for the recess. I hope he comes back, drops his EVEL plans, and I am sure we will get on just famously.

Chris Grayling: Let me reciprocate and say that although we will have lively debates across the Floor of the House, I have found initial relations between myself, my colleagues and the new SNP Members at Westminster to be pleasant and congenial. I return the hon. Gentleman's wishes and I hope that all SNP Members—indeed, all Members of the House—have a pleasant recess. Having gone through an election period when everybody works immensely hard, although lots of us have constituency work during the summer, I think that everybody deserves a short break as well. I wish everybody the best for the summer recess.

Perhaps over the summer, as the hon. Gentleman relaxes on the beach or wherever he is, he might consider whether he really wants to pursue the policy of reversing what he rightly said when he gave evidence to the McKay commission about the need for the Scottish National party to stay outside matters that do not affect it. That has been a policy of principle for the SNP over many years, and it is a shame that he has walked away from that. If anybody is U-turning at the moment, it is him. He is a man of principle, and I am sure that he will reflect again and perhaps take a different approach in the future.

I must disappoint the hon. Gentleman about the Welfare Reform and Work Bill, because I suspect that the Scottish National party's view on that will not change many opinions on the Government Benches. This is a Bill on behalf of working people, and I am certain that it commands support among working people in Scotland who—like everyone else in the country—want a welfare system that is fair, and also fair to those who pay for it. That is what the Bill will do.

On the Scotland Bill, I say simply that there will be a further day of debate in the House and the conclusion of proceedings. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to table amendments and debate them with the Scottish Secretary, he will of course have the chance to do so as normal.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): With the news this week that the promise that the European Union made to our Prime Minister has been reneged,

on, may we have an early debate on how we can hold the European Union to account so that it complies with its word? For example, can we bring forward a breach of promise action against the European Union?

Chris Grayling: I understand my hon. Friend's point and I have every sympathy with what he says. We have been clear that we in this country will not allow taxpayers' money to be put on the line for a bail-out. We are also clear that the political agreement reached between member states must be adhered to. That is a matter for the eurozone and for its members to resolve. We cannot be in a position where countries outside the eurozone have their taxpayers' money put at risk in circumstances such as this. We are clear about that, and sympathetic to, my hon. Friend's point, and there will be a number of opportunities next week for him to raise a point about which he is absolutely correct.

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): The Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill is currently finishing its progress through the other place and will come here shortly. Will the Leader of the House tell us when that will be? Will he also ensure that this English devolution Bill takes as much time on the Floor of the House as we have rightly spent discussing the Scotland Bill, which is a devolution Bill for Scotland? Will he ensure that the 85% of the UK population that is English can see that this House fulfils its obligations by considering the Bill on the Floor of the House and not in Committee?

Chris Grayling: I will take a careful look at the timetable for the Bill. We have a lot of business to get through in the autumn, but we will endeavour to make sure there is as much time available for key measures as possible. I absolutely share the hon. Gentleman's view on the importance of this measure. It is a part of a devolution package designed to provide additional powers across the United Kingdom. It is right and proper that cities such as Manchester have additional powers. My hope and expectation is that the Bill will pass and deliver those powers.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): Ladder for Staffordshire is a new campaign to promote apprenticeships across Cannock Chase and the wider area. It created 50 new apprenticeships on the first day alone. May we have a debate on the role that such campaigns can play in helping to create apprenticeships?

Chris Grayling: Local work done to promote our overall national goals on apprenticeships is absolutely vital. I praise all those in my hon. Friend's constituency who have been involved in that work, and her for the work she is doing. Engaging employers in providing apprenticeships is vital, something she will no doubt wish to discuss during the passage of the Finance Bill or when Treasury Ministers are here next week. We need to keep getting across to employers the role they can play.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I note on the Order Paper today that nominations for membership of the Backbench Business Committee have been forthcoming. We are not yet completely open for business, but I hope that by Monday we will be and that on Tuesday we can have our first meeting. Under normal circumstances,

we would be looking for submissions to the Committee by the previous Friday, which would be today. I have contacted colleagues and people are agreeable for submissions to be made by mid-afternoon on Monday, with the first meeting of the Committee hopefully at lunchtime on Tuesday. Will the Leader of the House please recommend to right hon. and hon. Members that they make applications for debates to the Backbench Business Committee on subjects of their choosing?

Chris Grayling: I am very happy to do that. I see the hon. Gentleman is making a number of appearances on the Order Paper today, since he is one of those who appears to be not entirely in line with his party's acting leadership on other matters. I absolutely support his request. Given that we are setting out Committees late before the summer recess, it is right and proper that a little flexibility is shown. I am sure everyone in this House would accept that that should be the case.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Following the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) about the breach of promise by the EU, as I understand it, we are now required, as the United Kingdom, to put £1 billion towards the bail-out of Greece. I think people will find that unacceptable, so may we have a statement from the Chancellor of the Exchequer next week on that subject?

Chris Grayling: The Chancellor of the Exchequer will be here on Tuesday and will certainly be explaining where we have got to on this matter. He is clear, and I am clear, that British taxpayers' money cannot be put on the line to bail out Greece. That would not be acceptable to the people of this country. We have a debate to come in this country on our relationship with the European Union. I think people would look very hard if we were put into a position where our taxpayers' money was on the line for a bail-out in the eurozone when we are not a part of the eurozone.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Great progress has been made in recent years in tackling cancer and increasing survival rates, but there remain great discrepancies between the various regions and countries of the UK in terms of early diagnosis and treatment. May we have a debate at some point early in the next session on how we can ensure that all our constituents get equal access to early diagnosis and treatment?

Chris Grayling: We would obviously want the best possible treatment for every citizen of the United Kingdom. We have arrangements where the health services in the four parts of the UK are managed separately. These are devolved matters in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is important that we share best practice from the NHS in England to the NHS in the other three countries in attempting to make sure that the best possible treatment is available, but that is of course a matter for the devolved Administrations to decide.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I thank the Leader of the House and you, Mr Speaker, for your quick response in recognising and responding to Members' concerns about the arrangements in the Division Lobbies.

Allegedly, Kettering is the most average town in England. It is, however, very special to those of us who live there, and its special status has been confirmed by

the award of a purple flag for it having a thriving, safe and vibrant night-time economy. That is similar to green flags for parks or blue flags for beaches. May we therefore have a debate in Government time about the importance of provincial town centres, and how best practice from places like Kettering might be rolled out to the rest of the country?

Chris Grayling: I am sure that my hon. Friend did not intend to inadvertently mislead the House, but I have to say that no constituency represented by him could possibly be an average town. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, Hear."] I congratulate everyone in Kettering who has worked towards that award. I know Kettering; it is a fine town. It is a great community, and it is a tribute to the strength of its community that it has been marked in this way.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Yesterday, I and other colleagues attended the opening of the new parliamentary education centre. I commend you, Mr Speaker, and the other Officers of the House, and Westminster City Council, for ensuring that it was up and running so quickly. Given the importance of the regions to the development of Parliament, would it be possible to look at setting up sub-offices of the parliamentary education centre in those towns and cities that are associated with the development of parliamentary rights? We obviously do not have a purple flag like Kettering, but we do have Simon de Montfort, the Earl of Leicester. May we have a debate on that very important subject?

Chris Grayling: As long as the right hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that we might relocate Parliament to Leicester, I would be very happy to table that as a thought for the Commission. I was very sorry to miss the launch of the education centre yesterday; the shadow Leader of the House and I were obviously in this Chamber for the debate on English votes. I congratulate everybody who has been involved in it. I am looking forward to visiting the centre to see the work that has been done, and I see no reason why we should not explore ways of ensuring that people around the country have an opportunity to learn more about Parliament.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): May we have a debate about local democracy and local accountability? In particular, may we explore the practice of electing people to local councils by thirds, which not only is a spectacular waste of money compared with all-out elections every four years, but undermines local accountability? When the local people want to get rid of a corrupt or poorly performing local authority—such as we have seen in the past with Doncaster and Rotherham—they cannot do so when it is elected by thirds, when one party has a massive majority. All-in and all-out elections surely bring about much more local democracy. May we have a debate on them?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I have both in my constituency—part of the constituency is all-out, part is by thirds. It is certainly the case that thirds creates a constant programme of elections, which cost the taxpayer. I cannot comment specifically on the circumstances that he refers to, but of course these decisions are taken locally, can be taken locally, and with a proper debate locally things can be changed.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Prior to the general election, the Chancellor advised that my constituency of Dewsbury would be designated an enterprise zone within 100 days. Will the Leader of the House agree to ask the Minister to meet me to discuss the implementation process?

Chris Grayling: Of course, the Chancellor will be here for Treasury questions next week and I would simply suggest to the hon. Lady that she puts that question to him. The enterprise zone programme is part of our plan to shift the focus in this country—in our deprived areas and our challenged areas and in towns that need support and development and economic growth—away from excessive welfare dependency and on to a focus on better conditions for people in the workplace through the national living wage and better support for business. It is a shame that the hon. Lady appears to oppose the measures that we shall bring before the House on Monday, because they would help her town and others like it.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Corby is under threat from plans for a gasification plant. Local people are united in opposing the plans, and I am standing shoulder to shoulder with them in fighting against them—Corby really does say no. May we have a statement from a Minister setting out the protections that are in place for communities that are under the threat of gasification plants being built?

Chris Grayling: I will make sure that my hon. Friend's concerns are passed on to the relevant Ministers. He is already proving a powerful advocate for Corby. I know that this is an issue of concern to local residents, and I will make sure he gets a proper response.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): August 6th will mark the 70th anniversary of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima, and a few days later will be the anniversary of Nagasaki. Will the Leader of the House provide Government time to reflect on the legacy of that event and the horrors of nuclear war, and will he perhaps tell us when we can expect a statement from the Defence Secretary about the timetable for the maingate decision on Trident?

Chris Grayling: No one could look back on the bombings at the end of the second world war without a sense that we must never allow that to happen again. The reality is that for 70 years the world has managed to keep a nuclear peace, and long may that continue. The Defence Secretary will be in the House again after the summer recess, will continue to be available for questions and will set out our plans in due course.

Byron Davies (Gower) (Con): Yesterday the Auditor General for Wales published a damning report on the Labour Welsh Government's handling of the regeneration investment fund for Wales and the underselling of a large amount of publicly owned property. May we have a statement on the issue from the Secretary of State for Wales as soon as practicable?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend gives me an example that I missed out when I talked about the chaos in the Labour party. It is chaotic in opposition, chaotic in

government, letting down Wales and failing to deliver the services and environment that Wales needs. It would be great to see Wales have a Conservative Government, not the current Labour Administration who have let it down year after year.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): Today the Home Secretary has published the terms of reference of the Pitchford inquiry into undercover policing. To be frank, I expected an oral statement, not a written statement, given the significance of that. The purpose is to investigate to what

“extent and effect undercover police operations have targeted political and social justice campaigners.”

Some months ago, we revealed in the House the extent of undercover police surveillance of trade unionists, but there is no explicit mention of trade unionists in the terms of reference, which we expected there to be. Will the Leader of the House seek clarification from the Home Secretary that trade unionists who have been under surveillance will be included in the inquiry's terms of reference?

Chris Grayling: It will be up to the Home Secretary to give a detailed response to that question, and I will make sure she is aware of the hon. Gentleman's point.

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): Last Friday I was delighted to look at three brownfield housing sites in my constituency, at Valley Road and Hope Mill in Barnoldswick and at Knotts Lane in Colne, where the Together Housing Group is delivering 95 new affordable homes this financial year. May we have a debate on brownfield generation and on what more can be done to ensure that we prioritise brownfield land over greenfield land?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. When the Chancellor announced our reforms to the planning process last week, he was clear that there should be a strong, and in many cases automatic, presumption of development on brownfield sites, and that we should protect our green belt. We as a party feel strongly about that. Yes, we face housing pressures and need to build new houses, but that must not happen at the expense of the character of our country. I believe that we have a portfolio of policies that will secure that.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): As the Leader of the House will fully appreciate, the Secretary of State for Transport's recent announcement that the electrification of the trans-Pennine route will no longer go ahead as planned has been met with widespread concern throughout the Chamber. Given the importance of the matter, does the Leader of the House agree that time should be allocated to debate the future of that major project?

Chris Grayling: Of course, the Transport Secretary has just been in the House answering questions on that very issue. We have not cancelled the programme; we have simply had to delay it. We will go ahead with the electrification. I remind the hon. Lady that when Labour was in government, it electrified 10 miles of railway line. We have a major programme of electrification that could have started when Labour was in government, but it did not.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): Our economic recovery will be put at risk if trade unions no longer act within the law, as they suggest. May we have an urgent statement on how trade unions can be made to act legally?

Chris Grayling: The one more disgraceful thing I have seen in recent days than a trade union leader saying that it is okay for his members to operate outside the law has been the Labour party's deafening silence in condemning such an irresponsible statement. I waited for the acting leader of the Labour party or any of the four candidates for the leadership to stand up and say, "That is wrong. Trade unionists should not break the law". But silence followed. I heard nothing—no condemnation. That is because they are so in hock to the trade union movement that they do not even dare to tell them that breaking the law is wrong.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): Following recent reports that the Ministry of Defence has spent almost £120 million in one year on car rental, may we have a statement or a debate in Government time on whether that kind of practice can possibly represent value for money in MOD procurement?

Chris Grayling: We can safely assume that the Ministry of Defence, under the high-quality leadership of the current Secretary of State, looks to make sure that it maximises the value of its budget. I am pleased that we will maintain our 2% commitment to NATO, but that does not mean that the Secretary of State will not look to drive out extra efficiencies to ensure that we put as much resource as possible into the front line.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): BCG is an important ingredient in drugs to tackle bladder cancer, but there is a shortage and only one manufacturer of it—MSD, which to its credit is producing as much as it can. Several other manufacturers have left that particular business. May we have a debate on ensuring the security of the supply of those most vital drugs?

Chris Grayling: I commend my hon. Friend for the work he has done in this important area. He is a great champion for the health service in his constituency and for his constituents who need healthcare. I will make sure that the Secretary of State for Health is aware of the concerns my hon. Friend raises, and gives him a response before we come back in September.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): In Transport questions, on a question on parallel tracks, the Secretary of State moved into a parallel universe when he refused to answer a question about the Brighton main line 2 rail upgrade programme and a feasibility study mentioned on page 69 of the Budget Red Book, which clearly states that the feasibility study exists. The rail Minister could not give the answer because the study does not exist, as revealed in a parliamentary answer I received this week. May we have a statement to bring clarity to the situation? Either the Department for Transport or the Chancellor is in danger of misleading the House.

Chris Grayling: If the hon. Gentleman wants to put the question directly to the Chancellor, he will be here on Tuesday for Treasury questions. The hon. Gentleman

could also request an Adjournment debate in which he could put his questions directly, over a longer period of time, to the Minister concerned.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the great work being done by the Heritage Lottery Fund, which allocates some £375 million to projects across the UK every year? An event last week, hosted by my predecessor, Sir Peter Luff, showcased many works connected with the centenary of the first world war.

Chris Grayling: The House's loss is the Heritage Lottery Fund's gain. Sir Peter was a distinguished public servant in this House for many years. He was well regarded and will be much missed in his constituency, even though he has a great successor. I pay tribute to the Heritage Lottery Fund and to all the organisations that have been involved in commemorating the centenary of the outbreak of the first world war. The Woodland Trust in my constituency has begun to create a new area of woodland to mark the occasion, as it is doing in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Several other organisations have been involved, and it has been an example of this nation at its best.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): The Smith family from my constituency, whose son Colin died tragically aged seven, a victim of the contaminated blood scandal, are keenly awaiting the Government's further response to the Penrose inquiry. When will that happen?

Chris Grayling: This issue has rightly caused enormous concern across the House. Many of our constituents have been touched by it, and the hon. Lady is not alone in having tragic circumstances in her constituency. I know that the matter is very much on the minds of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State. It is our intention to respond in the timetable that was committed to.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): This summer I am very much looking forward to my annual week of volunteering, when I will join the volunteers of the National Trust, the Holme Valley mountain rescue team, the Pack Horse trail, Huddersfield Canal Society and The Cuckoo's Nest in Marsden. May we have a debate about the wonderful service that volunteers provide in our communities day in, day out?

Chris Grayling: By the sounds of it my hon. Friend is not going to be getting much sleep that week! I hope he finds that that experience is helpful to him and enables him to do what we as Members of Parliament should all do, which is to pay tribute to the work that volunteers do in our society. Our society is a better and stronger place because of their work, and every one of us will have examples in our constituencies of people who go more than the extra mile to do good work for the areas where they live. We should praise every single one of them and be grateful to them for what they do.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The access to, and availability of, cancer drugs throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is an issue that concerns directly more than 50% of our population. The current cancer drugs strategy runs out in March 2016. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate about this vital health matter in the autumn?

Chris Grayling: It is of course important that we deliver the best possible support for cancer victims. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence makes a real effort to try to identify the right products to make available through the national health service, and individual local responsibility for decision making lies with the devolved Assemblies, but there will be opportunities after the summer recess to raise the issue with Health Ministers—in questions, in an Adjournment debate and now that the Backbench Business Committee is up and running. The Health Secretary is also in the House regularly to take questions from Members.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): Yesterday I went to the Diabetes UK lobby, where I met a brave triple amputee, along with two of my constituents who live with diabetes. One of them gave me the *Daily Mirror*, which reports that 135 amputations are taking place every week. We have found ourselves in an appalling situation, and it is only going to get worse with the obesity time bomb that is about to hit us. Is it possible to have a statement as early as possible from a Health Minister on exactly what the Government intend to do to tackle this appalling tragedy?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight that very real health challenge which this country faces, and the very real issue that many of our constituents face. I am pleased that we are the first Government, I think, in one of very few countries—if there are any others—to have a national strategy to address the issue. The Health Secretary takes the issue very seriously, and I will make sure that he is aware of my hon. Friend's concerns so that when my right hon. Friend is next in the House he can provide an update about the work he is doing in that important area.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): It was an act of cowardice by the Government to deny this House a democratic vote on fox hunting, just because the nasty, blood sports party has become too nasty even for many of its own MPs. When can we express the settled view of the country and of MPs that the tormenting and killing of defenceless animals for fun is not acceptable?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman represents a Welsh constituency, and it is perhaps not a coincidence that the Labour party lost seats in Wales at the general election, because it does not appear to be very much in touch with the concerns of Welsh business or, in this particular case, of Welsh farmers. I suggest that he talks to them about their concerns.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): In January I turned 40—[*Interruption.*] I know, I know. The reason why that is relevant is that the year before I was born is the last time we had wholesale reform of local government. Following on from the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), I think the time has come for a debate about how we run local government and whether it is fit for purpose. Mr Speaker, I know you are keen on brevity, so may we have a long debate about local government reform, one which needs to start specifically with the democratic accountability of one member per ward?

Chris Grayling: One challenge that many smaller councils face is that they have three-member wards, and several have decided they cannot afford to have so many councillors and have reduced those numbers. It is a live issue, but one that can be and is decided by local authorities themselves. I have no doubt that my hon. Friend will make strong representations in his own area on their moving to a more efficient system.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Given the shambles of the debate around EVEL, the Government's intransigence over the Scotland Bill and their all-out attack on the renewables sector in Scotland, may we have a debate in Government time about their one nation approach, because it would be very enlightening to know which nation they are referring to?

Chris Grayling: It still baffles me why the Scottish National party appears to believe that covering the Scottish mountains in endless wind farms is the best way to preserve Scotland's character. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues talk about English constituents raising concerns with them, thereby giving them the right to vote and express a view, but plenty of English people have expressed profound concern about wind farms in Scotland and the damage they do to the Scottish environment. We are listening to them.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): In the early hours of this morning, two young men were admitted to hospital with stab wounds following a major gang fight in my constituency. I understand that several individuals are under arrest as a result. I also believe that statistics have been published this morning showing that knife crime is on the increase for the first time in four years. Will my right hon. Friend facilitate an early statement from the Home Secretary on what we can do to remove the scourge of knife crime from our streets once and for all?

Chris Grayling: We have taken additional steps in this area to introduce tougher legislation. I pay tribute to our former hon. Friend, Nick de Bois, the previous Member for Enfield North, for his work in this area. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes), who has worked hard in this area too, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman). We have introduced measures as a result of which anybody caught carrying a knife for a second time will be subject to an automatic jail sentence. We have to send a strong message that it is simply not acceptable in our society today to carry a knife. If knives are carried, tragedies follow; they must not be carried.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Further to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden), the Prime Minister promised a statement before the summer recess on the contaminated blood scandal. By my calculation, that leaves next Monday or Tuesday. Will the Leader of the House confirm that we will have a statement on Monday or Tuesday?

Chris Grayling: It is the intention that we should do what we said we would do before the summer recess.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): As part of my constituency role, I sit on the board of the Links Trust, which looks after the St Andrews golf courses. As the Open begins, will the Leader of the House join me in wishing well everybody travelling to my constituency to take part, and will he find time for a debate in the House on the benefits of golf to the social and economic wellbeing of everybody in the country?

Chris Grayling: That is certainly true, although I might not be alone in thinking that time on the golf course is sadly at a premium in the busy life of a Member of Parliament. None the less, golf plays an important part in our national sporting life. I am disappointed that Rory McIlroy cannot take part in this year's Open, as he has proved a great champion for the United Kingdom as well as for Northern Ireland, but let us hope that despite the strong American challenge this year, one of our fine British golfers will win through come Sunday night.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I join colleagues in calling for an early debate on the situation in Greece. I am well aware that we are not part of the eurozone, but Greece is the cradle of democracy and a member of the European Union and the European community, and there are many young people in desperate straits and many children starving there. Surely, in the name of our common humanity, we can find room in our hearts to help Greece in its hour of need.

Chris Grayling: I do not disagree for a moment with what the hon. Gentleman says, but there is a big difference between being friends to the Greeks and saying that a country that is not in the eurozone should be part of eurozone support for Greece and should help to sort out its financial challenges. That is the issue and the challenge. We stand clearly as friends of the Greeks—we will work with them, seek to be their partners and help and encourage them out of the problems they are in—but we cannot, and should not, address the problems of the eurozone from the outside. We consciously, and rightly, decided as a nation not to be part of it. The eurozone must take the lead in sorting out the problems within its borders.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): A recent report by Citizens Advice Wales shows a 14% increase in the number of people going to their offices for help and support. The top 10 issues that people go for advice about are the personal independence payment, the employment and support allowance, working tax credits, child tax credit, housing benefit and disability living allowance—and the rest all relate to debt. May we have a debate on how the Government's benefits policy has led to an increase in debt in many regions of the United Kingdom?

Chris Grayling: What the Government's policies have done is create more employment in Wales, as they have in every other part of the country. What our policies in the benefits arena are doing through the introduction of universal credit is to simplify a complex system and create proper incentives for people to move back into work. People with disabilities should do small amounts of work in order to enable them to start making a move back into the workplace. That is the kind of strategy

this country needs—to help those who genuinely cannot work, but to make sure that the support is there for those who have the potential to get back into the workplace and that the jobs are there when they need them.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): On 18 June the Leader of the House answered questions that I had raised on behalf of a number of people who were unable to get information from the Scotland Office through the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Clearly, I, a Member of Parliament, should not have to rely on that Act. Is the Leader of the House aware that I subsequently attempted to use a number of parliamentary procedures, but have as yet been unable to get the Secretary of State for Scotland to tell us who wrote and who received the infamous “Benchgate” memo? I cannot even get him to admit whether he saw a copy of it before it was leaked. I cannot get him to tell us which Ministers or whether any Ministers saw that memo before it was leaked. No doubt the Leader of the House would agree that it would be enormously embarrassing for this place if I as an MP were forced to raise this matter under FOI. Does he agree that a Government who have nothing to hide should stop hiding? Will he arrange for the Secretary of State for Scotland to be brought before the House to explain himself as soon as possible?

Chris Grayling: Of course, one of the benefits of how this place works is that Members have a number of ways to bring Ministers before the House to answer questions—whether it be through Adjournment debates, oral questions, debates called by the Backbench Business Committee or whatever. I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will use one of those different approaches to bring the Secretary of State for Scotland here so that he can put those questions directly to him.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The third international conference on financing for development, which took place in Addis Ababa last weekend, made it clear that aid donor countries received five times as much in illicit financial flows as they gave out in aid—for every \$1 in aid, they received \$5 in illicit financial flows. We have not had a statement on the conference, which has been some surprise, but will the Leader of the House make time for a debate on what this country is doing to stop such illicit financial flows from flowing back from the developing world into the UK?

Chris Grayling: We are—I believe rightly—good citizens in the world when it comes to providing development support where it is needed, but none of us would ever condone illegal practices; in fact, we have some of the world's toughest and most highly regarded anti-corruption laws. I will make sure that the Secretary of State for International Development is made aware of the concerns that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Yesterday, I met a representative from Addaction, which provides drug and alcohol treatment services to prisons. She explained that because of staff shortages prisoners simply cannot be escorted for their treatments. May we have an urgent debate on the difficulties experienced in implementing drug and alcohol treatment regimes in our prisons?

Chris Grayling: I praise Addaction for the work it does. I have had many dealings with it over the years, and it does excellent charity work. The hon. Lady is right, and I know from my former role that there have been staff shortages in parts of the country. That has been a result, ironically, of our economic success and a buoyant labour market, particularly in the southern part of the country, where unemployment levels have been below the conventional full employment levels in many areas. It poses a challenge for public services. I know that my former team and the current team in the Ministry of Justice have been working hard to address those shortages and will continue to do so.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement, either before the recess or during the September sittings, on the future of the access to elected office for disabled people fund, which helps disabled candidates with the additional costs of putting themselves forward? I hope that I shall have the support of the Chief Whip in this regard, given that he has been a firm supporter of the fund.

Chris Grayling: I am very sympathetic to the hon. Lady's request. I am observing all sides of the various selection processes with great interest, especially that involving the Member who shadowed me in the days of my justice role, who is one of those now vying to be the Labour candidate in London. I always watched his Twitter feed with amusement, as about one tweet in 10 was about justice, and nine out of 10 were about his travels around different parts of London.

The hon. Lady has made a very important point. It is good for our democracy that disabled people stand for elected office, whatever party they belong to. We should always do what we can to help them, and I will ensure that the hon. Lady's comments are drawn to the attention of the appropriate officials.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): This weekend, I shall somewhat advisedly seek to double the number of Labour MPs in Scotland—albeit temporarily—by visiting Ayrshire to serve as best man for my friend Alan Gemmell, who is marrying his partner Damien Stirk. Does the Leader of the House share my pride in the fact that Britain has led the way on equal marriage, and will he provide time for a debate so that the House can show solidarity with lesbian and gay people throughout the world who are denied this and many other rights and freedom?

Chris Grayling: Equal marriage is one of the big social changes of recent years for which the House has voted. I supported it, the hon. Gentleman supported it and a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends supported it, and I think that it has been a positive step. I wish the hon. Gentleman well, and I wish the friends whose wedding he will be attending all the best for the future. I have to say that I think the Labour party will probably be outnumbered by the Conservatives in Scotland this summer, as I know that a number of my hon. Friends will be taking advantage of the tourist destinations and, in some cases, fishing rivers which that fine country offers.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Although more than 90% of the highlands and islands is mainland, my constituents,

along with people in neighbouring constituencies, continue to be unfairly discriminated against, and are forced to endure excessive delivery surcharges from some traders, particularly online. Will the Leader of the House grant a debate in Government time on the practice of delivery surcharges in rural areas?

Chris Grayling: That is an important issue, which does not affect only the hon. Gentleman's constituency. The provision of services in rural areas is an issue in many parts of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. We have had a number of debates in recent weeks about, for example, the provision of rural broadband. I can assure the hon. Gentleman, as I would assure colleagues on both sides of the House, that when the Government can help to improve the situation in rural areas, that will be a priority for us.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): If the Leader of the House and his colleagues wish to visit Northern Ireland as well during their holidays, they are welcome to do so.

During the passage of the Scotland Bill, we have had two debates on English votes for English laws, and the possibility of other legislation on devolved matters in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Will the Leader of the House set out his vision, or the Government's vision, for the Union during this Parliament, so that we know exactly what their priorities are, and can be assured that theirs is not a piecemeal approach?

Chris Grayling: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, and we will continue to discuss that issue. It is important for us to set out that vision for the Union. We want a strong Union with strong devolved Assemblies in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. We want fairness for the English. We want local communities and cities in England to have greater responsibility for managing their affairs. Ultimately, however, we want a strong Union in which we all work together.

I might add that the hon. Gentleman, in Northern Ireland, benefits from what I believe to be one of today's finest and most popular tourist attractions, namely the Iron Throne.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Reference has already been made to the Chancellor's proposed planning reforms, which will involve a near-presumption in favour of housing on brownfield land. Given that that is a substantial departure from the current plan-led system, in which such pieces of land are identified for other uses and particularly for employment use, will the Leader of the House first tell us how those measures will be brought to the House for discussion, and secondly what the time scales will be?

Chris Grayling: There are regular opportunities to discuss planning matters. We will be debating the Finance Bill next week, at which point such matters can be raised, and there will be Treasury questions and Department for Communities and Local Government questions when we return in September. It is important that we should move ahead with the development that we need, and that we should use sites that are sitting idle as the focal point for that development. That is the Government's strategy.

We do not want sites that could be used to meet urgent housing need to sit idle for years and years. That does happen in some places.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): May we finally have a statement from a Health Minister on the ongoing chaos and delay in the process of approving drugs for those with ultra-orphan diseases? My six-year-old constituent, Sam Brown, and many other children are no longer getting the drugs they need, and they are deteriorating and will die early as a result. Can we please, finally, have a statement on this, before the recess?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Our hearts go out to the very young people who are facing such dreadful health challenges, and I will make sure that his concerns are passed on to the Secretary of State for Health today.

NHS Reform

11.31 am

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on measures to improve the safety culture in the NHS and further strengthen its transition to a modern, patient-centric healthcare system. The failings at Mid Staffs, detailed in the Francis report, were not isolated local failures. Facing up to widespread problems with the safety and quality of NHS care and learning the appropriate lessons has been a mission that the Government and the NHS have shared, with a common belief that the best way to deal with problems is to face up to them rather than wish that they did not exist.

Measures taken in the last Parliament include: introducing the toughest independent inspection regime in the world; more transparency on performance and outcomes than any other major healthcare system; new fundamental standards; a duty of candour; and the excellent recommendations by Sir Robert Francis QC. But because the change we need is essentially cultural, a long journey remains ahead. The Department of Health was described during the Mid Staffs era as a “denial machine”. We therefore have much work to do if we are to complete the transformation of the NHS from a closed system to an open one, from one where staff are bullied to one where they are supported, and from one where patients are not ignored but listened to.

Today I am announcing some important new steps, including: our official response to Sir Robert Francis’s second report, “Freedom to Speak Up”; our response to the Public Administration Select Committee report “Investigating clinical incidents in the NHS”; and our response to the Morecambe Bay investigation. I am also publishing Lord Rose’s report into leadership in the NHS—a key part of the way in which we will prevent tragedies such as these from happening again. I would like to thank everyone involved in writing those reports for their excellent work.

In his report “Freedom to Speak Up”, Sir Robert Francis QC made a number of recommendations to support this cultural change. All NHS trusts will appoint someone whose job is to be there when front-line doctors and nurses need someone to turn to with concerns about patient care that they do not feel able to raise with their immediate line manager. We will also appoint an independent national officer, located at the Care Quality Commission, to make sure that all trusts have proper processes in place to listen to the concerns of staff before they feel the need to become whistleblowers. Other changes will include providing information about raising concerns as part of the training for healthcare professionals and part of the curriculum for medical students, and placing a greater focus on learning from reflective practice in staff development.

Dr Bill Kirkup’s report into Morecambe Bay brought home to the House that there can be no greater pain than when a parent loses a child and then finds that pain compounded when medical mistakes are covered up. We will accept all the recommendations in this report, including removing the Nursing and Midwifery Council’s current responsibility and accountability for statutory supervision of midwives in the United Kingdom, and bringing the regulation of midwives into line with the arrangements for other regulated professions.

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Likewise, we agree with the vast majority of the recommendations of the excellent PASC report into clinical incident investigations. In particular, we will set up a new independent patient safety investigation service by April 2016, based on the success of the “no blame” approach used by the air accidents investigation branch in the airline industry. It will be housed at Monitor/Trust Development Authority, which have the important responsibility of promulgating a learning culture throughout the NHS. Monitor/TDA will operate under the name “NHS Improvement”, and Ed Smith, currently a non-executive board member of NHS England, will become the new chair, with a brief to appoint a new chief executive by the end of September.

For NHS managers, Lord Rose’s report, “Better leadership for tomorrow”, makes vital recommendations to join up the support offered to NHS managers, to improve training and performance management, and reduce bureaucracy. He extended his remit to cover the work of clinical commissioning groups, which play a key role in the NHS, and today I am accepting all 19 of his recommendations in principle, including moving responsibility for the NHS leadership academy from NHS England to Health Education England.

These are important recommendations, which, in the end, all share one common thread: that the most powerful people in our NHS should not be politicians, managers or even doctors and nurses, but the patients who use it. Using the power of intelligent transparency and new technology, we now have the opportunity to put behind us a service where you get what you are given and move to a modern NHS where what is right for the service is always what is right for the patient.

A litmus test of that is our approach to weekend services. About 6,000 people lose their lives every year because we do not have a proper seven-day service in hospitals. Someone is 15% more likely to die if they are admitted on a Sunday than if they are admitted on a Wednesday. That is unacceptable to doctors as well as patients. In 2003-04, the then Government gave GPs and consultants the right to opt out of out-of-hours and weekend work, at the same time as offering significant pay increases. The result was a Monday-to-Friday culture in many parts of the NHS, with catastrophic consequences for patient safety.

In our manifesto this year, the Conservative Party pledged to put that right as a clinical and moral priority. I am today publishing the observations on seven-day contract reform for directly employed NHS staff in England by the Review Body on Doctors and Dentists Remuneration—the DDRB—and the NHS Pay Review Body. They observe that some trusts are already delivering services across seven days, but this is far from universal. According to the DDRB, a major barrier to wider implementation is the contractual right of consultants to opt out of non-emergency work in the evenings and at weekends, which reduces weekend cover by senior clinical decision makers and puts the sickest patients at unacceptable risk. The DDRB recommends the early removal of the consultant weekend opt-out, so today I am announcing that we intend to negotiate the removal of the consultant opt-out and early implementation of revised terms for new consultants from April 2016. There will now be six weeks to work with British

Medical Association union negotiators before a September decision point. We hope to find a negotiated solution but are prepared to impose a new contract if necessary. To further ensure a patient-focused pay system, we will also introduce a new performance pay scheme, replacing the outdated local clinical excellence awards, to reward those doctors making the greatest contribution to patient care.

I am also announcing other measures today to make the NHS more responsive to patients. Those include making sure patients are told about Care Quality Commission quality ratings as well as waiting times before they are referred to hospitals, so that they can make an informed decision about the best place to receive their care. NHS England will also develop plans to expand control to patients over decisions made in maternity, end-of-life care and long-term condition management, which I will report in more detail subsequently to the House. Finally, because the role of technology is so important in strengthening patient power, we must ensure that no NHS patient is left behind in the digital health revolution. I have therefore asked Martha Lane Fox, the former Government digital champion, to develop practical proposals for the NHS National Information Board on how we can ensure increased take-up of new digital innovations in health by those who will benefit from them the most.

When we first introduced transparency into the system to strengthen the voice of patients, some called it “running down the NHS”. Since then, public confidence in the NHS in England has risen 5 percentage points. By contrast, in Wales, which resisted this transparency, a survey has seen public satisfaction fall by 3 percentage points. Over the previous Parliament, the proportion of people who think that the NHS in England is among the best healthcare systems in the world increased by 7 percentage points, the proportion of those who think NHS care is safe increased by 7 percentage points and the proportion of those who think that they are treated with dignity and respect increased by 13 percentage points. That demonstrates beyond doubt the benefits of an open and confident NHS, which is truly focused on learning and continuous improvement.

As we make progress in this journey, we must never forget the people and the families who have suffered when things have gone wrong. In particular, there are the families and patients at Morecambe Bay and Mid Staffs, the whistleblowers who contributed to Sir Robert Francis’s work, and everyone who has had the courage to come forward in recent years to help reshape the culture of the NHS. Without their bravery and determination, we would not have faced up to the failures of the past or been able to construct a shared vision for the future. We are all massively in their debt. This statement remains their legacy, and I commend it to the House.

11.41 am

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for advance sight of it. Let me say at the beginning that I support much of what he said. I will focus my remarks on his plan for seven-day working, and then touch on some of the other issues he raised.

Ensuring that our health services are there for everyone whenever they are needed—be that a weekday or a weekend—should be our shared goal across this House

for a 21st-century national health service. Illnesses do not stop at the weekend and nor should our NHS. Although we support the principle of what the Secretary of State is trying to achieve with seven-day working, and will work with him where possible, I urge some caution in the manner in which he is attempting to drive through these changes. His remarks contain no acknowledgment that the NHS right now is in a very fragile condition. It has gone backwards, not forwards, in recent times. A&E is in crisis, and primary care services are overwhelmed. There is a shortage of staff and an over-reliance on agency workers. Staff are demoralised and worn out. If he does this in the wrong way, many may walk away and that would make matters even worse. Given all that, it is not immediately clear how seven-day services can be delivered in the timeframe he has set out without significantly impacting on the rest of the NHS.

The Secretary of State said that around 6,000 people lose their lives every year because we do not have a proper seven-day service. Of course that is an appalling statistic, but is there not a risk of implementing seven-day services by simply spreading existing resources more thinly? A recent study published in "Health Economics" concluded:

"There is as yet no clear evidence that 7-day services will reduce weekend deaths or can be achieved without increasing weekday deaths."

Will the Secretary of State tell us on what evidence he has based his announcement and, crucially, what steps he is taking to guard against what the study warns could be an increase in weekday deaths?

If the Secretary of State wants to make changes on this scale, it is vital that he works in partnership with NHS staff. I gently say to him that briefing headlines such as "Declaring war on doctors" have not got us off on the right foot, as doctors are already feeling worn out and put upon. The British Medical Association said:

"Today's announcement is nothing more than a wholesale attack on doctors to mask the fact that for two years the Government has failed to outline any concrete proposals for introducing more seven-day hospital services."

Will the Secretary of State take care to avoid provocative statements such as "Declaring war" and will he rethink the manner in which he is pursuing these negotiations? Talk of imposing deals at this stage is not helpful; it is premature and it would be better to proceed in a more constructive manner.

Staff across the entire hospital system—not just doctors—will be needed to run these services, but the Government confirmed only last week that many of them will face another five years of pay cuts. In total, that will amount to a decade of pay cuts. Has the Secretary of State looked at the detail of the Chancellor's announcement on pay for NHS staff? Will he tell the House what effect he believes this deal could have on staff numbers and retention?

The Secretary of State said very little about how he will fund seven-day services, but given that the NHS is struggling to fund weekday services, it is likely to need significant investment over the next five years, over and above funding attached to the five-year forward view. Can he confirm that the money allocated to fund the five-year forward view does not include seven-day working? That is not specifically mentioned in the "Five Year Forward View". If so, what extra funding will be made

available specifically to deliver seven-day working, and when will this funding be available? The announcement today appears to be unfunded and it will not escape the House's attention that the 2010 Conservative manifesto also promised to deliver seven-day services. The Secretary of State has a lot of convincing to do if he expects people to believe him this time.

In a statement last week in another place, Lord Prior, the Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for NHS productivity, said he was establishing an independent inquiry into extending charges in the NHS. This has sounded alarm bells among many patient groups. Will the Secretary of State say more about the terms of reference for this independent inquiry and when it will proceed with its work?

The Francis "Freedom to speak up" report contained a number of important recommendations to foster a more open culture and we support his work to implement them. The right hon. Gentleman will know that there have been a number of appalling examples of poor care in recent times at Orchid View, Oban Court and Winterbourne View, and these scandals were exposed only when undercover reporters infiltrated the care home. Will he look seriously at the idea of an independent body to receive complaints from NHS staff and social care staff so that they are not faced with the problem of always going to their employer if they are to blow the whistle?

I welcome what the Secretary of State had to say about the Kirkup report and his acceptance in full of its recommendations. We, too, think of the families affected by the failures at Morecambe Bay. I supported steps to improve the regulation of midwives, but the big question mark over the right hon. Gentleman's commitment is the failure to bring in a Bill on professional regulation. This was an important recommendation of the Francis report and the continued delay in implementing this proposal is putting patients at risk and preventing regulators from doing their job. Will the Secretary of State now commit to legislating at the earliest opportunity for the Law Commission's reforms?

These are extremely serious matters and I do not believe that some of the Secretary of State's more political comments today were appropriate, nor do I believe they will build the consensus that will be needed across this House to deliver these important changes. Labour introduced more transparency into the NHS with the establishment of independent regulation and the inspection of hospitals. I appointed Robert Francis to begin the work of looking at what went wrong at Mid Staffs. Where the Secretary of State seeks to build on these constructive changes, we will support him, but he will not achieve his goals by provoking confrontation with doctors or playing politics with patient safety.

Mr Hunt: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his support on many of the measures that we are announcing today. Where we can work together, we should. I thank him for his support for the principle of seven-day working, although I gently point out that this was in our manifesto in May and it was not in his. I shall deal in turn with the points that he raised.

On funding for seven-day services, the right hon. Gentleman has just fought an election on plans that would have meant that the NHS would get £5 billion less than this Government are prepared to commit. We are

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committing £10 billion to the NHS to implement the five-year forward view, which we can do on the back of a strong economy. That includes plans for a seven-day service.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about comments by Lord Prior in another place. There is no independent review on charging for NHS services. After the election, he should be very careful of such scaremongering. That is what he was doing for the whole election. When he makes such comments, he frightens NHS staff. He should think about the effect on morale when he does that.

The right hon. Gentleman said that the NHS has gone backwards, not forwards, but I have just presented figures showing that public confidence in the NHS is going up; the number of people who think that the NHS is one of the best systems in the world has increased. I gently point out that the reports we are publishing today are a response to problems that happened on his watch and that we are facing up to, so he should have a little modesty in this situation.

The right hon. Gentleman asked an important question about spreading services currently offered on five days over seven days. A lot of work has been done on this. The truth is that having services only on five days is not only dangerous for patients but incredibly inefficient for hospitals. For example, someone admitted to hospital on a Friday in need of a diagnostic test might not get the result until the following Monday or Tuesday so will have to stay in hospital for the weekend even though they could possibly have been discharged. That is bad for the patient and expensive for the NHS, so these measures will result in huge cost savings.

Most importantly, the right hon. Gentleman talked about carrying staff with us. Doctors go into work every weekend throughout the NHS and do a fantastic job, but often it is not recognised and they are not thanked. We want a more professional contract that recognises that contribution. That is why these measures are supported by the Royal College of Surgeons, the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal College of Emergency Medicine.

When the previous Labour Government changed the consultants' contract in 2003, senior doctors did not like it. They said that it led to "a loss of a sense of vocation and what it means to be professional". That quote is from a King's Fund report. It undermined the basic relationship between doctor and patient. We are not blaming doctors, and actually we are not blaming unions, because unions will always ask to see what they can get—the right hon. Gentleman spends more time with unions than I do, so he knows that better than I do. The people responsible for that decision in 2003 were the Ministers who signed off changes to the consultants' contract and the GPs' contract. It was Labour politicians who were responsible for those changes, and they must take responsibility for the fact that it was the wrong thing to do.

Finally, this is the most important question of all, and we have not heard an answer today: does the right hon. Gentleman support the measures that the Government are putting forward to make our hospitals safer with seven-day working or not? Leadership is about making choices, and today's choice is this: is he on the side of the patient or on the side of the union? We know whose side we are on. For Labour, once again, the politics matters more than the patients.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's vision of an NHS that is empowered to focus more fully on the people and communities it serves and that is more transparent, less bureaucratic and as safe on a Sunday as it is on a Wednesday, and I welcome his comments about culture change. Does he agree that meeting that challenge will also depend on financing? As welcome as the extra £8 billion announced in the Budget is, will he join me in urging colleagues to ensure that as much of that as possible is front-loaded, because it is so necessary for the transformational changes he has talked about? In encouraging leadership across the NHS, will he ensure that the changes that are needed at a local level, and the systems we can integrate for the benefit of patients, can be introduced more quickly and effectively?

Mr Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend for her important comments, and for sitting through a very long speech I gave this morning. We are trying to achieve many things. At their heart, as she rightly says, is a recognition that culture change does not happen overnight. She is right that the profiling of the extra money that the Government are investing in the NHS is important, because we need to spend money soon on some things, such as additional capacity in primary care, as in two to three years' time that will significantly reduce the need for expensive hospital care. We are going through those numbers carefully. She is also right that local leadership really matters. I know that she will agree, especially as she comes from Devon, that leadership needs to be good at a CCG level as well as a trust level, because CCGs have a really important role in commissioning healthcare in local communities. That is an area where we need to make a lot of improvements.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I have to declare an interest: like most doctors, I am a member of the British Medical Association.

I commend the Secretary of State for his announcement about a national officer for whistleblowers. Shona Robertson, Scotland's Cabinet Secretary for Health, announced this in June, and we are taking action on the Francis report in the same direction. It is vital that members of staff feel they have someone to speak to if things are not going well, and that if they are not being responded to locally there is an independent voice that they can go to.

With regard to seven-day services, the excess deaths of people who are admitted at weekends is recognised and abhorred by the vast majority of doctors. I do not know anybody who gets up and works the hours we do and does not care that someone did not do well. However, I think we are blurring the lines between the elective and emergency systems. The sickest people the Secretary of State mentions—those who run the risk of dying if admitted on a Friday or a Sunday—are not part of the elective system but of the out-of-hours emergency system. It is suggested that hospitals are like the *Mary Celeste* and there are no doctors. In fact, any service with an emergency component runs 24/7, but there is a multi-disciplinary team. Sometimes patients will be stuck on a ward because they cannot get access to a scan or there is no physiotherapist to help them recover from their stroke.

We are already working towards solving this in Scotland. We are doing so in a more collaborative way, and that is important. There is no resistance to that, because it is

recognised that we need all parts of the service. This is different from people coming in for a routine check-up on a Sunday when that does not result in a detriment to them if it is not available. The biggest shortage we have is in human resources—doctors, nurses, physios, occupational therapists and radiographers. I recommend that the Secretary of State separate these two aspects. The first is that hospital consultants did not get the option to opt out of 24/7 care for emergency patients in the contract, whereas GPs did. It is a matter of providing, funding and setting up a full service with all that is behind it to deal with ill patients seven days a week, no matter when they come in.

The other aspect is trying to get value for money. If we have invested in expensive machines and theatres, we want them to work as many days a week as possible so that we get value for money, but that must be secondary to the first priority, which is looking after sick people. I suggest that the Secretary of State starts talking about the two aspects on separate tracks and not crossing backwards and forwards, and that this should be collaborative. I echo the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) in saying that we require the money to be front-loaded so that we get it to start changing the service now.

Mr Speaker: Order. May I gently say that from now on we are going to have to enforce the time limits on Opposition responses to ministerial statements much more strictly? Otherwise they eat into the time available for other colleagues. The shadow Secretary of State has five minutes in response to a 10-minute statement and the third party spokesperson has two minutes. That really does have to be adhered to as a matter of course from now on.

Mr Hunt: The hon. Lady speaks with the authority of someone who works in hospitals, and I always listen to her very carefully. I do not think it is easy to make a rigid distinction between elective and emergency care. The opt-out in emergency care does apply, for example, to accident and emergency doctors. Sometimes when people are admitted to hospital because they are ill—they would not be admitted if they were not—their condition may not appear to be life-threatening on a Friday afternoon but then, over the course of the weekend, they deteriorate, and by the time they are seen by a senior consultant on a Monday or a Tuesday, it is too late. The trouble is that we have a culture in which a lot of major services are available only from Monday to Friday, and that is what is causing these avoidable deaths. The hon. Lady is right to say that this is not just about senior consultant cover; it is also about diagnostic care, handovers and many other things, and we are working at those. The Royal Edinburgh Infirmary has done a very good job of eliminating the difference between weekday and weekend mortality rates, as have Salford Royal and Northumbria hospitals in England. We need other hospitals to follow those examples.

Mr Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale West) (Con): Senior clinicians in my constituency are warning of a major threat to patient safety as a result of a proposed downgrade of one of Britain's best hospitals, Wythenshawe. The regional transplant unit is a world-class centre for heart and lung and there is a major trauma centre adjacent to Manchester airport, where it should be. That must all be protected. The Secretary of State knows my view that the consultation has been opaque,

and that the decision-making process has been flawed. Will he review the decision as urgently as possible, and meet me and other Members for local constituencies as a matter of urgency before the summer recess to discuss what can be done?

Mr Hunt: I am more than happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss those matters. Wythenshawe is an excellent hospital—I have been there—and it has provided a number of staff who have helped to turn round the standard of care at Tameside hospital, which has seen dramatic improvements. I recognise that Wythenshawe is an excellent hospital, and I am very happy to meet him to listen to his concerns.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): How will the Secretary of State pay for his very laudable objective of seven-day working when he has lost control of NHS finances? Contrary to what he claimed about the situation in Devon, as things now stand our patient care is suffering, waiting times are rocketing and we are facing a £434 million deficit.

Mr Hunt: Let me tell the right hon. Gentleman why so many places are going into deficit. They have looked at the lessons of Mid Staffs and said, "We don't want that to happen here." That is why, in the past two and a half years, hospitals have employed 8,000 more nurses on hospital wards to deal with the scandal of short staffing that they faced and wanted to do something about. In the end, if it is not sustainable, it is not quality care, so we have to find smart ways to control deficits—not by reducing the staff and making care unsafe, but by making changes to process and through efficiencies, such as making sure that nurses do not spend too long filling out forms and can spend more time with patients. In terms of funding, I would just say that the only way to fund a strong NHS is to have a strong economy, and that is why the country voted in a Conservative Government in May.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): I declare an interest as a member of the BMA.

I absolutely agree with all the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston). I like the reforms of leadership, but will the Secretary of State recognise the existing great leadership in the NHS? A safe NHS is one in which staff morale is at its best. If every leader in the NHS was at the level of Professor Sir Peter Morris, we would already have the best and safest health service in the world.

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend obviously speaks with huge knowledge—I am wondering whether she is the first Conservative MP who is also a member of the BMA—and is extremely welcome for the insights she brings to the House.

Leadership and morale are absolutely crucial. One of the ways in which we can improve morale is by giving patients and doctors alike the sense that we are honest about the problems and have good plans in place to tackle them. Nothing eats away more at morale than people going in day in, day out and not giving patients the care that they want to give and feeling that nothing is being done about it. That is why the move towards transparency, which I know my hon. Friend supports, is so important.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I echo the comments of the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady). Despite a public consultation wanting five major trauma receiving sites in Greater Manchester and Wythenshawe hospital being the public choice, it did not receive specialist status at the end of the Healthier Together process yesterday. What assurances can the Secretary of State give the people of Trafford and south Manchester, particularly in relation to the 18 specialisms that are underpinned by Wythenshawe being a major trauma receiving site?

Mr Hunt: As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady), I will look into the decision made by Healthier Together. The assurance that I can give to the constituents of the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), and indeed to all people in the Greater Manchester area, is that with some of the most exciting changes, such as the integration of health and social care and the transformation of out-of-hospital care—it has just been announced that there will be seven-day GP services across Greater Manchester—they are blazing a trail. It will be exciting for his constituents; none the less, I understand their concerns about their local hospital and I am happy to look into that.

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con): We in Staffordshire know better than most what the denial machine that the Secretary of State referred to meant to local people, so I congratulate him on his commitment to transparency and consistency. Will he encourage the Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust and the Burton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to work much more collaboratively, so that that commitment to transparency and better service is delivered to my constituents in Tamworth and Fazeley?

Mr Hunt: I will absolutely encourage that. The Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust is one of the biggest in the country and has had significant challenges. The Burton foundation trust has been through the special measures process, and patient care has improved as a result. Collaborative working will be the way forward. We need to break down the silos that have cursed so much of the NHS, and I will happily pass on that message.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I advised food manufacturers in the '90s about bringing in seven-day working to keep supermarket shelves stacked. Twenty years on we are still talking about seven-day working in the NHS, and it seems to me that good care and saving lives are rather more important. Will the Secretary of State ensure that exactly the same principle applies to mental health? Does he recognise that it is just as important to ensure that people can leave hospital and go home on a timely basis, seven days a week, but that with cuts to local government funding there will be more pressure and it will be more difficult to achieve that? Together with the extraordinary pressure that the system is under, does that not make the case even more strongly for a new settlement for the NHS and social care?

Mr Hunt: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for finding time to come to the Chamber on what I know is an important day. I am not sure whether I am allowed

to wish him luck, but I greatly value the time that I spent working with him as a ministerial colleague, and I know he will make an important contribution to the House. He is right, as ever, to speak about mental health. The programme towards seven-day working is as important for mental health as it is for other services, and we must also ensure that the revolution happens for things such as suicide rates and crisis care. He is right about the importance of the social care system; and in my mind when I speak about seven-day care I am thinking about social care and health as one entity.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Our doctors no doubt work incredibly hard in our hospitals. The people of Brigg and Goole and the Isle of Axholme work at weekends, whether in factories, at the docks or in the fields, and they want an NHS that does the same. The Secretary of State will know about my passion for ambulance services, which at weekends are often the last line of support for patients. What will his plans mean for ambulance services and the incredible job that paramedics do across the country?

Mr Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend because he leads by example as a first responder and does a fantastic job in his constituency—indeed, that role takes place at weekends. Paramedics and ambulance services operate a seven-day service. Nurses, paramedics and others who work in hospitals currently do not have an opt-out; consultants are the only ones who do. These measures will give ambulance services confidence that if they take someone to hospital at the weekend, there will be a proper senior consultant present and their patient will get in front of the right person. That will make their job all the more rewarding.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): The Secretary of State has not outlined what steps should be taken to recruit, train and retain front-line staff who are key to patient safety.

Mr Hunt: We have big plans to recruit and retain staff, and those are being worked up by Health Education England. We think that we will need extra doctors to deliver seven-day care, just as we will need more GPs. We think we can afford that within the extra £10 billion that we are putting into the NHS, and we are ensuring that all the numbers add up. I am sure that I will inform the House once we have come to a conclusion.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I declare an interest as an NHS nurse. Does the Secretary of State agree that the UK has one of the worst one-year cancer survival rates compared with the rest of Europe, with one in five cases being diagnosed as an emergency admission? Having a prompt diagnosis is very important. A seven-day-a-week service would be a major step forward, because patients should be seen when clinically indicated, not when indicated by the calendar. With a seven-day service they will be seen more quickly and be less poorly. Not only will that save money but—more importantly—it will save lives.

Mr Hunt: Absolutely. May I say how pleased I am to welcome my hon. Friend's experience on the Conservative Benches? It makes a big difference. She is absolutely right. NHS England will be saying more about how we

intend to deal with the problem of late diagnosis of cancer, which is critical if we are to improve our cancer survival rates. One point that links to the announcements I have made today is better collaboration between senior cancer consultants and GPs. If GPs are to be able to spot cancers earlier, they will need to link into the learning they can receive through closer contact with consultants and hospitals. That is something we need to think about.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): As someone who has spent quite a bit of time going to hospitals over the past 16 years, I have learned a little about it. I suspect that some people, like the doctors who the Secretary of State wants to collaborate with, just might have reflected on why this Tory Government are more concerned with getting in agency nurses and doctors than giving nurses a decent pay increase. Has it not crossed his mind that by telling nurses they are worth only 1% more, he will finish up with more agency nurses? The truth is that doctors see this happening every day. The main reason is that the Government have tried to reform and privatise the NHS for the past five years. The doctors and the nurses do not trust him—it is time he got out.

Mr Hunt: Let me tell the hon. Gentleman what the doctors and nurses working in our NHS hospitals see. They see 8,000 more hospital nurses on full-time contracts than when his party was in power, because we are doing something about the scandal of short-staffed wards that was left behind by his Government.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend ensure that neither the revalidation regime nor the NHS's status as a near monopsony employer is allowed to promote anxiety among NHS staff who would otherwise wish to speak up? It is essential that they know they have that freedom and security.

Mr Hunt: As ever, my hon. Friend is spot on. At the heart of what I am saying today is creating a new learning culture inside the NHS where people are able to be open. In the airline industry, it is much easier for a junior pilot to talk to a senior pilot about a mistake they think the senior pilot has made without feeling it will impact on their career. We need to break down the barriers, so that when people talk about their concerns—even about what their boss has done, which is never easy—they are listened to and treated seriously, and there no consequences as a result. We absolutely have to make that change.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Are the Government considering the introduction of charging in the NHS, as a member of the Secretary of State's ministerial team, Lord Prior, suggested in the other place in response to Lord Patel?

Mr Hunt: No, that is not the case, and the hon. Lady should avoid scaremongering.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Given the political priority which my right hon. Friend attaches to 24/7 consultant cover for accident and emergency hospitals, why was his Department unable to answer the question I put about which hospitals in England currently provide such cover? Will he collect that data and make sure that is published?

Mr Hunt: The truth is that all hospitals have been moving in this direction in the past five years in different ways. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that, to make sure we deliver on our manifesto commitment, we will be doing a full and comprehensive audit of which people are delivering which types of services. It is partly about senior consultant cover, which we are talking about today, partly about seven-day diagnostic services, partly about handover, and partly about mental health and many other standards, but, yes, that work is being done.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State was unclear before. May I say that, as far as I am concerned, those of us on the Labour Benches are absolutely in favour of measures that will increase safety at the weekend, and that my party will never prosper as a mouthpiece for the British Medical Association? Is he not concerned that the porters and nurses, who are being asked to swallow a decade-long real-terms pay cut, will not be able to deliver such change given the level at which they are being demoralised?

If you will permit me, Mr Speaker, may I also say that I very much welcome the full acceptance of the recommendations of the Morecambe Bay inquiry? Will the Secretary of State ensure that the families will remain fully involved in ensuring that these measures are implemented, as well as accepted, by Government?

Mr Hunt: Of course. The hon. Gentleman has liaised very closely with the Morecambe Bay families over the period of the inquiry. I am happy to give him the assurance that they will remain closely involved.

I am very pleased that the hon. Gentleman says he does not want his party to be the mouthpiece of the BMA, but if that is the case it needs to get behind the proposals that the Government are making today and say it supports them. We have not heard that from his party and that is what the public want to hear.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): The trust or place that has probably learned the most from Mid Staffordshire is Mid Staffordshire, or, as it now is, County Hospital, Stafford. Quality of care and performance has increased dramatically, with 98% and more patients seen within four hours at A&E. That is why we need a 24/7 A&E. May I urge the Secretary of State to ensure that the new independent patient safety investigation service is truly independent, despite being housed in the Monitor-Trust Development Authority building?

Mr Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend for the amazing work he has done in supporting County Hospital through the most unimaginably difficult circumstances. I put on record my thanks to the doctors and nurses working in that hospital who are doing a fantastic job. They have improved care. Many of them were working at the old Mid Staffs hospital and, even during the period of those problems, they were working incredibly hard and doing a very good job for patients. They did not want to be associated with any of the bad things that happened. They are a shining example to all of us. Yes, the independent patient safety investigation service needs to be independent, but I think trusts will welcome this measure. It will mean that a trust has a body, which is completely independent of anyone working in the trust, that it can

[Mr Jeremy Hunt]

call in. In a no-blame way, it can find out exactly what happened—a bit like a French *juge d'instruction*; that kind of principle. I think that will be really welcomed in the NHS, but independence is vital.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I declare my interest as a former NHS manager, latterly for a clinical commissioning group. I very much welcome the focus on patients, transparency and the use of digital, which will be very helpful for the challenges we will face. As a former NHS manager, I would make the plea that management needs support in facing the challenges ahead. I am afraid that confrontation with local doctors as the first step over the summer period is not helpful. Will the Secretary of State please support NHS managers in this difficult task ahead, across clinical and non-clinical standards? I very much welcome the Rose review, but can we please give managers the support they need?

Mr Hunt: I am really grateful to the hon. Lady for making that point. NHS managers have one of the most difficult challenges in the country. Not only do they have to balance revenue and expenditure; they have patients' lives at risk and public accountability. It is really difficult to run a hospital or a clinical commissioning group. These are some of the most difficult jobs one can imagine. We need to support them. I hope they will agree and welcome a move away from targets as the main way of driving change in the NHS to intelligent transparency and peer review. This is not a confrontation with doctors. Doctors overwhelmingly support a seven-day service. It is, I am afraid, a battle with the BMA, with which we have been trying to negotiate on the matter for nearly three years. It has refused to move. It needs to get in touch with what its members want and what the public want, and then I hope we can make much faster progress.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): A characteristic of the health system in our country is that we have something like 20% to 25% fewer doctors per head of population than comparable countries such as France, Germany and Spain. Is it part of the Secretary of State's vision to correct this over time, and will that make reforms such as these easier to push through?

Mr Hunt: We do need more doctors and more nurses. We saw an increase of about 8,000 nurses and 10,000 doctors in the previous Parliament. We will need more for the simple reason that we will have 1 million more over-70s by the end of this Parliament. That said, the NHS is admired in the other countries my hon. Friend talks about for our models of care, which are sometimes less hospital-centric and therefore inherently more efficient than what happens in some other systems. The learning should go both ways.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): My question is about whistleblowers. I want to know whether the Secretary of State is really satisfied that the fit and proper person test for managers is working, when it allows a chief executive who bullies and mismanaged, as happened in Hull, as the Secretary of State knows, to move with the help of the Trust Development Authority to another job as a chief executive, paying £170,000,

and yet the whistleblower has to fight for her rights. When the fit and proper person test was invoked, the TDA investigated and the new trust, unsurprisingly, said that that chief executive was okay. I do not think that that is independent, transparent or in the spirit of Francis.

Mr Hunt: I recognise that the hon. Lady has legitimate concerns about the way that the whistleblower, who I think is one of her constituents or is near to her constituency, was treated. I have, as she requested, looked into that very carefully. She will understand that it would not be right or proper for me to comment on an individual case. She knows that, as a result of requests by her and fellow MPs, I looked into whether due process was followed in the case that she mentioned. All I will say is that bullying behaviour should not happen anywhere in the NHS. That is a very important part of the culture change that I want to see.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): In Torbay, there are a number of concerns about access to primary care, due to issues of recruitment and retention of GPs. Recognising the comment that the Secretary of State made earlier in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), how does the Secretary of State see his statement today helping to improve this situation?

Mr Hunt: We have some fantastic primary care in Torbay. I remember visiting my hon. Friend during the election campaign and going to a hospice run by an absolutely inspirational lady. We need to build on those traditions, and modern technology offers us an opportunity to go even further. In the end, this is about having a less hospital-centric system and prevention rather than cure, and our great tradition of general practice will be our strongest asset in that change.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): The idea of seven-day working sounds absolutely fantastic for supplying services, but in west Cumbria, where we struggle to deliver services five days a week, it sounds like nothing more than a fantastic pipe dream. I am aware that the Secretary of State understands the specific problems we have in west Cumbria, but I want to ask him about a letter that I recently wrote to him to do with Cockermonth hospital—a beautiful new hospital which sits half empty. Will he meet me and clinicians from that hospital to see how we can deliver and solve the problems in Cockermonth?

Mr Hunt: I would be very happy to meet the hon. Lady and clinicians. I am aware of the problems in that health economy and I am aware that they are long-standing. They are a concern to me and I would be delighted to do anything I can to support her in helping to solve those problems.

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I was shocked to hear the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) running down the NHS yet again. He obviously has not been watching the series on television about the Royal Derby hospital, or looked at its website, where most of the comments are incredibly positive. Also in Mid Derbyshire we have surgeries that wish to take some of the burden away from hospitals. Does the Secretary of State agree that we should be encouraging that, where they can offer services to save people from going to hospital?

Mr Hunt: I absolutely agree. I commend the Royal Derby, which is an excellent hospital, and thank my hon. Friend for mentioning it. It is really interesting: around the country the number of people per thousand who use A&E varies from 166 to 355—a dramatic variation—and a lot of that relates to the availability of good primary care services, which is why our plans for seven-day GP appointments are also a very important part of the programme.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I welcome the partnership on patient safety that is being announced today between Queen's hospital in Romford and King George hospital in Ilford and the Virginia Mason Institute, and echo some of the comments made by my hon. Friends about the Government taking staff with them and looking at issues around pay and workforce. May I gently point out to the Secretary of State that it is now two months since I wrote to him about pressures in our local health economy and the future of our A&E department. Can he offset my disappointment by agreeing to meet me and my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) and other local MPs to discuss those issues?

Mr Hunt: I know that the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) secured a Westminster Hall debate on this yesterday, during which I hope the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) covered most of the issues he wants to address, but I am happy to arrange to meet him or to get the Under-Secretary of State for Health with responsibility for hospitals, my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer), to meet him to discuss those issues in more detail. The hospital trust that the hon. Gentleman talks about—Queen's and King George are covered by the same trust—has been through a very challenging period. It is a big trust; it is going through special measures, but I think it has good new management. I think they have really turned things around, and that staff are to be absolutely commended. The link with Virginia Mason in Seattle will be as inspirational for them as it has been for me to see what is possible.

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): I welcome today's statement about transformation of our NHS. Will the Secretary of State join me in welcoming the progress made by East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust, which came out of special measures about 12 months ago, and particularly the fact that a *Health Service Journal* and *Nursing Times* survey recently ranked the trust among the top 100 places to work, with improved staff engagement and morale, which is a huge transformation from where we were when the trust was put into special measures?

Mr Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend for his passionate support for that trust through a very difficult period. I also thank him for giving us perhaps the single biggest insight into how to transform a hospital in difficulty: according to all the measures, the most important single thing is to engage with staff. If staff feel supported and listened to, the result is safer care for patients and better outcomes. That is something they have done in East Lancashire, and it is something that many other hospitals could learn from.

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): Many current failures in care are caused by poor integration of services, not the failure of a specific service. What, in the proposals announced, addresses that problem?

Mr Hunt: The integration of the health and social care systems, as talked about by the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), is a very big priority. It is a vision shared by all parties. That is part of delivering safe seven-day care. The consequences for the health and social care system if we do not have safe hospital care are people with much greater medical needs, creating much more pressure in the system, so it is part of the same picture.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for coming to the House and also, I think, for making two written statements. There are only 32 other written statements from Ministers. I remember that when I first got here, there would be 87 written statements on the last day of term, with no chance to scrutinise the Minister. Following what my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) said, has the Minister had a chance to look at my Ovarian Cancer (Information) Bill, which would help reduce the number of ovarian cancer deaths through earlier detection?

Mr Hunt: I thank my hon. Friend for his support for that Bill. I hope that plans that NHS England will announce shortly about how we can improve early cancer detection will give him much encouragement. He will see that some of the things that he is campaigning for are actually going to happen.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Everyone supports seven-day-a-week, 24-hour NHS care—who would not? But the bottom line is that there are insufficient resources and insufficient people at the moment for it to be possible to deliver those services. For the Secretary of State to try to blame the health unions for that is not fair, and there are people behind that. The tone of the statement that the Secretary of State made this morning at the King's Fund has already caused alarm among GPs, and Maureen Baker, chair of the Royal College of General Practitioners, said that this announcement

“will sound...alarm bells for hardworking GPs who fear we will be next in line—even though we are already being pushed to our limits in trying to provide a safe five-day”

a week

“service for our patients.”

Mr Hunt: I do not blame doctors; I do not blame the unions. I blame Ministers from the hon. Lady's Government who gave consultants an opt-out at weekends that has had a catastrophic impact on patient care. I am delighted that she supports seven-day care, but it was not in the Labour manifesto; it was in the Conservative manifesto, and we are putting in extra money—£5.5 billion more than Labour was promising—to ensure that we can pay for it.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): I welcome the changes that my right hon. Friend has announced today in turning the NHS into a learning organisation rather than a denial machine. Does he agree that there should be a best practice industry standard for healthcare in this country, which learns and compares itself with other countries' healthcare systems, such as Germany, France and Canada?

Mr Hunt: That is a very interesting idea, and I am happy to take it away. I am a strong believer in learning from best practice all over the world. Sometimes it is difficult to gather the data, but it is an interesting idea.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State might be in aware that in Huddersfield we are having great difficulty in attracting and recruiting A&E specialists, nurses and GPs. He will know that I am more an education specialist than a health specialist, but given that this is an NHS reform statement, is it not time that we had a serious, fundamental look at how we educate and train everyone in our health service—doctors, nurses, technicians, the whole lot? At the moment it seems more appropriate to sometime in the 20th century than to looking forward in the 21st.

Mr Hunt: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. As part of what I said in my statement, we are looking at how we train doctors. My hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans) talked about creating a learning culture, and the big change that we need to make is creating a culture in which people feel supported to speak out about any concerns or anything on which they think they can see a way of doing something better. They must not feel that that could threaten their career prospects. We do not have that culture in the NHS at the moment, but we need it if the NHS is to be the world's largest learning organisation, as I argued in a speech this morning. I think staff are up for it, but it is a big change.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend very much for his extraordinarily embracing response to the Public Administration Select Committee report on clinical incident investigation. We started less than a year ago with the germ of an idea, and it has turned into what amounts to a radical reform of safety investigation in the health service. That is a tribute to him and to the Committee's witnesses, but it is a tribute to the health service itself that it has embraced the idea, which is a big change that I believe will be transformative.

May I pick up on the Secretary of State's reluctance to provide special legislation for the immunity of those giving evidence to the new patient investigation body? Will he keep an open mind on the subject? If he wants that body to be truly independent and to have a special status, he should remember that the marine accident investigation branch and the air accidents investigation branch have specific legislation to provide for such immunity. Public interest disclosure protection must not be challenged by freedom of information requests, given that freedom of information has been extended into areas where we never imagined it would go. We have to be specific in legislation that that cannot happen in this instance.

Mr Speaker: Too long—I hope the answer will be somewhat briefer.

Mr Hunt: It will, Mr Speaker.

My hon. Friend's idea is really interesting, and I am happy to take it up and explore whether we need to replicate that immunity so that we can get to the truth more quickly in a no-blame context.

I thank my hon. Friend for the work of the Public Administration Select Committee. I think it is true to say that we would not have the new patient safety investigation service, modelled on the air accidents investigation branch, which has worked so well in the

airline industry, if it had not been for the work of PASC. It brought the idea to my attention and it was a good idea, and I know that he will help me make sure that it is a success in practice as well.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I support the comments of my neighbours, the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale West (Mr Brady) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane). Three years ago the new health deal for Trafford resulted in the reduction of overnight and weekend services at Trafford General hospital on the basis that patients would receive better specialist care at Wythenshawe hospital. Does the Secretary of State understand that local people feel that the process has been chaotic, opaque and unresponsive to their concerns, and will he undertake to review the decision as a matter of urgency?

Mr Hunt: I thank the hon. Lady for the responsible approach that she took to the changes at Trafford general. Of course, I will listen to her concerns carefully, alongside those of her colleagues, and take them up with the NHS. Perhaps if she comes to the meeting that I am organising for her colleagues, that will provide an opportunity for me to do that.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I welcome a huge amount of the statement, particularly about the balance between transparency and more autonomy and the combination of scrutiny and support. Does the Secretary of State agree that not only hospitals and GPs but community and social care services need to be 24/7?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend speaks with great knowledge about health matters, because of her previous job. [HON. MEMBERS: "McKinsey."] Yes, McKinsey, which does some important work for the NHS. She is absolutely right that we need to be able to discharge into the community on all seven days, and it is important that the primary care and social care systems are part of that change.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): When does the Secretary of State intend to implement the recommendation of the Royal College of Pathologists and introduce the role of medical examiner, to provide independent scrutiny of deaths? That has been repeatedly delayed, despite the success of five pilot schemes and the fact that it was recommended in the Francis report.

Mr Hunt: That is an important recommendation, and the Government support it. We intend to implement it, but there are costs involved, which we are going through as part of the spending review process.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Local people in Corby and east Northamptonshire want to see a truly seven-day NHS. One way of achieving that in our area is to get moving on the new urgent care centre at Kettering, which has attracted cross-party support. Some Members could learn valuable lessons from that project and from what has been going on in Northamptonshire. I thank Ministers for all that they have done in the past to help get that project moving. Will the Secretary of State do everything he can to help it come to fruition in the months ahead?

Mr Hunt: It sounds a promising project, and I will keep myself closely informed of its progress. We need to better integrate urgent care centres into the work of GPs and hospitals so that, for example, somebody's GP medical record can be accessed in those centres and any advice that people get there can be seen by their hospital consultant or GP at a later date.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I must first declare an interest as a state-registered health clinician who worked in acute medicine until the election.

I have witnessed pilots of seven-day working, on the ground and across the country, that have just taken five-days-a-week services and stretched the same complement of staff to seven days a week, therefore not making the service any more efficient or safe. With £22 billion of efficiency savings, or cuts, how will we fund seven-day working?

Mr Hunt: A lot of the efficiency will come from seven-day working, and I do not agree with the hon. Lady that there will be a simple cost increase. The cost to a hospital of cranking down all its services on a Friday afternoon and then having to crank them up on a Monday morning is huge, and it is not efficient. Part of the savings will come from having more streamlined services that operate to a consistently high standard across the week.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Many of my constituents complain about the lack of availability of GP appointments at weekends and outside normal hours. The consequence of that is that people who are ill turn up at A&E, causing pressure on it. I know that my right hon. Friend is taking action on that, but what is he doing to ensure that we have proper seven-days-a-week working across the NHS in primary care as well as in hospitals?

Mr Hunt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to the fact that our manifesto commitment was to a true seven-day service across hospitals and general practice. That is why, a few weeks ago, we announced in our new deal for general practice plans to recruit 5,000 GPs so that we can increase capacity and make sure that people can get routine appointments in the evenings and at weekends.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome the NHS Pay Review Body's report on seven-day services. There is a compelling case for such services, but contractual barriers to reform need to be addressed. Today's statement refers to England and Wales, and the Northern Ireland Assembly has devolved responsibility for health. Will the Secretary of State consider having contact with the other UK regions, to assist them in engaging with national bodies based here on the mainland on how this important matter can be taken forward?

Mr Hunt: I am very happy to do that. We can learn a lot from each other across the UK about how things are implemented. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his interest in English health matters, because there is always a good read-across.

BBC Charter Review

12.39 pm

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement. I have today laid before Parliament a BBC charter review consultation paper, copies of which are being deposited in the Libraries.

The British Broadcasting Corporation is cherished and admired, not only in this country but around the world. At its best, the BBC sets international standards of quality. Even in a multimedia age, its most popular programmes continue to draw the country together in a shared experience, as happened with the London Olympics and world-beating dramas such as "Sherlock" and "Doctor Who". The BBC reaches 97% of the UK population every week. It has a pivotal role in helping the United Kingdom to reach every corner of the globe, as reflected in the recent report that found that the UK leads the world in terms of soft power.

The BBC is almost 100 years old. There have been many changes in that time, but the scale of change in the media sector over the last decade has been unprecedented. People are consuming a vast array of content from multiple sources, using technology that either did not exist or was in its infancy 10 years ago. Ten years ago, when a Government last conducted a charter review, millions of households still received just five television channels. Much of the social media that is now ubiquitous was, at the very most, at an embryonic stage. And few people owned the sort of devices that colleagues use daily, including in the Chamber.

One of the few things that is certain about the media landscape of the future is that we cannot be sure how it will look, not least because we cannot predict how much will stay the same. Predictions about the demise of television have proven premature, undoubtedly in part because technology has evolved but also because many people still enjoy sitting down to watch television in their living room. Radio also retains an important place in people's daily lives.

The current BBC royal charter will expire at the end of 2016. This paper launches the Government's consultation, which will inform a number of decisions that we need to take about the future of the BBC. The BBC Trust will play an integral role in this process, running a series of public seminars and events.

Fundamentally, we need to consider four questions. What is the overall purpose of the BBC? What services and content should the BBC provide? How should the BBC be funded? How should the BBC be governed and regulated? The BBC has six public purposes, set out at the last charter review. They are sustaining citizenship and civil society; promoting education and learning; stimulating creativity and cultural excellence; representing the UK, its nations, regions and communities; bringing the UK to the world and the world to the UK; and delivering to the public the benefit of emerging communications. We need to ask whether these purposes are still relevant and right.

One key task is to assess whether the idea of "universality" still holds water. With so much more choice in what to consume and how to consume it, we must at least question whether the BBC should try to be all things to all people—to serve everyone across every

[Mr John Whittingdale]

platform—or if it should have a more precisely targeted mission. Along with considering the mission and purpose of the BBC, we will consider whether the charter should also define its values, and what those values should be.

The public purposes set the framework for what the BBC should be seeking to achieve, and the charter and supporting framework agreement articulate what activities it should undertake to accomplish this. The upcoming charter review will look at whether the scale and scope of the BBC is right for the current and future media environment and delivers what audiences are willing to pay for.

Twenty years ago the BBC had two television channels, five national radio stations and a local radio presence. It is now the largest public service broadcaster in the world, with nine television channels, five UK-wide radio stations, six radio stations that reach one of the home nations, 40 local radio stations, and a huge online presence. The charter review will look at whether that particular range of services best serves licence fee payers. It will also assess what impact the BBC has on the commercial sector. There is evidence that the BBC helps to drive up standards and boosts investment, but also concern that public funding should not undermine commercial business models for TV, radio and online.

The BBC is highly used and valued by the majority of people in this country. But variations exist, and there are particular challenges in reaching people from certain ethnic minority backgrounds and in meeting the needs of younger people, who increasingly access content online. Variations exist among the different nations and regions too. These are issues that we will need to take into account throughout the process of the charter review.

The BBC's global reputation is second to none and the BBC has a central role in determining how the UK is perceived internationally. Each week, BBC services reach more than 300 million people across the world, and the director-general has set a target of 500 million.

The charter review also gives us an opportunity to look at the content the BBC provides, both in terms of the mixture of that content and its quality. We will analyse the way that the BBC's content is produced. It is essentially shaped by two main elements—the broader regulatory framework including the terms of trade, which set out how the BBC and other broadcasters work with independent producers, and the BBC's quota systems. The BBC executive has already made some radical proposals that would remove quotas and turn the BBC's production arm into a commercial subsidiary. Those and other reform options will all need to be considered as part of the charter review. We will also look at BBC Worldwide, which contributes a substantial amount of additional income to the BBC.

I turn now to the issue of BBC funding, a subject on which I know there are strongly held views. The licence fee has proven to be a very resilient income stream for the BBC, bringing in £3.7 billion last year, but it is not without its challenges. There is no easy solution to the broad question of how the BBC should be funded. The licence fee is levied at a flat rate, meaning that it is regressive. A subscription model could well be an option

in the longer term, but cannot work in the short term because the technology is not yet in every home to control access.

Therefore, the three options for change that are viable in the shorter term are a reformed licence fee, a household levy, or a hybrid funding model. In the longer term, we should consider whether there is a case for moving to a full subscription model. All have advantages and disadvantages.

There are a number of other funding issues that the charter review will cover. I have already announced to the House that the BBC, rather than taxpayers, will meet the cost of free TV licences for over-75-year-olds. That will be phased in from 2018-19, with the BBC taking on the full costs from 2020-21. We also anticipate that the licence fee will rise in line with the consumer prices index over the next charter review period, but that is dependent on the BBC keeping pace with efficiency savings elsewhere in the public sector and it is also subject to whatever conclusions are drawn from the charter review about the BBC's scope and purpose.

I am grateful to David Perry QC, who has conducted an independent review of the sanctions appropriate for non-payment of the licence fee. The "TV Licence Fee Enforcement Review", which is being published today, has concluded that decriminalisation would not be appropriate under the current funding model. The Government will now consider the case for decriminalisation as part of the charter review. I am today laying the "TV Licence Fee Enforcement Review" before Parliament and placing copies in the Libraries.

More people—especially younger people—now access catch-up television exclusively online and without a licence. That is perfectly legal, as the existing legislation was drawn up when the iPlayer did not even exist. The Government have committed to updating the legislation. We will also analyse the merits of a contestable public service funding pot that would not just be limited to the BBC. And we will look again at what areas and activities should have their funding protected in future. Broadband roll-out, digital switchover, local television, the World Service and the Welsh language channel S4C were protected in the last charter period. As I announced the other day, the broadband ring-fence is to be phased out by 2020-21, and S4C will be expected to find similar savings to those in the BBC.

Finally, there is the question of how the BBC is governed and regulated. Any organisation as large as the BBC needs effective governance and regulation. There have been occasions when the BBC has fallen well short of the standards that we expect of it. Editorial failures in the light of the Jimmy Savile revelations, the aborted digital media initiative, and the level of salaries and severance payments are among the issues that have caused disquiet. A lack of clarity in the BBC's governance structures has contributed to those failures.

The last charter brought in a new regulatory model, creating the BBC Trust, which exists to represent licence fee payers and hold the BBC to account. That structure has been widely criticised, and the chair of the BBC Trust has herself called for reform. There are three broad options: reforming the trust model, creating a unitary board and a new stand-alone oversight body, or moving external regulation wholesale to Ofcom. As with funding options, each of those has pros and cons.

While the BBC's editorial independence must not be compromised, that does not mean that we are not entitled to ask whether the BBC could be more transparent and to scrutinise how the BBC relates to the public, Parliament and Government. Any public body should be fully accountable to the public. People should be able to give voice to how well they think the BBC spends public money—some £30 billion over the current charter period—and how well it meets its myriad other responsibilities.

The British Broadcasting Corporation is part of the fabric of this country and a source of great pride. We want it to thrive in the years to come. This consultation paper sets out the framework for what I hope will be a wide-ranging and informative national debate about the future of the BBC. I commend this statement to the House.

12.50 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for foresight of his statement, which he very honourably gave us one full hour before he stood up. That is right. It is not what some other Ministers have done in recent years, so I am grateful to him.

The BBC is our cultural NHS. It is a beacon of accuracy and impartiality around the world. It is not just part of the national furniture; it is our greatest cultural institution. It is a miracle of constitutional engineering: independent of Government, yet funded by the public. It is the cornerstone of our creative industries, earning respect and money for Britain and British values. As the Secretary of State said, it drives up standards and boosts investment. The public love it and want it to inform, educate and entertain—and yes, that includes making “Strictly”, “Top Gear”, “The Voice”, “The Great British Bake Off” and big British sporting events on BBC Sport.

That is why the Government's attitude to the BBC rather mystifies me. The Secretary of State says that we should consider the matter of universality—the universality of the BBC. But surely the golden thread that runs through the concept of the BBC is that we all pay in and we should all get something out, including my constituents as well as his—those who like opera and those who like soap opera. He seems to accept that the licence fee should remain in place for the full period of the next charter. That is what I understood him to say. Can he confirm that clearly now? When will he close the iPlayer loophole, which he referred to last week, and what legislative method will he use?

Referring to the promised £145.50 plus CPI interest rate increase in the licence fee, the chair of the BBC Trust said:

“The word of a chancellor and a secretary of state you should be able to trust”,

but the Secretary of State seems to cast doubt today on that deal. So what is it, deal or no deal? Will it be £145.50 plus CPI interest rate or not? [Laughter.] I am glad the Secretary of State liked that one.

The Secretary of State says that the funding of S4C was protected in the previous charter period. That is not the view of anybody in Wales. It was not. It has actually been cut by one third since 2010, and he has just suggested that the further 20% cut to the BBC will mean a similar shrinkage to S4C. The proposal is barely mentioned in the Green Paper, so I presume that he is

not really looking at it with any seriousness. Will he consult the Welsh Government and the Welsh people on the future of S4C and make sure that its future is as guaranteed as that of the BBC?

The Green Paper asks whether the BBC should still broadcast Radio 1 and Radio 2. Where is the audience demand for that? Are people shouting: “What do we not want?”, “We don't want Radio 2”, and “When do we not want it?”, “Now”? Of course they are not. Radio 1 and Radio 2 are the most popular radio stations in Europe. Why on earth is the Secretary of State even considering closing them down?

The Secretary of State says the review will look at the “scale”—his words—of the BBC, a point repeated on page 4 of the Green Paper. Will he confirm that this is in direct contradiction of the recent negotiations with the BBC, when he said he would look not at the scale of the BBC, only at the purposes of the BBC? Is his real aim a smaller BBC? [Interruption.] I see the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy nodding his head that it is his aim. I ask, because many will be worried that this is just what *The Daily Telegraph* predicted on 12 May, when it reported, “Tories go to war with the BBC”, because the Prime Minister was infuriated with its election coverage. Would it not be profoundly unpatriotic to seek to diminish the BBC and thereby diminish Britain? Has any Member ever met a foreigner who has said, “You know what? I love Britain, I just hate the BBC”?

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I have.

Chris Bryant: You go on the wrong holidays! [Interruption.] Yes, probably in Russia—or Italy under Berlusconi.

There are some things that we can agree on. The BBC always needs reform. The trust is bust. These three weeks prove it. Either the chair lip-syncs the director-general or, frankly, she undermines him. Whatever the new structure, and I favour a unitary executive board with the primary regulatory role being met by a board of Ofcom, the next charter must ensure that the Chancellor's backroom, gun-to-the-head way of doing Government business with the BBC can never be repeated. The BBC is not a Government plaything, nor should it be a branch of the Department for Work and Pensions. It belongs to licence fee payers, and the public should have a say in its future, as the Secretary of State himself wrote earlier this year. Will he make sure that that is the case in future?

This process has been utterly shabby from the outset. Since the Secretary of State stood at the Dispatch Box last week, he and his Department have breached the ministerial code: they gave the precise details of his plans to *The Sunday Times* last weekend; they issued a press release on Sunday morning laying out the membership of a new panel, which he has not even bothered to mention today; and they leaked the substance of and direct quotations from the Perry report to the *Daily Mail* yesterday. That means he has not just let you down, Mr Speaker, he has not just let the House down, but frankly he has let himself down. I would be angry, but I am just disappointed. Who briefed *The Sunday Times* and the *Daily Mail*? Was it a special adviser or a civil servant? Did the Secretary of State authorise the briefings? If not, has the relevant person been dismissed?

[Chris Bryant]

That brings me to the panel the Secretary of State has set up. They may all be talented and clever, but what process did he use to select the membership? It certainly was not the Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies. Did he just get out his Rolodex and invite along all the people he had dinner with sometime last year? Most of the panel members have a direct financial interest and a conflict of interest with the BBC. The panel is to look at the BBC as a news provider and consider whether it should provide Radio 1 and Radio 2, yet three panel members run internet companies, another was managing director of a radio station, one runs the Arts Council and is, therefore, effectively a Government employee, and another runs a newspaper group. All of them are in direct competition with the BBC. How can they possibly be independent? Like Blofeld in “You Only Live Twice”, the Secretary of State has lined up a tank of piranhas, but he has not quite reckoned with the ingenuity of M and Bond in the shape of Judi Dench and Daniel Craig, who lined up to attack him yesterday.

On BBC Worldwide, which the Secretary of State referred to in his statement, is he considering selling it off? On decriminalisation of non-payment of the licence fee, the *Daily Mail* said yesterday that the Perry report declares that it is “crystal clear” that the system should remain as it is. Is that an accurate quotation? The Secretary of State was very opaque on his plans, but will he follow the advice of the Perry report or not?

The whole point of the BBC is that politicians should meddle with it only on very rare occasions. Yes, it is accountable to the public through Parliament and, yes, the charter renewal process gives Ministers a moment of great power over the corporation. But I urge the Secretary of State to curb his self-confessed inner free-market zealotry. With power comes responsibility. I will stand with him if he genuinely wants to strengthen the BBC, but, where he acts to undermine it or diminish it, I and Opposition Members will oppose him every step of the way.

Mr Whittingdale: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his recognition of our wish to co-operate with him by supplying the statement in advance. It is my intention that his party should have the opportunity to play a full role in what I hope is, as I said, a debate about the future of the BBC. I agree with many of his opening remarks about the importance of the BBC; indeed, they very much reflect my own. I share his admiration for many of the programmes that he mentioned. Even if I wanted to close down “Strictly Come Dancing”, which I do not, it would be completely wrong for the Government to decide which programmes the BBC should and should not make. It is, however, perfectly legitimate to ask that BBC programmes be distinct—that is part of the BBC’s overriding purpose and an aspect that we will consider—but the charter review is not about specific programmes, however much certain newspaper writers would like to think it is.

On the hon. Gentleman’s specific questions, we have made it clear that the licence fee is frozen under the terms of the current charter. During the future charter period, it will not be possible to move towards a subscription model, or something like that, in the short term because

the technology is not there, but we will consider whether in the coming charter we should examine how it might become an option in the future; but that is an open question. The other issue he raised, which is a more immediate challenge, was the iPlayer loophole. It is our intention to try to close that in the next year, and we will introduce legislative proposals to do so.

On the agreement with the BBC over the future rise in the licence fee, the words I used in my statement were precisely the words set out not only in my answer to the hon. Gentleman’s urgent question last week, but also in the letter sent to the director-general of the BBC. It hardly represents reneging on an agreement, when all we have done is re-quote what was in the letter.

On S4C, we have made it clear that we will consult the Welsh Government—and indeed the Scottish and Northern Irish Governments—during the charter review, although the question of funding for S4C is a distinct matter that will obviously be considered during the spending review and other things. Having said that, we will, as part of the charter review, be considering the BBC’s involvement in supporting and funding S4C.

On Radio 1 and 2, which the hon. Gentleman got very excited about, I certainly think there is a strong role for BBC Radio in providing a different type of genre and opportunity, including for unsigned bands, which would not have the same opportunity in the commercial sector. Radio 1 plays a valuable role in fulfilling that objective, and there is no proposal to close Radio 1 or 2. All these things are part of the wider debate about the BBC’s place in the broadcasting landscape, and however much people might wish the statement to contain details of exactly what the Government wish to do, it does not; it is part of a debate, and that applies as well to the question of scale and scope.

The hon. Gentleman asked if I was considering scope. We are considering it; it would be extraordinary not to, given the amazing change that has taken place and the proliferation of choice over the past 10 years. The question of whether the BBC still needs to do everything it set out to do 10 years ago seems to me to be a legitimate question. I am grateful, however, for his support on the reform of governance arrangements. I am interested that he has reached a conclusion, even if we are still open-minded about it, but I look forward to his giving greater details during the charter review.

The hon. Gentleman was very critical about the funding arrangements that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and I agreed with the BBC, but I would draw his attention to the remarks of his colleague, the shadow Chancellor, who said:

“All public institutions including the BBC I think have to do their part. We have always said that sensible savings at this time are really important and I don’t think the BBC can be excluded from that.”

As for the hon. Gentleman’s claimed breaches of the ministerial code, I have to say that I am not responsible for what appears in *The Sunday Times*, the *Daily Mail* or any of the other newspapers, some of whose accounts of what is in the charter review process appear to be entrants for the Booker prize for fiction. On the advisory panel, I merely say that it is not a public body, but a group of individuals, each of whom has considerable experience and knowledge in their particular fields, and they are there to provide advice, nothing more.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman said that the BBC was very precious and that we should only meddle with it on rare occasions. I think that a charter review that comes around once every 10 years probably meets the definition of a rare occasion, and it is entirely appropriate, given that the charter expires at the end of next year, that we take this opportunity to have the very full debate I have set out today.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Is it not now time for us to have a BBC England, to match BBC Scotland, and is it not the case that many people in England deeply resent the way in which their country is being balkanised and broken up under some kind of EU plan and that they do not want their much-loved broadcaster assisting the EU in doing that?

Mr Whittingdale: On my right hon. Friend's first point, the BBC has a duty to serve the nations and regions, and while there is a specific BBC executive responsible for England, nevertheless, as I suspect might become apparent during the debate, there is a strong feeling that the BBC needs to do more to serve particular regions. On the BBC's role in any discussions on our EU membership, as he is aware, the BBC is under a duty to maintain objectivity and impartiality, which I hope it will bear in mind, particularly during what I suspect will be quite a controversial debate.

John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for bringing his Green Paper before the House and for the opportunity to read it in advance.

There have been lurid headlines anticipating what the right hon. Gentleman might say, presumably because of the lurid comments made by so many of his BBC-phobic colleagues on the Tory Back Benches. In the event, however, the Green Paper asks a lot of the right questions, including: how to anticipate viewers' changing needs in the light of new technology; how best to provide for the nations and regions, as well as for minorities and young people; why many management figures in the BBC are so horrendously overpaid—an excellent question; and, crucially, how to fund the BBC going forward.

It is the SNP's belief that responsibility for broadcasting in Scotland should transfer from Westminster to Holyrood. Scotland collects £320 million of licence fee revenue annually, but the BBC is only given £175 million to spend in Scotland every year, which is manifestly unfair. I want to ask the Secretary of State two questions. Why was the Scottish Government not consulted and asked for their views in advance of the Green Paper, given Lord Smith's recommendations? Secondly, on funding, he has presumably anticipated the effect a new funding model would have on the licence fee per household. It is currently £145.50. What would its upper cap be, per household, under any new system?

Mr Whittingdale: The hon. Gentleman brings a particular knowledge and experience, as a former employee of the BBC, although I am sure he was not one of those within the corporation whom he recognised as possibly being overpaid. He raised two specific questions. On the involvement of the Scottish Government, the Smith commission agreement set out that there should be full consultation, and we are committed to that. I wrote to the Scottish Government about the terms of reference

for the charter review, and I intend to remain in touch with them during the debate over the next three months. We are obviously interested to hear their views.

On the transfer of responsibility for the BBC to Holyrood, I point out that it is the British Broadcasting Corporation and that Scotland, although he might not wish it, remains part of Britain, so I fear I might disappoint him on that.

Lastly, the future of the licence fee will be considered during the charter review, and the hon. Gentleman can obviously make representations on that point, along with any other matters.

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): The Secretary of State set out the concerns about the governance of the BBC and mentioned three options for reform. Is it his expectation that the BBC Trust, as we know it today, will go as a consequence of the charter renewal and that there will be a new model for governing the BBC?

Mr Whittingdale: It is fairly clear that the BBC Trust does not work in its present form. The shadow Secretary of State used stronger language than I did in saying that it is "bust", but it is widely accepted that it is not working properly. What should replace it is an important issue that we shall consider in the course of the charter review. The need for change is clear.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's statement and the Green Paper which, on the face of it, certainly looks more balanced than I had feared and more balanced, I expect, than the Murdoch press had hoped. Will the Secretary of State reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and his own critics in the other place—senior Conservative politicians—on the make-up of the advisory panel, which seems very skewed with people who have been hostile to the BBC? Also, how are the public, who are after all the BBC's stakeholders, going to be let in to this conversation?

Mr Whittingdale: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his opening remarks. The advisory panel is, as I said, an advisory body, and it does not play a formal role. As for its composition, let me point out that it includes, among others, the current president of the Voice of the Listener and Viewer, who is also the former chairman of Ofcom, and a former member of the BBC executive board. These are people who bring considerable knowledge and expertise. I think all fair commentators would recognise that they are well qualified to express views—but that is all they will be doing: expressing views. The responsibility for charter review remains with the Government. As for the involvement of the public, which the right hon. Gentleman raised and which is equally important, it is the intention of the BBC Trust to hold a number of public meetings. We hope that the trust will work to ensure that the public have every opportunity to have an input to the charter review process.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): It was a pleasure to meet Professor Brian Cox, who was in Parliament yesterday to open the parliamentary education centre. Does the Secretary of State agree that his programmes, such as "Wonders of the Universe" and "Stargazing Live", represent the BBC at its best because such programmes not only educate and inform, but entertain?

Mr Whittingdale: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I was sorry to miss the opening of the education unit; it was fantastic that Professor Cox was able to come. On the specific point, I share my hon. Friend's admiration for those programmes. They help to fulfil the BBC's purpose of educating, but as he has recognised, education is achieved much more easily if it can be entertaining at the same time. Brian Cox achieves both of those purposes.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): After last week's raid on the BBC, I want briefly to quote from February's Select Committee report "Future of the BBC". The Committee recommended

"that the Government seek cross-party support for establishing an independent review panel now on the 2017 Charter, along the same lines as the previous Burns' model, led by a figure similar to Lord Burns... We expect sufficient time to be allocated for this and for the development of, and consultation on, Green and White Papers",

yet we now have a rather different unilaterally announced panel, and a Green Paper issued, unlike with the last charter review, before any outside input or consultation at all. Will the Secretary of State explain why, for the second time in a week, he has so radically departed from what he so strongly recommended while Chair of the Select Committee fewer than five months ago?

Mr Whittingdale: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the time available before the expiry of the charter is now quite limited. We want to achieve a debate, and in time to reach firm views for renewal, but it would be difficult to set up an independent advisory panel within the current time period. That is why we decided not to go down that road, although I stand by what is in the Select Committee report—that there is an argument for doing so. The advisory panel is not an independent panel; it is simply an advisory group to provide advice. What is much more important, as the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) suggested, is for the public to have a full opportunity to get involved so that we get as wide a cross-section of views as possible, and we have put arrangements in place to ensure that.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated on the launch of this extensive consultation process and the information laid before us today. It seems that there is little off limits. However, I and many of my Solihull constituents will be slightly disappointed that there are many mentions within the document of the Scots, Irish and Welsh, but little mention of the unequal position for the English regions, particularly the west midlands. For every licence fee bought in my region, we receive back only £14.50 in investment. Will my right hon. Friend assure us that he will press top-heavy BBC management to correct this unfair situation?

Mr Whittingdale: I am aware of the widely held view that the BBC needs to do more to serve individual regions. In the case of my hon. Friend's region, I know there was a recent debate on the topic in Westminster Hall, in which he participated. It is indeed wholly appropriate to consider this issue in the course of charter review, and I hope my hon. Friend will continue to make his points while that happens.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): No one on the obscurely appointed panel is from Wales. The Secretary of State has just said that he will consult the Welsh Assembly

Government on the charter review and that the funding is to be decided separately. He is anticipating a further 20% cut to S4C on top of the 32% already implemented since 2010. In view of all that, what guarantee can he give, or what structure would he like to see put in place to ensure, that S4C will have some funding for the future? Otherwise, it will simply be unable to plan ahead.

Mr Whittingdale: The funding by the Government of S4C, along with all the other elements of Government expenditure, will obviously be considered at the time of the spending review. There is a commitment for the next couple of years. I am aware of the concerns of S4C, and I briefly spoke to its chairman last night. I hope to have another opportunity to discuss this and other matters with him and his colleagues in the near future.

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): There is a great deal that I, too, welcome in this document. Does the Secretary of State agree that it would be a mistake if this became a debate solely—important though this is—about value for money, particularly as between the different services that the BBC provides? I specifically mention local radio, and there is a figure in the document that could be construed as meaning that BBC local radio is the most expensive of the BBC's radio services. As someone who spent 20 years in it, I can say that it is a very efficient service. In my area, BBC Radio Devon is certainly greatly prized.

Mr Whittingdale: I completely agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of BBC local radio. It seems to me that it serves a very valuable purpose, which is not served by the commercial sector at all. As for the cost, I am not sure about BBC Devon, but my visits to BBC Essex certainly gave me the impression that it has not been blessed with huge amounts of cash in recent times.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to consult the Northern Ireland Executive on the charter review. However, let me say on behalf of many of my constituents that there will be deep disappointment that there is not going to be an early move on the issue of decriminalisation and sanctions for non-payment of the licence fee. I think that is a big mistake. Will the Secretary of State assure me that this will happen as soon as possible? It is also our view that we should move as quickly as possible to the subscription model for the BBC and get rid of the regressive, unfair current funding arrangements.

Mr Whittingdale: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, and I can give him the assurance that the Northern Ireland Executive will be involved in the same way as other Governments in the home nations. As for decriminalisation, Mr David Perry has produced an extremely thorough analysis. As I have only just placed it in the Library, I can quite understand that the right hon. Gentleman will not have had a chance to look at it, but it raises a number of quite serious problems with decriminalisation that would need to be addressed if we went down that road. The Select Committee report also identified problems, but the Perry report goes further in pointing out other practical problems that would need to be solved. I encourage the right hon. Gentleman to go away and look at that. The issue will be considered as part of the charter review, along with the future of the licence fee, which, as he has observed, has some disadvantages.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I used to be a presenter for BBC World Service Television, so I am not one of the BBC-phobic MPs on the Conservative Back Benches, but I understand the need for reform. Independent production in this country is a particularly vibrant and healthy sector. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that during the review he will examine the relationship between the BBC and the independent sector in order to ensure that it becomes less bureaucratic than it is at present, and takes full advantage of that vibrancy and health?

Mr Whittingdale: The growth of the independent production sector has been one of the outstanding successes of the last 10 years or so. It has been assisted in large part by the BBC's independent production quota, and also by the terms of trade. Obviously there have been big changes, and we will need to examine those. As my hon. Friend knows, the BBC itself has come up with a proposal for 100% competition for all BBC commissioning. It is an interesting proposal, but my hon. Friend can rest assured that I shall bear in mind the continuing success of the independent production sector throughout this process.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): In his statement, the Secretary of State did not make a single reference to the BBC's staff. I find that surprising, given the concerns that he expressed in his previous role. The staff are now extremely anxious about their future because of the resettlement fee, and this will not reassure them. Will the Secretary of State tell us how he will ensure that they are involved more thoroughly in the consultation process?

Mr Whittingdale: I think that members of the BBC Trust will have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said. I certainly think that members of the BBC staff, and, indeed, former members—a number of whom appear to be in the Chamber this afternoon—will have views that they will wish to contribute. I am anxious to hear from existing employees, and I hope that the a look at the Green Paper may reassure them a little, because its content is some distance away from what some reports suggested it would contain.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): As a journalist, I had the pleasure of covering a huge amount of the BBC's programme output, and, subsequently, the launch of the iPlayer. I thought that those were excellent services, but I also endured the launching of an endless stream of apps that seemed to have very little public value. The problem was that there was very little focus on the precise purpose of any specific product. Does my right hon. Friend agree that when it comes to services such as football on the BBC—which would serve very well on commercial channels—versus, for instance, a feature section on the website, we should be a lot clearer about what the BBC is actually for?

Mr Whittingdale: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. In its online activities, the BBC is operating in a highly competitive space where there are a large number of commercial providers, which is why there has been concern about its impact on commercial activities. That is something that we shall need to consider, as is the exact nature of BBC content. The content currently has to accord with one of the public purposes of the BBC,

but it is fair to say that it is almost impossible to think of any programme that could not be deemed to meet at least one of those public purposes, so they may well need to be drafted more tightly.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Of major concern in Wales is the future of S4C, which has made real-terms cuts of 36% since 2010. Today the Secretary of State reiterated his view that the channel needed to make further savings. Does he not recognise that further reductions could fundamentally challenge the future of S4C and the independent production sector in Wales?

Mr Whittingdale: S4C is publicly funded, and I do not think it is possible to exempt any publicly funded body from the necessity of seeking greater efficiency savings and making a contribution to the overall objective of mending our economy. I shall certainly want to discuss the issue further with S4C—as I said earlier, I had an opportunity to talk to representatives briefly last night—but I am also discussing it with my colleagues in the Welsh Office.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): During the last Parliament, the Public Accounts Committee examined severance payments for BBC executives. We reported that our examination

“exposed a dysfunctional relationship between the BBC Executive and the BBC Trust that casts doubt on... the BBC's governance model.”

My right hon. Friend clearly believes that the model of the trust is broken. Will he go further, and do what it is obvious to me, to my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) and to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) that he should do? Will he rule out reforming the trust, and indicate that either some independent body or Ofcom must have oversight of the BBC?

Mr Whittingdale: I think it was the experience of witnessing some of the exchanges that took place between members of the Public Accounts Committee and representatives of the BBC and the trust that convinced us that the present arrangement was not working. As for ruling things out or in, I think it would be wrong for me to rule anything out before we have even begun the consultation. I must say, however, that I have considerable sympathy with what my hon. and learned Friend has said.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I welcome the Secretary of State's very clear statement of intent. Will he assure us that he will do three things during the charter review? First, will he talk to DUP Members, who represent the single largest section of the community in Northern Ireland? I think there is good evidence to suggest that the BBC in Northern Ireland has been totally biased against our community, and I feel that a good conversation with the Secretary of State about these matters would be helpful. Secondly, will he ensure that the World Service is included in the review? As he knows, we pay 73p a year in fees for that wonderful service, and I hope that it will be protected for the future.

Thirdly, will the Secretary of State look into the issue of Twitter? I understand that up to 200 people work for Twitter at the BBC. That means a wage bill of five or six million quid, at a very generous estimate.

Mr Whittingdale: Of course I shall be happy to talk to the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues. I hope that he and his party will become actively involved in the charter review process, and I look forward to discussing that with them in due course. I entirely share his admiration for the World Service. I mentioned that the United Kingdom was recently rated No. 1 in the list of the most effective proponents of soft power, and the World Service is an essential part of that. Having being involved in discussions about, for instance, what was happening in Ukraine in my previous capacity as chairman of the all-party group, I know how important the service is, and I want it to continue.

I am sorry; I have forgotten the hon. Gentleman's final point.

Ian Paisley: Twitter.

Mr Whittingdale: Oh—Twitter. I am not sure that it is for me to say how many people the BBC should employ tweeting, but if the figure that the hon. Gentleman gave is correct, it does seem an awful lot. Perhaps the BBC would like to examine that when it is seeking additional efficiency savings.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for making his important announcements to the House first, thus allaying fears that they had been leaked to the press.

During his exchanges with the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), did the Secretary of State say that we had stuck with the licence fee because it was not currently possible to change to a subscription service for technical reasons? If so, what are those technical reasons?

Mr Whittingdale: What I said was that there might be attractions in moving, in due course, towards at least an element of subscription—and that is something that we will consider during the review—but it would not be possible to introduce a subscription system at the moment, because such a system requires the ability to switch off people who do not pay the subscription, and most households do not have the technology that would enable that to happen.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): The Secretary of State is right in saying that BBC local radio is a highly valued service. Unfortunately, it does not exist in Wales. Does he think that the contestable public fund to which he referred in his statement would be available to provide such a service?

Mr Whittingdale: We have not decided whether there should be a contestable fund, but if there were, its purpose would be the promotion of public service programming by other potential providers. I think that, in theory, if someone wanted to make an approach to establish a local Welsh radio station, it would be a possible candidate, but nothing has been decided at this stage.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Reading *Hansard* this week, I realised that I was not the only Member of the House to have witnessed not only political correctness at the BBC but nepotism and, for some if not others,

inflated salaries. Given that the charter renewal will provide an opportunity to look at the funding of the BBC, does the Secretary of State expect it to act in a more commercial manner in the future?

Mr Whittingdale: The BBC gains considerable income from its commercial activities, which are carried out by BBC Worldwide. How that is done is something we will want to look at. However, one of the principal reasons that £3.7 billion of public money goes towards supporting the BBC is to support programming that is in the national interest and that has great public importance, but which would not necessarily be produced commercially.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): Mr Speaker, last night you missed the focus in the Chamber on my experience, or inexperience, of how the House operates. In preparing to come to the House, however, I watched a very good BBC production, the original version of “House of Cards”. I am not going to put about any stick this afternoon, but I watched “House of Cards” through Netflix, which costs £6.99 a month. When I watch BBC iPlayer, I do it through Now TV, which costs £5.99 a month. Even when I add those two together, it is still better value for me than the licence fee, from which I do not get any great benefit. Will the Secretary of State tell the House what discussions have taken place with organisations such as Netflix, Now TV, blinkbox, Flixster and other successful organisations—*[Interruption.]* Now TV is Sky—that are succeeding in providing a good service and a version of media that more people wish to access?

Mr Whittingdale: The hon. Gentleman rightly identifies those services, which have recently entered the market and are proving extremely successful. Some might be cheaper than the licence fee and some might be more expensive, but the one thing they have in common is that people can choose whether they want to subscribe to them, which of course they cannot do with the licence fee. I remain an admirer of the original version of “House of Cards”, which he rightly says was produced by the BBC, and of the very clever adaptation for the American market, which was done by Netflix. Both versions are examples of superb drama, and I say that not just because the author is my daughter's godfather.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Somewhat inevitably, we as politicians judge the BBC in a slightly different way from the majority of our constituents, who just want an organisation that provides them with their favourite programmes, such as “EastEnders” and “Match of the Day”, and stations such as BBC Radio 2. May I urge my right hon. Friend to take a cautious approach to some of the suggestions that have been put forward in the past week or two? We should not assume that our constituents will thank us if they end up having to pay more to watch their favourite programmes. Can he assure me and my constituents that their interests, in terms of what it costs them to watch their favourite programmes, will be given serious consideration?

Mr Whittingdale: I hear what my hon. Friend says, and I have a lot of sympathy with him. The existing cost of the BBC licence fee is substantial for many families on low incomes. What we have said is that, subject to the conditions that I set out in my statement, we anticipate

that the licence fee will rise in line with inflation from the beginning of the next charter period, but that will still represent a real-terms freeze. The BBC is quite at liberty to make the case, during the charter review, for more funding in order to provide more, but I would need a lot of convincing before going down the road of increasing the cost to families, for the reason that my hon. Friend has described.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State agree that this is an important time of change in broadcasting generally? The BBC is a national institution that dominates our country in many ways, but we also have a very intimate relationship with it. We have all grown up with it, and we know it intimately. We all have our foibles, and one of mine is that I cannot stand some of our broadcasters and would like to see them changed. I am thinking particularly of the family that seems to dominate “Question Time”. There are two great challenges for the BBC at the moment. It is British, and there is a bunch of people locally, in Britain, who would love to get in there and dismember it. We all know who they are—a mixture of Russian oligarchs, pornographers and goodness knows who else—but the real challenge is not the small people but the Googles and the global media people. They represent the real challenge, and we must protect the BBC, because it is British, and help it to stand up against that kind of globalisation.

Mr Whittingdale: I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not waiting for his invitation to go on “Any Questions”. I completely agree with him about the importance of the BBC. It is an immensely important institution, and our purpose during the charter review is to look at ways of strengthening and modernising it, precisely because of the technological developments and new services that have come about in the last 10 years. It needs to be modernised, but I certainly do not wish to destroy it or undermine it.

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): Like the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds), I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his reassurance that decriminalising non-payment of the licence fee will be considered in the context of charter renewal, although I am disappointed that it will not happen sooner. Will my right hon. Friend reassure me that he remains genuinely open-minded—notwithstanding the issues identified in the Perry report—towards the decriminalisation of non-payment of the licence fee?

Mr Whittingdale: I understand that there are strong feelings right across the House on the issue of decriminalisation. Indeed, the report produced by the Committee that I chaired during the last Parliament made it plain that the Committee also agreed with decriminalisation. Having said that, the Perry report raises some very real challenges that would need to be overcome if we were to go down that road, and we will have to take those into account during the charter renewal debate.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Many of my constituents value highly the local radio station, BBC Radio Humberside—no more so than in 2007 when large parts of Hull were flooded. The station

provided essential information to people at that time. I am concerned at the Secretary of State’s saying that local people would be able to put forward their views at public meetings, because such meetings are not often held in areas such as Hull; they tend to be held in places such as Leeds. Will there be any other opportunities for local people to feed in their real concerns about the possible changes?

Mr Whittingdale: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to point up the extremely important role that local radio plays, particularly at times of local disasters. She has given the example of what happened in Hull. I know that BBC local radio also played a part in a process that had a rather happier outcome—namely, the nomination of Hull as the city of culture. On the question of public meetings, the way in which they are organised will be a matter for the BBC Trust. The hon. Lady will see when she reads the Green Paper in detail that we have tried to give people every opportunity to contribute, including through writing in to the Department and making their views known online.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): In the past, I have asked the Secretary of State about the possibilities surrounding the BBC diversifying its streams of revenue. For example, it benefits from a huge archive. What consideration will be given, during the charter review process, to opening up that archive online and perhaps enabling people to download material for a small charge?

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend makes an important point. One of the BBC’s great assets is its extraordinary history of great programming, which still has value. I know that the BBC is looking into how it might make that available through the BBC archive online, and that is certainly something that has the potential to provide it with an additional source of revenue.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): So long as the BBC is guaranteed a source of income, whether through the licence fee or the proposed household levy, there will be no incentive for it to address its well-documented, massively wasteful expenditure or the issue of bias—whether it is left-wing bias, pro-EU bias or man-made climate change bias—which so annoys millions of people across the United Kingdom. Does the Secretary of State not agree that the only way of giving the BBC an incentive to address those issues is to give people the choice of whether they wish to pay for it or not?

Mr Whittingdale: The hon. Gentleman makes the case for moving towards a subscription model, which, as I have said, in the longer term is an option that should be considered. He will have the opportunity to make that case again in the course of charter renewal. He raised a separate issue about BBC bias. At the moment, complaints about bias are examined by the BBC Trust. Whether that is the right place and whether it should be done externally by an independent are questions that we will want to consider as part of charter renewal.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I agree with the Secretary of State that the BBC across the UK is cherished and admired, not least BBC Radio Devon. Productions that show life across the UK are a vital part of the BBC’s public purpose, but does he agree that that must be

[Kevin Foster]

linked with such content being created across the UK in order for local communities to feel properly represented by and valued by their BBC?

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend is right, in that the BBC's content should reflect all the different parts of the UK but as part of the indie quota one of the things we achieved was that commissions have been placed right across the UK. During the short time I was able to spend at a reception last night for broadcasters and producers in Wales I met several small independent production companies from Wales which have been very successful in providing programming, not just for S4C, but for the BBC and indeed other broadcasters.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Like the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley), the Secretary of State and hundreds of millions of people around the world, I greatly value the World Service, which is almost always a voice of truth and sanity. But to compete with the other international stations, both on radio and television, the World Service and World Service Television will need greater investment in the coming years. Where does my right hon. Friend think that will come from?

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. As I indicated, the role of the World Service is vital, particularly given Russia's huge investment in its propaganda outlets and China's investment in its broadcasting. The need for an impartial and respected voice of truth, which is what the World Service represents, is greater today than perhaps it has been for a long time. As he knows, the funding of the World Service was transferred to the BBC but it is nevertheless protected. Again, we will need to look at that during the charter review.

Point of Order

1.42 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In the past couple of hours there has been an announcement that more than 720 jobs may be at risk at the Tata speciality steels division in Rotherham. Obviously, that is devastating news for many hon. Members who unfortunately cannot be in the House because of constituency business. It reflects the wider challenges facing the steel industry and energy-intensive industries more generally, which I know is a matter of concern to Members on both sides of the House. We had a constructive debate with the new steel Minister in Westminster Hall this week, but this devastating news has come out since that debate. Have you received notice of any intention for a statement to be made by the steel Minister on this news, and on the steps the Government are taking to stand up for the steel industry in the UK?

Mr Speaker: The short answer is that I have received no indication of an intended Government statement on the matter. However, the hon. Gentleman will be aware of the means available to him to probe the Government on this subject before we depart for the summer recess. I do not know whether it will be possible for him to air his thoughts further today from the Back Benches—that is one option and there will be other options on Monday and Tuesday, which he does not need me to spell out for him. I am grateful to him for putting that important matter, which will be of widespread concern, on the record.

BILL PRESENTED

CRIMINAL CASES REVIEW COMMISSION (SUPPLEMENTARY POWERS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Andy McDonald, supported by Keir Starmer, Grahame Morris, John McDonnell and Andy Slaughter, presented a Bill to amend the Criminal Appeal Act 1995 to make provision about supplementary powers for the Criminal Cases Review Commission (CCRC) to secure information from public bodies; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on 11 March 2016, and to be printed (Bill 60).

Summer Adjournment

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming adjournment.—(*Guy Opperman.*)

1.44 pm

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I wish to discuss Derby City Council's decision to close the cattle market in Derby with one week's notice. There has been a cattle market in Derby since the 12th century but within one week, with no consultation with anybody, the council has decided to close it, depriving local farmers of the opportunity to bring their cattle calmly and sensibly to a market close by. Once this market has closed and been demolished—that is what the council plans to do—people will have to go to Leek, Newark or further afield. The cattle that go to this well-used market will face additional stress and longer journeys, and farmers will have much greater fuel costs. As the Deputy Leader of the House knows, farmers struggle to make a living as it is and the extra fuel costs will cause some of them to cease farming. Some people have been going to the cattle market since the more recent one opened.

The problem is that Derby City Council has spent years and years not investing—it does that with many of its buildings—so it is now trying to say, “It will cost £190,000 in lost revenue, and we cannot afford this because of Government cuts.” However, this is actually about good housekeeping in Derby. The council claims that £2 million-worth of funding will be required to bring this market and the wholesale market up to scratch, but that is because it has not bothered to look after it for many, many years. That is a failure of Derby City Council's local government strategy of downgrading everything and not spending money on proper investment and good housekeeping, but spending money on its pet projects.

I have received representations from farmers and from local people on this issue, and councillors feel very aggrieved that nothing was said before a week ago. Last night, the council voted to close the market without any more ado. The council is not only going to close it; it is going to demolish it and sell the site off for business units. I am not against business units, but we need a cattle market in the area. The problem we have with Derby City Council is that it wishes to ignore what the countryside is about, because it has only one farm within the city boundary and it does not care about farmers and what they are doing. This closure is a retrograde step, because Derby is the centre for many rural communities who come into Derby to bring their cattle. The auctioneers have been there for many years and this market is a centre of excellence—or it was until the council decided to close it. It does not have to close until next year, when the leases run out, so the council could have undertaken a better study in order to decide on its viability or whether there were alternatives and other people would be prepared to invest in it.

As I have said to the Deputy Leader of the House before, Derby City Council does not care about anybody outside its boundary. The council does not care that this is the centre for the farmers, it does not care about the welfare of the animals and it does not care about the people's livelihoods that it is affecting, because it says that this is nothing to do with Derby. The council is riding roughshod over these interests. The Government should be looking at this and saying, “You cannot just

blame it on Government cuts.” That is what the council does, but this is not down to Government cuts; it is down to very bad housekeeping. I would like this House to examine this at some point in the future to stop councils riding roughshod over the will of the people.

Derby City Council does not do the same thing with other buildings. Buildings such as Allestree hall in my constituency have been going to rack and ruin for many years because the council has not invested in it. It has a golf course attached to it and the council could sell it off; it keeps promising to sell it off but it does nothing. The trouble is that when somebody eventually buys it and develops it, they will have to spend two, three, four or perhaps 10 times as much as they would have had to spend 10 years ago. Can we examine how we can make local authorities make good housekeeping decisions about the buildings they own, now and in the future?

1.49 pm

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): My elation at being called first from the Opposition Benches is matched only by the slight annoyance that I felt yesterday when I spent six hours in here without being called. But I am delighted and really grateful to be called to speak today.

In the first of my three brief points, may I ask whether it is possible, in this day and age, for the Procedure Committee to consider having a list of speakers for a debate on the back of the Speaker's Chair, so that colleagues can have some way of managing their day sensibly? Although Members will obviously be in the Chamber well before they speak and well after they speak, they will be able to plan their days more effectively.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): That is an absolutely excellent point. In a modern Parliament, there should be no reason why we cannot have more control over who speaks and when they speak. I wish to put it on the record that I am delighted that the Deputy Speakers are not hiding the lists as well as they may have done in the past. At least we can get some information, but having a list on the back of the Speaker's Chair will be even more helpful.

Mr Allen: Indeed, that is a welcome development. Communication channels, even informal ones, should be established. We could take this a little further and ensure that this place attracts Members more seriously, rather than have them undergo this sort of endurance test before they can make a point of importance in a debate.

Going from the micro to the macro, my second point is about English devolution. Colleagues in the House—I look to some of those on the SNP Benches—will no doubt vouch for the fact that I have served my time on the Scotland Bill and I hope I made some helpful contributions. For me, that was really a warm-up for English devolution, which affects an even larger number of people in the Union than the Scotland Bill, important and essential though that is.

The Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill is in the other place at the moment. It has been scrutinised carefully on the Floor of the House, which means that everyone has been able to contribute to what is, arguably, the most important Bill that will come before this House over the next five years.

[Mr Graham Allen]

I do not wish to get sidetracked on to English votes for English laws, which is a relatively straightforward and perhaps minor procedural matter that has very little to do with the devolution of power to the localities, cities, regions and councils of England. The proposal is misnamed. It is in fact English MPs' votes for English laws, which is yet another Westminster bubble issue. Devolution is about how we all exercise power in the localities and about how electors and members of the public can see that they are in control of their politics. That is where we need to get to. I hope very much that the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill will come to this place briskly in September, that colleagues from all parts of the House will consider it and work on it, and that it goes as far as we have gone with our Scottish friends on the Scotland Bill.

What is good about devolving power to Scotland is that Scottish people can rightly take control of their own destinies and lives as much as is humanly possible within a Union and a federation of nations. I would welcome that 100%. I have sat through the proceedings on the Scotland Bill to learn all the lessons. One of the lessons for England is to do with financial devolution. We need to ensure that there is income tax assignment so that local government—whether it is based on combined authorities, regions or whatever people in England wish it to be—can go forward and people can take control.

What unites Scottish, English, Welsh and Northern Irish people and their representatives on this issue is the fact that Whitehall has had its day. It is a massive over-centralised beast that tries to control everything. Unless we put it beyond change or entrench it, which is one of the many issues that I raised in the debates on the Scotland Bill, it will inevitably get sucked back to the centre. The gravitational pull of one Government or another to control will be so strong that unless we are clear about entrenching it—and there are lots of ways to do that—we will find that the power that we would like to give will inevitably go back to the centre. That is why Labour's posture going into the 2015 election was not adequate. Suggestions of beefing up the amount of money that the centre gives to the localities and creating super local enterprise partnerships rather than genuinely devolving power to England meant that people felt that we were not differentiated from other parties, and we paid a very dear price for that.

If we are not clear about what we stand for in 2020 and beyond and if we do not have a vision, then those who do—even if it is a vision with which I do not necessarily agree—will seize our territory in England as certainly they have done in Scotland. It is a lesson for all of us. Essentially, to EVEL I wish to add DEVIL—devolved English voices in local government. Let us have more DEVIL about our debates and a little less EVEL, because then we will have all four nations of the Union being able to master their own fate—not in a way that is decided by Whitehall. We do not want Whitehall saying, “You have got to do it this way; otherwise we won't let you.” No, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland need organically to grow how they wish to devolve and exercise power. There is that most beautiful concept described by the ugly word, “subsidiarity”—doing these things at the most appropriate level. Ultimately, there must be a federal answer, which will also lead to federal

parties within the United Kingdom. That is my hope and my aim. Indeed, along with other colleagues in my party, I have written to the four leadership challengers to ask their views on that, so that we can learn the lessons and have devolution in England.

My last point is more specific, and relates to the fact that I am a Member of Parliament for the constituency that sends the fewest number of young people to university in the United Kingdom. We all have great records that we wish to boast about; this is one that I bear as a cross and think about every single working day of my life. The young people in my constituency deserve as much of a chance as anyone else, but, because of the demography, that is rather difficult to achieve. We can do stuff about that.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): On that point, the whole House knows the wonderful work that my hon. Friend has done on early intervention. Does he agree that the biggest thing that we can do to help more young people from his constituency, and other disadvantaged young people, is to concentrate on the early years and early intervention?

Mr Allen: I am trying to be brief, because I wish to retain my place in the pecking order of being called early, so I am keen not to go into a topic that is very dear to my heart. Obviously, the idea of helping every baby, child and young person grow up with social and emotional capability is the key to everything—to relationship building, getting a decent job, and avoiding drink, drug abuse and all the rest that comes with that. My hon. Friend is very generous in her comments about a matter that is dear to my heart.

When young people get to the point of thinking of going to university, particularly when that is not in the culture and tradition of their area, they need a bit of a hand. I have to say openly in this Chamber that having gone to work after school, I would not have gone to college and then to university had there not been a full grant to get me there, and many other people can say that. I am one of those who benefited from that system. Over recent years there has been a fantastic effort by people, especially headteachers, in my area, my city and my locality, Nottingham North. Although Nottingham North is way off the pace—an outlier from all the other areas—we have closed the gap massively, but still the rate of young people going to university, instead of being one in three, which is the average throughout the United Kingdom, is one in eight in my constituency.

I finish with one final point related to that, and I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for your generosity. Just last week, those who have worked night and day—the headteachers, the teachers, the parents and those young people who are in a minority in trying to get to university—received a devastating blow in the Budget, which said that low income families who get a grant to help those young people take that first step on the higher and further education ladder will no longer get it. As my area is quite a low income area, 93% of families in my constituency, according to the last figure, can get a full or partial grant.

That was ended by the Chancellor last week. I am sure it looked okay when he was going through the list of things that might save a little bit of money here and a little bit there, but it is a devastating blow to the motivation, the drive and the aspiration that the Government talk

about so much. I will raise this issue again in full if I secure an Adjournment debate. I will not take the time of the House to go through it all now, but I hope very much that, amid all the billions and billions of pounds of taxpayers' money at his disposal, the Chancellor will allow people in my constituency who, perhaps as in my case, will not be able to go to university without that small help.

It is no good replacing the grant with a loan when dealing with families who regard the current sum of £45,000 as a mountain to repay. If the figure goes up to £55,000 or £60,000, it will not be in their compass even to consider helping their young daughter or their young son go to university. I ask the Chancellor to think again, and I ask colleagues across the House to support any move that we can bring forward to restore the grant to low income families, so that people who are capable of going to university are not prevented from doing so by a lack of funding.

2.3 pm

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Before the House rises for the summer recess, there a number of issues that I wish to raise and I will rattle through them as quickly as possible, so my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House, who is making her debut responding to the debate, need not panic if she cannot get the answers to everything.

Terrorism is a great issue for each and every one of us to face. There are no easy solutions, but it is not helpful to keep calling the dreadful people who were responsible for the attacks in Tunisia a state or Islamic. Let us call them Daesh.

I am appalled that we have spent a huge amount of money on the Chilcot report and waited a huge amount of time for it to be published. The gentleman is paid £799 per day for his work on that. I want the report published as soon as possible because, as someone who voted for us getting involved in the war in Iraq, I want to know whether I was misled. *The Independent* will shortly publish an article which will highlight my concerns on that issue.

I am honoured to be the chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on the Philippines. We are celebrating 70 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries. I will be attending a conference in London later this year. It is wonderful how that country has picked itself up following the devastation caused by the tsunami.

We have heard a lot about Iran. I shall not bore the House with my views on that, but recently, with a number of colleagues, I attended a conference in Paris. Those who attended it feel increasingly frustrated that the PMOI—the People's Mojahedin of Iraq—is still, disgracefully, a proscribed organisation. That is absolutely ridiculous, and Mrs Maryam Rajavi is still not allowed to visit this country. That is crazy.

Every colleague says, "David, it's wonderful to fly from Southend airport." Some of my constituents experience challenges if their property is under the flight path of the aeroplanes. Owing to the formula for recompense for noise pollution, a constituent has found that he is unable to claim for 50% of the cost of insulation, despite the fact that his own readings show noise levels of 88 decibels or higher. That is much more than the statutory limits of 63 to 69 decibels. The legislation on that needs to be looked at.

On grammar school funding, we have four grammar schools in my constituency—Westcliff high school for boys, Westcliff high school for girls, Southend high school for boys and Southend high school for girls. The funding for grammar schools is not fair. It is done on the basis of funding per pupil, rather than per qualification, which has led to great difficulties in running our grammar schools. I hope that colleagues who have grammar schools in their constituency will make sure that we get fair funding for our schools.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): We have great grammar schools in Lincolnshire as well. Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the things the Government need to do is remove the ban imposed by the Labour Government on new grammar schools opening and on existing grammar schools supporting the opening of new capacity where it is required within their own county?

Sir David Amess: I am in complete agreement with my hon. Friend. As a boy supposedly born into poverty, grammar school gave me the opportunity to make the most of my life. It was a great shame that another party decided that we should not continue to support grammar schools.

On mental health, there are tremendous funding challenges and I am totally dissatisfied with mental health services in my area, so I am glad that the Care Quality Commission is carrying out an inspection. I hope that while CQC is doing so, the people running our services are not going to cook the books.

I was delighted that the Conservative party manifesto said that my party would do something about banning wild animals in circuses. That was wonderful news. When is it going to happen?

On public sector pay, I am sick to death of senior management being paid ridiculous salaries. I was appalled to discover, for instance, that my local hospital paid £343,000 for three people to walk around the hospital for three months asking people what was wrong with the hospital. Absolutely ridiculous! Given that my hospital originally had a £7.8 million deficit and now has a deficit of £9.8 million, it is not acceptable for money to be squandered in that way.

I have the highest regard for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. I will stand shoulder to shoulder with him in what he is trying to do about the BBC. I read the letter that was signed by a number of people who work for the BBC—absolute icons, but they have a vested interest in that they tend to be higher earners. It is right that this House makes sure that senior management in the BBC does not continue to be paid the ridiculous salaries that they currently receive.

On national health service agency staff, before I became an MP I owned an employment agency, so I am not against the amount of money that employment agencies make from placing staff, but the amount of money spent on agency staff in our hospitals is ridiculous. As someone who served on the Health Committee for 10 years, where we had many inquiries, I think it is crazy that do not now have the number of permanent staff that we need.

[*Sir David Amess*]

On 9 September Her Majesty the Queen will become the longest reigning monarch ever, which we should all celebrate. I know that she does not want a fuss, but I hope that when we return in September this House will allow half an hour or an hour for us to pay our tributes.

Southend-on-Sea will be the alternative city of culture in 2017. We have a wonderful museum. I am very keen that we should have a marina. I congratulate Southend United on being promoted to league 1. Southend deserves to become a city, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House will pass that message on.

All Members of Parliament are subject to lobbying; some good and some bad. I was delighted to be lobbied recently by Results UK, which told me that our country is by far one of the most generous donors of international aid, ensuring that valuable taxpayers' money is spent in places that truly need support. We should be proud of the money that has gone to help people in Kenya, for example.

The Optical Confederation is encouraging opticians to move outside hospitals, which can lead to tremendous savings in the work they do. I hope that colleagues will get involved in that.

I was pleased recently to meet the chief executive of Essex Community Fund. The funds are built up by philanthropic people who are unsure about whom they should donate their money to. Rather than leaving it to cats and dogs homes—there is nothing wrong with that, of course—they can leave it to Essex Community Fund, which will be delighted to receive it.

I am looking forward to attending a night shift with St Mungo's Broadway, a charity in my constituency, although I do not think that I will be sleeping overnight on the pavement. As a party for one nation—I know that is controversial, but I think we are a one nation party—we must do all we can to show our concern for those who have fallen on hard times and to help them get back on their feet.

The National Deaf Children's Society is a wonderful organisation. I have 104 deaf children living in my constituency, so I was interested to hear the organisation's ideas for allocating Ofsted inspectors who have experience of the needs of deaf children. Perhaps the Secretary of State for Education should evaluate whether that proposal should be taken forward.

I recently had the privilege of meeting Lady Cobham, the chairman of VisitEngland, which used to be called the English Tourism Council. I understand that the money for tourism in Scotland is quite good, but apparently in England we are a little short of money to spend on that organisation. It is crazy that 39% of tourists come to London but only 16% go elsewhere in the UK. We should redress that balance, including by encouraging people to visit the wonderful country of Scotland.

Many countries across Europe have invested in a universal vaccine for hepatitis B, and I wonder whether the Government should consider doing the same here.

I very much support the endeavours of the Thames Estuary Partnership, because the Thames is the jewel in the crown, given everything that happens on the river.

Roche has brought to my attention its concerns about how quickly the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence recommends medicines to be made available

on the NHS. We all know that the pharmaceutical companies complain about NICE delaying matters, but I do think that it could speed things up a little.

The final issue I want to mention is a depressing one: funerals. I am a member of the all-party group on funerals and bereavement, which has existed for over a decade. As we all know, two things that are absolutely certain in life is that we are born and that we die. They are very important events. The all-party group has undertaken an inquiry into delays between death and burial or cremation, following concerns raised by our late colleague Paul Goggins. The group hopes to publish its report shortly. On funeral poverty, the social fund provides vital support to the poorest in our communities seeking to hold a decent funeral for their loved ones. However, the cap on "other funeral expenses" from the social fund has remained at £700 since 2003, which is absolutely ridiculous, because all the costs have risen.

I end my remarks by wishing Mr Speaker, the Deputy Speakers and the officers and staff of the House a very happy summer. For my own part, at the end of this debate I shall be dressing up in armour, getting on my horse and preparing for my investiture at Windsor castle tomorrow.

2.14 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Today we have an opportunity hopefully to bring some closure on issues that have been with us over the Parliament. It was announced during business questions that the Backbench Business Committee is about to restart. I hope that Members will take the opportunity when leaving the Chamber today to go down to Dining Room A, where, because of my interest in Parkinson's, motor neurone and kidney disease, I have brought in a lobby group to talk about bladder and bowel problems, particularly continence issues. I would welcome Members going there to find out how prevalent this is in all our constituencies. Hopefully they will support my application for a Back-Bench business debate on an important issue that affects all our constituents.

Today, having waited since July 2014, I received a response from the Home Office about an application from my excellent Bridgend college. In July 2014 it applied for a tier 4 general sponsor licence to allow it to take overseas students. It was promised that the application would be dealt with by October 2014. I have since been writing letters and asking parliamentary questions, but answers have come there none, until today. Today's letter told me that I would have an update in two weeks. I do not want an update in two weeks; I want a decision.

Can we at least move things forward? We have heard a lot about the vital role that universities have played in bringing people to this place. I have an awful lot of young people in my constituency for whom further education colleges are the gateway to a change in their life and opportunities, and many people decide later in life that they want to extend their capabilities and skills. Granting the licence to Bridgend college would allow it to move into a different league of operation. I hope that the Home Office will give me a decision in two weeks, not an update.

In January 2015 I secured a Back-Bench business debate on open-cast mining—I know that you have a great interest in this, Madam Deputy Speaker, because you oversaw the Backbench Business Committee's decision

to allow the debate. We talked about the great crisis we have across the United Kingdom with orphaned open-cast mines, where private companies have ripped up the landscape, made huge profits and then disappeared, leaving sites desperate for finance—often many millions of pounds are needed to restore them. The companies make themselves bankrupt and then disappear.

In that debate I asked for a meeting with the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock), then a Minister in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. He said that he would meet me. I repeated the request in a Welsh affairs debate in March, during which I talked about the problems at the open-cast mine at Parc Slip in Cynffig hill. I finally met the Minister on 18 March and was promised that during the recess work would be undertaken by the Department to look at how we can fund the restoration of such sites. I was also told that companies making themselves bankrupt did not mean that they did not have to face up to their financial responsibilities.

When I returned to the House after the general election, I started emailing the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), who had taken over as Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise. I had meetings with her and was assured that something would move forward quickly. Then I received a note out of the blue informing me that responsibility for the matter had moved to the Department of Energy and Climate Change. I again started to ask for meetings. Today I received a promise that I will have a meeting on 3 September.

For the people of Cynffig hill, and for the people of Cefn Cribwr in the Ogmores constituency and the people of the Aberavon constituency, this issue cannot keep being dragged out. We have a mile and a half-long scar on the countryside of south Wales, with a huge open-cast mine, and the company that owns it, Celtic Energy, has walked away from its responsibilities. It is a large void with severely steep sides that fills up with water. At the moment the water level is low, but that makes it even more dangerous because children still see it as somewhere fun to go and swim. Motorcyclists still see it as somewhere fun to drive their bikes. People have even said, “Ooh, wouldn’t it be great to have a boating lake there?” I am fearful that someone will decide to take an inflatable boat into that void. It is highly dangerous—deep and steep-sided. There is a fear of one of the walls collapsing and the water cascading into my community of Cynffig Hill. The water quality is highly suspect, and we need to tackle this.

Mining was started at Parc Slip in 1985 under British Coal, and privatised under the Coal Industry Act 1994. Celtic Energy bought 13 sites in Wales, including Parc Slip. When mining finished in 2008, the Serious Fraud Office attempted to prosecute Celtic Energy, the company that had responsibility for Parc Slip. Further planning permission to continue mining had been denied, and it was time for Celtic Energy to fulfil its obligation to restore the site. At the Serious Fraud Office hearing, Mr Justice Hickinbottom described how at this time some of Celtic Energy’s directors and executives came up with a plan called “the big picture” arranging for the creation of a series of companies and parent companies in the British Virgin Islands. The ultimate owners and financial beneficiaries of these companies were the men themselves. It was arranged to sell to one of them, Oak Regeneration, the land and the attached responsibilities for restoration.

After the sale, many of the provisions for restoration that Celtic Energy had held in accounts—about £135 million—were released by the auditors. Six members involved in planning the transaction were awarded large bonuses. The sale to Oak Regeneration must have seemed strange to the auditors and non-executive members of Celtic Energy’s board. A fee of £10,000 was paid for legal advice from Stephen Davies, QC, who advised that it would not be a successful way of transferring the restoration responsibilities to another company. After another fee of £250,000 for further advice from Mr Davies, it was said that the sale would in fact be a successful way of transferring restoration responsibilities. The fund was reduced to £67 million, and Celtic Energy now claims that the money does not even exist. It says that the figures are “provisional” for liabilities on the balance sheet and do not represent any assets in any form, cash or otherwise. During the course of the Serious Fraud Office investigation, it was not clear whether the transactions were effective.

We need Government advice as to whether Celtic Energy remains responsible. One of the problems is that it claims that when it bought the land for £100 million, that gave it no responsibility for restoration. We were told that the question had been answered. The Minister told me at the meeting in March that responsibility for restoration still rested with Celtic Energy and was not removed by the bond-free period.

The people of Cynffig Hill deserve to know what is going on. The Serious Fraud Office case failed purely on a point of law; it had nothing to do with the case. Mr Justice Hickinbottom said that

“conduct that some may regard as morally reprehensible is not open to be set aside, let alone be the possible subject of criminal sanctions, because Parliament has determined that those sanctions should not apply in those circumstances”.

It was a nit-picking point of law that prevented the people of my constituency and the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Member for Ogmores (Huw Irranca-Davies) and for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) from having justice. We need a decision.

Unfortunately, when my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon tabled a question asking what decision would be made, the answer was that the matter would not be within the purview of the Department of Energy and Climate Change. I am looking forward to the meeting in September. However, I need to be sure about this. I need to be able to go to my constituents and say that responsibilities rest with this Government in helping to make sure that the site is restored and justice is finally done, and that a company cannot use dubious legal and accounting practices to hide money and to take it away from restoration, while avoiding meeting its responsibilities for that restoration. This is a blot on the landscape that is dangerous to children and to people who, sadly, see it as a recreational opportunity but not as the dangerous site that it is.

2.25 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It is an honour to follow the thoughtful speech by the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) on behalf of her constituents. I cannot match the eloquence of my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) in rattling through so many issues in such a short space of time, but I will do my best. I want to use this opportunity to

[*Bob Blackman*]

raise a number of unfinished business items that the Government need to pick up, and possibly some local issues if time permits.

The first issue is compensation for victims of the Equitable Life scandal. I am delighted that the Government have managed to pay out, overall, more than £1 billion to the 900,000 policyholders who are victims of this scam. However, the fight is not yet complete. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has announced the closure of the compensation scheme at the end of this year to new applications for compensation. I am delighted that the Treasury has agreed to open up applications to ensure that the people—136,000, we believe—who have not yet registered a claim on the account can do so, and that we will use national insurance numbers and all means to trace those individuals so that they can register that claim.

Of course, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced further compensation for the people who have not yet received full compensation, but that is limited to the individuals who were on pension credit. On the Government figures alone for what has been agreed, £2.8 billion is still owed to nearly 1 million policyholders who have not received their full compensation. I can assure the House that the all-party group on Equitable Life policyholders, which I am privileged to co-chair—we have over 200 members—will continue the work until such time as all those policyholders receive full and fair compensation.

The second issue that I want to discuss arose in the previous Parliament. Tacked on to a piece of legislation in the other place was a move to enact highly divisive caste discrimination legislation without proper consultation with the Hindu community. It has caused immense concern within that community. Despite the fact that it was voted down by this House and returned to the other place, the other place insisted on its clauses and sent it back. Then, unfortunately, our coalition partners gave way on the issue instead of removing it from legislation. Now that we have a Conservative-only Government, we clearly need to remove that divisive legislation from the statute book completely.

In general, we would all want to ensure that any form of discrimination is outlawed, but as soon as legislation is introduced in the sensitive area of caste, one of the problems is that it then has to be monitored. I can imagine the scenario were this legislation to be enacted, with children returning home to their parents and asking, “Mummy, Daddy, what caste are we? My teacher has asked me to find out what caste we are so that we are not discriminated against.” Caste, particularly in the Hindu community, is in many cases a thing of the past, given intermarriage and so on, so it is wrong to create a problem in relation to something that is slowly desisting. One step the Government should take is to introduce legislation to remove that from the statute book for good and all.

The third area is one of my great passions—stopping people smoking and preventing young people from starting to smoke. I have just had the honour of being elected to the chairmanship of the all-party group on smoking and health. The coalition Government gave local authorities substantial funds for public health, which was due to be ring-fenced, to encourage people to

give up smoking and to prevent people from starting to smoke, as well as for connected purposes. My particular concern is that the funds are not being used for their intended purpose, and that, as a result, we are not getting the action we need to ensure people are assisted to make the health decision to give up smoking.

In my view, whether to start smoking is one of the key decisions that a young person makes in life. If they start smoking, they quickly become addicted, and the big tobacco companies have them for life. The fact is that tobacco and cigarettes are the one product sold world wide which, if you use it as it is intended to be used, will kill you. The reality is that we must encourage people not to smoke. We need to ensure that local authorities use this opportunity to make sure that smoking becomes a thing of the past. I still believe that smoking is a matter of free will, so I do not want it to be banned completely. I do, however, want to make sure that we do not encourage anyone to smoke in the first place.

The next area I want to raise is my great disappointment that Chatham House has decided to invite Bako Sahakyan to speak. No country, not even Armenia, recognises the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. That area is illegally occupied by Armenia, which has resulted in more than 1 million people being displaced from their homes to refugee camps. I do not think it is right that a body should bring into this country, and give a platform to, someone who is perpetuating injustice to that community. There have been United Nations resolutions galore about that, yet none has been implemented. It is the constant complaint of people from Azerbaijan that while resolutions are agreed at the United Nations and immediate action follows, in their case they have been waiting more than 30 years for justice.

On a lighter note, I await the result of the judicial review of the application of VAT to bridge clubs. When that result is announced, I hope that the Government will ensure that mind sports, such as bridge and chess, are properly funded by Sport England so that young people get the opportunity to learn not only the physical aspects of competitive sports, but the mental ones. I hope there will be the opportunity for such sports to be promoted in this place and elsewhere—in schools and beyond—so that clubs can operate under and get grants from Sport England to ensure that the mind as well as the body is trained to perfection.

I wish you, Madam Deputy Speaker, as well as Mr Speaker, the other Deputy Speakers and all the staff of this place a very happy recess. I shall be running a work experience programme in my constituency so that a number of young people can learn about the joys of being involved in politics and learn something about the hard work that we all put in.

2.34 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman). This is my first opportunity to congratulate the hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey) on her appointment as Deputy Leader of the House of Commons. I saw her on television last night and she is in the Chamber again today, but her marathon stint is much appreciated.

The issues I want to raise in this summer Adjournment debate centre on transport and roads. The three main issues affecting the lives of my constituents are the

roadworks on the M6, the state of our roads and the campaign that I want to launch for a 20 mph zone around schools in Walsall South.

Transport, and particularly local transport, are key to people being able to get about in their daily lives. Whether goods need to be transported or people need to get to work or to their leisure activities, transport links such as cars, buses, trams and trains are vital. At the moment, however, my poor constituents in Walsall South are spending an inordinate amount of time in traffic jams, which affects not only their wellbeing and quality of life, but their productivity. In 2013, productivity in the west midlands fell to 11.8% behind the national average.

As Members will remember, just before the election we all received a letter from the Department for Transport stating that the Highways Agency would be renamed Highways England. Even though it is still an arm's length body, it is wholly owned by the Government, with the Secretary of State as the sole shareholder. I am finding it difficult to get a response from the Secretary of State and Highways England, which was responsible for closing the slip road at junction 9 on the M6. The slip road enabled local traffic to bypass the motorway, but my constituents and others who come to the west midlands now have to follow a four-mile diversion to junction 7, and my constituents have said that it takes them an hour to do what is effectively a two-mile journey.

I raised that matter in a question to the Leader of the House almost two weeks ago, and I was informed that I would get an answer. My letter to the Secretary of State, copied to Highways England, was sent on 16 June. Not only have I not received an answer, but I have not actually seen anyone working on the slip road. Several times, when I have been past on returning to my constituency, I have seen absolutely no one working on it and no one working under it. That sounds a bit like "We're Going on a Bear Hunt". It is a flyover, so someone could be working under it.

Worse still, a press release dated 20 May said that the slip road was due to open on 13 November, but the bulletin on the Highways England website said on 15 June that it would open on 30 July. There is not only confusion in Highways England, but confusion all round. We know that the work on the motorway needs to be done, but it is not clear why the slip road needs to be closed. I would appreciate a response on that, because the slip road seems to be as silent as those from whom I should be getting a response.

The closure of the slip road not only affects what is happening on the motorway, but has led to congestion on local roads. Since the roadworks began, there has been congestion past junction 10, and that has led to congestion on the black country route from Wolverhampton to the M6 at junction 10. Wolverhampton Road West is one of the roads affected. It runs parallel to the black country route, and because of the congestion there, people are using that road instead. Cracks are appearing in the tarmac and there are now potholes. One evening, one of my constituents who lives on Wolverhampton Road West counted 125 lorries going down it, which is totally inappropriate for that road.

Bescot Crescent is also affected, with potholes, and cracks to the road surface and to the fairly old speed humps. It is one of the main roads leading to Walsall

Football Club and to local businesses. Members will be interested to know that the council's response to me states that many people and councillors have raised the issue. The letter said that the road could be

"argued to be in need of resurfacing"

but bizarrely it then stated that the road's condition is not sufficiently severe to warrant inclusion in the 2015-16 programme. I am concerned because when I mentioned the resurfacing of Oxford Street—the one in Walsall South, not London—nothing was done until just before the election, and then somebody else took the credit.

My biggest difficulty with local roads is Walstead Road, where a safety scheme has been put in place. Residents told me that a short consultation was held over the summer, but because there were no responses, that counted in favour of the proposals as if there had been a positive response. Many other councils do not do that. What might the residents of Walstead Road now have to put up with – speed humps, traffic islands, or speed humps near traffic islands at various random places on the road such as right in front of people's drives so that they cannot reverse out? Residents were not consulted on a solution, but I held two meetings and people came up with some good solutions, two of which—sequencing of traffic lights and signage at Birmingham Road to stop people going down Walstead Road—have been taken up by the council.

The alternatives to speed humps were not even considered, even though residents provided the council with solutions. We know that speed humps cause a lot of noise, as well as damage to cars. When I have travelled down that road it has been painful—I had to clutch my neck, so there are personal injuries issues as well. The speed humps seem rather large, and I have arranged for them to be measured. They come right up to the limit of 100 mm, but because of the heat—or for some other reason—they seem to be concaving, so they are clearly higher than the maximum height allowed.

Drivers will not go down Walstead Road, so they now use Delves Crescent and West Bromwich Road. Constituents from both those roads have contacted me to speak about the effect of the humps on Walstead Road and the lack of proper traffic calming measures. Walstead Road could do with a watchman sign such as the kind that flashes up speeds and number plates. That seems to work for Sutton Road, which has large detached houses, so I do not see why it cannot work on Walstead Road.

My third point is about the 20 mph speed limit, which was first mentioned by the parents of pupils at Bentley West primary school. Monmouth Road is quite narrow and cars speed down it—it is like the straight at Silverstone. One resident said that they can hear motorbikes speeding round, and they are just waiting for the thump. The school is on the corner of the road and there is a park nearby where people walk their dogs. There are a lot of pedestrians in that area.

Let me give the House an interesting statistic: pedestrians hit by a car at 20 mph have a 1.5% fatality risk, compared with an 8% fatality risk for those hit by a car at 30 mph. Those figures are from a report published in June by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents.

In Hull, there is widespread use of 20 mph zones in residential areas, and approximately 25% of its roads make up 100 separate zones. That is the largest number

[Valerie Vaz]

of 20 mph zones of any local authority in the UK. Interestingly, between 1994 and 2001, personal injury accidents in the 20 mph zones in Hull dropped by 56%, and fatalities by 90%. We can see that it works. Bristol city council is about to implement a blanket 20 mph speed limit that will apply everywhere apart from major roads. The pilot for the scheme was successful in reducing traffic speeds by using only 20 mph signs without additional traffic calming measures. In the pilot area, average speeds dropped to below 23 mph. The London borough of Islington has had a blanket 20 mph speed limit on all roads apart from those managed by Transport for London since 2012.

Implementing a 20 mph zone does not cost money. It is merely a traffic regulation order passed by the local authority after a consultation, but it saves lives. Walsall metropolitan borough council will be receiving more than £12 million for the maintenance and repair of local roads over the next five years. I flag up the fact that roads in my constituency also need resurfacing, and I hope the council will listen. I have put in a freedom of information request to ask how much has been spent in Walsall South because I travel around the area and see that some constituencies have better roads than there are in Walsall South—I should not have had to put in that FOI request, but I hope nevertheless that some of that money comes our way. I also ask the Transport Secretary and Highways England to respond to my correspondence and give reasons for why that slip road remains closed.

It is amazing: we have new horizons and can see the face of Pluto, but we cannot come up with a creative solution—even though my constituents have come up with some sort of a solution—to find alternatives for the speed humps. Pluto leads me neatly to Professor Brian Cox, because I was present at the opening of the education centre. That amazing centre will make a huge difference to our constituents and children from our schools. Professor Cox opened the centre, which is a tribute to Mr Speaker and the parliamentary education service. Children across the UK will be able to see how Parliament works, and what a difference we will make and the seat of democracy will make to their lives.

Mrs Moon: When I was in Australia, I discovered that the Australian Government pay for every child to travel across Australia to go to the Parliament so that they can experience how democracy works in their country. Would it not be wonderful if train companies in Britain could do the same, because the cost of transporting children from poorer areas such as my constituency mean that many never get here?

Valerie Vaz: There is a travel subsidy, but because it is over-subscribed, I think it is for those outside the M25. It would be nice if that was extended to everyone, but many schools have benefited from that travel subsidy.

Finally, I thank the House staff, the Library, the education service and everyone else, and I wish them a very happy recess.

2.47 pm

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): It is somewhat daunting to follow experienced colleagues such as my hon. Friends the Members for Southend West (Sir David

Amess) and for Harrow East (Bob Blackman), but I shall do my best. The hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) mentioned the M6, and as someone who uses the motorway—even though it has been improved with the toll road—I know that travelling with three children often results in tears of anger and frustration, and that is just from me. I wish the hon. Lady well in her efforts.

As a new Member I shall begin by thanking everyone in the House staff, the Speaker's office and the Doorkeepers for the warm welcome that they gave us. I particularly thank my buddy, Charlotte Blythin, who helped me in the first fortnight. The way that the induction programme was run gives the lie to the idea that this is an archaic workplace. In fact, compared with my experience at a City law firm, this place is positively 22nd century!

Right hon. and hon. Members may be aware that the statistics in England for one-year survival rates for cancer are lower than those of our European neighbours, largely because of late diagnosis. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), as chair of the all-party group on cancer, for his work on this issue. Diagnosis and prognosis for breast cancer is so much better than it was 20 or 30 years ago, but there are still about 12,000 of our fellow countrymen—mainly women, but some men—who die of breast cancer every year. It was the case in my constituency of a father and a daughter who were diagnosed with breast cancer at the same time and felt very badly let down by Southport hospital, which closed its breast cancer unit without a proper consultation, that has spurred me on to become a breast cancer ambassador for Breast Cancer Now.

I am sure all hon. Members will have had in their inboxes an invitation from Breast Cancer Now to become an ambassador. Breast Cancer Now is the merger of Breast Cancer Campaign and Breakthrough Breast Cancer. Its aim is to eliminate the disease by 2050. I think about 178 right hon. and hon. Members have become ambassadors, but I urge even more to do so, particularly hon. Gentlemen. Men are not just affected as husbands, fathers and sons when their wives, girlfriends and daughters get breast cancer. As the case in my constituency shows, men are also victims of the disease. We need to carry on the efforts of this campaign and eliminate it by 2050.

South Ribble is a wonderful place to live and work, but in one respect our statistics are slightly worse than the national average: the number of older people who live alone. Social isolation is the objective measure of how many contacts a person has, and loneliness is how an individual feels. They can both exacerbate a plethora of health problems, including hypertension, sleep problems and, in particular in the society we live in today, dementia. People are becoming more conscious of this issue, and national and local government are beginning to take measures to deal with it. I draw the attention of right hon. and hon. Members to the “Hidden Citizens” report from the Campaign to End Loneliness. I am sure many colleagues will have heard, particularly when talking to councillors and local groups in their constituencies, how difficult it is to identify very isolated older people, who are literally hidden behind doors. I am sure all of us, in March and April in particular, found those people on the doorstep. They were the ones who were really keen to carry on speaking to us, because they are so isolated and perhaps have only one or two conversations in a fortnight.

The report considers this vast problem and highlights factors intrinsic to loneliness, including gender, sexuality, ethnicity and temperament. It is on extrinsic factors that we in this place can make a difference. How do we build our towns? How do we plan our healthcare? How do we think about travel in the future? I would be very interested to hear what my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House has to say on what the Government are doing in this area.

Finally, I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on being part of the team that secured the nuclear deal with Iran. Right hon. and hon. Members may know that, as the first British Iranian in this place, I take a particular interest in that country. I know that on all sides of the House there are worries about what will happen in the future, but my right hon. Friend laboured for many years, with his P5+1 colleagues, and I hope very sincerely that this is the beginning of a new era of reconciliation and contact between our two peoples. As we saw on the streets of Tehran, the vast majority of Iranians—including many in the Iranian Parliament and Government—are open to the world. They want to turn their faces to the world and have a new era of peace. It is in Britain's interests, in terms of security and trade, that we engage with Iran going forward. Let us hope the deal does not unravel over the recess and that when we meet again progress will have been made on lifting the sanctions.

2.54 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the new hon. Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy), whose performance was really assured. I have been in this place quite a long time and I am slightly worried that I will not be quite so assured, but I do wish to raise an issue of great importance to me and, I believe, to Members on both sides of the House—that of social mobility in the UK. By that, I mean the ability of children, wherever they are born, whoever they are born to, to get on in life and have access to the opportunities, the education and the careers that they would wish to have, regardless of their background.

I acknowledge that we live in an amazing city that has brought hope and opportunity to generations of people from all over the world. That was never brought home more to me than when watching my late, wonderful father lean over the balcony in the House of Lords to see my sister ennobled.

My dad was one of 14. He was brought up in two rooms in a bog in the middle of the west of Ireland—a beautiful and wonderful place, but a place that could not give him work, could not allow him to feed himself or to feed his family. So he came to London in 1947, like a generation of others—no different, no more exceptional—and he built our roads, and he built our offices. He never asked for anything but the opportunity to work. He met a wonderful woman, my mother, who in '47 came to be in that first generation of nurses. Together they had two daughters, not exceptional in themselves—and I am by far the less exceptional of the two—who have had the opportunity and the honour to become the Member for Mitcham and Morden, and to become a Member in another place. A wonderful opportunity, a wonderful city and a wonderful country.

I had parents who bestowed on me the complete and unwavering desire to work hard, believing that nothing came but from work for those of us who were born to

nothing—believing that work enables you to support yourself and your family, but it is also a moral duty to help your community. Also, as we now know, work helps us stay healthy. But what worries me is that for the generations that come after me—particularly, I am sad to say, the white working-class kids in my constituency—the doors that were open to me are closing.

By most measures, the UK falls behind other countries on social mobility. Alan Milburn's recent report on the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission found that we are trailing behind most developed nations, and there appears to be a stronger relationship between parental background and children's future income in Britain than in any other country in Europe. The report also found that top jobs in Britain across a range of sectors go overwhelmingly to those educated in the private sector: 71% of senior judges, 62% of senior armed forces officers, 55% of permanent secretaries and 50% of Members of the House of Lords all attended independent schools.

I do not have with me the figures showing what those percentages are in the media, but I know that they are even more concentrated on groups of more privileged people. That is why I am delighted that my great friend Michael Foster—who was the Labour candidate in Camborne, Redruth and Hayle—after seeing the riots on TV a few years ago, became aware of how few black and Asian reporters there were on our TV screens and set up Creative Access, a charity to find work experience and internships for black and Asian young people that paid £16,000 a year. Eighty per cent. of the hundreds of black and Asian young people that he has got into work are now in permanent jobs in the media. Michael is now extending that, understanding how low is the representation of white working-class young people in our media, and he is piloting projects in our sixth forms in London, including, thankfully, in my constituency, from next year.

Although these great initiatives happen, we are lagging so far behind. At times when professions desperately need to reach out to people from different backgrounds and be more representative in order to be most effective, the doors are being closed. Take the example of the police force. It took me weeks and months in the previous Session of Parliament to make hon. Members from all parties understand that currently, any young person wanting to apply to join the police force has to undertake a course, with private tutors, costing £1,000. That is the certificate in knowledge of policing. Being in a police force used to be an opportunity, in the main for working-class men, to get on, get a job and move up the ladder. Today the doors are being closed to those who want to become police officers. The bobby tax probably deprives us of great people who could make connections in their own communities to help policing and bring down crime.

We also know about the number of employers who ask for work experience when assessing job applicants. Parents often tell me that their children want a job but cannot get on the job ladder without that experience. Too often they cannot get the work experience they need unless they have contacts and the money to work unpaid. On and on it goes, round and round in a circle.

I started a work experience scheme in my constituency when I realised that more young people from outside my constituency than inside it were applying to work with me. I have had the great opportunity to get more

[*Siobhain McDonagh*]

than 60 local employers together and put together a booklet of opportunities, which I send to all my local young people. Only today, when I visited Benedict primary school, I met Safira Hassan, who told me that she had taken up one of the opportunities in that booklet and as a result is now working full time as a teaching assistant for challenging children. She hopes to go on to be a drama therapist. Helping individuals in that way is the real excitement of having this job.

Some sectors are particularly restrictive in the number of obstacles that they put in front of those from less privileged backgrounds. Alan Milburn's recent report found that just 7% of new medical students came from the bottom three socioeconomic groups, partly due to the difficulty that those without family connections have in accessing work experience in the sector. Many bright young people come to my advice surgery asking me to help, and I am grateful to Professor Field, the director of research at south-west London elective orthopaedic centre, who regularly gives me the opportunity to enable young people in my constituency to get work experience.

We all know that the cuts to careers advice services in schools under the coalition Government further widened the gap between those who have the knowledge and contacts to get on and those from less privileged backgrounds who have great potential. The rapid expansion of unpaid internships is another factor restricting opportunities. The Sutton Trust has found that a third of graduate internships are unpaid, and that three-month internships in London in which expenses are provided cost about £3,000 to complete. We cannot allow it to be the case that only those who can afford to work unpaid end up being able to get their foot on the first rung of the ladder in many careers. What if a young person who might go on to discover a cure for cancer cannot afford to do an internship with a cancer research charity, or cannot get the work experience needed to apply to medical school?

Much of a child's opportunity is, of course, determined by the quality of their education at a young age. There has been discussion in recent years about the stark correlation between economic inequality and low educational achievement. Of course, there are huge challenges facing many disadvantaged groups of children, but the below-average achievement of white working-class children remains static. Last year, just 31% of white children on free school meals achieved five A* to C-grade GCSEs. I am extremely proud of the work that the last Labour Government did to close that gap, and I will for ever be grateful to Lord Harris of Peckham, a peer not of my political persuasion but one who has taken two of the most underperforming schools in my constituency and transformed them, particularly for young people on free school meals.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I am really sorry, but I will not; I do not want to go on too long, because I know a number of Members are trying to get in.

In 2009, only 28% of students at Harris Academy Morden—then Bishopsford school—achieved five A* to C grades including English and maths. By 2013, that had doubled to 57%. In 2007, only 28% of Harris Academy Merton students achieved five A* to C grades, but by 2013 that had nearly trebled to 75%. That means real chances and opportunities, and I do not understand why the Conservatives want to make schools that are already achieving become academies. We should concentrate on those schools that are underperforming, because they will have children from the most-excluded groups.

I have so much to say, but I do not want to deny other hon. Members the right to contribute. We all as individual Members have a role to play in helping people get on the ladder, but Parliament and the Government have nothing less than a moral imperative.

3.5 pm

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (*Siobhain McDonagh*). Before I talk about some issues on behalf of my constituents in this Adjournment debate, I want to mention the excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (*Seema Kennedy*). I think all the existing Members have been surprised by the fantastic quality of all the new Members on both sides of the House, and how quickly they have got to grips with this place.

My hon. Friend made a particularly insightful speech about breast cancer. I remember the Christmas eve when my mother told me she had breast cancer, and how scared and worried I was. For the whole Christmas, all we really talked about was how we could lose her. I am delighted to say that she is now well and has enjoyed a long and happy life since that Christmas. It is such an important disease, and I am now proud to be a breast cancer ambassador. It was an excellent speech and the issue was well worth raising.

In my constituency, rural businesses are succeeding, such as the Wellbeing Farm in Edgworth, but lack of broadband is a huge issue for such businesses, rural homes and towns. It stops many businesses flourishing as they should. Across Lancashire, 80% of homes and businesses are now connected to superfast broadband because of the work that the last Government did. Constituency figures are not available, but I am sure that the reach is not 80% in my constituency. That is not good enough, frankly, and I hope that the Government will continue to work with me, British Telecom and Openreach to ensure that we have a real plan to get all rural businesses and homes in Rossendale and Darwen connected to superfast broadband by 2020. In other areas where superfast broadband is not available, such as Lower Darwen and Whitworth, we are plagued by “not spots” that have no 3G or 4G available on mobile phones or tablets. That is a really big issue, and at business questions a few weeks ago I asked whether the Government would make a statement on what progress they intend to make in tackling “not spots”. There has to be more we can do in terms of encouraging mobile companies to share bandwidth and masts to ensure that across my constituency, and other rural areas, we provide mobile broadband at least, and superfast broadband as soon as possible.

In our work as Members of Parliament, we get to do lots of visits, and I recently visited Blackburn hospital. It is just outside my constituency, but it serves people from both Rossendale and Darwen. The hospital has been put into special measures, but it has made huge progress. It was a real privilege for me, as a local Member of Parliament, to go and speak to occupational therapists, doctors, nurses and managers in that hospital and talk to them about the long journey they have been on.

I want particularly to highlight a plan that the hospital has to put a GP surgery at the front of its accident and emergency department. It is an excellent idea, because it will mean that my constituents who go to Blackburn hospital's A and E department with the worst injuries or illnesses can be seen quickly. Some people who go to the A and E department need to see a GP. They should not be there in the first place, but if they are there with an ailment that a GP can look at, they will be diverted to the hospital's GP practice. That is an excellent initiative by Blackburn hospital, and I think it is worth drawing to the attention of other hon. Members. The special measures regime can bring new ideas and different thinking to hospitals, and it can improve them.

I am very pleased that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made £8 billion available to the NHS in this Parliament to ensure that such great ideas, and our fantastic NHS staff, have the money they need to serve my constituents. On that £8 billion, it is hugely important that all MPs engage with their local GP surgeries, clinical commissioning groups and NHS Trust—for me, it is East Lancashire Hospitals—to ensure that we have a fantastic service for the people we represent, because making sure the NHS is there for my constituents is and always shall be my top priority.

In my constituency we have some delays at the moment on the railway line between Darwen and Manchester. That has not caused too much disruption, but it is a great sign that the work we have been promised—to double the track between Manchester and Darwen—is now under way. We are going to move to a half-hourly service for trains all day, which will be a huge boost to people who live in Darwen but work in Manchester.

We have also been promised some new trains for our lines. We have Pacers, which are no longer fit for purpose, and I hope and believe that as part of re-franchising the Northern Rail franchise the Pacers will be phased out. We have been promised some new trains with wi-fi. I hope that over the summer people who live in Darwen, who will suffer delays while that work goes on, will think it is worthwhile and that we have delivered on the promise of improved rail links.

In Darwen we also have the A666. It is not the devil's road, as some people have called it, or even the road to hell. It is a road that goes through the centre of the town of Darwen, and at the moment it is the scene of severe travel disruption, because Blackburn council has installed a new set of traffic lights. I hope that over the summer the council will listen to the literally thousands of my constituents who have signed an online petition asking it to turn off those lights. People are contacting me all the time, saying, "It is taking me over an hour to visit my family", "get to work" or "drop my children at school." We all support road improvements in our constituency, but the traffic lights scheme on the A666

has not been and is not working. The local authority should never be afraid to step back, turn the lights off and think again.

In Transport questions today, I mentioned a problem on Bacup road, which is being dug up for the third time in fewer than 18 months, causing severe disruption. I hope that over the summer people will not be too badly affected. Despite these transport improvement works and transport problems, I hope that Members from all parts of the House will not be put off visiting my constituency during the summer. In particular, they should go to the town of Bacup, where we have £2 million of Townscape Heritage Initiative investment in the town centre, restoring some of its 120 listed buildings.

I was reminded, after I finished my advice surgery at the newly restored library in the centre of Bacup, of how much the town has come on by the opening of a new antiques shop called The Shabby Elephant. I must admit that I have been suffering from a fit of desire since I went to The Shabby Elephant, because it had a rather splendid Raleigh bicycle, with a leather seat, mudguards, chain guard and three gears. If people do not get there before me, I may go back and buy it this weekend, and try to get fit over the summer.

In Rawtenstall town centre—again, really worth a visit—we have plans for a new bus station. I met the local authority this week and am delighted that it is thinking again about these plans. It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape our town centre, but when we have fantastic historic mill towns we must make sure that any development reflects that heritage. The people of Rawtenstall need to be front and centre in terms of the design of, and the changes that need to take place to, the bus station plans before they go ahead. I am pleased that the council will do that over the summer, and the bus station work should start later this year.

I want to finish with some good news, about HAPPI—not the Pharrell Williams song, which we may all be listening to as we get in our cars and go back to our constituencies for the recess, but a community group in Haslingden, which has worked tirelessly for the last couple of years to reopen Haslingden pool. I had some wonderful news this week, because the pool should be reopening. Unfortunately, for parents who live in the village of Helmshore, where I live with my wife, or who live in Haslingden, the pool will not be open for this summer holiday, but it will be for the next set of school holidays. It just shows what a fantastically driven and well organised community group can do. It is no small feat to take a pool that has been closed for 18 months, sort out the building's refurbishment, persuade the council to hand over some money and get it reopened. I am absolutely delighted, and it will certainly get my recess started with a splash.

3.15 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for allowing me to participate in this end-of-term debate.

I wish first to put on the record my thanks to Mr Speaker and all the Deputy Speakers. As a Back Bencher with no thoughts of ever being anything else, it is good to have the opportunity, which they give us, to participate in debates and ask questions. I also wish to thank the staff of the House for their courtesy, kindness and

[*Jim Shannon*]

assistance. We could not do our job without them. This is my second term in the House, and I have appreciated all their help over the past few years, as well as the guidance that the Speaker and Deputy Speakers provide.

I want to bring before the House an issue of importance to me and my constituency. I did a quick headcount before I got up to speak: about half those Members present were elected back in 2005 or before, and about half are first-time Members. Some of those present, therefore, will have heard me talk about the importance of country sports, which is a subject of particular interest to me. Particularly in the light of the postponement of the debate on the Hunting Act 2004, it is important that I at least put down this marker. I feel I must raise this topic, and I hope that many will agree on the importance that country sports play in our society.

Perhaps it is difficult to imagine the contribution of country sports when the subject is raised in this wonderful House, located, as it is, in the centre of the hustle and bustle of London. As we walk around this vast city, we are surrounded by busy suits hurrying to their next meeting, and the sheer noise of the cars and buses is often overwhelming—not to mention the often cramped and often pushy conditions of the rush-hour tubes. If Members will allow, I will transport them to my wonderful constituency of Strangford. I hope they will use their imagination so that we can focus on the importance of country sports.

I need not remind Members how beautiful is my constituency, as those who live there or have visited it will know. I am sure that many others feel they know it already. For those who have not had the pleasure of visiting, however, let me say that we are fortunate to have a happy mix of towns, villages and countryside, all in one. Right on doorsteps of the towns, and often just a short drive or walk away, are loughs, rolling green fields and beautiful forests and parks. There is no better constituency for country sports. Those who know me will be aware that I am a country sports enthusiast, particularly when it comes to shooting.

I suppose it is no shock to anyone here that someone from Northern Ireland should be interested in shooting, but I have to say it is legitimate, legalised shooting, and I have a licence to prove it. For me, shooting is a way to relax, although with present commitments, I cannot pursue it as much as I would like. Some Members will remember my maiden speech in June 2005, when I said that the ducks and the pheasants of my constituency would be relieved to have two or three days a week when they did not have to worry about me chasing them, because I would be in this House.

Shooting and fishing contribute so much to society in terms of revenue, jobs and conservation. As a keen shooter, I find myself a dedicated conservationist. Back home on the family farm on the Ards peninsula, I am always thinking of new ways to conserve the natural habitat for animals and birds. I have planted on the farm some 3,000 trees, I have dug and excavated two duck ponds, and I always ensure the hedgerows are maintained and that land is set aside where wildlife and fauna can excel.

I am not alone in carrying out such conservation work. Anyone who enjoys shooting or fishing tends to do the same, and it is really great for wildlife. It not only preserves natural habitats, but encourages new habitats:

in recent years, I have seen the return to our farm and district of the yellow bunting, which has been missing for many years. That they are back in numerical strength is an indication of the good work being done on our and our neighbours' farms.

Birds of prey also abound, and I have no doubt that that is the result of good conservation work. Each year, I hold a few shoots on my land and on neighbours' land, and it is proving to be a huge success, bringing together friends and relatives for a day of relaxation and good company—and hopefully a few birds at the end of the day for the purpose of the plate.

Conservation must go hand in hand with shooting; we must get the right balance between them. That means people who want to conserve can do so, and people who want to shoot can do so. However, for me, it is not possible to have one without the other.

In Strangford, we are inundated with places to fish and places to shoot. In fact, Northern Ireland is often described as one of the finest places in Europe to fish because all types of angler are catered for—whether it be coarse fishing, game fishing or sea fishing. My constituency has the largest coastline of all of the Northern Ireland constituencies, with seawater access. Not only that, as we are surrounded by various loughs and lakes that prove extremely popular with anglers. Just a couple of weeks ago, I attended a fly-fishing festival in Killyleagh in my constituency—and what a fantastic day it was! I was pleased to see so many people in attendance.

I am always keen to get more children and young people involved in country sports because of the potential for real family occasions. Shooting was passed down to me, and I have passed down my love for that sport to my own sons and my granddaughter, Katie-Lee, a six-year-old. I believe we have another generation of shooters coming through, even at that young age. There are many shooting estates and syndicates at Rosemount and Greyabbey, at Dunleath estate in Ballywalter, Carrowdore castle, Mount Stewart estate in Greyabbey, the Rademon in Crossgar, the Demesne in Saintfield and also at Portavo and Donaghadee.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I thank my very hon. and good Friend for giving way. I know him so well and am sure that he or someone else will eat every single thing he shoots—so there is a good purpose in shooting.

Jim Shannon: If it is edible, yes, I would probably have a go at it. I cannot say that I eat everything I shoot, because some things are not edible. There is nothing quite as tasty as “duck à l'orange”—for those who are unsure, that is duck in orange. Pheasant is good, but my favourite bird for eating is a pigeon. I have a great appetite for pigeons because when I was a wee boy in Ballywalter, my cousin, who shot up in West Tyrone in the '60s and '70s—this is a true story—used to send pigeons by post down to Ballywalter, which is from the west to the east of the Province. Sometimes they arrived at Ballywalter in the Ards peninsula—perhaps not in the best of condition, but we cooked them anyway. I had a love of pigeons, and I still have it today. Yes, pigeon is my favourite bird—two-legged ones, with wings!

Shooting plays a large part in the UK economy—worth £2 billion, and it supports the equivalent of 74,000 jobs. In these uncertain times, this sector is proving its popularity

and its importance to its participants. On goods and services, it is estimated that shooters spend £2.5 billion each year, while shoot providers spend around £250 million each year on conservation. The Public and Corporate Economic Consultants estimate that shooting actually manages 10 times more land for conservation than the country's nature reserves. Undoubtedly, then, for so many, country sports play an integral part in society.

Despite this issue being raised on a fairly regular basis here, I feel that we still need to raise awareness of country sports and show just how important they are—not just for the love of them, but for the money they generate, the jobs they provide and for the conservation that comes off the back of them. With more than 600,000 people across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland participating in shooting sports alone, I do not feel this is something that can be ignored, and I would like to see more done to encourage people to get involved with local country sports clubs—perhaps at country fairs. I had the opportunity last month to open an event at Shane's castle, one of the great country fairs of Ireland. There is one fair at Shane's castle in Northern Ireland and one at Birr castle in the Republic. Such events provide an opportunity to bring together people from all communities and encourage them to participate, whatever their gender or age.

I want to record my thanks to the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, the Countryside Alliance and Game Conservancy USA for all the work that they do to help the shooting community, as well as farmers and landowners. They try to make young people's involvement a reality, and they certainly have my support in that regard. However, I want to see more done for young people in schools. Most secondary schools in Northern Ireland offer a huge range of sports clubs, and, in many instances, equestrian clubs. However, rarely do I hear of fishing or shooting clubs, and, in the light of the figures provided by PACEC, I do not think that that is due to a lack of interest. I fear that it is due to the reputation that country sports often seem to carry. Because this is a devolved matter in Northern Ireland, we are changing the existing legislation to lower the minimum age at which people are allowed to shoot—under supervision, of course. That is good news, because it means that more young people can be introduced to shooting and enjoy it.

I hope that today's debate will help to ensure that the general attitude to country sports is raised from toleration to celebration. We must do more to improve the situation in the years to come.

3.26 pm

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): It was very interesting to listen to the speech of the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). If the hon. Gentleman has not yet sorted out his holiday reading, I recommend the autobiography of Sir Peter Scott. He too was a shooter, but he put his rifle down to become of the world's top conservationists. Who knows? The hon. Gentleman might change his mind.

Jim Shannon: I am quite well acquainted with the author to whom the hon. Lady refers. There is a bust of him in one of the wildfowling clubs in Comber, which is my constituency. He started off as a shooting person,

and he enjoyed that, but he became a conservationist in the end. I do not think I shall ever be like that. I shall continue to be a shooter.

Dr Mathias: I will lend the hon. Gentleman my copy of the book if he cannot find it. Sir Peter Scott talks of the thrill of conservation being equivalent to the thrill that he had achieved while shooting. That is what persuaded him to—literally—put down the gun. So the hon. Gentleman can always change.

I want to talk about a resident of my constituency, Wadih Chourey. He has lived in Twickenham for 18 years, but he is originally from Beirut. He also has a learning difficulty. His parents died in Lebanon in 2010, and he is being looked after by his brothers, who are also resident in Twickenham. I met one of them, Camil. They run a café and patisserie, and they are important members of the community. Wadih works in the café and patisserie as well. He has so many supporters that the petition asking for him to be allowed to remain the United Kingdom has tens of thousands of signatures.

That petition came about because Wadih Chourey applied for leave to remain in the United Kingdom. His application was originally refused by the Home Office. Wadih then appealed, at some legal expense. The family were very stressed by the process, but the appeal was successful. The community—and, obviously, the Chourey family—were very happy. However, the Home Office then appealed against the successful appeal. The saga continued, with the family again having to invest in legal opinions, and more stress for the family and the community. The family then applied for permission to appeal against the Home Office's appeal against their own original appeal. The situation right now is that we do not know whether Wadih can stay. His family has been granted permission to appeal, and the case might go to the Court of Appeal.

I urge the Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey) to raise this matter with the Home Office and to follow up my plea to the Home Office to stop this sorry saga. This is family who are wanted in the community. Wadih is an important member of the community and we want him to stay. Please, please end all the horrible legal expense, as well as the stress for the family, for Wadih and for me by stopping this sorry saga.

3.30 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in this debate, in the custom of making my maiden speech. I pay sincere tribute to my predecessor, Michael McCann, who worked diligently as deputy leader of the council before becoming a Member of Parliament from 2010 to 2015. Prior to becoming an MP and working for the council, Michael McCann worked as a trade union official, a path that I have also trodden in my journey to this Chamber, having been a union representative in health for 14 years. I wish Michael McCann well. I am sure, given our backgrounds, that we must share a similar belief in workers' rights and representation, even though we come from different political persuasions.

I am extremely proud to be here, having been elected to represent the constituency in which I was raised, attended school, trained and worked in the NHS as a

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

psychologist. My job has always been a conversation stopper. In fact, it has been known to empty rooms. People quieten, then back off, worrying that I might be analysing them, but rest assured: I have been far too busy for that recently. I am pleased to say, however, that all your assessments will soon be in the post!

More seriously, I can attest that coming to this House is a psychological journey for any new MP, so I wish everyone success in adapting to its landscape. There are still some days when I wake up with Paul Simon's words ringing in my ears: "How did I get here?" On reflection, however, I know that I am here for three key reasons: to represent the interests of my constituency, to influence those issues that I hold dear and to give Scotland a stronger voice.

My constituency of East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow is diverse. It includes Scotland's first new town, East Kilbride, which afforded hope and opportunity to families who had moved from the city, including my own. It is known fondly as the polo mint city, due to its keenness for building roundabouts. It is therefore a terrifying experience for all learner drivers. East Kilbride is an amazing place to visit. It has also had many important residents over the years, including Lorraine Kelly, Julie Wilson Nimmo, Ally McCoist and the House's own Liam Fox.

We also have beautiful rural landscapes, around the market town of Strathaven and the surrounding villages of Chapelton, Stonehouse, Auldhouse, Sandford, Drumclog, Glassford and Jackton—I hope I have not missed any out. To the south rest Blackwood, Kirkmuirhill and Lesmahagow, all affording wonderful scenery alongside historic links to traditional industry or farming.

There is affluence in my constituency, too, in Thorntonhall, which has previously boasted the most expensive street in Scotland and has been home to footballers and personalities. The latter include Andy Cameron, whom I used to pretend to be related to when I was at school. Members will be pleased to know that I have never pretended to be related to any other famous Cameron, but I can inform the house that I have spent much of the past two months answering emails from interested American and Canadian citizens clarifying whether there was a connection.

Distressingly, in my constituency there is also considerable growing poverty, which needs to be addressed, not solely by individual aspiration, but by collective enabling. Psychologically, few people aspire by having their crutch kicked from beneath them and being left to crawl, but most can be enabled, through opportunity, support and encouragement, which eventually teaches you to fly. Proudly, my constituency enables others, with a strong public sector workforce, and also, importantly, reaches out across the world, via the Department for International Development, to assist those vulnerable to inequality, climate change and poverty. In my role as climate justice spokesperson, and as a member of the International Development Committee, I am delighted to be able to directly support this crucial work.

In terms of the issues I hold dear, having worked as a doctor in trauma and mental health, and with patients who have learning difficulties and developmental disorders, including autism, I want to champion continued investment in those areas of health, often previously viewed as the

poor relation. Having served as an expert witness in cases of trauma, I understand only too well how crucial it is that survivors of childhood abuse, rape and domestic violence have a system that meets their needs and that ensures that justice prevails. Issues of institutionalised abuse must be dealt with transparently to ensure that survivors' voices are heard. As a society we can never stand by in silence.

It is true to say that so far I have had some frustrating days in this House, but I have also been heartened by small things that I did not expect. An unexpected influence has been attending Prayers prior to the sitting of the House, where we are reminded daily of our responsibility to improve people's well-being. That is the litmus test of why we are here, and we must question ourselves and whether our policies improve people's lives. I believe we are here to make a difference.

Fundamentally, alongside my 55 Scottish National party colleagues, we are also here to give Scotland a stronger voice. It is clear that change could never have come from within the system and so change had to be sent here, by the people. We are here to try to make a difference to people's lives, and we are here for the devolution of powers that raise revenue, growth, jobs and productivity—powers that also protect those most vulnerable and that deliver social justice. These ideologies can and always should, in a progressive society, go hand in hand.

3.37 pm

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): It is a great honour and privilege to follow the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) after such a powerful and eloquent maiden speech. I fear that she is going to have spend some of the next five years here teaching me how to pronounce all the names in her constituency. She stands in a long tradition, in that I think it took the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) at least five years before I started to get the name of his constituency right. I know that she will be a valued Member of the House, not only from that contribution, but from the fantastic work she has done in her constituency in her profession before she came into politics. On behalf of the whole House, I would like to congratulate her on such a fantastic speech.

These are, of course, the debates before the summer recess and I shall try not to detain the House for too long, but I hope I can be forgiven for making one observation about the procedure of the House. These debates previously took place in a way that permitted Ministers from across the whole of Government, by Department, to respond to the concerns of hon. Members that were raised before the long break and fell within their particular areas of ministerial responsibility. Although it is an enormous pleasure to see my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House on the Front Bench, and although he and the Deputy Leader of the House will take the concerns of the House back to each individual Department, the transition that we have made so that the Leader or Deputy Leader of the House now responds to this debate and individual Ministers do not do so is one that should be looked at by the Procedure Committee. It is, in my respectful observation, a change that does little to enable the concerns of Members to be brought to the forefront of Ministers.

I wish to detain the House briefly on two matters. The first of those is one that troubles me greatly, as my right hon. Friend knows. I have campaigned on it in the past and I intend to campaign on it in this Parliament: it is the effect of corruption across the world and what it means for the people of this country.

The House debated the matter recently in an Adjournment debate, and there have been other opportunities to raise it. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that this is an issue that must be tackled not only by this Government, but by the international community. It is a fact that very many of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people have their lives touched to a considerable degree, and not in a way that is good for them, by the corruption that is rife, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and the developing world. The effect of that is devastating for those who live in appalling conditions, as many do in the developing world, but it also has an effect on all of us in the United Kingdom, because while that corruption takes place, our security is threatened. It is the thing that drives economic migration to Europe and drives people to take the desperate measures to try to cross the Mediterranean to look for a better life in Europe, albeit illegally. It is also the thing that runs the risk of driving the terrorist threat not only in this country but in all the countries that are allied with us. It is therefore something that the Government are rightly focusing on in this Parliament.

I wish to hear not only that this matter is a priority for the Government—the Prime Minister has rightly said that it is—but more details on the anti-corruption seminar that the Prime Minister intends to run in this country next year for all UN nations and, indeed, what is intended to be achieved by that summit. Although we have a framework that is principally centred on the UN anti-corruption convention and to which many nations are signed up, it remains the fact that very little effort goes into monitoring and enforcement. As I have said, that is something that not only affects those in the developing world—some of the most vulnerable and poor people to whom we owe a moral responsibility—but threatens our security here.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend, who is also a very good friend, for giving way. It has always struck me in so many nations in the world that, when the leader of a country takes up the reins of power, far too many of them believe that every single thing in that country belongs to them, which leads to the suffering of the people.

Stephen Phillips: As ever, my hon. Friend makes an excellent point. The trouble is that corruption permeates in many of these countries from the top to the bottom. The view that previously held sway in much of the developed world was that there was nothing that could be done about it, and that it was, if not a desirable thing, something that we had to put up with because there was no way of getting people to enter public service—given the rates of pay on offer to them—unless they could subsidise their income through corruption. I hope that that view has largely disappeared, but it is something that must be stamped on. We in the developed world need to take action and tackle this scourge of corruption throughout the developing world—and in the developed world where we see it as well—not just

because it is our moral responsibility, but because it affects our own security. I hope that I will hear something on that matter from the Deputy Leader of the House.

I want to touch on a very far-flung corner of this land—perhaps not as far-flung as the constituencies of some of those on the Scottish National party Benches, although having talked to civil servants in Whitehall, I could be forgiven for holding the belief that they seem to think that the part of the country that I am about to come on to is even further away than Orkney and Shetland. I speak, of course, of God's great county, Lincolnshire, in which my constituency lies, as well as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), who I see is in her place.

Contrary to popular belief in Whitehall and, dare I say it, among some Ministers not only in this Government but in Governments of the past, Lincolnshire does not lie somewhere in the North sea. It is only an hour and 20 minutes or so from King's Cross station or perhaps two hours' drive up the A1. It would be rather nice if we could see Ministers and, perhaps more importantly, civil servants occasionally taking the trip to Lincolnshire so that they could see for themselves not only what a wonderful county it is, but quite how much we are affected by some of the spending decisions made here in London. I have in mind two particular areas that I want to focus on.

The first of those is Lincolnshire police service, which is now the poorest funded police service in the country per capita. That is notwithstanding the fact that our population is as sparse in many ways as the population in some other areas of the United Kingdom, such as those in Scotland. The result of the underfunding of Lincolnshire police, which has been going on for decades, is that the police service in Lincolnshire is now stretched so thin that no further cuts can be made other than on the front line, and if that happens, the service which is received by people in Lincolnshire will be even worse than it is now.

The permanent secretary in the Home Department came to the Public Accounts Committee this week and I tackled him—quite feistily, it has to be said—on the past settlements which have been made in relation to police funding in Lincolnshire. He effectively admitted what we who live in the county have all known for far too long—that we have been on the receiving end of a very unfair funding formula which, thankfully, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice is now looking at. I hope we will get a new funding formula by the end of the year.

That discrimination, which is what it is, against the rural folk of Lincolnshire has been going on for far too long. What I would like to hear from the Deputy Leader of the House is something about the timetable for the introduction of the new funding formula, even if she has to write to me about it, so that I can go back to the police commissioner and the chief constable in Lincolnshire in due course and tell them precisely when we can expect the police service in Lincolnshire to be properly funded.

It is not, of course, just the police. My hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) raised as recently as this morning in Transport questions the gross underfunding of our road network, about which the House has heard from Members on all sides during this debate. That, too, needs to be tackled.

[Stephen Phillips]

The other area on which I want to focus is local authority funding and, in particular, the funding of Lincolnshire County Council. As matters stand, Lincolnshire County Council is facing a 55% reduction in its grant funding over the next four years. That is, in effect, a £68 million reduction for one of the largest counties in the country with one of the most difficult areas to serve because of the sparsity of its population and the fact that we have ribbon development along many of our arterial and other roads. At the same time as that reduction is going to take place, budget pressures will fall on the county council, which mean that in 2015-16 alone approximately £31 million will have to be found just to cover inflation and an increase in adult social costs.

The funding formula for local government, not just for Lincolnshire but for many rural counties, has been unfair for far too long. Many of us argue in this House year after year that rural English counties need more money, yet very little ever seems to change. I hope that as a result of this debate the Deputy Leader of the House will go back to colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government and make it clear that this inequity, which results in public services—which cost just as much to run in rural Lincolnshire as they do in rural Scotland—being underfunded, has to be brought to an end. Staffing numbers are already reducing, and many programmes that the county council has been running, including, for example, in relation to public health, which we all trumpet in this House, have already had to be cut. Our libraries budget has had to fall, to the great detriment of those who use them. The same is true of children's centres. Indeed, the number of firemen on each fire engine has fallen from five to four, which I understand is the absolute minimum allowed by statute.

All these matters indicate that counties such as Lincolnshire—it is Lincolnshire that I am concentrating on, of course—have been at the thin end of the wedge for far too long. Far too much funding has gone into urban areas and perhaps, dare I say it, to the devolved regions. That has to be remedied. It has to be a task of this Government. It has to be something we tackle, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle would agree. Unless we tackle it, there will be a real problem with rural England continuing to feel that it is discriminated against at a time when more money is being ploughed into our towns and cities and to the devolved regions, and at a time when every single public service in Lincolnshire for which local authorities are responsible has been cut to the bone.

3.51 pm

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): It is a privilege to have an opportunity to raise an important constituency case in this debate. I would first like to echo the tributes to the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) for her excellent maiden speech. Not only did she talk appropriately about her high regard for her constituents—and evidently her constituents' high regard for her—but I was particularly touched by her reference to prayers, when we are reminded daily that, whatever our political standpoint and whatever manifesto we were elected on, our first priority is always to our constituents. Having listened to her speech,

I know the dedication she has shown already to her constituents. I wish her well in the months and years ahead.

I want to talk about an issue that I have spoken about in the Chamber on four occasions over the past three or four years: namely, the mis-selling of interest rate swap products by the commercial banks and the effect that has had on some of the small and medium-sized enterprises in my constituency. I will focus, in particular, on fixed-rate loans, tailored business loans, sold to constituents of mine by the Clydesdale and Yorkshire bank, whose motto is, "We care about here." Over a period of time, these loans were peddled by overzealous relationship managers, who managed to cause havoc to a large number of SMEs in Aberystwyth, the largest town in my constituency. The asset-rich farms, hostelrys and shops of my agriculture and tourism-dependent constituency were deliberately targeted by greedy salesmen.

In that context, I want to talk today about one constituent in particular, Mr Mansel Beechey, who I believe to be a victim of mis-selling by Clydesdale and Yorkshire bank, and the difficulties he has had in seeking redress from the authorities. Aberystwyth's Hen Llew Du public house is a long-established and successful local family business. Mr Beechey has owned it for 30 years, and his family have worked hard to create a popular, lively and iconic Welsh social hub that welcomes locals and students alike.

In 2008 Mr Beechey decided to expand the business by buying another pub with a restaurant for his daughter to run. Having identified suitable premises in his home village of Llangrannog in the south of Ceredigion, he was offered what was talked up as a straightforward loan by his relationship manager, a local man known well to Mansel for many years. The Beechey family borrowed money from the bank on a variable rate basis to purchase their new business. The loan was to be partly secured by their pub in Aberystwyth. However, unbeknown to Mr Beechey, approval for the tailored business loan was granted based on an incorrect interpretation of his accounts. None the less, on or around 28 January 2008, Mr Beechey signed a variable rate loan agreement with Clydesdale bank to borrow £700,000. His facility letter stated:

"The Borrower may at any time prepay all or any part of the Loan."

There was no mention of any form of fee, cost or penalty for early pre-payment or repayment of the amount of the loan, nor was there any reference to any of the following terms that might indicate a possible cost for early repayment.

Mr Beechey drew down the bulk of the loan in early February to complete the purchase of the second business and immediately began extensive refurbishment work. Once the project was under way and the Beecheys began repaying capital on the loan, it became clear that there would be issues of affordability. At that point, Mr Beechey discovered that the friendly and trusted bank manager had submitted figures that showed a far larger net income from the Yr Hen Lew Du pub in Aberystwyth than was actually the case.

Then there was a second bombshell. The Beecheys were told that National Australia bank, of which Clydesdale is a part, was withdrawing from the UK hospitality sector, and owing to a stated technical breach of the loan,

which the Beechey family disputed, the bank was demanding that they came up with a strategy to repay the entire loan within just a few weeks. Against a difficult economic background, with falling property prices, the Beecheys realised that the rapid sale of the new pub and restaurant that they had only just bought was unlikely to raise enough money to repay the entire loan, so their suggested strategy was to sell the new business and restructure any remaining debt. However, Clydesdale told them that if they repaid even part of their loan before the end of a 15-year term, they would incur a “breakage fee” of some £200,000—a not insubstantial amount for a small family-run business—even though it was the bank itself that was forcing early repayment. I repeat term 3.1 of the facility letter that the family received:

“The Borrower may at any time prepay all or any part of the Loan”.

The Beechey family were never warned about the potential scale of any early repayment charges. They have since discovered that instead of the simple fixed-rate loan that they thought they had, their tailored business loan had an embedded, or hidden, interest rate hedging arrangement, or swap—a complex derivative product that would protect the bank against interest rate fluctuations during the term of the loan. They now know that this would have been established during the phone call to fix the interest rate with the bank manager’s “colleague”, who was almost certainly a registered derivatives trader—not that that was known to the Beechey family.

Mr Beechey first came to my office in December 2012 about this problem. He had already, in April, made a complaint to the bank through his solicitor about the mis-sale of the TBL—an unregulated product. Appallingly, it took Clydesdale and Yorkshire bank over six months to respond to that formal complaint. We are talking about a business operating on the margins it needs to survive. This cloud should not last; it needs to be dealt with. Having taken six months to respond to the initial written complaint, to this day the bank has still not fully addressed it, despite my office facilitating meetings with its most senior personnel.

Mansel Beechey had always made it clear to his relationship manager that he wanted a loan that was flexible, sustainable and affordable. He is an experienced businessman, and he was shrewd enough to know that if things did not go to plan in the new venture, he would need a loan that he could repay or pre-pay at any time. Indeed, that is exactly what was said in one part of what turned out to be a complicated agreement. Yet three weeks after taking out the loan, over the course of three days and three telephone calls with what turned out to be bank treasury officials, the seemingly straightforward loan had morphed into the now infamous Clydesdale and Yorkshire tailored business loan—the fixed-rate loan with hidden swap. Two years into the loan, the Beechey family found themselves in an impossible position. They could not afford to pay the increased interest charges and so could not service the debt, and nor were they able to sell the business and repay the loan because of the huge break charges that they were initially unaware of.

The name “tailored business loan” was given by National Australia bank to a new type of loan designed to look like a traditional fixed-rate loan but with traditional penalty charges for breaking the loan replaced with an

open-ended break cost. Of course, Clydesdale and Yorkshire was not the only bank to provide such loans. It issued, on its own admission, 8,300 of them. The Financial Conduct Authority has disclosed that 69,738 were issued across a range of banks. There has been at least a suspicion that the Clydesdale and Yorkshire Bank manufactured these loans to avoid regulation.

I was very interested in the Treasury Committee’s inquiry into these matters at the end of the last Parliament. It took evidence from David Thorburn, the chief executive officer of the Clydesdale and Yorkshire Bank, and Debbie Crosbie, who bears the rather promising title of executive director for customer trust and confidence. Their impression of what needs to happen and what the bank will do to put matters right when a customer is mis-sold one of their products is very different from the reality experienced by constituent.

When Ms Crosbie appeared before the Treasury Committee last summer, she said of fixed-rate TBLs that

“the customer gets a fixed payment for a fixed period of time and that payment will never change as long as the customer does not want to terminate the agreement early.”

Yet the Beecheys’ payments were increased more than once, since the bank was simply able to vary the margin that they paid on top of the fixed rate. Mr Beechey never envisaged that that might happen. He understood that a fixed-rate loan meant what Debbie Crosbie had described. Indeed, her boss, the chief executive, David Thorburn said:

“This is a product which does what it says on the tin.”

I remind the House of the evidence that Ms Crosbie gave to the Treasury Committee last June. To his credit, the hon. Member for Dundee East (Stewart Hosie), the Treasury spokesman for the SNP, asked the fundamental question about the sales process:

“If a customer is able to identify that that process did not happen, that that warning was not explicit, that would count as a mis-sell would it...?”

Ms Crosbie confirmed:

“We believe that once you examine that process, and find that it had not been carried out in accordance with what we had agreed is appropriate, we would absolutely redress a customer and we have done so on a number of occasions.”

I do not doubt that Clydesdale has addressed these matters on a number of occasions, but not in the 8,300 cases; and the other banks have certainly not addressed all 69,000 cases. The few offers made to people such as my constituents are derisory and have been made only under acute pressure. Only a portion of the overcharged interest is offered to be refunded, and no consequential losses are considered at all.

Over the past two or three years, we in this House have travelled a great distance in seeking justice for SMEs that have been mis-sold interest rate swap products. We have moved some way, but we are nowhere near where we should be. The public and the businesses I am dealing with find it confusing and frustrating given that evidence to the Treasury Committee last year shows that the banks all too often wittingly knew what they were about when they sold these products. They were delaying responses to complainants, denying the existence of the problem and diluting the seriousness of the complaint by not voluntarily offering full disclosure of information.

[Mr Mark Williams]

I am mindful of your stipulation about the time, Madam Deputy Speaker, but let me cover this quickly. Mr Andy Keats of the Serious Banking Complaints Bureau has commented that

“the largest complaint by far is that there is no access to bank held documentation... The bank relies on concealment of your central file, committee meeting reports and minutes, internal and external valuations of your property”.

That has been my constituent’s experience.

In the past six months, during which my constituent has put in simultaneous requests to both the Clydesdale and Yorkshire Bank and the Financial Ombudsman Service, I have seen transcripts of conversations between my constituent and officials that are quite different from those initially provided in response to the first subject access request made to the bank. I have seen three different credit reports and three different sets of credit figures, and, worryingly, none of the figures was correct. Things seem to have been changed at the stroke of a pen. That is a serious but deeply concerning allegation. The Treasury Committee has exposed great misconduct, yet we cannot move forward unless we have complete transparency in the process.

I believe that the process of redress is not working as well as it needs to. The issue has been approached in a far more positive way in New Zealand. An arrangement has been made between the New Zealand Commerce Commission and a New Zealand bank, ANZ, under which the bank paid compensation of 18.5 million New Zealand dollars. Those funds will be distributed to affected customers who complained to the regulator. That has been done in New Zealand and it needs to be done here.

Above all, my plea is for the Minister to look mindfully at the suggestion that she will hear from the all-party group on interest rate mis-selling—the Bully Banks group—which is ably chaired by the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb), to push for a new, fair banking Bill that will regulate all products and services for commercial enterprises. I hope that we can push for fruition soon so as to benefit my constituent, Mr Beechey and, I believe, many others across the country.

4.5 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): The 2014 publication of the United Nation’s Commission of Inquiry report into human rights violations in North Korea was a defining moment. No longer was the suffering of the North Korean people overshadowed by nuclear weapons, political stalemates or sensationalist media stories. Instead, human rights rightfully took centre stage as the world became fully aware of a theatre of unimaginable horror situated in the northern half of the Korean peninsula. Detailing evidence that shocked even those of us who have sat with countless North Korean refugees and listened to their testimonies, the UN report documented the most egregious abuses of humanity in the modern era: state-sanctioned starvation, the prolific use of torture, endemic sexual violence, the use of political prison camps, and public executions as tools of social control.

I have spoken on this issue a number of times in the House, but new Members are present so I will give just a few examples of the kind of horrific torture and treatment that people in North Korea experience. Lee Hee-ho

gave evidence to the Commission of Inquiry—she later became the First Lady of the Republic of Korea, following the experiences that she suffered with her husband. She told of how supporters of democracy were

“Deprived of any clothing and mercilessly pummelled with wooden bats, deprived of sleep, and had water poured into their nostrils while hanging upside down like so much beef hanging from hooks in the slaughter house.”

Another piece of evidence received by the North Korea all-party group described one woman who was arrested for her faith and

“assigned to pull the cart used to remove excrement from the prison latrines...the guards made her lick off excrement that spilled over”.

Children are kept in classes in prison camps, and there is a story of how one child who had picked a few grains of wheat from a field on the way to class was accused of stealing by her teacher. She was murdered by that teacher—beaten to death with a wooden stick that day. A teenager working in the prison camp accidentally dropped a sewing machine. As a punishment he had one finger cut off. I could go on.

I am proud that the UK, EU and European states were instrumental in the establishment of the UN Human Rights Council resolution that mandated that Commission of Inquiry, and for which our all-party group hosted testimonial sessions. A General Assembly resolution, co-written by the EU, acknowledged the Commission’s findings as crimes against humanity, and encouraged the UN Security Council to consider targeted human rights sanctions and to refer the situation to the International Criminal Court—no fewer than 111 countries demanded that, following the publication of the report.

The COI report has placed human rights on to the Security Council’s permanent agenda, ensuring ongoing scrutiny, and it is clear that since its release, Governments and non-governmental organisations have devoted much thought to how the international community should respond. I am pleased that one recommendation of the Commission—the establishment of a field office in Seoul to monitor human rights violations in North Korea—opened on 23 June. We must press for all the other recommendations in the report to be implemented.

The international community must do more. Momentum must be maintained because every day people in North Korea suffer the most indescribable atrocities in prison camps, in what can only be described as today’s holocaust. We must look for tangible means to improve the lot of the ordinary North Korean, at new forms of diplomacy that can transform North Korean society, and to untrodden paths that lead to unfettered engagement with ordinary North Korean citizens.

We must consider whether the decade plus of on-the-ground engagement inside North Korea, pursued by the international community and commonly termed “critical engagement”, has been enough. Is there any evidence that our engagement policies to date have transformed North Korean society for the better, improved human rights, or compelled North Korean decision makers to alter their violent course? In the wake of the horrific contents of the Commission of Inquiries report, the short answer must be no. North Korean officials continue to commit crimes against humanity in spite of our ambassadorial presence in Pyongyang, and in full knowledge of international human rights law. As Justice

Michael Kirby noted in the final page of his COI report the North Korean Government

“has for decades pursued policies”—

indeed, for 60 years—

“involving crimes that shock the conscience of humanity raises questions about the inadequacy of the response of the international community.”

Like my colleagues in the all party group on North Korea, I am a firm advocate of engagement with the North Korean Government and the North Korean people, but engagement is not analogous to appeasement. Engagement with the North Korean people should not be confined to a small, hand-picked group of elites and outer-elites encountered by our engagement projects. There are 24 million North Koreans who have their substantive rights violated on a daily basis. We must reach those North Koreans.

Our engagement with North Korea in the post-COI era should not simply be renewed, it must be revised. Cracks in North Korea's façade are appearing: a burgeoning unofficial economy; normative changes in society and an elite group of decision makers who operate without checks or balances, all point to opportunities of influence. We should not set out to collapse the DPRK, but embassies and Government should work to affect tangible change and not just pursue engagement for its own sake. The question is what next, after the publication of the COI report? I do not have all the answers, but here are some.

The international community should invest greater time and resources in understanding how North Korea organises its power structures. How is power transferred all the way from Kim Jong-un to a local party secretary who allows the abuse of women and children? Closer working with non-governmental organisations and others to facilitate the exchange of information with North Korea should be supported. In addition, the foreign policies of concerned Governments should work in a more co-ordinated manner to exhibit increased energies to address human rights atrocities suffered by the people of North Korea. This should not be exclusively, or even primarily, occupied with the nuclear threat. Emphasising the importance of human rights should be a thread of steel running through all diplomatic engagement.

China should be pressed to end immediately its practice of the forcible repatriation of North Korean refugees. It should be called on to permit refugees to travel to neighbouring countries, and it should allow international observers to look into the conditions in which North Korean refugees live in China. Any future six-party talks should ensure that pressing for human rights improvements are a prominent element of negotiations. Further accountability measures should be pursued through UN Security Council channels. There should be fact-finding missions. A UN General Assembly resolution could determine the creation of tribunals to try North Koreans, possibly even in absentia, and other alternative justice mechanisms to complement the International Criminal Court process.

The North Korean Government must be challenged when reports reach our ears, such as those recently published by John Hopkins University that anthrax and other biological agents have been tested on disabled people in North Korea. Every effort should be made to ameliorate the desperate plight of the North Korean

people themselves. We should pursue ever more creative ways of breaking the information blockade that new technology such as DVDs, mobiles and USBs provide, and urge radio stations, in particular the BBC World Service, to broadcast directly into the Korean peninsula.

Finally, we should support the provision of aid through reliable NGOs, such as UNICEF and the Red Cross. UNICEF is warning of North Korea's worst drought in 100 years. This is critical in a country that is already utterly malnourished and where the Government are incapable—indeed, often unwilling—to provide even the most basic sustenance to many of their people. During its last drought in the 1990s, millions of people were reduced to eating grass and bark as they starved to death. Let us respond to the call from UNICEF and provide this basic help to the people of North Korea.

4.14 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my first speech in the House. First, I want to thank all of the staff here for their invaluable help. Without them, I literally would not be here. I have never before been guided so gently to where I should be, or given so much advice, and encouraged all the time to drink water, keeping me on the right road. I am truly grateful.

However, my main thanks today must be to my campaign team, led, ably and wonderfully, by my husband and agent—and we are still happily married, an achievement in itself. I was supported by a wondrous team, full of talent and ability and of every age and faith—a real mixer-maxter, as we say—who made the campaign fun and who watched over me like angels.

I know that there are some hon. Members in this House who have spent their whole adult life in preparation for being here; I haven't. I have lived a full and rather enjoyable life—in fact, I want to go on doing that—but I am, or have been, a wife, a mother, a granny, a teacher, a local councillor, a trade union official, an auditor, a bookkeeper, a housewife, a student in the swinging sixties, the chairman of the parent-teacher association and a secretary of my local community council. Each of these jobs and responsibilities has taught me a little bit about myself and a wee bit about the world around us. I know how to knit a jumper, although it has been suggested that as a deputy Whip I should, perhaps, consider knitting some other suitable accessories for the job. I can persuade a lazy 16-year-old to turn up to class on time, I can negotiate a fair pay deal for my colleagues and I know how to balance a set of books—a declining skill around here, I believe. [*Laughter.*]

I know that some of my colleagues' youthfulness has attracted a bit of attention here in the Chamber—and beyond. I hope to complement their great strengths by bringing my experience and skills to bear on our work. Too often I hear that those of us with more life experience are overlooked. I promise to make my experience count, and to stand up in this place for the grannies, grandads, retired and never-going-to-retire, wordly wise men and women across the country. We have a lot to offer our communities and this place.

But four years after I retired for the first time, the people of my own community gave me an opportunity to use my skills and experience here, as their first female

[*Marion Fellows*]

non-Labour MP. That is what I fully intend to do. I was voted here in record numbers, with a 38% swing and a majority of 11,898, as a declaration by the people of Motherwell and Wishaw that they wanted change, not the austerity policies ideologically driven towards deficit reduction which relegate the dignity of human beings behind the priority of the balance sheet. They want an end to the persecution of those least able to care for themselves and their families through misfortune and disability.

I want to remind the Labour hon. Members who shouted at me on my first day in this Chamber, “Why are you here? You don’t even want to be here,” of my response to them and to this House. I am here because I was democratically elected. And no—some sort of strange virus has not gripped the people of Scotland; they voted for change, and for a stronger voice for Scotland. And to those on the Government Benches I say, I was elected to be a full Member of this House. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] I am charged with the hopes and aspirations of the people of my constituency, who want better from this place.

I am very proud to come from the area that elected the first ever Scottish National party MP, Dr Robert McIntyre. He was elected in 1945. I also come from a place in Scotland where the majority of people voted yes to independence for Scotland last year. Every single one of the 27,295 votes I received from the people of Motherwell and Wishaw in this election is a reminder to me that I have a great responsibility to all of my constituents, not just those who voted for me. I fully intend to do my best to deliver the change my constituents want to see.

I am very proud of the industrial heritage of my constituency and the roots we have in steel and coal. The announcement earlier today of the threat to 720 jobs in Rotherham will be felt in my constituency, where so many jobs in steel were lost. It was fantastic to see the recent unveiling of “The Steelman”, an inspirational sculpture by Andy Scott, set as a memorial to those who left to work in heavy industries and did not come home.

I know that this subject was close to the heart of my predecessor, Frank Roy. I know from his kind and gracious words to me on the evening of the general election that he was and is proud of the people of the constituency, as am I. I want to wish him and his family well for the future.

I asked my constituents through Facebook what was great about our community. The answers came in thick and fast. There is a real sense of social justice in Motherwell and Wishaw, and the people want a fairer and more equal community—one reason why my constituents voted so well in the referendum was that they are really committed to social justice.

The people are the best thing in my constituency, someone said on Facebook, as they try to regenerate from the devastating loss of all the major industries in the area. The children in the local schools are fully engaged politically, and they are a strong future base. It is about adapting to change, I was told, and having hope, and now we must not let those children down. I was also told, and I know, that the constituency is the best of both worlds—minutes from Glasgow and minutes

from the Clyde valley; only an hour from the beach, and 45 minutes from our capital, Edinburgh. It is an ideal location.

Motherwell was famous for Olympian swimmers. Sir Alexander Gibson, founder of the Scottish national orchestra, was born in Motherwell. You can walk to New Lanark and Glasgow along the Clyde walkway and take in Baron’s Haugh, the RSPB reserve, which is a great place for twitchers—I do not see many here today. It is an area once rich in natural resources, which was of interest to the Romans, who built a bath house in what is now Strathclyde Country Park. The park was also the site of other aquatic spectacles—in last year’s hugely popular Commonwealth games, the triathlon and the rowing competitions took place there. One of my constituents is Charlie Flynn, “The Mailman”, who won a gold in boxing at the Commonwealth games. We are very articulate in Motherwell and Wishaw—Charlie more than me, it has to be said. Strathclyde Park also contains Scotland’s theme park—culture, sports and dodgems in one place.

The former Ravenscraig steel mill is now the site of a sports hub, the envy of many other places, with a full-sized indoor football pitch, and a new town is slowly being built on the site.

Did Members know that if they buy a kilt anywhere in the UK, it was probably made in Motherwell by Glenisla Kilts? Gallant Members who served in Scottish regiments would have been dressed by that company too, as it makes all the kilts for the Army. It has also worked with Vivienne Westwood on cutting-edge designs. The Dalzell works, now owned by Tata Steel, still rolls steel, and there are many enterprising businesses throughout the area.

I have to say, I was disappointed not to see Mr Speaker’s comments on my Facebook page, as I know that he had his own happy month living across the road from where I now live when he was a candidate in Motherwell and Wishaw in 1987. He was taken in by the people living there, and my constituency has long taken in folk from afar: Irish refugees after the famine, Lithuanians after the first world war, Congolese refugees more recently, and Polish families, who all add to our society.

When some people talk about the communities in Motherwell and Wishaw, they define us by what we once were, not what we are or could be in the future. Our job is to look to the future. I agree with the bard, not Rabbie, but the English bard—Shakespeare, I think he is called. He wrote that

“what’s past is prologue; what to come, In yours and my discharge.”

My community, my constituency and my country have fantastic assets and attributes. The people are the centre of that. It is not where people are from but where they are going that matters, and our job is to lead the way. To quote my national bard, in his “Epistle to a Young Friend”, he cautioned him to “better reckon the rede”—in English, to take advice. I would advise the Government to take heed. The people of Scotland are holding them to account and they sent 56 representatives here to remind the Government to give us what was promised in the vow. We want that, and we want to be full Members of Parliament.

I promise that in my time here over the next five years I will work hard to realise my constituency’s fantastic potential, and be a hard-working and approachable local MP. I am looking forward to it.

4.26 pm

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): It is very nice to follow the maiden speech by the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows). I wish her all the best in the Parliament. We all bring different attributes and experiences here, and she was very down-to-earth in describing herself as a mother, a teacher and a bookkeeper. All those attributes will be very useful here in Parliament. She also said that she very much wants to represent her constituents and, irrespective of our political party, that is something that we really value. Our constituents will definitely hold us to account when it comes to the next election. I welcome the hon. Lady and hope she enjoys her time here. I will not go into great detail on some of her political points, because it was her maiden speech, but I congratulate her.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this recess debate. We have just heard from a Scottish Member, but if we look at the south-west we see that the borders of Tewkesbury are three miles closer to the Scottish border than they are to Land's End. That shows how big the south-west is, and how necessary it is for infrastructure to get there. We often talk about rail being electrified to Bristol, but it needs to be electrified all the way to Cornwall, because there is a lot of west country in between. The Government are focusing on getting the infrastructure right, but we need to do more because that helps our constituents and businesses—generally, it creates the economy that we all want.

The A303 being dualled from Stonehenge to Ilminster, along the A358 to the M5, is right, but there is a stretch between Ilminster and Honiton that needs serious improvement. I really want to see proposals from the Government to make sure that we do that. We have agreement from the area of outstanding natural beauty that the road can be built, and we need to get to grips with that.

On broadband, we need to ensure greater competition. BT is a great company, but it has almost a monopoly when it comes to rolling out broadband. In some areas, it moves in, delivers broadband to a few properties and then the rest of the properties are missed out, which makes it difficult for other companies to come in to provide it. I would love to see Ministers come forward with a voucher system, especially in the areas that are hardest to reach. If we cannot get connected through BT, let us get it through wireless, as we are deciding to do in Exmoor and Dartmoor. We have got to get our constituents broadband—not only individual constituents and residents, but businesses. It is very much part of the infrastructure that we require, and I look forward to it being delivered throughout Devon and Somerset and beyond, but we need greater competition so that BT does not dictate to us exactly what we should have.

My final point, as I promised to be brief, is that I have been very fortunate to be elected Chairman of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. We are very keen to start looking into what is happening with the single farm payment, making sure it is delivered on time; and to ensure that TB is eradicated from this country, with the necessary measures taken not only in testing cattle, but in making sure that wildlife is clear of the disease as well. There is much to do in the farming world, because prices are poor, and we need to help with that. We also need to look at flooding, and at having more internal drainage boards so that more

local people and more local knowledge can be used to deliver a much better drainage system at a much more competitive price. So, there is much to do, but we are more than up to doing it.

4.31 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I am sure that Members throughout the Chamber will join the community in Wood Green in mourning the loss of Mr Erdogan Guzel. Our condolences go to his wife and two children, who lost their beloved father and husband. Mr Guzel was fatally shot last Friday while sitting outside his friend's bakery on Lordship Lane on a sunny afternoon. Mr Guzel was gunned down in a drive-by shooting with a sawn-off shotgun, in a tragic case of mistaken identity. Ms Sonya Gencheva was also injured and is today in a critical but stable condition in hospital—another innocent passerby caught up in that appalling crime.

Gun crime is terrifying, and I am pleased that the police have moved quickly to apprehend a number of suspects. I wonder whether it will be possible to debate, in the autumn session of Parliament, what increased measures can be taken to prevent gun crime in our cities, among worryingly increasing levels of violent crime. After today's debate, I am going to hold a special debate about this issue in my community. I was keen to take the wishes of the whole House to the community of Wood Green, who are still reeling in shock as a result of this terrible crime.

4.32 pm

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): It is a great pleasure to reply to this debate, and I congratulate the two hon. Members who made their maiden speeches. We heard from the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), who is a local lass made good. She pointed out that our analysis reports are in the post—monitoring 649 subjects for the next five years would keep anyone busy—but, as she also pointed out, she is already busy representing her constituents. She talked about how her constituents helped others, through public services and the work that Department for International Development civil servants do in her constituency. I am sure that she is very proud of them, and they will be proud of her today. I can honestly say that “polo mint city” is a better description than Basingstoke's, where my first job was, which was known as the doughnut—again, the reference being to roundabouts.

The hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) was right to praise her family's support during the election campaign—I am sure that she will continue to have a happy marriage. I am really impressed that she is already a Whip; that is fast promotion, indeed. I was a Whip in the previous Parliament.

I was surprised that the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow denied any relationship to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, but I am sure that together they could each wear the tartan made in the constituency of her hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw. You never know: one day we may see a kilt or two in the Chamber, even if it is worn by you, Madam Deputy Speaker, with one of your beautiful scarves.

[Dr Thérèse Coffey]

The hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw also mentioned her life experience and referred to balancing the books in her professional life. I gently point out that that is what we are seeking to do, with our long-term economic plan, as we move from deficit to surplus, because at the end of the day we have to balance the books; every accountant knows that.

I will do my best to go through the speeches in turn. In starting the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) rightly brought to the House's attention the council's closure of the cattle market, which is to be demolished, with barely a week's notice, and she pointed out that Derby City Council had not invested in the facility. I have heard this about other councils. It is a great shame that county towns do not recognise the heritage or the living countryside that surrounds them. It is important that county towns act for the entire county, and I suggest that she considers approaching farmers to see whether they could apply to make it an asset of community value, so that if the opportunity to buy the site comes up, they would have the option of doing so. The only other advice I can offer is that she follows this up with our colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government to see whether there are other options. In addition, the Chairman of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, who has just spoken, will have heard her point or will read it in *Hansard*.

The hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen), who is not in his place, referred to having a list of speakers at the back of the Speaker's Chair. The traditional reason for not having one is to ensure that people debate, rather than just read pre-prepared speeches. The very good debate yesterday was an opportunity for people to make different points, rather than necessarily repeating the same ones. I understand that Members all have busy lives, but I particularly enjoy sitting in the Chamber and listening to our debates—I know that you do a lot of that as well, Madam Deputy Speaker. The issue, however, is probably a matter for the Procedure Committee to consider, alongside the review I hope it will conduct into our proposals on Standing Orders.

On English devolution, the hon. Gentleman suggested that because the Committee stage of the Scotland Bill was taken on the Floor of the House, so too should that of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill. The Scotland Bill covers not one particular legislative area, however, but the transfer of general areas of responsibility from this Parliament to the Scottish Parliament. I am not convinced, therefore, that it is necessary to take the other Bill on the Floor of the House, but as always all Members will be able to contribute on Report, even if they were not selected for the Committee. On financial devolution and income tax assignment, he seems to have missed the fact that the coalition Government achieved a lot with the Localism Act 2011. The powers are out there and deals are being done, so I encourage him to work with his local authority in Nottingham and the Greater Nottingham area to take advantage of that.

The hon. Gentleman said that his constituency had the lowest number of people going to university, and I think he mentioned the removal of the maintenance grant. When we made our changes to fees in the last

Parliament, it was said that the number of young people going to university would collapse and that people from poorer backgrounds would simply not go, but that has not proven to be the case. What matters, as the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) said, is ensuring that children have access to good schools and are not frightened of going to university. In that respect, the early-years preparation she mentioned does matter.

I now move on to the marathon speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess). It was quite a canter. In fact, Southend seems to have everything except a racecourse, although I bet he is going to tell me it has a greyhound track. I do know, however, that one gets plenty of exercise if one even attempts to walk up and down the pier, which I think is the longest in the United Kingdom—but most normal human beings take a train from one end to the other.

I want to say something about the Chilcot inquiry. The inquiry, which is completely independent of Government, is examining a range of complex and difficult issues concerning events that ran over a period of about 10 years. Sir John Chilcot wrote to the Prime Minister on 15 June updating him on the inquiry's position. Since January, the inquiry has received a large proportion of the responses expected from individuals who were given the opportunity to respond to provisional criticisms—something referred to as the Maxwellisation process. The responses have been constructive, and in some cases they have opened up new issues or highlighted evidence not seen before by the inquiry but which the inquiry is now considering with care.

In the Prime Minister's reply, he said that he was disappointed that the inquiry was not yet able to provide a timetable for completion of its report; and as soon as Maxwellisation is completed, the Prime Minister expects to receive an update from Sir John on the timescale for the urgent completion of the inquiry. The civil service continues to be under instruction to provide every assistance to the inquiry, and Sir John agreed to meet Sir Jeremy Heywood in accordance with the Prime Minister's wishes. I can assure my hon. Friend that the Government are very keen to see this report published. I know that many around the House are as impatient as he is to get it.

My hon. Friend made a number of different points. On Southend airport and his constituent's problems with noise pollution, I suggest that if he has not already done so—I am sure he has, as I know he is an assiduous Member—he should contact the aviation Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill).

On the point about the National Deaf Children's Society and the allocation of Ofsted inspectors who have experience of the needs of the deaf, the training and allocation of the inspectors is, of course, a matter for Her Majesty's chief inspector, but I know that this chief inspector takes very seriously the need to ensure that inspectors have the appropriate skills and knowledge to perform their role. I understand that those who inspect specialist provision will have had previous relevant experience in teaching and leadership, and will undertake additional Ofsted training. I am also aware that where a school has a specialist unit for deaf children, inspectors will establish in the pre-inspection conversation with the school whether a British sign language interpreter is required when meetings pupils.

When it comes to mainstream schools, a requirement for all inspectors to have experience or specialist training in respect of people who are deaf or hearing impaired was seen to raise very significant cost and efficiency issues, as well as practical ones. For that reason, I understand that Ofsted has no plans to make further changes to its arrangements at present.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend West referred to the wild animals in circuses Bill. He will know that there was a commitment in our manifesto, and the Government are committed to bringing in this legislation when parliamentary time allows. I am sure he will be pleased to know that the interim licensing scheme is ensuring good welfare for the 18 wild animals being used by the two travelling circuses.

On the NHS agency staff bill, my hon. Friend will be aware of the action already taken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. It is an important issue that probably affects every health trust in all parts of the United Kingdom, so my hon. Friend is right to raise it on behalf of his local hospitals.

My hon. Friend referred to the promotion of Southend United. I congratulate the team on that. The last time I saw Southend United play was when I was a parliamentary candidate for Wrexham, and I am afraid Southend lost to Wrexham in the Johnstone's Paint trophy. All I can say is that Wrexham ain't anywhere near where Southend United is in the football league nowadays.

I hope I have covered a good number of the points that my hon. Friend raised. He is right to talk about VisitEngland and to want to improve tourism outside London. I am sure he will welcome the fact that as we speak many tourists will be heading up to my constituency to enjoy the Latitude festival. I hope that the weather stays good for them. The sun always shines in Southend, and it usually does in Suffolk, too. I am sure, finally, that other hon. Members will join me in congratulating my hon. Friend, who I am sure will enjoy his investiture at Windsor castle tomorrow.

The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) raised a number of points. She mentioned open-cast mines. I understand that the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, met Carl Sergeant of the Welsh Assembly Government today to discuss issues relating to open-cast mines, including the Parc Slip west site. My hon. Friend has agreed to have further conversations about options to deal with the site and possible sources of funding.

The hon. Lady raised the issue of continence. I do not know whether the event she mentioned is still happening as we speak—possibly not. I recognise the need for nationwide improvements in continence care. This has led to the continence care programme, which is aligned with the national compassion in practice strategy. NHS England is leading a national programme of work in this area. I am not aware of what is happening in Wales in that regard, but the hon. Lady will appreciate that she can have direct conversations with the appropriate people in the Welsh Assembly Government.

I understand the hon. Lady's frustration about tier 4 student visas, because there is a similar issue in my constituency. As I am sure she will recognise, acquiring student visas used to be one of the main ways in which people managed to overstay, and I understand that very careful deliberation is taking place about all the different

applications that are being made. Nevertheless, I hope that the Home Office will move as quickly as possible to satisfy her local college and, indeed, mine. I am sure that my Home Office colleagues have noted my issue as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) asked about Equitable Life. I was proud to be part of a governing party that ensured that compensation was provided, and that further compensation was given to those on pension credit. I understand the point that my hon. Friend made, but I am not aware that the Treasury has any plans to extend the compensation regime any further.

My hon. Friend also expressed concern that the public health funds given to councils were not being used for their intended purposes. Public Health England continues to issue targets against which councils are measured, but one of the purposes of giving councils public health funding was to address local needs and ensure the provision of not only immediate but long-term public health benefits, and I think that that should be respected. If my hon. Friend wishes to raise any specific local issues, I am sure that he will be able to do so directly, either with my colleagues or with councils themselves.

The hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz)—or, as she accurately said, “hon. Friend” outside the Chamber—was right to highlight problems relating to traffic jams and productivity. Having checked on my phone earlier, I know that, as we speak, there are just big red lines on the southbound section of the M6 in her constituency. I grew up in Liverpool and some members of my family still live there, while others live in parts of north Wales, so I am a regular traveller up the M6. I share the hon. Lady's frustration, which is why I do not use that road any more.

According to the Department for Transport, the entry road at junction 9 has been closed to help to prevent gridlock on local roads in Walsall. If the road were kept open, traffic would have to queue to access the M5 link road, which currently has only one lane available owing to vital repair work on the carriageway. Queues would build up quickly and result in heavy congestion on the M6, which would back up into other roads in Walsall—although the hon. Lady seems to think that that is already happening. I understand that Highways England has discussed the matter in depth with Sandwell and Walsall councils, and that they understand the need to prevent needless congestion for local drivers.

The hon. Lady said that no work seemed to be being carried out on the entry road, and she was absolutely right. The road has been closed not so that repairs can be carried out, but with a view to preventing gridlock on the M6 and local roads around Walsall. However, I am sure that the authorities will take careful note of what she has said today, and will look at the issue again.

The hon. Lady mentioned traffic-calming measures in Walstead Road, and the need for a 20 mph zone in Monmouth Road. As she knows, her local council must tackle the issue, but she has plenty of experience in that regard, and she was right to raise it on behalf of her constituents today.

As for the education centre that the hon. Lady mentioned, I agree with her that it will be a great result. I was not invited to the opening of the centre, so I feel a bit left out, but I shall be sure to go and see it on Monday.

[*Dr Thérèse Coffey*]

The hon. Lady also mentioned the travel subsidy. Unfortunately for me, it is for those outside the M25. Children from Suffolk do not benefit from the subsidy, and I assure the hon. Lady that those in Lowestoft, which is not in my constituency but 130 miles away, do not benefit from it either. As a result, not many schools in my constituency come here. However, I am sure that the excellent new centre will help.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy) spoke passionately about her role as a breast cancer ambassador. She was right to do so, on behalf of her constituents, but also because of the need to continue to raise awareness. The independent cancer taskforce has developed a five-year strategy for cancer services with the aim of improving survival rates and saving more lives. The strategy will recommend improvements along the cancer pathway, and is expected to be published later this month. We will work with the NHS, charities and patient groups to deliver that.

My hon. Friend also referred to the Iran nuclear deal. After more than a decade of tough negotiations, we have reached an historic agreement aimed at ensuring that Iran's nuclear programme is and remains exclusively peaceful, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will be grateful for her praise. She also raised the important issue of the number of older people living alone and the isolation that many of them feel. I am not aware of exactly what we are doing on that, but I am sure that her concerns can be addressed in future Question Time opportunities.

The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden spoke passionately about the need for social mobility. She referred to the parental link, the privileged professions and the link to private schools. She mentioned early years provision in an intervention on the hon. Member for Nottingham North. Her Majesty's chief inspector of education published the annual report on the early years sector for Parliament on 13 July—just a few days ago. It shows a positive picture overall, welcomes the Government's major new investment in free childcare for working parents and highlights the fact that the quality of all types of early-years provision is at its highest ever. We are absolutely committed to continuing to help children from disadvantaged backgrounds, which is why we offer 15 hours of completely free childcare.

On the question of social mobility, I can tell the hon. Lady that one of the things that drives this Government is ensuring that every child has a good early start and goes to a good school. We are passionate about keeping that going, because it matters. We only have one chance of being a child and getting that education, and she is right to champion that issue. I can assure her that this Government are on the side of those who want to get on and do the right thing.

The hon. Lady talked about the certificate in knowledge of policing now costing £1,000. It is my understanding that special constables, certainly in the Metropolitan police, do not need the certificate. The Met is also open to providing interest-free loans. I do not particularly want to become a tax lawyer at the Dispatch Box, but my personal experience would lead me to expect that people who see the benefit of investing in such a certificate would be able to deduct the cost as a fully allowable expense.

Siobhain McDonagh: Does the Minister not appreciate that the group of young people I was talking about would not have any knowledge of tax relief? They are people who want to become police officers but who have neither the time to arrange such things, because they are working, nor the ability to say to their parents, "Can I have £1,000 so that I can train and apply for this job?" The certificate simply allows them to apply; it does not guarantee them a job.

Dr Coffey: I recognise what the hon. Lady is saying. Perhaps the way out for some people would be to train as a special in the first place. She also mentioned unpaid work experience, and I recognise the points she made. I am pleased that HMRC is cracking down on unpaid internships; that is the right approach for us to take.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) also covered a wide range of subjects. He talked about broadband "not spots" and the sharing of masts. My right hon. Friend the Business Secretary made a breakthrough in March in his negotiations with the phone companies, and it is important that that progress should continue. I hope that my hon. Friend is also benefiting from the mobile infrastructure programme.

My hon. Friend was right to praise the staff at Blackburn hospital for making progress since it received the perhaps not very helpful but nevertheless accurate assessment outlining what needed to be done in the interest of its patients. I also welcome the idea of having a GP surgery at the entrance to the A&E department, to which patients can be sent, if necessary, following triage.

I am sure that my hon. Friend's part of the northern powerhouse will feel the benefit of half-hourly trains. I wish I could get the same service for Suffolk; it would be a good thing if we at least had trains coming through. I welcome the fact that the pool in Haslingden is reopening thanks to the work of the community group known as HAPPI. I think I misheard him at first, but he did refer to Pharrell Williams, and "Happy" is one of my favourite karaoke songs. I am sure that HAPPI will be able to think about some of the town centre improvements to which my hon. Friend referred. It is vital that we improve our market towns if we are to have prosperity and great places to live and work, and I am sure that he will be a strong champion of the towns in his constituency.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is no longer in his place, mentioned that he was a fan of country sports, including shooting and fishing. You may have missed this, Madam Deputy Speaker, but he announced that he has a licence to shoot, so I guess we are going to re-christen him 007. He was right about the important role of country sports in not only conservation but jobs for local people.

My hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) raised the case of one of her constituents in respect of the police and the Home Office, so she should follow it up with the Home Secretary via the usual routes. It would be inappropriate for me to comment while legal proceedings are ongoing. The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) highlighted the case of his constituent and mis-selling. He rightly paid tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb) for the work he has done. I believe that a substantial amount of action has been taken by the Financial Conduct Authority and reviews are under way. Some £1.9 billion

has been paid out so far. I recognise what the hon. Gentleman says about consequential losses, and he will not be the only Member who has constituents affected in that way. He is right to press on this point and I am sure the Treasury will be listening.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) raised the important issue of the violation of human rights in North Korea, a subject that she has championed regularly, and, as she is co-chair of the all-party group on North Korea, I am sure she will continue to do so. My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) talked about many rural issues, including the A303, the BT monopoly on broadband—that is what he suggests—and flooding in internal drainage boards. I am sure that now he has been elected as the Chairman of the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs he will be able to bring his additional weight to bear on these matters. It is right that we focus on ensuring that rural parts of our country not only get a fair deal but get access to the services and infrastructure we need.

I wanted to answer a point made by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Stephen Phillips). I will not pretend that I know Lincolnshire very well, although I have family who came from there. I know it is a sparsely populated county, and other rural counties will face similar issues. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government takes seriously issues relating to how rural funding has been addressed. I know that some additional funding was given in order to do that, and I appreciate the campaign to continue that approach. I hope that my hon. and learned Friend will be tenacious on this, as I know he is. On fair funding for the police in Lincolnshire, we know that the current model for allocating police funding is complex and out of date. That is why we are undertaking a detailed review of the formula and will be launching a consultation on reforming the current arrangements for allocating funding before the end of next week.

On my hon. and learned Friend's point about corruption, we are applying pressure to our international partners, and that is at the heart of this matter. We are working on the UN convention against corruption in partner countries, and with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund on strengthening financial action taskforces around the globe. We have been taking real leadership in these areas, and DFID works with other G8 and G20 members, and through the UN, to strengthen the international architecture to combat corruption and illicit financial flows. I remind the House that the UK took the lead when we chaired the G8 in 2013, implementing a number of measures which have put the UK in a leadership position.

The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West), who is no longer in her place, was right to raise the worrying events in her constituency last week. Madam Deputy Speaker, it was kind of you to allow a few people to speak who were not here at the start, because it really matters that people have the opportunity to use this Chamber to raise issues on behalf of their constituents. It is my great pleasure to speak to this Chamber. It is only just a year since I joined the Government, and I want also to thank those who have been—

Mrs Moon *rose*—

Dr Coffey: I was about to conclude, so if the hon. Lady does not mind, I will not give way.

I want to thank everyone who has helped all new Members to settle in and the rest of us to settle back into life. It is a great privilege to be a Member of this House, and I believe that only one person has yet to make their maiden speech. People of the pre-2015 intake are delighted at the number of new people who have joined this House and at the quality of the debate that they are bringing to it. I also want to thank the people who work for me in my constituency and my staff, those before the election and the ones now. Without all our staff, we would not be in a great place in order to serve our constituents in the way we do.

On that note, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish you a great recess, when I am sure you will be working hard in your constituency of Epping Forest, too.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Would it be appropriate to ask to put on the record the thanks of everyone who has taken part in this debate for the very full and thorough reply that we have all received from the Deputy Leader of the House. To be honest, I have never heard such a fantastic response from a Minister at the Dispatch Box, and we all owe her a great thank you.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): It would not strictly be in order as a point of order to the House, but I am very pleased that the hon. Lady has used that device to make that point. I was about to make it myself on behalf of the House, but I am very glad to have a unanimous congratulations to the Minister for her very full, thorough and thoughtful response to this important debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered matters to be raised before the forthcoming adjournment.

Business without Debate

RESTORATION AND RENEWAL OF THE PALACE OF WESTMINSTER (JOINT COMMITTEE)

Resolved,

That this House concurs with the Lords Message of 9 July, that it is expedient that a Joint Committee of Lords and Commons be appointed to consider the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster.

Ordered,

That a Select Committee of six Members be appointed to join with the Committee appointed by the Lords to consider the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster.

That the Committee shall have power—

- (a) to send for persons, papers and records,
- (b) to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House,
- (c) to report from time to time,
- (d) to appoint specialist advisers, and
- (e) to adjourn from place to place.

That the quorum of the committee shall be three.

That Ms Angela Eagle, Neil Gray, Chris Grayling, Ian Paisley, Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg and Mark Tami be members of the Committee.—(*Dr Thérèse Coffey.*)

EUROPEAN SCRUTINY

Ordered,

That Graham Stringer be a member of the European Scrutiny Committee.—(*Jackie Doyle-Price, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Insurance Companies: Child Abuse Inquiries

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Simon Kirby.*)

5.1 pm

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I have campaigned for several decades to expose child abuse in Wales and will continue to do so until all the cover-ups have been exposed and justice has been served. I feel very strongly about this matter because children from my constituency of Cynon Valley in south Wales were taken to Bryn Estyn children's home in north Wales, 130 miles away from their families and friends. All those young men have been damaged in some way. Their experience affected their future relationships with people. Some of them got into trouble with the law. Of the many young men who gave evidence to the Jillings inquiry, to the police or to the Waterhouse inquiry, a shocking number have committed suicide, have self-harmed or have been killed in mysterious circumstances.

Many people have expressed their concern at the adverse influence that insurance companies can exert on any inquiry or report into complaints about children in the care of local authorities—though that also applies to other areas such as churches, hospitals and so on. This influence, or cover-up, has been used in many previous inquiries—I am talking about the Kincora children's home in Ireland, the Cartrefle inquiry in Wales, the Jillings inquiry in Wales and the Waterhouse report in Wales—preventing exposure of the problems, often redacting vital information and so failing publicly to uncover the truth for the alleged victims.

In February, the BBC's "File on 4" carried out an investigation that found evidence that local authorities in England and Wales may have allowed fear of losing insurance cover to influence their approach to child abuse inquiries. There were also cases where insurers attempted to suppress information about abuse allegations.

In Rochdale, the then council leader, Colin Lambert, was shocked by a response from council officers when he proposed an investigation last year into a possible cover-up of child abuse at the Knowl View special school for boys. That involved the alleged sexual assaults by Rochdale's former MP, the late Cyril Smith and others, in the 1970s, '80s, and early '90s. Mr Lambert says he was told that an inquiry could lead to problems with the council's insurers. He said:

"I can recall a conversation with officers that this could lead to the insurers withdrawing cover...Holding an actual open inquiry would expose exactly who did know what—and therefore the council probably would have been liable. And that then opens up the insurers to claims."

In Bedfordshire, Tim Hulbert, former director of social services, said that insurers "instructed" him on what to do when he was helping set up an inquiry into alleged child abuse at a children's home in the early 1990s. He said:

"I had a phone call from the insurers who were anxious to influence the terms of reference of the inquiry so they didn't actually produce circumstances which would increase the likelihood of claims."

At another council, Hereford and Worcester, in the same period, former child protection manager Peter McKelvie said council lawyers warned him not to admit

the authority's liability at an inquiry into abuse at Rhydd Court school for boys, near Malvern. He said:

"I could talk about the abuse that children suffered, but I was not to talk about how it could have been prevented."

Mr McKelvie believed that insurance concerns lay behind the instruction.

There have been a number of inquiries into serious sexual abuse in children's homes run by the old Clwyd county council. I want to concentrate on two previous inquiry reports whose publication was prevented by the council's insurers. The first, which became known as the Cartrefle report in 1992, was an investigation undertaken by Detective Inspector Cronin of North Wales police into allegations of sexual abuse at Cartrefle. Later reports found that Cronin undertook a thorough investigation to the best of his abilities, but that the investigation was restricted by a lack of co-operation by children's services and social services. Cronin's report found insufficient evidence to undertake a successful prosecution, but it was subsequently submitted to the council.

In 1992, Clwyd council was told by Municipal Mutual Insurance Ltd, which now operates under the name of Zurich Municipal, that publication of the first report, the Cartrefle inquiry, could amount to a waiver of public interest immunity or privilege and could become a contempt of court case in view of anticipated forthcoming criminal proceedings arising from the abuse.

The second inquiry, chaired by John Jillings, tried again to investigate abuse in Clwyd care homes after being commissioned by Clwyd county council in 1994. The panel met with considerable opposition over the course of its inquiry. For instance, the then newly appointed North Wales chief constable refused to meet the inquiry or help with access to the police major incident database. Some 130 boxes of material handed over by the council to the police were not made available to the panel. The Jillings inquiry said in 1994:

"We were disappointed at the apparent impossibility of obtaining a breakdown of data. We are unable to identify the overall extent of the allegations received by the police in the many witness statements which they took."

In addition, the council did not allow the inquiry to place a notice in the local press seeking information, because this was considered unacceptable to the insurers. It is interesting that the insurers of the county council were also the insurers of North Wales police.

This resulted in the need to collect 70 duplicate and additional witness statements. I put a notice in my local paper, and six young men answered the advert. I took detailed statements from four of them who wanted to talk to me. I took a long time to interview them individually, and I found the allegations that they made and the descriptions of their experiences totally emotionally draining. If I felt like that, it is impossible to imagine what their feelings were.

The Jillings report commissioned at the time laid bare the north Wales child abuse scandal. It found a child care system in which physical and sexual violence were common, from beatings and bullying to indecent assault and rape. Children who complained of abuse were not believed or were punished for making false allegations. The report stated that the number of children who were abused was not clear, but at least 12 former residents were found to have died from unnatural causes.

The report stated that some staff linked to abuse may have been allowed to resign or retire early. It stated that allegations involving famous names and paedophile rings were beyond its remit and something best addressed by a potential later public inquiry. It concluded that its panel members had considered quitting before publication, due to

"the considerable constraints placed upon us."

The final report's appendices included limited copies of the key witness statements taken by North Wales police during their earlier investigation.

Despite such obstructions, the panel stuck to its brief to investigate child care in Clwyd, in the wake of a number of allegations and court cases involving care workers. Most of the allegations covered the period from 1980 to 1988, and a four-year police inquiry saw 2,600 statements taken and 300 cases sent to the Crown Prosecution Service. Eventually, eight men were charged and six were convicted.

Mr Jillings has made clear what he discovered back then:

"What we found was horrific and on a significant scale. If the events in children's homes in North Wales were to be translated into a film, *Oliver Twist* would seem relatively benign."

According to Jillings, the scale of what happened and how it was allowed

"are a disgrace, and stain on the history of child care in this country."

Had the report been published at the time, it would have sounded alarm bells and things would have moved much faster.

The report was not published because of concerns over libel, and because of legal advice and concerns from the council's insurers, Municipal Mutual Insurance, which warned that publication would encourage court cases and compensation claims. The report, which was limited to 12 copies only, was virtually unseen by committee or council members and was pulped. The insurers even suggested that the chair of the council's social services committee, Malcolm King—a brave and determined whistleblower—should be sacked if he spoke out. They wrote to the council:

"Draconian as it may seem, you may have to consider with the elected members whether they wish to remove him from office if he insists on having the freedom to speak".

In November 2012 Malcolm King said:

"Because it was suppressed, the lessons of the Jillings report were not learned. It was the exchange of financial safety for the safety of real people. It was one of the most shameful parts of recent history."

In 1996, just before William Hague announced the Waterhouse inquiry, I tabled four early-day motions to put on the record what had allegedly happened in north Wales, because I had seen the Jillings report. To do that, I had to block parliamentary business for two nights running. As Members can imagine, I got into considerable trouble with my Chief Whip, as well as with Whips from other parties. I re-tabled one EDM in November 2012, which contained the gist of the complaint at the time. Back then, however, the subject disappeared from the Order Paper. The moment the Waterhouse inquiry was announced in Parliament, discussion of these matters in this place was shut down for four years. That is why I

[Ann Clwyd]

thought it so important at the time to table the EDMs, so that people would understand the seriousness of the allegations.

It was not until July 2013 that a redacted version of the Jillings report was finally published, after a request by the BBC under the Freedom of Information Act. Flintshire County Council had previously uncovered one copy of the report in its archive. The six north Wales councils took legal advice on whether it could be made available. That was after demands by myself and many others for the report to be published after the Jimmy Savile sexual abuse scandal came to light.

I want to finish by discussing the Waterhouse inquiry. At the time, it was

“the biggest investigation ever held in Britain into allegations of physical, sexual and emotional abuse of children who passed through the care system”.

The findings, which were published in February 2000, concluded:

“Widespread sexual abuse of boys occurred in children’s residential establishments in Clwyd between 1974 and 1990. There were some incidents of sexual abuse of girl residents in these establishments but they were comparatively rare.”

The Waterhouse inquiry stated that the insurers had “acted throughout with the honourable intention”

of preventing the council from acting in such a way that they would be forced to repudiate liability for claims. However, during the Waterhouse inquiry, the insurers’ representatives accepted that they went too far and

“that at times the tone of the correspondence on their behalf”—that is, the insurers’—

“was intemperate and went too far in the demands made of the Council. They accepted also that their approach to the dilemma of striking a balance between the duty of a council to seek the truth and identify reforms on one hand and its duty to protect its financial interests on the other, may be open to criticism.”

The inquiry made 72 recommendations for changes, constituting a massive overhaul of the way in which children in care are dealt with by local councils, social services and the police. Recommendations 71 and 72 called for the Law Commission to investigate the legal issues arising from the clear conflict of interest between insurers and the insured. In July 2004, The Law Commission published a 220-page report, “In the Public Interest: Publication of Local Authority Inquiry Reports”—No. 289. That very thorough report makes two principal recommendations for reform: first, to amend the law of qualified privilege; and secondly, to create a new power of inquiry. The report found that

“insurers do in practice ‘lean’ in some way on authorities to prevent publication when reports may reveal admissions of liability”.

It said:

“The practical difficulty is that insurers and local authorities are in a market. If the risk for the insurers becomes too great, they might either raise premiums so that it is uneconomic for authorities to pay them or they might walk away from the business altogether.”

The report also points out that although it investigates local authorities and their insurance issues, in principle the same issues can arise in relation to any public body providing a public service, other than central Government. While the Law Commission report was presented to Parliament and accepted, it was not implemented.

It is a matter of concern that insurance companies can still exert adverse influence on any inquiry or report on complaints about children in the care of local authorities. As Tim Hulbert, former director of social services in Bedfordshire, explained in a report on the BBC’s “File on 4”,

“There is actually a conflict between the responsibilities of a local authority to safeguard its finances, which represents the interests of the insurers amongst other people, and the responsibility to protect children in whatever circumstances.”

He went on to say:

“For that reason, it needs to be dealt with as part of the whole examination of what influences have allowed the cover-ups of child abuse for so long.”

While we wait to see what comes out of the Macur review, I fear that the Goddard inquiry will not have access to that uncompleted review and may not have access to all previous unredacted local authority inquiry reports.

It is now high time—I hope the Minister agrees—that the Government implemented the Law Commission’s recommendations and brought forward a Bill to reform insurance company influence. I hope that in future any council that wants to publish a report, on whatever subject, will be protected from its own insurers. This matter has not yet been resolved and needs to be put right.

Finally, I pay tribute to Alison Taylor, a residential care worker who was one of the first whistleblowers in Gwynedd, and to Councillor Malcolm King, who was the chair of social services at Clwyd County Council. They were both outstandingly brave, and Alison Taylor was sacked because nobody believed her at the time.

5.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) on securing this important debate. She has been absolutely tireless in her efforts to expose the barriers to justice for children who were abused while in the care of the state. She speaks today with as much passion as ever about this tragic issue, and I commend her for bringing it to our attention once again.

Child sexual abuse is of course a despicable crime that this Government are absolutely determined to eradicate. It is a fundamental right of children and young people that they should be protected from such abuse.

The right hon. Lady spoke very eloquently about her concerns that local authority inquiries into abuse in care homes in the former county of Clwyd and other areas of the country have been barred from publication so as not to jeopardise councils’ insurance cover. She is absolutely right that that is completely unacceptable. I wholeheartedly agree with her that it is terrible if inquiries do not see the light of day. That is true whether these are cases into child abuse or into failings in any other institution. Not only is it a completely unacceptable waste of money and resources for an inquiry to be carried out and not published, but, much more importantly, it is unforgivable if the failure to publish an inquiry means that we do not learn the lessons from the atrocities of the past and that more children suffer in the future. In my response, I hope to be able to demonstrate that the Government have addressed her concerns, and that we are learning from the past to make sure that children are protected both now and in the future.

I fully understand the right hon. Lady's disappointment that the then Government failed to take forward recommendations in the Law Commission's 2004 report. That report followed recommendations from the Waterhouse inquiry into child abuse in north Wales children's homes. She outlined a lot of what the Law Commission said. As she pointed out, although its recommendation was accepted when it was presented to Parliament, it was never implemented. However, there have since been a number of changes, in both the insurance industry and the statutory framework for inquiries, which I will outline.

I fully appreciate the right hon. Lady's view that it is not appropriate for insurers to influence the terms of reference, the processes or the outcomes of inquiries that local authorities commission; nor is it appropriate for them to influence the content or publication of the final reports. As I understand it, that is also the view of the Association of British Insurers.

I understand that many standard insurance contracts across a range of product lines contain a clause requiring the insured not to admit liability or to settle a claim until the insurer has provided written permission. One of the reasons for that is to ensure sufficient time to establish the facts in an individual claim properly.

I have checked the position with my counterparts at the Treasury. Their view is that, at present, there is no indication that any insurer has broken any regulatory rules. That said, the Government are determined that financial services firms be subject to appropriate regulation. The Financial Conduct Authority regulates the insurance industry in the UK and sets the standards required of insurance firms in relation to their business. It also supervises the conduct of insurers and will take action against insurers that are found to be in breach of the FCA rules.

Furthermore, the Association of British Insurers has informed me that it is working with its members to create clear guidance and to make sure that an insurer's role in these sensitive processes is very clearly understood. The insurance industry recognises the sensitivities of such child abuse inquiries for the survivors of abuse, as well as their importance in investigating what went wrong and what lessons can be learned.

As well as better regulation of the insurance industry since the right hon. Lady first became involved with these issues, the whole statutory framework for inquiries has changed beyond recognition both in local government and in central Government inquiries. She asked for clarification about whether previous redacted reports would be available to the new inquiries. As they were statutory inquiries, the reports will indeed be available.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has the power to direct a local inquiry to be held into the way that a local authority has carried out its functions if he is satisfied that an authority has failed to comply with its duties. In such local inquiries, witnesses can be compelled to attend and give evidence on oath. In central Government, we now have the Inquiries Act 2005, which repealed the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921, under which the Waterhouse inquiry was originally set up. The 2005 Act provides a much more solid statutory framework for inquiries, to make them swifter, more transparent, less costly, and more effective at finding facts and making practical recommendations. It also aims to restore public confidence

in inquiries, particularly given the concerns following previous inquiries such as that into Bloody Sunday. It clearly sets out the respective roles of inquiry chairs and Ministers, and it stipulates that proceedings should be in public unless there are good reasons to restrict public access.

Nowadays, public inquiries rightly expect to receive full and frank co-operation from all parties. They regularly take steps to ensure that the evidence gathering process, and subsequent recommendations, are free from undue influence and retain public confidence. Public inquiries are a vital means of holding public bodies to account and providing answers to some of the most troubling events, and nowhere is that more necessary than in relation to child sexual abuse.

The Home Secretary's independent inquiry into historical child sexual abuse will investigate whether, and to what extent, public bodies and non-state institutions have taken seriously their duty to protect children in England and Wales. The inquiry will challenge institutions and individuals, without fear or favour, to get to the truth. It has been established under the Inquiries Act 2005 and so can compel witnesses and call for evidence. There are no time limits on what the inquiry can consider—it is free to consider evidence from any point in the past without restrictions.

The Government very much welcome the fact that Justice Lowell Goddard—a highly experienced and respected High Court judge from New Zealand—is leading this inquiry. Victims and survivors were instrumental in setting that up, and they will be at the centre of the inquiry's work as it moves forward. We want nothing to stand in the way of the inquiry. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get to the truth, expose what has gone wrong in the past and learn lessons for the future. In addition to the Goddard inquiry, in March 2015 the Prime Minister launched the "Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation" report. We are getting on with delivering the actions in that report.

As the right hon. Lady knows, Lady Justice Macur is carrying out a review into the scope of the Waterhouse inquiry and whether any specific allegations of child abuse falling within the terms of reference were not investigated. I know that the right hon. Lady has been interested in that review from the outset. Like the Goddard inquiry, that review is entirely independent of Government, and Lady Justice Macur made it clear from the outset that her review would be thorough and that she would draw no conclusions until she had considered all the evidence. We look forward to receiving that report in due course.

There have also been major changes in the way that children's homes are run since the right hon. Lady first became involved in these issues. Children's homes provide care for some of the most vulnerable, traumatised and challenging children and young people in the country. Many homes provide excellent care, but we want to make sure that all homes provide high-quality care that meets each child's individual needs and enables them to live their life to the full and reach their full potential.

The legislative and regulatory framework around the regulation of children's homes is very different today from how it was in the past. Changes over the past 12 years include a comprehensive programme of legislation that aims effectively to safeguard all children living away from home in residential and foster care. For example,

[*Caroline Dinenage*]

all children's homes and fostering services must now be regulated and inspected by Ofsted, and all people working in them must undergo enhanced disclosure checks. Last year, the Government reformed care planning and children's homes regulations to improve the safety of children in residential care. That included strengthening safeguards when children are placed out of area, and when children go missing from care.

Earlier this year, the Government introduced new children's homes regulations, which include quality standards that all children's homes must meet for their children. One of those is the protection of children standard, which clearly sets out what staff must do to ensure that children are protected from harm and enabled to keep themselves safe—a lot of change, and all for the better.

The right hon. Lady highlighted a sensitive issue that goes to the heart of society, and society must surely be judged by the way that it looks after its children. The historical sexual abuse of those trusted to the care of

children's homes in north Wales and in foster care was truly shocking. More recently, we have seen the systemic and appalling abuse of children in Rotherham, Rochdale, Oxford and elsewhere, and we know that this crime affects communities up and down the country.

Sir Ronald Waterhouse's report in 2000 led to the Law Commission report and recommendations, but nothing was really done about the issue. Today, there is a real will to tackle this stain on our society. Many of the issues that the right hon. Lady has highlighted are now being addressed by initiatives across Whitehall.

The right hon. Lady has worked utterly tirelessly on this issue and I give her every credit for doing so. I have every confidence that Justice Lowell Goddard's inquiry into historic child sexual abuse will both allay her concerns about transparency and finally fully expose the truth behind the troubling events that she has been fighting to uncover for so many years.

Question put and agreed to.

5.30 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 16 July 2015

[SIR ROGER GALE *in the Chair*]

Sentencing (Cruelty to Pets)

1.30 pm

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered sentencing for cruelty to domestic pets.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger, although on this occasion I cannot say it is a pleasure to be here, because some of the incidents that have taken place in my constituency have caused a great deal of trauma, not only to domestic pets but to their owners.

Let me give a little insight into what has been taking place in some villages in my constituency. There has been a spate of domestic cat deaths, many of which have been linked to the consumption of antifreeze products. That has been confirmed by local veterinary surgeons after people have presented pet cats suffering terrible symptoms. The tragedy is that once cats in particular have ingested antifreeze products, there is very little that a veterinary surgeon can do to stop the inevitable process of very painful death. Ethylene glycol, which is the toxic ingredient in antifreeze, attacks a cat's kidneys, causing excruciating pain. Sadly, the cat often has to be put down before it dies very slowly and painfully.

One village in my constituency lost 22 cats over one summer. It is important to emphasise that it was in the summer—not traditionally a time when people use antifreeze products. There is a lot of debate about whether people should put antifreeze into garden water features to prevent them from freezing over the winter, because pets can accidentally drink from them, but these incidents happened in the middle of the summer. Many people in the village concluded that someone local was maliciously targeting their pets. I cannot overemphasise the trauma that families go through when they lose a loved pet, which is why I am here to emphasise how the judicial system deals with people who are convicted of this horrendous crime.

I secured a debate some time ago that was responded to by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. We looked at a number of options to try to prevent these poisonings, including introducing bittering agents to antifreeze products to try to prevent animals from ingesting them. Since then, I have been working with Nottinghamshire police, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Cats Protection to research the topic—I should credit the work of my colleague, David Sforza—and to see how we can help. I have come to the conclusion that introducing bittering agents into antifreeze products will probably not help a great deal, because by the time a cat has tasted the bitterness, it has, unfortunately, probably already consumed enough to kill it. Products are available on the market that do not contain the toxin, but they are very expensive

compared with the ethylene glycol products. That is something to look into, but I called this debate to discuss sentencing.

Section 7 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 covers attempts to kill an animal by poisoning, and the sentence is currently set at a maximum of 51 weeks in custody, a fine of up to £20,000, or both. The guidelines recommend a 12 to 26-week sentence and a fine of up to £5,000. It is interesting to look at what other countries do. In Australia, the maximum sentence for a crime of this nature is five years. A little closer to home, in Germany and the Netherlands it is three years, and in Spain it is 18 months. I repeat: the UK guideline is a maximum of six months. That is not a strong enough punishment for this horrendous crime.

It is interesting to see what has happened in the courts. A custodial sentence has never been handed down for the deliberate and malicious poisoning of a domestic cat. I have a number of examples. A gentleman called Donald Waterworth poisoned five of his neighbours' cats. The punishment for that crime was a £125 fine. To put that into context, that is probably not even the commercial value of one of the cats, never mind the emotional trauma experienced by the poor families and the animals themselves. Alan Gillibrand had a problem with his next-door neighbour's cat, so he decided to leave poisoned chicken all over the neighbourhood to try to kill it. That resulted in many cats in the neighbourhood being killed. He received a 12-week suspended sentence for that crime. Charles Coulter poisoned his neighbour's cat and showed no remorse, protesting that he did it to protect his pigeons. He was fined £140. RSPCA research shows that the general public find such sentences insulting and think it is time we took stronger action against the people who commit these horrendous crimes.

Part of the reason for such lenient sentences is that magistrates tend to see animal cruelty cases as fairly trivial and unimportant, but we are a nation of animal lovers, and I do not think the way magistrates are sentencing is in tune with the views of the general public. We have to find a way to train our magistrates and make them more accountable, and to give them a flavour of the strength of feeling on this topic. We need to issue improved sentencing guidelines to magistrates. I hope the Minister will comment on that when he responds.

It is worth mentioning that the majority of cases in which custodial sentences are handed down seem to involve fighting animals—when people have engaged in the abhorrent practice of dogfighting or cockfighting—but not malicious poisoning of animals. What is to be done? I would like to see a number of outcomes from this debate. Sentencing should be much tougher. We need to create a real deterrent, and in my opinion that has to be a custodial sentence handed down to people who are convicted of this horrendous crime. A £150 fine is nowhere appropriate for such an horrendous crime.

I would like the Government, through the Ministry of Justice and other Departments, to talk to companies that produce antifreeze products, because we need to find a more affordable non-toxic variety. One challenge is that the ethylene glycol products are very cheap, whereas the alternatives tend to be very expensive because currently very few people use them. Consumer power is the answer, and the Government should do what they can to highlight that so that consumers can look for

[Mark Spencer]

and purchase pet-safe antifreeze products, which would bring their costs more into line with the ethylene glycol products.

As I have mentioned, we have to improve awareness and responsibility in the training of magistrates, so that they consider those crimes in the light of the true abhorrence people feel about them. We want magistrates to hand out sentences that match how dreadful those crimes are.

We also need to encourage people to contact the RSPCA, the body that often brings private prosecutions against the people who commit these horrendous crimes. We should encourage people not to be afraid to ring the RSPCA and to report incidents to it. The RSPCA is good at investigating gently, and if there has been no crime and no abuse, it is good at talking to people and explaining that it has had a report. I am sure that it could handle such situations well, so we should encourage people to work with charities such as the RSPCA and Cats Protection.

I am taking action locally, raising money through a community fund so that we can issue residents in some of my villages with GPS tracking devices for their cats. That might seem to be an extreme measure, but it is a way of saying to the people committing these crimes, “We are coming after you. We are not going to accept that you are committing these offences against our pets. The net is closing in.” We are working with Nottinghamshire police and the RSPCA to ensure that we catch the people, or the individual, committing the crimes. I openly admit that if someone’s cat is poisoned, it will probably still die, sadly, but we will be able to track where it has been in the previous 24 hours and to build a map of where the offences have taken place—a grid to assist the police in clamping down.

I do not intend to detain the House for the full 90 minutes allotted to the debate, but I hope that I have got across a flavour of how abhorrent these crimes are and the fact that they are not taken seriously enough by magistrates when people are prosecuted. We have a long way to go in the judicial system before we get the right punishment for inflicting a dreadful, painful death on a domestic pet.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con) *rose*—

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Ordinarily, Mr Knight, it would not be proper to call a Member who has not heard the opening speech, but I will make an exception, because you took the trouble to write to Mr Speaker. Put that down as a marker for the future.

1.42 pm

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): Thank you, Sir Roger, for your understanding and consideration. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) for securing this important debate.

We are undoubtedly behind other countries when it comes to sentencing for these abhorrent crimes, which hit the sensitivities of many in the wider community and the animal-loving population—and we are a nation of animal lovers. Australia has a maximum sentence

of five years for such crimes, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria three years and countries such as Denmark two years. In the UK, the maximum sentence is six months.

There has been action in the past. In 2012 fines were uprated, but with no actual effect on sentencing, and the offences are still dealt with in magistrates courts, which have limits because their powers have never been uprated. This is an inconsistency left behind by previous Governments and I hope that our Government will do something.

Prosecution rates for these crimes are low. In 2014, for example, the RSPCA investigated 159,831 cases, but only 2,419 were prosecuted. The burden of proof seems to be higher to an extent, because obviously the animals subject to these crimes and horrendous activities cannot speak for themselves, so there is always the issue of evidence. However, the number still seems to be low, given that prosecutions are brought in only about 1.5% of cases investigated by the RSPCA.

Mark Spencer: One of the challenges with the burden of proof is that a post-mortem by an independent veterinary surgeon is necessary to mount a prosecution. When a family has lost a loved pet, however, the last thing that they want to do, frankly, is allow their pet to sit in a deep freeze for weeks until it has had a post-mortem operation, only then to be used as a piece of criminal evidence, rather than being treated as a loved pet.

Julian Knight: I thank my hon. Friend for that important and interesting intervention. He makes a good point about the procedure, and the sensitivity around it. I maintain that a prosecution rate of 1.5% in this country is still low.

Not only are we prosecuting far fewer individuals for these crimes, but when people are brought to trial and found guilty, the sentences that they are receiving are far too light by any international comparison. The RSPCA has made the good point to me that existing laws are not being used properly. The organisation’s government relations manager suggested, for example, that disqualification or deprivation orders could be “a powerful tool in protecting animal welfare”.

The problem is threefold: light prosecution rates; poor sentencing; and existing sanctions not being used sufficiently.

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that what is abhorrent is not only the intent, but the pain and suffering that the animals are put through?

Julian Knight: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. The crime is abhorrent from a social perspective and it gnaws to the marrow of many Britons.

As a nation of animal lovers, we want to see proper sentencing. I have heard that many times from constituents when such matters are brought before them. Solihull in particular has a strong history of good and careful treatment of animals. When such cases are talked about, people’s first reaction is often, “They got how long?”, “They got fined how much?” or, “Are you sure that these people can keep an animal again?” All too often, the answers are inadequate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood has made an important point today and I speak very much in support of the motion. I hope that the debate sends

out a strong message that enough is enough. We want prosecutions and tougher sentencing for these offences to reflect the general abhorrence in which our society holds individuals who commit such crimes against defenceless creatures.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP) *rose*—

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. Once I call the Front Benchers, that will in effect be the end of Back-Bench contributions to the debate. Ms Solloway, do you wish to speak?

Amanda Solloway: No.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): That's fine. I wanted to be certain, so that you were not prevented from making a contribution if you wanted to.

1.48 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Sir Roger.

I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) on securing this important debate. I am aware of the work that he is doing in his constituency to tackle some awful instances of cruelty to animals. I have read about many other examples of cruelty to animals in the newspapers, and they make for the most unpleasant reading—cases of starvation, overcrowding or failure to obtain required veterinary treatment. Even more unpleasant, as the hon. Gentleman said, are cases of deliberate harm to animals and organised fighting.

It is a concern to read that the RSPCA has reported increases throughout England and Wales in the number of complaints of cruelty to pets, including complaints of direct cruelty, such as beatings, improper killings, mutilations and poisonings. Equally, though, the RSPCA reports that more people are accepting advice and assistance from that organisation; there were more than 80,000 examples of that during 2013-14. What we all agree on is that animal cruelty and abuse is abhorrent and cannot be tolerated in a modern civilised country such as the United Kingdom.

The laws and penalties are similar, but not identical, in Scotland, where the legislation was consolidated and brought up to date in the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006. There, the maximum penalty on conviction for causing unnecessary suffering or for animal fighting offences is 12 months' imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £20,000. Other offences, such as poisonings or mutilations, attract a sentence of up to six months' imprisonment or a £5,000 fine. During the passage of the Bill that became that Act, there was extensive debate on sentencing powers. Indeed, it was in the light of evidence provided to the relevant Scottish Parliament Committee and debate there that a 12-month sentence was attached, in place of the six-month sentence, to the offence of causing unnecessary suffering, as well as to offences relating to animal fighting.

The suggestion of increased sentencing powers is far from unreasonable. As hon. Members have pointed out, certain jurisdictions apply heavier maximum sentences, but in other jurisdictions there are more limited sentencing

powers. However, broadly speaking, I believe that the powers that the courts have now are just about proportionate to provide adequate sentences for those found guilty of animal welfare offences. I agree with the hon. Member for Sherwood that there is an issue about how the current sentencing powers are used. I agree that the sentencing powers should be reviewed from time to time, but more importantly and more immediately, we have to look again at judicial guidance and how the existing sentences are used.

What is also striking about the reports of animal cruelty in the newspapers is that although there are clear deliberate acts, which must be the priority for clamping down on, there are also many instances that relate to lack of awareness, transient personal problems, ignorance or even mental health issues. That is not in any way to negate the suffering caused to the animals, but we need to keep the issue in mind when considering a proportionate response.

In each year from 2009 to 2011, 1,100 to 1,300 people were found guilty in England and Wales of animal cruelty offences—and 100 or fewer each year were sentenced to custody. Similarly, in Scotland during 2013-14, there were 124 prosecutions and 99 convictions and just two custodial sentences were handed down. The Scottish courts, too, have yet to use the maximum penalty available to them.

Again, I believe that the issue is more about use of the current powers than about increasing the powers available to the courts. People are not necessarily committing these offences because they think that the maximum punishment is not particularly severe.

Julian Knight: I was struck when the hon. Gentleman said that people are not committing these crimes because of the sentencing—in effect, it is not a deterrent at present. Surely the point of increasing the sentence is that it would stand as an exemplar. If people open their newspapers and see that someone has been sentenced to five years for one of these offences, perhaps that would bring up short certain individuals who may be treating their animals cruelly.

Stuart C. McDonald: I agree that people are influenced by what they see in the newspapers. However, I think that it would be much more influential if, as the hon. Member for Sherwood said, people became aware that the RSPCA and others were coming after them and that they were likely to be caught. That would be more influential than seeing the difference between a one-year maximum sentence and a two-year maximum sentence.

Do I really think that the person behind all the cat poisoning in the hon. Gentleman's constituency would think differently if the maximum sentence was two years, three years or five years? I suspect that a twisted individual such as that is more likely to rethink what they are doing if they think that they are going to be caught, rather than by sitting down and thinking over the maximum sentence that they could receive if they were caught.

We need to consider other options. The hon. Gentleman mentioned looking at judicial guidelines on sentencing. Education is key. For example, the Scottish Government have published various codes of practice for the welfare of animals, including cats and dogs. The Scottish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals undertakes a

[*Stuart C. McDonald*]

free prevention-through-education outreach programme. In 2014, education officers, animal rescue officers and inspectors delivered that programme to about 317,000 primary school children. Scotland's Rural College has also been undertaking research into how a duty of care can be best promoted to our young people.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need to ensure that people are aware of how to report suspected incidents of animal cruelty. We also need to ask ourselves whether we are doing enough to ensure that people know where they can find help if they are no longer capable of looking after their animals. I agree that we perhaps need to look at sentencing guidelines. This debate is well motivated and we may well want to revisit this issue in the future, but I am still not quite convinced that the case for the particular solution that has been offered—increasing the maximum penalty—has been made out. There are other ways of tackling this problem and we should concentrate on those first.

1.55 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be here under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) on securing the debate. He has been campaigning assiduously on this issue, and I am sure that his constituents are very grateful to him. I am sure that his cat, which I believe is called Parsnip, is also grateful for the effort he is making.

This is an important matter. Our inboxes this week show, I am sure, how interested the public are in animal welfare. I am sure that, like me, other hon. Members have had several hundred emails about the proposed revisions to the Hunting Act 2004. That confirms for me that we are a nation of animal lovers and that the British public care deeply about animal welfare.

The hon. Member for Sherwood raised the tragic case of a spate of cat poisonings in his constituency. In doing a little research, I found that that is certainly not restricted to his constituency—it is a regular occurrence. Just this year, more than 140 cats have been poisoned across the country. One of the other victims—the hon. Gentleman may know this but I did not until I looked into it—is my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones), whose own cat, Jaffa, was poisoned and killed in the same way. I should make it clear, having spoken to my hon. Friend, that it is actually his partner's cat, but I am sure that it is a loss to the whole family. The fact that several hon. Members have been victims, or at least have concerns about this issue, shows just how common it is becoming.

I worry about the level of animal cruelty. Looking at the Library's debate pack, which cites some horrific cases, most of them very recent, makes one wonder about the mentality of people who can engage in such actions. Earlier this week, there was a story in the *Evening Standard* relating to my own constituency. It was about a cat that was thrown out of a car on to the Hammersmith flyover—extraordinary, one may think. There was a happy ending, as it was observed by staff of Notting Hill Housing, who risked their own safety to go out and rescue the cat, now called Bridget and now recovering in hospital, with only a grazed chin, I am told. But it was an extraordinary event, and these are

not isolated events—they are very common. I still say that we are a nation of animal lovers, as the response of the public in that case shows, but many cats, dogs and other domestic animals—pets—are not as fortunate as Bridget and are often the victim of horrible treatment, whether through cruelty or negligence, at the hands of owners who end up abusing them.

In anticipation of the debate, I asked the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, a number of parliamentary questions. He confirmed that 752 people were found guilty in 2014 of causing, permitting or failing to prevent unnecessary suffering to animals, but only 76 of those—about 10%—received immediate custody, and I think only about half that number received a custodial sentence of more than three months.

It is clear that the public are increasingly concerned that some sentences do not appear to match the abuse suffered by the animal victims, especially in the case of extreme cruelty. We hear reports from reputable organisations such as the RSPCA, Cats Protection and the International Fund for Animal Welfare about serious neglect, cruelty and violence against animals every day. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 is an exemplary piece of Labour legislation, and I believe we can all sign up to it because it advances the cause of animal welfare. We have some of the best animal welfare legislation of anywhere in the world, but that is not to say that sentencing could not be addressed and improved.

The RSPCA states that, during the past five years, the maximum fine imposed on anyone who has been prosecuted under the 2006 Act was a fine of £15,000, which was £2,500 for each of six offences. In the RSPCA's words, the courts

“increasingly take the position that unless someone can repay a fine and costs incurred within a reasonable period there is no point in imposing large fines. This suggests that the focus should be on prison sentences.”

We have to be slightly careful about saying that, because people might not be able to pay fines, prison is therefore the alternative. Let me suggest two or three alternative avenues that the Minister might like to look at. The hon. Member for Sherwood mentioned that the maximum sentence for some offences is set at 51 weeks. The Government had a change of heart during the progress of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012—I served in Committee—in relation to magistrates' sentencing powers. The previous Labour Government introduced in the Criminal Justice Act 2003 the principle that a magistrate should have the power to impose a sentence of up to 12 months for a single offence. We did not activate that section, and the coalition Government proposed to repeal it but, wisely, had a change of heart. The Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but I believe that that section is still not in force. Giving magistrates the power to sentence people for longer on a single offence may be a route to allowing greater sentencing powers on some of the more serious animal welfare offences without making them either-way offences.

Mark Spencer: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, particularly when he is agreeing with me wholeheartedly, but I think the point is that whatever the maximum sentence is, it has never been implemented for a case of this nature. In one such case, someone

had premeditatedly gone out, purchased bait—for want of a better word—and poison and distributed them far and wide. The fact that they received only a very small fine emphasises that some part of the system is not working.

Andy Slaughter: There are a number of elements to that, as the hon. Gentleman implies, one of which is the sentencing guidelines. Interestingly, there are sentencing guidelines for some animal cruelty offences and not for others. The advice from the Attorney-General, in answer to a parliamentary question, was that one should read across from those sentencing guidelines to offences for which there are no guidelines. For example, for section 7 offences, which cover poisoning, there are no specific sentencing guidelines, but one should look at guidelines in relation to, say, section 4 offences to see, first, whether existing guidelines are being followed—I am not sure that they are in every case—and, secondly, whether they should be strengthened in any way. That is a matter for the Sentencing Council. The Minister will no doubt want to deal with the use of existing sentencing powers and the question of whether there is any will in the Government to increase sentencing.

There is always danger inherent in the escalation of sentencing powers, not only because of the financial cost of prison places and so forth, but because if we begin to ratchet up sentences for one offence, there will be an immediate demand to do so for others. The Minister might want to look at repeat offending, however. By analogy, we proposed in the previous Parliament that driving while disqualified, which is a summary-only offence, should become an either-way offence with a maximum sentence of two years. Many animal welfare charities advocate a similar proposal for animal cruelty offences, which they think should carry a two-year maximum sentence.

The hon. Member for Sherwood is right that maximum sentences are rarely used. By definition, they are used only in the most serious cases. There is always a discount, usually of up to a third, for a guilty plea, which of course includes remission. Typically, even for a very serious offence with a guilty plea, the offender will receive a four-month sentence and will be out within two months. The only way in which the situation can be remedied, if Parliament's will is for there to be longer sentences, is to increase the maximum. I am wary of sentence inflation, but in the case of repeat offending, there could be a reason for considering that proposal.

I used the analogy of driving while disqualified because to treat a first offence as a summary-only matter may well be perfectly reasonable. A small minority of people, however, repeatedly abuse the law by driving while disqualified again as soon as they get out of prison, knowing that the maximum that they are likely to get on a guilty plea is another two months inside. That might also apply to the sort of callous and sociopathic people who repeatedly commit serious offences against animals. The Minister might want to consider increasing magistrates' sentencing powers, and to consider the selective use of either-way offences or the sentencing guidelines. I would be interested to see what he has to say on those matters.

In a similar debate in 2013, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Minister said:

“The Government deplore acts of animal cruelty and believe that offenders deserve the full force of the courts.”

He expressed his belief that the current legislation was “fit for purpose” and pointed out that judges had

“a great deal of discretion”—[*Official Report*, 15 October 2013; Vol. 568, c. 229-230WH.]

when it came to determining the appropriate sentence for individual cases. That might be what the hon. Member for Sherwood is complaining about—judges may use that discretion in the wrong way.

The Minister in that debate also noted that nobody had been given the maximum sentence available under the law, and that judges would be expected to explain why anyone convicted of animal cruelty offences was not subsequently disqualified from owning or keeping animals. That is an important point. The sentencing guidelines state, in bold type:

“Consider disqualification from ownership of animal”.

I believe that that power is too rarely invoked. I had some personal experience of the matter, because my godson's young brother's kitten was savaged and killed in his presence by a dog. The court returned the dog to the owner with a £280 fine, despite the fact that it was a serial offender—or rather, the owner was a serial offender at letting it get out and be abusive in such a way. The dog was being used, effectively, as a weapon, but in such a case or in the case of someone who repeatedly commits animal cruelty, I cannot for the life of me see why any court in its right mind would allow them to continue to keep an animal. I ask the Minister to address whether he feels that the judiciary have heeded his colleague's words on section 4 and section 7. If not, does he intend to take any actions to encourage the toughening up of the law, or at least of the guidelines? Will he consider asking the Sentencing Council to look at it again?

I would also like the Minister to clarify his position on section 8 offences, which relate to animal fighting. As things stand, the maximum sentence is six months, but it is rarely handed out. Animal fighting offences are some of the most serious offences and there can be very little mitigation for matters such as organised dog fighting. Does the Minister feel that the law in that respect is sufficient, or will he consider reviewing the situation?

There are powers in the 2006 Act to impose deprivation and disqualification orders. Will the Minister commit to ensuring that guidance in that area is updated and republished to ensure that it is used better and more consistently? How can it be right for repeat offenders of animal cruelty, poisoning or fighting to get away without being disqualified from looking after animals and possibly mistreating them again?

I advise the Minister to read the Labour manifesto. His colleagues seem to be dipping into it from time to time, whether it is the Chancellor on minimum incomes or, this morning, the Lord Chancellor on better use of the court estate and amalgamating places where hearings should be held. On animal welfare, we said:

“We will build on our strong record on animal welfare—starting with an end to the Government's ineffective and cruel badger cull. We will improve the protection of dogs and cats, ban wild animals in circuses, defend the hunting ban and deal with wildlife crime associated with shooting.”

We made six pledges, one of which was to improve the protection of dogs and cats. Our offer on animal welfare was very strong, and I hope the Government are prepared to work with us on achieving some of those aims.

[*Andy Slaughter*]

Today we are discussing the protection of domestic pets, and too often we see inadequate dog breeding practices causing suffering to both the animal and its owner. More puppies are being bred than there are good homes available, and large-scale puppy farms and backstreet breeders operate in terrible conditions in which dogs are frequently sick or unsocialised.

Julian Knight: The hon. Gentleman has made some fine and balanced points in his interesting speech. On puppy farming, is not one of the points about sentencing and the treatment of offenders that there are major profits to be made for professional breeders and those involved in animal-related issues? He talked about a case that resulted in a £15,000 fine, which is equivalent to five or six puppies of a premium breed. With such potential profits to be made, is it not true that the available sentences and criminal sanctions are inadequate?

Andy Slaughter: Indeed, and the maximum £15,000 fine was for six separate offences. Most fines for individual offences are way below that level. I am not sure whether the maximum fine, which was increased to £20,000 by LASPO, is necessarily inadequate. It might just be that the courts are not imposing fines. Fines have to be proportionate, because it is pointless fining people who will never have the means to pay. We perhaps need to find an alternative such as community sentences. There can be no reason for not fining commercial enterprises, or people who are making profits from dog breeding, at or near the maximum.

The unlawful trafficking of puppies with little or no regard for their health means that many fall sick or die shortly after purchase, leaving their owners not only heartbroken but often lumbered with large vets' bills. Such trafficking also results in unsocialised dogs that present a threat to humans and other animals. Dogs are effectively treated as mere commodities by the people who are selling them. There is ineffective regulation, a lack of information for pet owners and a failure to address irresponsible and cruel breeding practices. The coalition Government struggled with those issues, and I hope the new Government will make headway. If they do, they can count on our support.

We pledged to review the inadequate regulation of the sale and breeding of cats and dogs. Poor breeding and rearing practices contribute greatly to the number of abandoned animals in rescue centres, and tougher sentencing might play a part in stopping animals being abandoned. That will have a beneficial effect down the line, including for animal rescue centres, which do such a fantastic job. We urge the Government to build on the Animal Welfare Act and the strategy we proposed.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In Northern Ireland, just last year, a sentence was handed out to a father and his sons for extreme cruelty to animals. The shock among the community was such that elected representatives such as me, and many others, sought for the case and the sentence to be reviewed. We sought a custodial sentence that reflected the severity of the cruelty. Unfortunately, the reply stated that the judge was unable to give the type of custodial sentence that should have been given because the law did not allow that to happen. What the hon. Gentleman is saying, and what I suspect

every other hon. Member has said, is that that needs to be reflected in the law of the land to enable judges, whenever the situation arises, to hand down a custodial sentence that reflects the severity of the cruelty. Society finds the current sentences distasteful when it sees such cruelty. We must ensure that people who commit such crimes receive the correct sentence.

Andy Slaughter: As always, the hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I hope the Minister will address all those issues in full, including the use of current sentencing powers—not only custodial and financial penalties but preventing offenders from keeping animals and monitoring repeat offenders.

Returning to my point, will the Minister commit to reviewing the existing regulations on the sale and breeding of cats and dogs? This has been an interesting week for animal welfare campaigners, who know that they can always rely on the Labour party. Perhaps they can now also rely on the Scottish National party, but no other mainstream political party can equal our track record on delivering for animals, be they domestic pets or wild animals. Whether it is legislating on hunting with dogs, fighting to protect wild animals that are being exploited in circuses or introducing the Animal Welfare Act, we have a strong legacy.

When the Animal Welfare Act was published, my right hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), the then Minister with responsibility for animal welfare, said:

“Once this legislation is enacted, our law will be worthy of our reputation as a nation of animal lovers.”

Almost 10 years later, we need to ensure that the Act is working properly in relation to sentencing guidelines, and I offer the Minister our full support in ensuring that that is still the case.

I end by quoting Gandhi:

“The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.”

I am glad Bridget is recovering from her traumatic experience and I am glad there are some good stories, but in preparation for this debate I read some harrowing stories of animal cruelty. I look forward to hearing the Minister's proposals for how we can discourage and punish such cruelty where it continues.

2.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice

(Andrew Selous): It is, as always, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mark Spencer) on securing this important debate. He is right that the needless suffering of animals is always a concern, whether that suffering is deliberately inflicted, accidental or the result of negligence, and whether the animals are domestic or wild. It often happens because people are unaware of the effect of their behaviour, and sometimes simple steps can be taken to prevent animals from coming to harm—indeed, he set out a number of steps in his excellent speech.

The suffering of pets can cause considerable distress to their owner as well as to the animals themselves, as this debate has made clear. At a recent constituency surgery, a widow came to see me who strongly believes that her dog was stolen. In the two or three times that she has been to see me since, it has been vividly impressed on me that, to her, that is akin to a family bereavement. She lives on her own, and her dog was her only companion.

We need to recognise how greatly the loss of a much loved domestic pet affects our constituents. Victim personal statements mean that courts, at the discretion of the judge, are able to consider the degree of harm caused by an offence, and they are open to statements from pet owners in such horrific cases.

I welcome this debate, which I hope will raise awareness of our responsibilities and of the legal measures that are available to us. The Ministry of Justice is responsible for ensuring that the courts have the powers they need to deal appropriately and proportionately with all the cases that come before them. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is responsible for animal welfare issues more widely, including ensuring responsible pet ownership and the wider protection of our pets and wildlife. The Animal Welfare Act is the main legislation that protects the welfare of animals, and the Government reviewed the operation of that Act in 2010. A report was prepared by DEFRA and shared with the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The report concluded that the Act had

“a positive impact on animal welfare. It has successfully brought together a number of different pieces of legislation into a comprehensive whole providing a duty of care for those responsible for animals.”

The report did not suggest that the available penalties are inadequate.

Legislation sets maximum penalties that the courts may apply. It is for the courts—usually magistrates courts in animal welfare cases—to take a view on what sentences should be given in individual cases, having heard all the evidence and taken account of the circumstances of the case. In coming to a view, the courts are helped by the sentencing guidelines produced by the independent Sentencing Council. The council, set up under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009, consults widely before issuing guidelines, which are available on its website. Sentencing guidelines set out a recommended range of sentences and aggravating and mitigating factors that may make the sentence more or less severe in particular cases. The courts have a duty to follow the guidelines unless, exceptionally, it would not be in the interests of justice to do so.

Guidelines do not exist for every offence, but there are specific guidelines covering offences in the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991. The Sentencing Council recently consulted on updating guidelines in response to changes to the 1991 Act contained in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. Sentencing guidelines for magistrates include guidelines for offences of animal cruelty under the Animal Welfare Act 2006. They help magistrates impose proportionate and consistent penalties. The guidelines were last updated in 2008 and reflect the current penalties available.

The Government’s responsibility is to ensure that courts have the powers to impose appropriate sentences. To that end, the Animal Welfare Act 2006 makes it an offence to cause any unnecessary suffering to an animal, with a maximum penalty of six months’ imprisonment, an unlimited fine, or both.

Mark Spencer: After this debate, will the Minister reflect whether the guidelines for magistrates are robust enough to encourage them to give out the correct sentence? We have heard of a number of crimes of premeditated poisoning for which no one has been

given a custodial sentence on being convicted. Might he reflect on those guidelines and write to me with those reflections?

Andrew Selous: I am more than happy to do so. I meet the Sentencing Council reasonably regularly, and I will ensure that a copy of this debate is sent to the council so that it is well aware of the widespread interest in these matters in Parliament.

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 also makes it an offence to fail to provide for an animal’s welfare needs, attracting a maximum penalty of six months’ imprisonment, a fine, or both. The courts also have powers to disqualify someone from owning an animal in future. Where they have that power but do not impose such a disqualification, courts must state why.

The Government have introduced new measures to tackle antisocial behaviour by allowing police and local authorities to issue warning notices to low-level offenders who allow their dogs to worry others. Dog owners, for example, could be asked to go on training courses with their pet. Those new measures form part of the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

Figures taken from the court database do not show that the courts are finding that their powers are inadequate. There have been around 2,000 convictions annually under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 in recent years. In 2014, some 959 cases were proceeded against; 800 people were found guilty, 78 of whom received custodial sentences. The average sentence was about three months.

My hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) suggested that a higher penalty might have a deterrent effect. Research shows little evidence that this is the case; rather, it is the likelihood of being caught that has the deterrent effect. On that note, I particularly commend what my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood is doing in his constituency with GPS tracking, which might provide evidence and act as a significant deterrent in his area.

We should concentrate on ensuring that animal cruelty is not overlooked or tolerated and that offenders are brought to book. The RSPCA and others provide us with valuable help to ensure that that message gets through loudly and clearly. I agree with the Scottish National party spokesman, the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald), on the important role of education in that respect.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood told us at the beginning of this debate that there have been some horrific incidents in his constituency involving antifreeze. I cannot comment on individual cases, but it is illegal under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to poison wild animals, and under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to poison domestic ones. Whether the poison is intended for domestic or wild animals, its use is an offence in either case. There are offences and penalties to tackle such behaviour, and where it occurs it should be reported to the police or the RSPCA. Once again, I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing this important debate before the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered sentencing for cruelty to domestic pets.

2.26 pm

Sitting suspended.

Police Procurement (Motor Vehicles)

3 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered police procurement of motor vehicles.

I am grateful for having secured today's debate in conjunction with my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders).

As the Government struggle to find an answer to their woes about Britain's lack of productivity and as globalised corporations continue to send more British manufacturing and engineering abroad—not because build quality is better, but simply to boost their own short-term profits—we still have a lead in one sector, in which we are globally renowned. That sector is the automotive industry, where the UK is steaming ahead with a global lead based on design innovation, engineering excellence, manufacturing quality, investment in skills and a commitment by managers and employees alike to work together to achieve common aims of success and, crucially, to share the fruits fairly.

The automotive sector in the UK presents an ideal opportunity for the Government to implement a positive procurement strategy. More than 600 automotive companies are based in the UK, employing just over 730,000 people and turning over more than £60 billion. The UK produces 1.6 million cars and commercial vehicles and over 2.6 million engines every year. We are now the second largest vehicles market and fourth largest vehicles manufacturer in the European Union. We are also the second largest premium vehicles manufacturer after Germany. Some 80% of all vehicles produced in the UK are exported and, for the first time since the 1970s, the UK has a trade surplus and a positive balance of payments for the auto sector. Take the Range Rover Evoque, built by Jaguar Land Rover in Halewood: demand is such that they cannot build the cars quickly enough. Think also of Nissan's massive success with vehicles such as the Qashqai or the LEAF.

Yet for all its success, the automotive sector remains if not precarious, then never quite secure. Car firms are only as good as their next model, and the allocation of work to plants across a group will take place many years before production commences. In my former role as an official with Unite the union—I am still a member—and its predecessors, I twice joined in negotiations with the global management of General Motors to try to save the Vauxhall plant at Ellesmere Port. These are tough discussions with big global players that see local management and workers fighting together for their plant but often having to make difficult concessions on pay and working hours to remain competitive. Government assistance to support that competitive position is always welcome, because there is no such thing as long-term security in the car industry.

At this stage, the Home Office Minister may be forgiven for wondering whether it is he or I who is in the wrong debate, but we are sadly now at a point when the Home Office has a direct interest in the motor vehicle industry. Through the central purchasing system set up by the Government and administered by the Cabinet Office, a consortium of around 22 police forces, including my own in Cheshire, are on the verge of signing a

procurement deal for police vehicles. Despite the abundance of quality in the UK car manufacturing sector, it is reported that the principal deal is likely to be with Peugeot. No other major EU country would betray one of its leading industries in this way. I challenge all hon. Members to go to Germany and find a police car that is not an Audi, a Mercedes or a Volkswagen or to go to France and find a police car that is not a Peugeot, a Citroen or a Renault.

We must recognise that the supply chain works right across Europe and helps both British companies and those who supply into the British-made market, but is not just the failure to buy British that is the scandal here. There is a double insult because Peugeot chose not to manufacture in this country. In 2006, it closed its plant at Ryton in Coventry and moved the work to Slovenia—lock, stock and barrel. It was not that Ryton was unprofitable or unproductive; it was simply that the global management of Peugeot believed that bigger short-term profits could be made by moving to a country where manufacturing costs are lower. That is its prerogative, even if it did put 3,000 skilled British workers out of well-paid jobs.

That being the case, why on earth, just a few short years later, are we considering rewarding Peugeot with a massive public sector contract, having seemingly forgotten its betrayal of a loyal British workforce?

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Had he not done so, we would simply not have been aware that the deal is about to be done. I support him when he says that we should always seek to buy British, but does he agree that, provided that they buy British, it is right that police forces should collaborate in order to procure?

Christian Matheson: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We must surely welcome collaboration between police forces if it leads to greater efficiency and greater savings. We cannot dismiss that process, but wider considerations must be taken into account in the police consortium's discussions, and I will talk about that later.

In times of austerity, it cannot be right that we are potentially taking millions of pounds of British taxpayers' cash and posting it across the channel. Does that really represent value for money for British taxpayers? Part of the problem has been with how the Government transposed the EU procurement directive. By transposing the directive into UK law in a weaker form than that adopted by our EU partners, the Government have left the British manufacturing industry at a serious competitive disadvantage. Article 1 of the new directive states the fundamental principle of the right of member states to define and run their public services in their own interests, and as such they are not subject to marketisation under EU law. However, the UK Government decided not to transpose that section and have excluded any reference to that principle within the regulations.

The mandatory considerations in article 18(2) lay down the labour law standards and working conditions that must be respected throughout the stages of the public procurement procedure. Additional social, economic, quality and environmental criteria are those that provide the flexibility to enable contracting authorities to promote sustainable and positive procurement policies. Unfortunately, the Government have taken a distinctly minimalist approach to implementing that article.

Returning to the point that I made in response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), all this means that the only consideration that ever seems to be taken into account is one of bare cost. I simply cannot understand why the Government, or other public authorities such as the consortium or police and crime commissioners, are so keen to open the doors to foreign corporate bidders and hand over huge public sums to globalised corporations that hold no loyalty to the UK, given that other corporations of similar size and stature have made a commitment to this country by choosing to site and manufacture here. One thing is for sure: it was not due to some Damascene conversion to the European ideal that the Government chose to water down the directive.

Returning to my right hon. Friend's point, I accept that cost must be a central factor in procurement decisions, as is the question of whether the chosen equipment can actually do the job it is being purchased to do. However, in addition to those two principles, there must surely be a cost-benefit consideration for the British economy more widely.

We must support skilled employment, retain skills and provide opportunities for real apprenticeships, which the Government are keen to promote, as opposed to the more cheap and cheerful training courses. The automotive industry has led the way in providing quality training and apprenticeships, and in bringing real skills and design innovation into this country. It has given real value to the country, and we should be supporting it in its success. Instead, we appear to be failing to stand up for British jobs and skills by intending to reward a firm that specifically chose to turn its back on this country.

There is still hope, however. I ask the Minister to urge the police and crime commissioners to review the decision. He must urge them not to sign the contract with Peugeot—and to consider other British bidders. He must save the PCCs from shame and obloquy by preventing them from handing over huge quantities of taxpayers' cash to a foreign corporation, when British firms would not have had the chance to do the same in other EU countries, which actually fight for their manufacturing base and as a result have a much more balanced economy.

I doubt whether, when the Minister took the Prime Minister's call and accepted a position in the Home Office and the Department of Justice, he realised that striking a blow to Britain's car industry would be at the top of his agenda within a matter of a couple of months. He has the power to call a pause to what I believe is a crazy, crackpot scheme. I urge him to use it and to fight for British jobs, British skills and the British working people, whom the Government claim to be so fond of championing. Now is the time to stand up for Britain. I ask the Minister to step up and meet the challenge.

3.11 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I am also grateful for the clear and compelling case made by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson). He explained the circumstances in which this matter has been raised.

The British manufacturing sector includes 11 of the world's leading global vehicle and engine manufacturers: Aston Martin, BMW, Ford, General Motors, Honda, Jaguar Land Rover, Lotus, MG, Nissan, Toyota and Volkswagen. Several of those manufacturers are in close proximity to my constituency. The Vauxhall Motors plant in my constituency employs several thousand people locally and many more elsewhere in the supply chain. Motor vehicle manufacturing is a key part of the local economy, as it has been for more than half a century.

We recognise that police budgets are under pressure as a result of Government decisions. Central funding to police forces has fallen by £2.3 billion in real terms since 2010—a 25% reduction in five years—so the challenges faced by the police and crime commissioners and chief constables making such decisions are real. The need to ensure value for money for the taxpayer is greater than it has ever been.

As correctly highlighted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), the concept of a procurement consortium is good, because the combined purchasing power of many police authorities can deliver significant savings. I have seen many examples in local government of how that has worked to the benefit of the taxpayer. That power should be utilised to provide wider benefits. When looking for value for money on an issue such as vehicle procurement, it is important that we take a wider, more holistic approach than simply looking at individual unit cost. We need to look at the value, not just the price. That encompasses a range of issues, including fuel economy, servicing, maintenance cost, resale value, fitness for purpose and, most importantly, social value.

I share the anxiety expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester about having a narrow, short-term approach to procurement, which could end up costing us much more by providing poor value for money. That is particularly true when we look at social value, which seems to have been completely disregarded in this case. As my hon. Friend said, a cursory look at police fleets in other countries shows that we stand almost alone in failing to recognise the importance of social value as part of the procurement process.

In France, the police use Citroens, Renaults and Peugeots, produced in French factories. In Germany, they use Mercedes, BMWs and Volkswagens. In Spain, they use SEATs. In Sweden, they use SAABs and Volvos. In Italy, they have Alfa Romeos, Fiats and a few Lamborghinis—I am not quite sure what value those bring. All those countries are governed by the same directive as we are, yet they are all able to procure in a way that supports their own industries. I ask myself why police officers in Cheshire are using vehicles made thousands of miles away rather than those made down the road at the local Vauxhall factory.

We should pay tribute to the success of Vauxhall Motors in Ellesmere Port in recent years. In the face of stiff competition from other General Motor plants across Europe, it has consistently seen off threats to its existence. Management and trade unions have worked together to show that British industry can be competitive and adaptable. Just this week, the plant is looking to recruit more than 50 young people in new roles as it prepares for the launch of the latest model of the Astra.

[Justin Madders]

The continued revival of the UK car industry through initiatives such as the Automotive Council leaves us with the conundrum that one of our most dynamic and successful industries has been leading the way in our bid to increase exports but appears unable to compete with foreign manufacturers on its own patch. We should be proud of the success of Vauxhall and other British manufacturers, but we should not be complacent about the challenges they face. We should take every opportunity to bolster that success.

We seem to be procuring more skilfully in other parts of the public sector. I note, from a response to a written question I tabled recently, that the Government car service has shown improvement in that area. From 2011 to 2014, 80% of all vehicles purchased by the Government car service were manufactured in the United Kingdom. Clearly, I would like that figure to be 100%, but it is a lot better than the 0% for policing.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester in urging the Minister to get the police and crime commissioners together to find a way to support British business. Do we really want to make ourselves the laughing stock of Europe on this subject? Do we really want to miss this opportunity to secure more jobs and investment in our car industry? I understand that procurement processes have to be legally robust, but a comparison with other European countries shows we are missing a trick somewhere. I hope a way can be found to procure in a way that delivers value for money for the taxpayer and boosts our economic performance.

Mr Graham Brady (in the Chair): We now come to the first of the Front-Bench winding-up speeches, after which Mr Matheson will have the opportunity to make a short reply.

3.17 pm

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) for securing this important debate, for his excellent speech and for his passion about the principle of buying British. I have some degree of sympathy for that principle.

Policing in Scotland is a devolved matter, but there is now a single police force in Scotland, which procures police vehicles through the Home Office contract. As far as I am aware, the Scottish Police Authority is part of the consortium of 22 or 23 police authorities that procure cars through the Home Office contract.

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his position in the House. Actually, it is not the Home Office contract, but a contract with West Yorkshire, which is the central procurement team for the forces. He is absolutely right that Police Scotland is involved in the procurement process, but this is not a Home Office issue. It is done through the constabularies themselves, and West Yorkshire leads.

Richard Arkless: Nevertheless, the hon. Member for City of Chester made some excellent points. Before I heard them, I intended to outline the procurement process in Scotland and the savings that the single

police is making within it. However, given what the hon. Gentleman said, I am not sure the debate would be served by that analysis.

I give the hon. Gentleman a commitment that I will approach the Scottish Police Authority and ask it about this issue. I will ask whether it is aware of the contract potentially being given to Peugeot and get its view on the matter. I will also liaise with the Scottish Government and talk to the hon. Gentleman about the results of that, so we can take that forward. I do not have the information he has about whether the contract will go to Peugeot, but if it is going to, I share his concerns.

I cannot add a great deal to what the hon. Gentleman said, other than to agree with the comments of the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz). I think the procurement process is best served by a consortium for procuring vehicles, so we can take advantages of economies of scale and get more bang for our buck. We could make demands on price, and we could make things cheaper and more cost-effective for the UK taxpayer.

I will leave it at that. I give the hon. Member for City of Chester my firm commitment that I will contact the Scottish Police Authority and the Scottish Government, and liaise directly with him on this issue to see what we can come up with to take it forward.

Keith Vaz *rose*—

Mr Graham Brady (in the Chair): Order. The Chairman of the Select Committee did not stand earlier, but given that he clearly would like to speak and that we have time, I call Mr Vaz.

3.19 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I did not intend to speak in the debate. I saw the words “police” and “vehicles” on the Order Paper, so thought I would pop in to support my hon. Friends the Members for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) and for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders). The debate is important. I will be brief because I have just three major points to raise and I know that the Minister and shadow Minister want to respond to what my hon. Friends said.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester on securing the debate. It opens up an area that we need to look at carefully. The Select Committee on Home Affairs has just been reformed and we are looking at our list of inquiries for the future. I checked today to see when we last considered procurement, and it was in our report on the “New Landscape of Policing” in 2011. We referred to vehicle purchase with reference to the new police and crime commissioners and the chief constables. The Committee felt that it was important for everyone to have a say in how procurement operated.

We have believed, in producing previous reports, that a system where individual police forces prosecute their own procurement policy is wrong. Collaboration, which the Government have done—and encouraged—extremely well in the past five years, is the right way forward, in our view. With collaboration there are economies of scale. There is a much larger purchaser, and a better deal can be obtained for those who end up paying—the taxpayers.

Mike Penning: I am grateful to the Chair of the Select Committee for being so generous in giving way, as always; I hope I always do the same for him. I shall probably be appearing before his Committee quite soon, so I am going to be nice.

In Leicestershire there is a fantastic chief constable and the PCC is doing exemplary work. Sadly—it may be because of procurement issues and already being locked into a contract—Leicestershire is not part of the consortium. I hope that it will join, and perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will join me in the hope that it will come forward to do so; it is important to get as many as possible. I respect the fact that the force may already be in a contractual obligation, although hopefully that will come to an end quite soon. If the right hon. Gentleman will join me, perhaps we can bring Leicestershire to the party as well.

Keith Vaz: I am happy to do so. That is the second thing that I have learned this afternoon. I did not know that, and I think that Leicestershire should be part of a consortium or collaboration because that is the best way, working together among the various police forces, that we can get the best possible deal for taxpayers.

We have not yet reached the Scottish situation outlined by the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless) in which there is one police force and one chief constable who can work with the national Government to procure the best deal. Who knows whether we may be looking in that direction? I have just been looking at the evidence that the permanent secretary at the Home Office gave on Monday to the Public Accounts Committee. He hinted at economies of scale with reference to mergers. I do not say that we are going to consider mergers, because that always causes a lot of concern among hon. Members, who are all keen to preserve their local police forces. However, value for money is an important criterion.

My second point, and I suppose a more important one for the present debate, is what kind of vehicles we would like our police officers to be in. Of course as British citizens we would like them to be in vehicles manufactured in our country. When we considered the issue of value for money, we found that cheapest is not always best. Of course we would want the best possible deal. I am not sure how the bidding process happens—whether by sealed bid or open negotiations; but I think that if there were a way for the consortium to put to a British manufacturer the deal that it had got with a foreign one, to see whether it could be matched in this country, that should be done.

The only way that can be done, of course, is if what has happened is properly examined. I promise my hon. Friends the Members for City of Chester and for Ellesmere Port and Neston that I will write to whoever is the lead in the consortium—as the Minister has made it clear that he will not be signing the contract, at the end—and ask the reason for the decision. Buying British is not always the best option. We are not the ones who sit at the negotiating table, in the end. However, both my hon. Friends have made a compelling case for the matter to be looked at carefully, and of course we want the police to use vehicles made in this country, if that is possible.

Christian Matheson: My right hon. Friend makes a good point about the importance of buying British. Does he accept that there may be occasions when the

model that would best meet the specifications is not made in the United Kingdom, but is made by a manufacturer that has made a commitment to the UK by manufacturing other models here? Perhaps that would not be ideal, but we might at least consider such manufacturers that have made a commitment to UK jobs, skills and prosperity.

Keith Vaz: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point, and I support it. I have not heard it before. As to whether we should have a system of contract compliance for public sector contracts, I am quite attracted to that. I think a commitment to this country would be a good idea. I do not have enough knowledge of the detail, unlike my hon. Friends, but we need to consider that carefully. Even at what sounds like the 11th hour, I hope that those concerned will pause and consider what is happening. In bringing the matter before the House my hon. Friends have brought to my attention, and that of the Select Committee, something we did not know about before.

My final point is about the nature of the private sector's relationship with the public sector. We examined that in the context of Olympic delivery, when a large Government contract was outsourced to G4S and we found that it was at fault; what it was prepared to deliver was wanting. That was the eve of the Olympics and there was not much chance to do much; we had to accept what G4S said. However, very large companies such as G4S and Serco, which are not necessarily British but may be global, with headquarters here and paying taxes elsewhere, may try to get the Home Office and other Departments over a barrel because of their size. I am sure that the Select Committee will want to look at that in the future, especially when we examine Mark Sedwill and his role as permanent secretary.

Those things come to Ministers at the end, and there is a lot of pressure on them to settle for the best possible deal, which sometimes means the cheapest. However, we know that in the present case the decision will not be made by the Minister who is here today. We will have to look at the issue again, because the private sector is powerful and has enormous sway over Government decisions. I hope that in future the Select Committee will look at what this afternoon's short debate has opened up—the way in which private sector organisations deal with the Home Office, in particular—because that is our remit. That might have wider implications for other Departments.

I hope that my hon. Friends the Members for City of Chester and for Ellesmere Port and Neston will be successful in getting a short pause to allow people to think again before the deal is signed. As we know, once a contract is signed—as we found with e-Borders and the cost to the taxpayer of, in the end, £750 million—there is nothing we can do. It is better to stop and consider carefully before signing the deal, and I urge those involved to do that.

3.28 pm

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I congratulate my hon. Friends the Members for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) and for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) on obtaining the debate. They are right that we must work towards British bobbies buying British cars.

[Jack Dromey]

My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester was right when he referred to the world-class success story that is the automotive sector. I welcome the fact that the steps that the Labour party took in government for a dedicated industrial strategy and the Automotive Council UK were continued in the past five years. There has been a welcome continuity of policy in the automotive sector, designed to build on that success. My hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston was right when he said that we need constantly to bolster that success, particularly when decisions that can be influenced by the Government are being made.

We would not be having this debate in France. Sadly, I vividly remember what happened to the Peugeot factory in Coventry. I was involved in the efforts to persuade the company to change its mind. If we were having this debate in France and anyone said to the French Police Minister, “Will you buy British cars?”, I think the Minister’s response would be, “Pas croyable! On achète des voitures Anglaises, pour nos flics Français? Merde!” Or, loosely translated, “You cannot be serious.”

Mike Penning: I bet *Hansard* is loving this!

Jack Dromey: Part of the problem is the approach towards procurement. However, there is also the issue raised by both my hon. Friends in respect of the interpretation of the European Union procurement rules. I remember that in my former role as deputy general secretary of, first, the Transport and General Workers Union, and then Unite, we regularly sought to influence procurement decisions under successive Governments. The rather narrow interpretation of EU procurement rules in our country, compared with France and Germany, was stark. In one rather heated discussion with senior civil servants in the Treasury some years ago, they said, “Well, we would like to, but we can’t, because of the constraints of the EU procurement rules.” Perhaps my Catholic education lets me down, but my recollection is that when Moses came down from the mountain with the tablets of stone, they did not have written on them EU procurement rules. EU procurement rules are manufactured by Minister and man and can, and should be, interpreted flexibly, exactly as happens in France, Italy and Germany, who traditionally hold their industrial base in much higher regard than we do, all too often.

Mike Penning: The hon. Gentleman mentions Italy, a part of the world that I love dearly. I am informed that Italy has just awarded a contract for 4,000 cars to SEAT, from Spain.

Jack Dromey: I am aware of a Franco-Italian-Spanish collaboration. Interestingly, that refers back to the point made in an earlier intervention about countries making reciprocal arrangements that benefit the countries and industries involved.

There are two problems: first, the interpretation of EU procurement rules; and, secondly, the lack of a strategic procurement strategy. The Minister was right to mention the welcome step in the right direction in the 22 forces coming together and the role of the Crown Commercial Service, anchored by West Yorkshire—a collaboration not before its time. I take the point made

by the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless), the Scottish National party spokesman, that it is different in Scotland, where there is a national strategic procurement approach, but the problem is that while we have 43 forces in England Wales, taken as a whole, the story of our life is all too often separate decisions being made that do not necessarily make sense in terms of operational effectiveness and efficiency, and the best interests of our industrial base.

That long-standing problem has recurred under successive Governments, but under the previous Government a damning National Audit Office report mentioned a particular sum in respect of the procurement portal’s potential: if it were fully realised it could lead to a benefit of £50 million. However, what was being realised was peanuts, because there was only 2% take-up through the national procurement portal.

The official Opposition have argued that collaboration is crucial, but there needs to be a move one step further in a nationally driven strategic approach with the police service, including mandated procurement. Some of the work that we have done during the past two years has demonstrated that saving 25% of the £2.2 billion procurement budget, or £550 million, is eminently achievable, considering the experience elsewhere in the public and private sectors. By the way, that sum could save many police officers who would otherwise go. Whether in respect of a sensible approach to realising savings to enable investment in policing, or in respect of procurement and the industrial interests of our country, the time has come for a national strategic approach, at the heart of which should necessarily be—where appropriate and not in all circumstances—mandating.

I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, saying that his Committee might return to this at the next stages, not least because of the enormous benefits there would be for our industrial base in Britain, but also because we would have capacity to invest in policing, particularly front-line policing, at a time of continuing constraints on public expenditure.

We urge the Minister to consider two things during the next stages. First, a powerful case has been made for the pause, if I can use my right hon. Friend’s words. Concern has been expressed, rightly, about what may happen at the next stages—will a major contract be placed with a company that has not, in the past, shown quite the loyalty to this country that it should have done? My hon. Friends are right to raise that matter. I hope the Minister is prepared to sit down with those able to make the decisions and urge them to reconsider, very much along the lines that my right hon. Friend mentioned. Of course, we need value for money, but we should think of the wider and longer-term interests, including our country’s industrial interests.

Secondly, I would be the first to recognise that there have been some welcome steps in the right direction under this Government, but I hope they go significantly further in the aspect of procurement relating to hardware—to use the shorthand—whereby, working with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the police service, they seek a strategic focus on getting the best for Britain out of procurement.

In conclusion, it goes without saying, but it is worth saying nevertheless, that the best should always be bought for our police service, because, particularly at

times of stress and crisis, it needs to be absolutely confident that what is purchased for its use works and is of the highest possible specification, subject to value for money. We need to be confident that that is so. However, having said that, I do not believe that that contradicts a “Buy British” policy, for which my hon. Friends argued powerfully. No one is suggesting that always, on every occasion, nothing else is done, but we should have that approach. My hon. Friends have flown the flag for their two constituencies today, and our approach should be to fly the flag for the country as a whole.

3.38 pm

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): Mr Brady, it is a pleasure, as usual, to serve under your chairmanship in my first Westminster Hall debate in the same role as I had in the previous Government, but doing more. The Prime Minister kindly inserted the word “Crime” into my portfolio—a short five-letter word that means I have apparently taken over most of the rest of the Home Office.

I congratulate the hon. Member for City of Chester (Christian Matheson). It is a beautiful city; I know it well. It is a long time since I was there, so perhaps I need to go back soon and go out on patrol. The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) also spoke in the debate. As a young fireman I did a bit of moonlighting in the Port Sunlight area, delivering quite a lot, and I used to drive through that part of the world regularly—well, I tried to drive, but it was like a car park on the motorway most of the time.

Anybody who knows me will know that I am ever so slightly Eurosceptic, so I have a great deal of sympathy with what has been said in this Chamber this afternoon. As a Minister with experience in five Departments now, I assure colleagues that I have pushed the parameters as far as I can when it comes to what I perceive—and what I am sure the Government perceive—as incorrect interpretation of EU regulations. My advice is that many of the things that Members have been asking be done—I will ensure that I check this when I write to them—are illegal under the EU procurement directive. Even looking at the matter again in 2015, as Members have mentioned, that would have made no difference to the geographical part of the procurement process. If I am wrong, I will certainly write to colleagues to correct it, but that is the advice I stand here with as a Minister.

Justin Madders: On the lawfulness of the process, is the Minister aware of any judicial testing of how the system operates in other European countries compared with our own?

Mike Penning: As a Minister in the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice, I would not want to take on other responsibilities, but I promise to make sure that we look into that and get the facts on how other countries do it. Other countries interpret their membership of the European Union differently. I have committed infractions on more than one occasion in more than one Department, because my interpretation was different both from what my officials were pushing me to do and from the interpretations of courts in Europe.

If I was sitting on the Opposition Benches—I have sat there—I would be arguing for similar things. Whether we can physically do those things and how we get to the position where we can do them are important. To be

honest, a Select Committee could look at this in procurement terms, so that we can be open and honest about what we can and cannot do. I thank the shadow Minister for his comments; we have come a long way in the past couple of months. We disagree that there should be a centralised purchasing system. We have freed up the police authorities to police their areas in the way that they feel they should. The police are doing fantastic work in Cheshire: crime has dropped with fewer police officers and less money, and the situation is exactly the same with West Midlands police.

One point that the shadow Minister and I agree on is that there is money to be saved in procurement. There is no argument about that; I was banging on about that long before I came into the House. As a fireman, I used to complain bitterly about the money that we spent. There were cupboards full of stuff bought 15 years before; it was sitting there and would never be used. I am desperately trying to push that spending down. To be fair to the PCCs and the chiefs, they are coming to the table. We created the PCCs to be independent and to be able to do what they want, and all I have said to them all along is that there has to be value for money. Some of them have clearly said to me, as Members have in this debate, that if they can buy locally, that should outweigh a little of the cost that they could have saved if they had got it cheaper elsewhere, and I understand that point. There are, however, huge differentials in what forces are paying, not only for cars, but for batons, shirts, fleeces and trousers. They are so huge that I have decided in the next couple of weeks to publish by police force the main things that they buy, so that the public can see what their force is spending in their area. We will make that information available, including for Cheshire, West Midlands and Leicestershire.

I was a tad cheeky in saying that Leicestershire was not part of the consortium of 22 police forces that has done the recent review. The West Midlands force, sadly, is not part of it either. I am sure there are reasons for that, and I am sure they will come to the party. We can get that 22 up, but it is not just about having all 43 forces. As we have heard, Police Scotland is part of the consortium, which is welcome as it helps us to get more bang for our buck, as are the British Transport police.

I will touch on the points raised on it being only Peugeot that won a contract, because it was not only Peugeot. BMW, Ford, Vauxhall and Peugeot were successful in the e-bid process that we have just come through. An interesting point was made about whether, when manufacturers have brought something else to the UK, that balances things out. That is similar to what the shadow Minister said about Italy buying 4,000 SEAT vehicles from Spain that were manufactured in Spain—some of the parts might have been produced here in the UK. We are a major exporter of car parts, and we should not underestimate that part of the system. BMW makes the Mini in this country, and that very successful product employs lots of people in Swindon. Sadly, Ford does not manufacture vehicles here any more. As a young fireman in Essex, I used to go to the Dagenham plant all too often—it was technically over the boundary, but we were often needed when there was an incident. The TCDI engine is a world-leading diesel engine that is exported all over the world. Some 80% of the vehicles manufactured in this country are exported, and Members have alluded to that great success story.

[*Mike Penning*]

I must declare an interest: many of my constituents in the great constituency of Hemel Hempstead work in Vauxhall's Luton van manufacturing plant, which is part of the consortium. Vauxhall vans will be with police forces, based on the process that took place, and Peugeot has also won a contract.

A new bidding process will take place this autumn. I am sure that Vauxhall, like many other manufacturers, will want to bid. Nearly every time I have visited a police force, I have been squeezed into the back of an Astra. The Astra is a bit of a Marmite subject for police forces. I love the Astra, and we have had Astras in our family, but colleagues who have been out on patrol will know that if there are two burly bobbies with all their kit and a burly Minister in the back, it can be interesting—but it does the job. Peugeot has won this contract, and I am sure that Vauxhall will be bidding for the other one.

What has happened here for the first time is economies of scale. I was a little bit cheeky by naming two forces that just happen to cover the constituencies of two of the most senior Members in Westminster Hall this afternoon. I am sure that there are contractual reasons for those forces not being in the consortium, because nearly all the chiefs I have met have said, "We're going to be part of this. It's very important." I hope that forces join together at that level in other types of procurement. We see a lot of joint practice across different forces at the moment on HR and procurement in the IT sector. We have just announced a new IT company that will run the IT purchases for all 43 forces. I hope that Scotland will join us on that, because it would be brilliant to have an operable IT system. We need to work together on that with the National Crime Agency and organised crime units, and I will be working on it with Ministers in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The key is having the right vehicles for the right people doing the right jobs. I first became a Minister back in 2010. I never dreamt that would happen to me, but it did. Having been a shadow Health Minister for four and a half years, the Department for Transport was really interesting on the first day. One thing I worked on was the Government car service. I am sure that colleagues remember the Mondeos outside Parliament over the years, then the Priuses and the Honda hybrids, but they have probably noticed that we do not see those vehicles out there any more—certainly not the Honda hybrids and the Toyotas. I made an absolutely conscious decision to buy the Avensis for junior Ministers, because they were assembled and manufactured in this country. There was not another compatible vehicle that could do the job—we tried lots of other vehicles: we had a Qashqai on loan for a considerable time, but it did not work; Hyundai sent us some vehicles, and I think one of them is still hanging around. I took a little bit of flack, but I wanted that pressure.

There are exemptions. For instance, the Metropolitan police wanted to use BMW armoured vehicles because they come off the production line armoured, whereas all other vehicles, such as the Jaguar, are retrofitted. I think we will find that the Prime Minister is in a Jaguar. It took a little while, but we got there in the end. I do not criticise the Metropolitan police for taking that time, because they wanted to keep people as safe as possible,

but I want to ensure we have vehicles that create as many jobs as possible in this country, and I have a track record of trying to do that.

Jack Dromey: The steps taken by the Minister in relation to the Government car service were very welcome indeed. However, the lesson is surely that the Minister was able to move to the overwhelming majority of requirements being met by way of a British manufacturing strategy because he had the power so to do and drove that decision centrally. Does he accept that if we continue down the path of hoping that collaboration will deliver the kinds of outcome we are debating today, it is highly unlikely we will ever succeed to the extent we could realise with a strategic, mandated approach?

Mike Penning: We have debated this point before. I do not agree that the Home Office is the best place to control the procurement. In the example that I used, I was the Minister responsible, but I had to prove with cost analysis that it was the right vehicle. Of course, it was a very small procurement in real terms, but it sent a message.

I the point and advise that it would be illegal to look at the successful bid now and then, outside that, offer a British company the opportunity to match that bid. That would be illegal under EU procurement rules. Frankly, the e-auction mechanism would just collapse, because the process would not be in place.

We need to strike a balance between getting the best possible bang for our buck with the limited funds that we have at the moment in the difficult times we are still going through, and making sure that the police are happy with the vehicles they get and use, while at the same time bringing the forces as close together as possible to ensure that they build an economic argument. I can understand the point about Peugeot, but there are three other companies. There will be lots of jobs for my constituents building vans in Luton.

Jack Dromey: On the wider policy issue of how best to conduct procurement, I hope that on reflection, and informed by a Select Committee investigation, we will see progress in the next stages. In the here and now, however, a decision about Peugeot is imminent. Will the Minister agree to the very reasonable requests made by my hon. Friends the Members for City of Chester (Christian Matheson) and for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), and at the very least use his formidable powers of advocacy to call in those who are making the decision and ask them, "Can you not think twice?"?

Mike Penning: I speak regularly to West Yorkshire police, which is the lead force in the procurement process. I think we are beyond that stage, because we are already discussing the autumn auction, when there will be lots more vehicles out there.

The Crown Commercial Service facilitates the process within the Cabinet Office—it used to be done all over Government, with each Department doing its own thing, so at least it has now been brought together. Under the 2015 public contracts and social value legislation, the CCS has to look at the framework and set out—it is set out on its website, and I will get the documents sent out—how it has considered social value as well as cost analysis. That is enormously important.

The shadow Minister mentioned an investigation. I thought that Select Committees did inquiries rather than investigations—it sounds like I will have to swear an oath before I sit down. I honestly think that we should be having this debate in public, and we should be honest about the restrictions that result from our membership of the EU—what we have to do, how we interpret it and whether or not we are gold-plating it. If we are gold-plating it in any shape or form, Members who have known me for a long time will know that I will push back and push back. I have the Prime Minister's permission to do that in as many areas as possible.

As I said earlier, if I was a Back Bencher, I would probably have been here arguing in exactly the same way as Opposition Members have today. Perhaps I have allowed a little more openness in the debate by mentioning the companies other from Peugeot that manufacture in this country, which is very important. No one was more disappointed than me when I heard that Peugeot was not going to do the work. Colleagues did an awful lot of work to get Peugeot to stay, but it made a commercial decision to go. Perhaps next time, it will make a commercial decision to come back.

3.53 pm

Christian Matheson: Thank you, Mr Brady, for presiding over the debate. I thank right hon. and hon. Members for joining in, and pay tribute to the Minister for his characteristically forthright and honest approach. He asked us to look at his experience and track record, which suggests that he understands at least some of the issues we have raised, and I am grateful for that. The one question I would like him to ponder after the debate is why, if he has been advised that my proposals would be illegal, the same is not the case in our partner states in the EU, such as France and Germany.

Mike Penning: We have some time, so it is important that I respond to that. As I mentioned earlier, when I go to ministerial meetings and meet ministerial colleagues from Europe, they often have a very different attitude to their membership. I will try to find out how they have done it. Someone mentioned Saab earlier; sadly, it went out of manufacturing and stopped producing cars. I love Saabs. I used to drive them, and they are great, fun cars to drive. I am a bit of a petrolhead, so I do get in trouble when I talk about these sorts of things.

I will find out about the legality issues relating to procurement, and I will write to Members, copying in

the Chair of the Select Committee and the shadow Minister. If I have misled the House in any way, I did not mean to. I am not a lawyer, but I am trying to be as honest as possible.

Christian Matheson: I thank the Minister for that intervention and the interest he is taking in this issue. I am extremely grateful to the other right hon. and hon. Members who participated in the debate. The Minister mentioned future contracts; I can tell him and others present that with, I am sure, my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), I will be taking a very close interest in that process—hopefully from the start of the process this time.

Richard Arkless: Before we embark on that process, will the hon. Gentleman and, perhaps, the Minister commit to looking at the other side of the coin? I am not saying whether or not this is the case, but do our European partners procure items, such as vehicles, for their public services from the UK? Would it not be wise to investigate that possibility before coming to a decision?

Christian Matheson: It is absolutely the case that—I think that the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) referred to this fact—the supply chain in the United Kingdom does supply to businesses across Europe. I say to the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless): go to France and find a police car that is not a Peugeot, a Citroën or a Renault, and go to Germany and find one that is not made by a German manufacturer. This problem appears to be peculiar to the United Kingdom.

In conclusion, I thank you, Mr Brady, and other hon. Members again. The UK automotive industry is very successful and is always looking to the next model, but it is never quite as secure as it appears and needs support from the Government to maintain its success. I shall maintain my vigilance on the contracts in the coming months.

Question put and agreed to

Resolved,

That this House has considered police procurement of motor vehicles.

3.57 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 16 July 2015

CABINET OFFICE

Individual Electoral Registration

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): I am today laying before Parliament the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (Transitional Provisions) Order 2015, which will end the transition to individual electoral registration (IER) in December 2015.

The Electoral Commission has recommended that the transition to IER should end in December 2016. The Government are concerned that by retaining “carry forward” electors (those who have not yet registered under the new system of individual electoral registration) beyond December this year, this will pose an unacceptable risk to the accuracy of the register. Since the registers published by 1 December 2015 will be used for the parliamentary boundary review and then the elections in May 2016, retaining carry forward electors risks having an unknown number of redundant entries on the registers, which would distort the results of the boundary review, increase the risk of electoral fraud, and potentially compromise the integrity of those elections.

The Government do not agree that we should be making a choice between completeness and accuracy, given the importance of both elements in delivering a fair democratic system which commands the confidence and respect of voters. We need to be more ambitious. We can and should aim to achieve both, which is why the Government believe it is crucial that the registers used to conduct the parliamentary boundary review and for next year’s elections are as complete and as accurate as they can possibly be.

The remaining “carry-forward” group of electors is already only a third of its original size and by December they will have been contacted at least nine times to encourage them to register individually. In addition to this, I am pleased to announce that up to £3 million of additional funding is being made available for all electoral registration officers in Great Britain to target their non IER registered carry forward electors.

This funding will be targeted primarily at those authorities which have more than 5% of their register consisting of carry forward electors. All authorities however will be entitled to bid for funding, if they feel they need to take additional steps to target this group of electors.

[HCWS127]

TREASURY

Counter-terrorist Asset Freezing

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin): Under the Terrorist Asset-Freezing etc. Act 2010 (“TAFAs 2010”), the Treasury is required to report to Parliament, quarterly, on its operation of the UK’s asset freezing regime mandated by UN Security Council Resolution 1373.

This is the 16th report under the Act and it covers the period from 1 January 2015 to 31 March 2015. This report also covers the UK implementation of the UN Al-Qaida asset freezing regime and the operation of the EU asset freezing regime in the UK under EU Regulation (EC) 2580/2001 which implements UNSCR 1373 against external terrorist threats to the EU. Under the UN Al-Qaida asset freezing regime, the UN has responsibility for designations and the Treasury has responsibility for licensing and compliance with the regime in the UK under the Al-Qaida (Asset-Freezing) Regulations 2011. Under EU Regulation 2580/2001, the EU has responsibility for designations and the Treasury has responsibility for licensing and compliance with the regime in the UK under Part 1 of TAFAs 2010.

Annexes A and B to this statement provide a breakdown, by name, of all those designated by the UK and the EU in pursuance of UN Security Council Resolution 1373. The two individuals subject to designations, which have been notified on a restricted and confidential basis, under sections 3 and 10 of TAFAs 2010 are denoted by A and B.

The following table sets out the key asset-freezing activity in the UK during the quarter ending 31 March 2015:

	TAFAs 2010	EU Reg (EC) 2580/2001	Al-Qaeda regime UNSCR1989
Assets frozen (as at 31/03/2015)	£39,000	£11,000 ¹	£58,000 ²
Number of accounts frozen in UK (at 31/03/15)	41	10	25
New accounts frozen (during Q1 2015)	16	0	0
Accounts unfrozen (during Q1 2015)	20	0	0
Total number of designations (at 31/03/15)	31	33	308
(i) New designations (during Q1 2015, including confidential designations)	1	0	10
(ii) Number of designations that were confidential (during Q1 2015)	1	0	0
(iii) Delistings (during Q1 2015)	2	2	6
(iv) Individuals in custody in UK (at 31/03/2015)	3	0	0
(v) Individuals in UK, not in custody (at 31/03/2015)	2	0	3
(vi) Individuals overseas (at 31/03/2015)	19	10	234
(vii) Groups	7	23 (1 in UK)	71
Individuals by nationality	10	n/a	n/a
(i) UK Nationals ³	14		
(ii) Non UK Nationals			
Renewal of designation (during Q1 2015)	12	n/a	n/a
General Licences			(i) 0
(i) Issued in Q1			(ii) 0
(ii) Amended			(iii) 0
(iii) Revoked			

	TAFAs 2010	EU Reg (EC) 2580/2001	Al-Qaeda regime UNSCR1989
Specific Licences			
(i) Issued in Q1	8	0	0
(ii) Amended	2	0	0
(iii) Expired	15	0	0
(iii) Refused	1	0	0

¹This does not duplicate funds frozen under TAFAs.

²This figure reflects the most up-to-date account balances available and includes approximately \$64,000 of funds frozen in the UK. This has been converted using exchange rates as of 31/03/2015. Additionally the figures reflect an updating of balances of accounts for certain individuals during the quarter, depleted through licensed activity.

³Based on information held by the Treasury, some of these individuals hold dual nationality.

⁴ For full listing details please refer to <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/current-list-of-designated-persons-terrorism-and-terrorist-financing>

⁵For full listing details please refer to www.gov.uk

* EU listing rests on UK designation under TAFAs 2010

Legal Proceedings

The damages claim brought by Gulam MASTAFA against a number of Government Departments including the Treasury, remains stayed.

The claim brought by Zana RAHIM continues to progress towards completion.

Proceedings were filed on 29 May 2014 at the High Court appealing against the Treasury's decision to renew MF's designation under TAFAs 2010. The final hearing took place on 29 April 2015, after the period covered by this report and will be covered in the next quarterly report to Parliament.

An individual previously designated under TAFAs 2010 lodged an appeal on 3 November 2014 against his designation, challenging the Treasury's decision to revoke rather than quash his designation. These proceedings were ongoing during the reporting period.

There were no criminal proceedings in respect of breaches of asset freezes made under TAFAs 2010.

Annex A—Designated persons under TAFAs 2010 by name⁴

Individuals

1. Hamed ABDOLLAHI
2. Bilal Talal ABDULLAH
3. Imad Khalil AL-ALAMI
4. Abdelkarim Hussein AL-NASSER
5. Ibrahim Salih AL-YACOUB
6. Ruhul AMIN
7. Manssor ARBABSAR
8. Usama HAMDAN
9. Nur Idiris HASSAN NUR
10. Nabeel HUSSAIN
11. Hasan IZZ-AL-DIN
12. Mohammed KHALED
13. Parviz KHAN
14. Reyaad KHAN
15. Musa Abu MARZOUK
16. Khalid MISHAAL
17. Khalid Shaikh MOHAMMED
18. Aseel MUTHANA
19. Nasser MUTHANA
20. Abdul Reza SHAHLAI
21. AN Gholam SHAKURI
22. Qasem SOLEIMANI

23. A

24. B

Entities

1. Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA)
2. Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)
3. Fuerzas armadas revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)
4. Hizballah Military Wing, including external security organisation
5. Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command (PFLP-GC)
6. Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—(PFLP)
7. Sendero Luminoso (SL)

Annex B: persons designated by the EU under Council regulation (EC)2580/2001[5]

Persons

1. Hamed ABDOLLAHI*
2. Abdelkarim Hussein AL-NASSER*
3. Ibrahim Salih AL YACOUB*
4. Manssor ARBABSAR*
5. Mohammed BOUYERI
6. Hasan IZZ-AL-DIN*
7. Khalid Shaikh MOHAMMED*
8. Abdul Reza SHAH LAI*
9. AN Gholam SHAKURI*
10. Qasem SOLEIMANI*

Groups and entities

1. Abu Nidal Organisation (ANO)
2. Al-Aqsa E.V.
3. Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade
4. Babbar Khalsa
5. Communist Party of the Philippines, including New People's Army (NPA), Philippines
6. Devrimci Halk Kurtulu Partisi-Cephesi—DHKP/C (Revolutionary People's Liberation Army/Front/Party)
7. Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)*
8. Fuerzas armadas revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC)*
9. Gama'a al-Islamiyya (a.k.a. Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya) (Islamic Group—IG)
10. Hamas, including Hamas-Izz al-Din al-Qassem
11. Hizballah Military Wing, including external security organisation
12. Hizbul Mujahideen (HM)
13. Hofstadgroep
14. International Sikh Youth Federation (ISYF)
15. Islami Büyük Dogu Akincilar Cephesi (IBDA-C) (Great Islamic Eastern Warriors Front)
16. Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF)
17. Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) (a.k.a. KONGRA-GEL)
18. Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)
19. Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)
20. Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command (PFLP-GC)*
21. Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—(PFLP)*
22. Sendero Luminoso (SL) (Shining Path)*
23. Teyrbazen Azadiya Kurdistan (TAK)

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Television Licences

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): On 9 September 2014 my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove (Sajid Javid), announced an independent review into TV licence fee enforcement. The obligation to conduct a review of the sanctions regime for TV licence evasion is contained in section 77 of the Deregulation Act 2015.

I am pleased today to announce the publication of the report for the TV licence fee enforcement review. This review has been independently led on behalf of the Government by David Perry QC, to whom I would like to record my thanks for his excellent work in considering this difficult issue.

The review is now complete and will be published today. In accordance with section 77(3) of the Deregulation Act 2015, I will lay a report setting out my response to the review within three months.

A copy of the report for the TV licence fee enforcement review has been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

Attachments can be found online at:
<http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>

[HCWS129]

DEFENCE

Service Complaints

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): I am pleased to release today the Ministry of Defence's formal response to the Service Complaints Commissioner's (SCC) annual report for 2014 on the fairness, effectiveness and efficiency of the service complaints system.

The SCC's report commented on the performance of the current service complaints system and looked forward to the changes that will come from the new system under the Armed Forces (Service Complaints and Financial Assistance) Act 2015. The response sets out how the MOD is addressing each of the Commissioner's new recommendations which relate primarily to the preparation for and the implementation of the reforms.

The 2015 Act introduces significant reforms of the process and creates a powerful independent voice in the new service complaints ombudsman. It is important that we have a system in which our personnel have confidence to raise matters of concern so they can be resolved.

A copy of the response will be placed in the Library of the House.

[HCWS120]

Iraq and Syria

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): The House may welcome an update on the military campaign against ISIL in Iraq and Syria.

ISIL presents a direct threat to the UK and to UK interests and the Government have been playing a key role in the global counter-ISIL coalition since its formation last year. The military effort is only one element of the wider coalition campaign to halt, degrade and defeat ISIL and its violent ideology through political, diplomatic and military means. In military terms, we have always recognised that the campaign would be a long one. While ISIL has recently had some tactical successes in Iraq and Syria, it has also lost significant ground, most recently in northern Syria. Its progress has been broadly halted and it is beginning to be rolled back. In Iraq, it has lost some 25% of the territory it held after its advance last summer.

The coalition air campaign has been vital in providing support to those fighting ISIL on the ground and in degrading ISIL's military capabilities. As part of that campaign, RAF Tornado and Reaper aircraft have now flown over 1,000 missions and UK Tornado, Reaper, Airseeker and Sentinel aircraft have contributed sophisticated intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities to the coalition to find and strike ISIL. The UK is currently, the only coalition nation conducting manned ISR over Syria and, with the increasing requirement for intelligence understanding across a broad geographic region in Iraq and Syria, we have also taken steps to increase the efficiency of the coalition ISR effort through collaborative force management and sharing arrangements with the US for Reaper and Airseeker. As US systems, these two types are particularly suitable for such co-operation.

Since the outset of the air campaign, we have provided to Parliament a range of information on UK air activity, including on the number of strikes carried out by our aircraft based on UK methodology. As the campaign has progressed, we have had better visibility and understanding of the method used by the coalition to calculate total strike numbers which differs from the method used by the UK. I have concluded that it would be preferable in future to use coalition produced numbers for UK strikes. For transparency, the table below shows the number of strikes carried out to date by both methods. This will result in an apparent reduction in the total number of UK strikes but does not represent a material change in the substantial contribution that the UK has, and continues to make to the counter-ISIL global coalition air campaign. This includes some 30% of the total airborne intelligence effort, reflecting the crucial importance to the coalition of the UK contribution in this field.

The wider coalition military strategy also relies on working with local land forces to build their capability and capacity to help them combat ISIL more effectively on the ground. The coalition has been training Iraqi security forces at four and now five locations. This is a long term effort but, as part of this work, the UK has now trained over 1,600 personnel. The decision to expand our presence in Iraq by a further 125 UK personnel—which will bring total UK forces in Iraq to over 275—will enable us to bring this training to further coalition training sites across Iraq, and will particularly help the Iraqi security forces to combat improvised explosive devices which form the most pernicious threat they face as they combat ISIL. The UK is also participating in a programme with US and regional partners to train the new Syrian forces in regional training centres outside

Syria. This nascent programme will take time to bear fruit but demonstrates our willingness to give direct support to members of the armed moderate opposition who show themselves capable and committed to fighting ISIL.

Op Shader: UK Strike Numbers

	<i>Monthly Strikes—UK Method</i>	<i>Cumulative Total—UK Method</i>	<i>Monthly Strikes—Coalition Method</i>	<i>Cumulative Total—Coalition Method</i>
September 2014	2	2	2	2
October 2014	15	17	8	10
November 2014	40	57	26	36
December 2014	33	90	26	62
January 2015	46	136	28	90
February 2015	24	136	28	90
March 2015	42	202	29	138
April 2015	34	236	26	164
May 2015	37	273	34	198
June 2015	30	308	28	226

[HCWS132]

EDUCATION

GCSEs and A-levels

The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb): Today I am launching a public consultation on revised subject content for seven GCSEs and five A-levels which will be taught from 2017.

This represents an important step in the third phase of GCSE and A-level reform. Our aims for GCSE and A-level reform are unchanged. We are reforming GCSEs and A-levels to be rigorous and more knowledge-based and to match the qualifications used in the best education systems in the world. The reforms aim to ensure that GCSEs are more academically demanding and will be qualifications in which students, employers, and further and higher education institutions can have confidence. At A-level, our reforms aim to ensure that they prepare students for undergraduate study. A priority in the development process has therefore been to secure the views of subject experts, particularly university academics in the relevant subjects.

The subject content documents being published today set new expectations which all awarding organisations' specifications must meet. Awarding organisations have drafted content, working with Department for Education and Ofqual. An additional consultation will be published in the autumn with content for the remaining subjects to be taught from September 2017.

This consultation is an opportunity for teachers, further and higher education colleges, parents and students, industry and all those with an interest in these subjects to provide their views and allow us to take them into account when redrafting the content for final publication.

Summary of changes to subjects

Astronomy GCSE has been reformed to ensure it has the same level of demand as the newly reformed GCSE science content. Demand has been increased by introducing new areas of knowledge and placing greater emphasis on students' use of mathematical skills.

The business GCSE content increases breadth and depth of knowledge, and introduces more focus on the overall purpose of business, on how the different parts of a business work together, and on how business decisions are made.

The new economics GCSE content has been significantly strengthened and focuses clearly on economics as a social science, with additional depth added such as requiring students to understand movements along, and shifts in, supply and demand curves, and with more demanding mathematical requirements.

The engineering GCSE has an increased level of demand with a greater emphasis on systems-related content, a detailed section on testing and investigation, and new and more demanding mathematics.

Environmental science A-level has been brought in line with other reformed science A-levels, and requires greater scientific knowledge, understanding and skills.

The new geology GCSE content requires students to study a greater number of minerals, rock types and fossil groups, and there is new content on planetary geology.

History of art AS and A-level content will ensure students study a wide range of art and artists from different movements and periods including pre- and post-1850.

Music technology AS and A-level content is focused on the knowledge and skills which relate solely to music technology, with the content that overlapped with music A-level removed. As a consequence the qualification now includes more technical, scientific and mathematical content.

Philosophy AS and A-level content will enable students to gain a thorough grounding in key philosophical questions and concepts, including through critically engaging with ideas and reading and understanding the work of key philosophers and thinkers.

Psychology GCSE content will require all students to study in more breadth and depth the five core areas of psychology—social, cognitive, biological, developmental and individual differences—including key theories. All students will also be required to develop a strong understanding of research methods including quantitative analysis.

Sociology GCSE content has been updated to reflect the new, more demanding A-level, with additional sections on the sociological approach and with students now required to know and understand the ideas of key sociological theorists.

As with the reform of the GCSE, the Department has developed subject content for design and technology A-level. The A-level retains a specialist focus with students able to study engineering, product design, or fashion design and development. All students will be required to study the core content of design processes that are at the core of contemporary design practice, and the technical principles needed to choose the right solution to address the design need.

[HCWS112]

School Funding

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr Sam Gyimah): World class schools are a vital part of the Government's long-term economic plan, and are one of the key drivers of the productive economy of the future.

We are therefore committed to making school funding fairer, to maintaining the amount of money that follows children into schools and to confirming the extra £390 million fairer funding uplift from 2015-16 in budgets for 2016-17 and beyond. This will help every child, everywhere, to have the best possible chance to reach their potential.

Today we are taking the first steps towards meeting these commitments by publishing the per pupil funding rates for each local authority's schools budget for 2016-17. This protects the per pupil funding in each authority from 2015-16, meeting the commitment to protect the national schools budget and to base-lining the £390 million extra funding.

We are also publishing the Education Funding Agency's operational guide; to allow local authorities to start the process of consulting with their schools on how the funding should be distributed in their area.

The forthcoming spending review will set out the Government's plans for the delivery and funding of public services for this Parliament. It will set out further detail on key delivery priorities for schools and local authorities and confirm funding levels for other grants and programmes. In light of the spending review and any consequent changes to the school finance regulations (which would of course be consulted on), the operational guide may have to be updated and local authorities may have to review the planning and modelling they have undertaken.

Final funding allocations to each authority will be made in December, in line with the latest data on their pupil numbers.

Base-lining the 2015-16 minimum funding levels in 2016-17 is an important step towards making funding fairer. However it remains the case that a school in one part of the country can receive over 50% more funding than an identical school in another part of the country.

I am therefore committed to making schools and early education funding fairer and will put forward proposals in due course.

We recognise the links between funding for early education, schools and pupils with high cost special educational needs. These are complex issues to consider, and we will consult extensively with the sector and the public on them.

[HCWS135]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Small Waste Oil Burners

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): As part of our commitment to cleaner air the Government will amend the current environmental permitting guidance to state clearly that all small waste oil burners burning

waste oils in England fall under the scope of the industrial emission directive. This will reduce emissions of air pollutants and it will require all operators of small waste oil burners burning waste oils to meet the requirements of the industrial emission directive or, alternatively, to choose to burn other fuels such as gas or fuel oils.

My Department will conclude a consultation on the amended guidance for England and measures available to help industry with the transition in October 2015. Following the consultation, new guidance will be published in December 2015 that will take effect in April 2016.

I have arranged for a copy of the document to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. A copy is also available on the gov.uk website.

[HCWS111]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Diplomatic Immunity: Offences

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): In 2014, 14 serious and significant offences allegedly committed by people entitled to diplomatic immunity in the United Kingdom were drawn to the attention of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office by parliamentary and diplomatic protection of the Metropolitan police, or other law enforcement agencies. Twelve of these were driving-related. We define serious offences as those which could, in certain circumstances, carry a penalty of 12 months' imprisonment or more. Also included are drink-driving and driving without insurance.

Some 22,000 people are entitled to diplomatic immunity in the United Kingdom and the majority of diplomats abide by UK law. The number of alleged serious crimes committed by members of the diplomatic community in the UK is proportionately low.

Under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961, those entitled to immunity are expected to obey the law. The FCO does not tolerate foreign diplomats breaking the law.

We take all allegations of illegal activity seriously. When instances of alleged criminal conduct are brought to our attention by the police, we ask the relevant foreign Government to waive diplomatic immunity where appropriate. For the most serious offences, and when a relevant waiver has not been granted, we seek the immediate withdrawal of the diplomat.

Alleged serious and significant offences reported to the FCO in 2014 are listed below.

2014

Driving without insurance

Greece	1
Algeria	1
Equatorial Guinea	1
Mexico	1

 2014

Driving without insurance, driving otherwise than in accordance with a licence, and without due care and attention

South Africa 1

Driving without insurance, without an MOT, and with tyres significantly worn below the legal limit

Saudi Arabia 1

Driving while under the influence of alcohol, without insurance, and without a valid licence

Malawi 1

Driving under the influence of alcohol

Thailand 1

Saudi Arabia 1

Guatemala 1

Equatorial Guinea 1

In charge of a vehicle under the influence of alcohol

China 1

Possession of a firearm

Saudi Arabia 1

Development of malware for the purpose of fraud

Saudi Arabia 1

We also wish to record a further four offences of conspiracy to cheat the Revenue between 2009 and 2012, of which four former Gambian diplomats were convicted in 2014. These were not recorded in previous written ministerial statements because the cases were either under investigation or were sub judice. Their previous inclusion may have hampered investigations or prejudiced the outcome of criminal proceedings.

Figures for previous years are available in the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs' written statement to the House on 15 July 2014, *Official Report*, column 50WS.

[HCWS128]

Government Wine Cellar

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I have today placed a copy of the annual statement on the Government wine cellar for the financial Year 2014-15 in the Libraries of both Houses.

Following the outcome of the review of the Government Hospitality wine cellar in 2011, this fourth annual statement continues our commitment to annual statements to Parliament on the use of the wine cellar, covering consumption, stock purchases, costs, and value for money. The wine cellar has been self-funding since 2011-12, through the sale of some high-value stock and payments made by other Government Departments for events organised by Government Hospitality.

The report notes that:

Sales of stock amounted to £71,050 (cf. £56,000 in FY 2013-14);

Further funds from other Government Departments added £21,514 to the overall receipts (cf. £16,762 in 13/14);

Purchases amounted to £70,432 (cf. £50,054 in 2013-14);

The highest consumption level by volume was of English and Welsh wine, at 44% of the total (cf. 48% in 2013-14);

Consumption rose in 2014-15 by around 15% due to the significant number of major international conferences and meetings (eg NATO summit, Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict summit).

[HCWS142]

International Justice

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): I am pleased to provide Parliament with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's annual statement of Government support for the principles and institutions of international justice in 2014-15 and our plans for the year ahead. Tomorrow marks international justice day, a good moment to take stock of the UK's contribution to this crucial area of work.

International justice is central to the UK's foreign policy. It is essential that perpetrators of atrocities are held to account for their actions, and that victims see justice done. International justice does not stop with punishing the perpetrators—it goes further by helping victims of atrocities and their communities to come to terms with the past, starting the healing process and deterring those who might otherwise commit such violations in the future.

In 2014 we showed our commitment to international justice by contributing £8.2 million to the International Criminal Court, £3.2 million to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, £1.5 million to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, and £2 million to the Residual Mechanism which will take on the essential functions of the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda tribunals when they close. Furthermore, in financial year 2014-15 we made voluntary contributions of £1 million to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and contributed to the international component of the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia and to the Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone (RSCSL). The UK also continues to provide support for the RSCSL through our enforcement of the sentence of Charles Taylor.

UK support for international justice is a key element of our ongoing work to end sexual violence in conflict through the preventing sexual violence initiative. We will continue to promote stronger national and international accountability, including through advocacy and training to improve investigation of these crimes using the international protocol on the documentation and investigation of sexual violence in conflict. We welcome the recently published policy by the ICC prosecutor on sexual and gender-based crimes and will support the prosecutor's office in implementing it fully.

The continued work of the International Criminal Court and the international tribunals to tackle impunity for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity helps to strengthen the rules-based international system and makes a contribution towards building a safer more secure world. For example, in January 2015 Dominic Ongwen, a senior commander in the Lord's Resistance Army, appeared before the International Criminal Court. This in itself was a major achievement for international

efforts to end impunity for the actions of the Lord's Resistance Army, and for the victims of the Lord's Resistance Army's crimes in Uganda. In March 2015, the International Criminal Court issued its judgment on reparations for the victims of Democratic Republic of the Congo warlord Thomas Lubanga. This was the first final judgment including provisions for compensation for the victims.

This coming year will see further progress in international justice. The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court is currently investigating nine situations. The court has ongoing proceedings against 21 individuals and 12 fugitives who remain at large. The trial of the former Côte d'Ivoire President Laurent Gbagbo will start. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia is expected to deliver a verdict in the Radovan Karadžić trial. The formal closure of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda is due to happen in the autumn with all its remaining functions transferring to the Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals. The Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia is now in the second phase of a trial dealing with crimes of genocide, forced marriage, and rape, having delivered in 2014 a verdict in the first phase of the trial of the most senior surviving members of the Khmer Rouge. And the Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone will continue to uphold the legacy of the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

The UK values these institutions and the way in which their activities strengthen international support for the principles of international justice, accountability for crimes, and an end to impunity. We will continue to support these institutions over the next 12 months. We will continue to encourage other states to support these courts and tribunals and to fulfil their legal obligations. We will continue to ensure they deliver value for money by scrutinising budgets and making sure they make the best use of available resources.

This is the third annual update to Parliament on the FCO's work to support international justice.

[HCWS125]

Diplomats: London Congestion Charge

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): The value of unpaid Congestion Charge debt incurred by diplomatic missions and international organisations in London since its introduction in February 2003 until 31 December 2014 as advised by Transport for London was £87,440,287. The table below shows those diplomatic missions and international organisations with outstanding fines of £100,000 or more.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of Fines</i>	<i>Total Outstanding</i>
Embassy of the United States of America	80,174	£9,441,370
Embassy of Japan	54,158	£6,374,505
High Commission of the Federal Republic of Nigeria	45,511	£5,339,020
Embassy of the Russia Federation	45,650	£5,323,900

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of Fines</i>	<i>Total Outstanding</i>
Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany	34,976	£4,052,895
Office of the High Commissioner for India	32,503	£3,908,465
Embassy of the Republic of Poland	26,365	£3,152,000
Office of the High Commissioner for Ghana	23,979	£2,861,855
Embassy of the Republic of Sudan	22,297	£2,549,135
Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan	18,831	£2,273,760
Embassy of the People's Republic of China	17,523	£2,176,310
Kenya High Commission	17,950	£2,076,095
Embassy of France	15,416	£1,811,555
Embassy of Spain	14,504	£1,715,385
High Commission for the United Republic of Tanzania	13,577	£1,556,810
High Commission for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan	12,184	£1,478,620
Embassy of the Republic of Korea	11,960	£1,442,550
Embassy of Romania	12,153	£1,426,000
Embassy of Greece	11,420	£1,344,692
Embassy of Ukraine	11,268	£1,315,970
Embassy of the Republic of Cuba	10,235	£1,231,480
South African High Commission	10,567	£1,217,005
People's Democratic Republic of Algeria	10,414	£1,205,110
Sierra Leone High Commission	10,050	£1,149,975
Embassy of Hungary	8,032	£949,185
High Commission for the Republic of Cyprus	7,902	£941,595
Embassy of the Republic of Yemen	6,558	£770,245
High Commission for the Republic of Zambia	6,593	£766,770
Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria	6,386	£735,810
Embassy of the Republic of Belarus	5,452	£635,960
Embassy of the Slovak Republic	5,296	£616,425
High Commission for the Republic of Cameroon	5,216	£600,685
High Commission of the Republic of Malawi	4,737	£555,170
Botswana High Commission	4,566	£543,940
Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	4,537	£518,185
High Commission for the Republic of Namibia	4,515	£516,455
Embassy of the Republic of Zimbabwe	4,520	£500,810
Kingdom of Swaziland High Commission	4,347	£494,500
High Commission for the Republic of Mozambique	4,255	£494,410

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of Fines</i>	<i>Total Outstanding</i>
Embassy of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea	3,877	£446,685
Embassy of Austria	3,478	£443,920
Embassy of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire	3,721	£431,350
Mauritius High Commission	3,688	£425,875
Malta High Commission	3,486	£412,810
Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania	3,266	£395,315
High Commission of the Kingdom of Lesotho	3,415	£392,140
Embassy of the Czech Republic	3,383	£390,080
Uganda High Commission	3,278	£385,910
Embassy of Belgium	3,200	£378,200
Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan	2,955	£351,545
Embassy of the Republic of Liberia	2,934	£350,235
Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam	2,953	£344,110
Royal Danish Embassy	2,756	£327,040
Embassy of the Republic of Turkey	2,466	£292,380
Embassy of the Republic of Guinea	2,573	£291,140
Jamaican High Commission	2,429	£284,320
Embassy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo	2,280	£279,110
Embassy of the Republic of Latvia	1,995	£238,630
Embassy of Portugal	1,950	£236,460
Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt	2,244	£235,575
Embassy of Finland	1,921	£227,680
Embassy of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea	1,979	£227,680
Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia	1,731	£211,670
Embassy of Luxembourg	1,731	£205,500
Embassy of Tunisia	1,594	£193,710
High Commission of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka	1,560	£193,530
Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco	1,477	£185,075
High Commission for Antigua & Barbuda	1,573	£184,840
Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia	1,689	£183,310
Embassy of the Republic of Iraq	1,192	£149,180
Embassy of the Republic of South Sudan	1,126	£143,855
Embassy of Estonia	1,164	£141,615
Embassy of the Dominican Republic	1,081	£127,840
Belize High Commission	990	£121,990
Embassy of the State of Eritrea	1,017	£118,320
High Commission for Guyana	914	£105,620

Figures for previous years are available in the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs' written statement to the House on 15 July 2014, *Official Report*, column 53WS.

[HCWS134]

Diplomats: Parking Fines

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): In 2014, 5,307 parking fines incurred by diplomatic missions and international organisations in the United Kingdom were brought to our attention by councils. These totalled £536,289.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has held meetings with a number of missions about outstanding parking fine debt. In addition, in April this year we wrote to diplomatic missions and international organisations concerned giving them the opportunity to either pay their outstanding fines or appeal against them if they considered that the fines had been issued incorrectly.

Subsequent payments—including amounts waived by councils—totalled £214,154. There remains a total of £322,135 in unpaid fines for 2014.

The table below details those diplomatic missions and international organisations that have outstanding fines totalling £1,000 or more, as of 22 June 2015.

<i>Diplomatic Mission/International Organisation</i>	<i>Amount of Outstanding Fines (excluding congestion charge) £</i>
High Commission for the Federal Republic of Nigeria	49,235
High Commission for the Republic of Zambia	42,520
Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia	25,990
Embassy of the United Arab Emirates	16,520
Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt	9,650
Embassy of the Republic of South Sudan	9,390
Embassy of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea	9,165
Embassy of the Republic of the Sudan	8,075
Embassy of the Sultanate of Oman	7,940
Embassy of the Republic of Cote d'Ivoire	7,645
Embassy of the Republic of Azerbaijan	7,600
Embassy of the State of Qatar	5,260
Embassy of the Republic of Liberia	5,135
Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan	5,115
Embassy of France	4,985
High Commission for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan	4,975
Embassy of the State of Libya	4,795
Embassy of the Republic of Iraq	4,590
Embassy of the Democratic Republic of Congo	3,860
Embassy of Georgia	3,815
Embassy of the Republic of Angola	3,670
Embassy of Tunisia	3,305
Embassy of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea	3,020
Sierra Leone High Commission	2,985
Embassy of the Republic of Uzbekistan	2,695

<i>Diplomatic Mission/International Organisation</i>	<i>Amount of Outstanding Fines (excluding congestion charge) £</i>
Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania	2,680
Embassy of the Gabonese Republic	2,670
Embassy of the Republic of Guinea	2,530
Kenya High Commission	2,505
Office of the High Commissioner for Ghana	2,485
Embassy of the Republic of Yemen	2,460
Malaysian High Commission	2,360
Embassy of the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria	2,080
Embassy of Greece	1,880
South African High Commission	1,825
High Commission of the United Republic of Tanzania	1,815
Embassy of the Republic of Bulgaria	1,635
Embassy of Brazil	1,600
Embassy of the Republic of Tajikistan	1,530
Embassy of the People's Republic of China	1,410
Embassy of the Kingdom of Morocco	1,330
Embassy of the Russian Federation	1,330
Brunei Darussalam High Commission	1,315
Embassy of Romania	1,310
Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	1,295
Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany	1,270
Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam	1,235
Embassy of the Republic of Serbia	1,085

Figures for previous years are available in the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs' written statement to the House on 15 July 2014, *Official Report*, column 51WS.

[HCWS131]

Diplomats: Non-domestic Rates

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): The majority of diplomatic missions in the United Kingdom pay the national non-domestic rates (NNDR) due from them. Diplomatic missions are obliged to pay only 6% of the total NNDR value of their offices. This represents payment for specific services received such as street cleaning and street lighting.

Representations by the protocol directorate of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to missions in 2015 led to the settlement of outstanding debts by a number of missions.

As at 14 July 2015, the total amount of outstanding NNDR payments, due before 31 December 2014, owed by foreign diplomatic missions as advised by the Valuation Office Agency is £743,858, an increase of 2.5% over the 2013 figure, as reported in the 2014 WMS (£726,076). However, £99,683 of this outstanding debt is owed by Iran, which is in the process of reopening its embassy in the UK, and Syria—which is not currently represented in the UK. We have therefore been unable to pursue these debts. Three missions are responsible for just under a third of the remainder. We shall continue to urge those with NNDR debt to pay their dues.

Missions listed below owed over £10,000 in respect of NNDR.

High Commission for the People's Republic of Bangladesh	£98,963
Sierra Leone High Commission	£59,949
Embassy of the Republic of the Sudan	£53,466
Embassy of the Republic of Zimbabwe	£35,599
Uganda High Commission	£29,549
Embassy of the Republic of Liberia	£24,892
Embassy of the Republic of Iraq	£17,755
Embassy of the State of Qatar	£18,883
Embassy of Ukraine	£18,720
Embassy of the Republic of Albania	£18,374
Embassy of the Republic of the Philippines	£16,691
Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia	£16,772
Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt	£14,676
Ghana High Commission	£14,170
High Commission for the Republic of Cameroon	£13,483
Embassy of the United Arab Emirates	£12,447
High Commission for the Republic of Zambia	£12,797
Embassy of the Republic of Angola	£12,435
Kenya High Commission	£10,555

Figures for previous years are available in the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs' written statement to the House on 15 July 2014, *Official Report*, column 55WS.

[HCWS133]

Foreign Affairs Council

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council on 20 July. The Foreign Affairs Council will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Iran

Ministers will have an exchange of views on Iran and will consider what the joint comprehensive plan of action means for future EU-Iran relations including the EU wider geopolitical approach, beyond sanctions. The Foreign Affairs Council is likely to welcome the Iran deal through conclusions.

Tunisia

After the Bardo Museum terrorist attack in March, the EU and member states agreed to intensify co-operation with Tunisia. Following the further terrorist attack at Sousse on 26 June—which resulted in the deaths of 30 British nationals—Tunisia's need for support is greater and more urgent than ever. The evolving security situation has meant the FCO is advising against all but essential travel to Tunisia. We have not taken this decision lightly but our first priority will always be the safety of our citizens. We believe it is essential to offer support both to Tunisia's economy and its security. The terrorist attacks have affected Tunisia's tourist industry, causing further damage to its economy. At the same time,

regional inequalities and high unemployment—particularly among the youth—are fuelling dissatisfaction and extremism.

We will urge the EU to take steps urgently to support regionalisation, micro-financing and job creation—particularly for the youth in regions outside the North/West coastal regions. On security and counter-terrorism, we will urge the EU to support a package of CT and security measures to deepen our understanding of the threat, increase our options to disrupt it, support capacity-building in Tunisia, and ensure our response is fully co-ordinated with international partners. Helping the Tunisians deliver better security is the key priority, and will allow us to review our travel advice.

Middle east peace process

Ministers are expected to discuss what more the EU can do to support prospects for the middle east peace process, including the situation in Gaza.

EU action plan on human rights and democracy

Ministers will discuss the proposed new EU action plan on human rights and democracy for 2015 to 2019, with a view to its adoption by the Council.

Climate change and post-2015 development agenda

The FAC will discuss the outcomes of the Addis Ababa conference on financing for development due to take place 13-16 July, and look forward to the summit on the post-2015 development agenda in New York in September, and the Paris climate conference in December. The UK places high importance on working with developing countries on both these issues.

On the post-2015 development agenda, we believe that there should be a set of clear communications messages in the final outcome and that we, together with EU partners, should communicate the final set of sustainable development goals the world over, encouraging all countries to start focusing on implementing the agenda.

On climate change, we welcome the co-ordinated EU diplomatic effort to demonstrate our climate leadership in support of a global low-carbon transition and to those most vulnerable to climate risks. We continue to press for a global deal in Paris in December, with an ambitious set of emissions reductions contributions from all parties and a framework for future review which keep us on track to limiting global temperature rises to below 2°C.

Mediterranean Migration

We believe that the EU must continue to address the root causes of refugees and economic migrants crossing the Mediterranean and identify comprehensive solutions in those countries from which migrants originate and transit that will reduce the push factors, build stability, create livelihoods, and tackle the criminal gangs and smuggling networks. The UK is leading the way through alleviating poverty and working to stabilise countries of origin and transit. We are disrupting smuggling networks. We are tackling the perception that getting on a boat will lead to automatic entry into the EU. And we continue to work closely with EU and African partners.

[HCWS138]

British Nationals Abroad: Murder and Manslaughter

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Philip Hammond): The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is committed to providing high-quality, cost-effective and compassionate support to British nationals abroad, focusing on vulnerable groups and those that most need our help.

In January 2015, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe, announced the completion of the FCO's review into the support we provide to families in the event of British nationals being murdered abroad, and the establishment of a new unit to provide a more co-ordinated and professional service during these often complex and long-running cases. (*Official Report*, 22 January 2015; Vol 591, c10-11WS.)

The terrible events in Sousse, Tunisia, in June sadly demonstrate the requirement for such a unit. Since January, the unit has taken on 66 new cases of British nationals murdered abroad, including the victims of the terrorist attacks in Tunisia and the Germanwings airplane crash in March, as well as supporting the families of victims in over 150 ongoing cases. We have renamed the new unit the murder and manslaughter team to make clear the nature of the cases the unit deals with.

The team has also been developing new specialist training for consular officers on managing cases effectively and sensitively, updating information available to the public, strengthening our relationships with partnership organisations, improving the support we provide to families attending trials, and considering what further support we can provide to families of those who have died under suspicious circumstances.

We will continue to monitor and evaluate our progress during 2015-16.

[HCWS124]

HEALTH

NHS Leadership

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): I have published today “Learning not blaming” (CM9113), which sets out the Government's position on the freedom to speak up consultation, the Public Administration Select Committee report “Investigating Clinical Incidents in the NHS”, and Dr Bill Kirkup's independent report on the Morecambe Bay investigation; and, in a separate document, Lord Rose's report on NHS leadership.

The three reports cover distinct areas, and the accompanying document addresses the points and recommendations raised in each report. The “freedom to speak up” review by Sir Robert Francis QC, focused on whistle blowing; the Public Administration Select Committee report “Investigating Clinical Incidents in the NHS”; and, the investigation into university hospitals Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust, conducted by Dr Bill Kirkup CBE. There are, however, some themes common to each report, including the importance of:

- openness, honesty and candour;
- listening to patients, families and staff;
- finding and facing the truth;
- learning from errors and failures in care;
- people and professionalism.

In considering points made in these reports, the Government have been guided by the need to build on the work we and the NHS have done in recent years to improve the way in which the NHS treats patients and families, by developing capabilities locally to respond to patients' and families' concerns and to exercise proper oversight of care quality.

In recognition of this, the NHS's own Five Year Forward View emphasises the need for care to be both safe and sustainable over the long term. For each of the reports, we therefore propose specific actions to address the immediate issues they raise, and in doing so make clear that the NHS must develop an improved approach to patient safety and complaints. Our response therefore sets out a strong expectation that we want nothing less than a renewed culture that values learning, not blaming; compassion, not defensiveness; and putting patients and families before systems and institutions.

In summary, we will:

put in place freedom to speak up guardians in each trust to build up capability and capacity locally, at the frontline of service provision;

ensure that every local NHS provider provides training in raising and listening to concerns;

remove the Nursing and Midwifery Council's current responsibility and accountability for statutory supervision of midwives in the United Kingdom. (The NMC will of course remain responsible for the regulation of midwifery, but the supervision of midwives will be brought into line with the arrangements for other clinical professions);

review the professional codes of doctors, nurses and midwives and ensure that the right incentives are in place to encourage people to report openly, and to learn from mistakes;

set up a new patient safety investigation function to be fully operational from 1 April 2016—the independent patient safety investigation service. An expert advisory group will convene shortly in order to develop the structure, governance and operating model of this new service.

Freedom to Speak Up

The Government have consulted on a package of measures to implement the principles and actions set out in Sir Robert Francis QC's report. In light of the consultation responses, I can now announce that the role of independent national officer will be hosted by the Care Quality Commission, who intend to have them in place by December 2015. I can also announce that freedom to speak up guardians will be appointed in all NHS Trusts, to build up capability and capacity locally, at the frontline of service provision, following guidance published by the independent national officer.

Robert's report also called for training on raising and hearing concerns in every local NHS provider organisation. The relevant national bodies will now be working on a package that would include the following content:

the inclusion of content on raising concerns in induction training for all staff;

the inclusion of good practice regarding the raising of concerns for healthcare professionals as part of their professional codes, followed up through continuing professional development;

the regular use of reflective practice, through for example team meetings or Schwartz rounds, to review particular examples when concerns have been raised or not raised and how this might be improved in future;

the inclusion of content on raising concerns in other specific packages of training that NHS workers are expected to undertake or which NHS employers have included in annual training priorities; and

the inclusion of content on raising concerns in initial education and training undertaken by those learning to become healthcare professionals. This is already being considered and developed by health education England.

Morecambe Bay investigation

The Government have accepted all the recommendations of this report.

The recommendation for an independent patient safety investigation service is explained in more detail in our response to the Public Administration Select Committee report.

We will use secondary legislation to remove the Nursing And Midwifery Council's current responsibility and accountability for statutory supervision of midwives in the United Kingdom. The NMC will of course remain responsible for the regulation of midwifery, but the supervision of midwives will be brought into line with the arrangements for other clinical professions. This will improve the local oversight and accountability for midwifery. Existing arrangements will remain in place until alternative arrangements are introduced.

In addition, I have asked Professor Sir Bruce Keogh to review the professional codes for all regulated staff in the NHS and to ensure that the right incentives are in place to encourage reporting and learning from mistakes, and prevent covering up.

In response to recommendations 25 and 42 in the report, I am proposing to review the regulations that set out statutory requirements for notifications to the Care Quality Commission and Monitor during 2015-16 with the intention of addressing Dr Kirkup's recommendation that trust boards should openly report the findings of any reviews of care to relevant external bodies.

We would also like to extend this to the commissioning of any such reviews. We will consult on any changes.

In response to recommendation 20, NHS England has established a national review of maternity services, independently chaired by Baroness Cumberlege. It is anticipated that the review will publish proposals on safe and efficient models of maternity care at the end of the year. The review will pay particular attention to the challenges of achieving this objective in more geographically isolated areas.

Public Administration Select Committee report

We accept the recommendations of this report.

Our response sets out the Government's decision to set up a new independent patient safety investigation service, to be operational from 1 April 2016. IPSIS will operate independently and it will be brought under the single leadership of Monitor and the NHS Trust Development Authority.

We have also set up an expert advisory group to advise on the scope, governance and operating model of this new service. The membership of this group includes:

Dr Mike Durkin, National Director for Patient Safety

Keith Conradi, Chief Inspector of the Air Accidents Investigations Branch

James Titcombe OBE, Morecambe Bay campaigner and currently working as a patient safety adviser to CQC

Prof Jonathan Montgomery, Professor of Healthcare Law at University College London

Julian Brookes, advisor on clinical governance for the Morecambe Bay Investigation, deputy chief operating officer Public Health England

Carl Macrae, Independent Quality Improvement Expert
 Prof Martin Marshall CBE, Professor of Healthcare Improvement at University College London
 Dame Eileen Sills DBE, Chief Nurse and Director of Patient Experience, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Trust
 Dr Bill Kirkup CBE, Chairman of the Morecambe Bay Investigation
 Kate Lampard CBE, barrister and NHS strategic health authority chairman who provided oversight on the NHS's Savile investigations.

PASC also recommended that, “draft legislation should be published for scrutiny early in the next Parliament” as part of the establishment of this new function. We will ask the expert group to consider whether the work of the independent patient safety investigation service would benefit from having any legal powers to fulfil its duties effectively.

I am confident that the new service will help to transform the state of patient safety.

Rose

I have today also published the report of Lord Rose's review of National Health Service (NHS) leadership, “Better leadership for tomorrow”. A copy can be found online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>. This is an important report making recommendations for the creation of a single NHS vision, improving training, performance management, reducing bureaucracy and improving management support.

I asked Lord Rose early in 2014 to consider what might be done to attract and develop talent from inside and outside the health sector into leading positions in the NHS and to recommend how strong leadership in hospital trusts might help transform the way things get done. Following the publication of the NHS's Five Year Forward View, I requested him to extend his remit to consider how best to equip clinical commissioning groups to deliver the vision outlined within that report.

I welcome Lord Rose's report and his 19 recommendations, all of which I have accepted in principle.

I am announcing today that the Government accept fully the recommendation to transfer responsibility for the NHS leadership academy from NHS England to health education England (HEE).

The Government also accept the need to do more to manage talent in the NHS and I can announce today that talent management for our brightest and best will become a formal responsibility for the single leadership of Monitor and the NHS Trust Development Authority.

My Department will work with the health and care system to develop plans to implement each of the other recommendations to the extent possible, subject to an assessment of proportionality, cost-effectiveness and affordability.

[HCWS113]

NHS Remuneration: Doctors and Dentists

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt):

I am responding on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the seven-day services reports of the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration (DDRB) and the NHS Pay Review Body (NHSPRB).

The reports have been laid before Parliament (CM9107 and CM9108). Copies of the reports are available to hon. Members from the Vote Office and to noble Lords from the Printed Paper Office.

This Government are committed to creating a seven-day health service fit for the 21st century with patients receiving the hospital care they need seven days a week by 2020. Patients expect and should receive high-quality, safe care every single day. It is simply wrong that mortality rates are higher for patients admitted to hospital at the weekend than during the week. 6,000 lives are lost needlessly, each year, as a result, making this manifesto commitment a clinical priority and a moral cause.

Last year, I asked the Review Body on Doctors' and Dentists' Remuneration (DDRB) and the NHS Pay Review Body (NHS PRB) for their observations on how contract reform for directly employed NHS staff in England might be required to support the delivery of seven-day services.

The DDRB was asked to make observations on proposals for reforming the consultant contract to better facilitate the delivery of healthcare services seven days a week, taking account of proposals for pay progression to be linked to responsibility and patient care, and for reforming clinical excellence awards. It was also asked to make recommendations on a new contract for doctors and dentists in training, including a new system of pay progression.

Similarly, the NHS PRB was asked to make observations on the barriers and enablers of seven-day services within national employment contracts for staff employed under the agenda for change pay framework—AfC which applies to non-medical staff—with particular reference to the impact of premium pay rates for working unsocial hours, incremental pay progression and any transitional arrangements.

I am grateful to the chairs and members of the review bodies for producing these reports.

The case for seven-day services

I am pleased that all those who responded to the PRBs' calls for evidence accept the compelling case and support the vision for seven-day services with its primary aim of putting patients first and reducing mortality rates at the weekends.

How seven-day services are delivered on the ground must be informed by the clinical needs of local communities; one size cannot fit all. Some trusts are already delivering services across seven days as the PRBs observed, but this is by no means universal. The DDRB said,

“We also investigated the position in healthcare systems elsewhere in the world and it is our understanding that outside of accident and emergency services most international public healthcare systems are not providing a comprehensive twenty-four hour, seven-day service. We therefore conclude that the proposed new NHS arrangements would be trailblazing within healthcare systems.”

The NHS PRB concluded that the agenda for change pay system was not a barrier to the delivery of seven-day services and that more work should be undertaken to understand in more detail how services might be delivered in the future, the workforce implications and transitional arrangements. They also observed that the right of consultants to opt out of non-emergency work in the

evenings and at weekends is a contractual barrier to the delivery of seven-day services and the DDRB also observed that,

“the role of consultant presence at weekends to make a difference to patient outcomes is accepted.”

It was noted that this is a contractual protection which is enjoyed by no other NHS professionals or by any other areas of the public sector workforce. DDRB said,

“In our view, the current ‘opt-out’ clause in the consultant contract is not an appropriate provision in an NHS which aspires to continue to improve patient care with genuinely seven-day services, and on that basis, we endorse the case for its removal from the contract.”

The PRBs’ views on the proposals

The independent DDRB concluded that the key principles proposed by the Government and NHS Employers are reasonable—to improve patient outcomes across the week and to reward greater responsibility and professional competence. They acknowledged the case for changing the contract for doctors and dentists in training (juniors) and concluded that the proposals made are fair, and that removal of the consultant opt-out clause is,

“an opportunity to smooth the transition between the junior doctor grade, which is routinely rostered for weekend working, and the consultant grade, which can choose whether to be rostered or not.”

They found that the core principles for reforming the consultant contract look right; that the proposals should be viewed as a total package of reform across the two contracts; and that there is scope for progressing some elements of consultant reform at different speeds, including early removal of the consultant opt-out. The DDRB endorsed changes to the antiquated approach for time served mainly annual incremental progression in both contracts.

I am particularly pleased that the NHS PRB agreed that contract reform should work for staff and patients and that any reform of the system of premium pay for working unsocial hours should not be done in isolation, but as part of a wider package of reform.

The NHS PRB observed that premium pay rates may not be out of line with comparator industries, but that there is a case for some adjustment to unsocial hours pay, for example, extending plain time working further into the evenings—from 7/8pm currently to 10pm—and noted the move, in some sectors, to plain time working on Saturdays. The DDRB suggested that the night window for juniors and consultants should start at 10pm.

The DDRB supported the proposed approach to the pay package for juniors; while it noted that the rates for unsocial hours and other elements were for the parties to agree, it also noted that total pay for juniors compares favourably with comparator groups and that, given the cost-neutral pre-condition for negotiations, that position will continue. It acknowledged the proposal to undertake further modelling on unsocial hours rates for consultants, while noting that some other professionals working across seven days do not receive any such payments but are expected to work any necessary additional hours as part of professional salary arrangements.

The DDRB recommended a common definition should be applied across all NHS groups, or a rationale for not doing so should be provided. The NHS PRB recommended

that this be considered as part of a wider review of AfC, including reform of incremental pay progression so that there is a much stronger link between pay and performance.

We agree with the DDRB that contractual safeguards are necessary. These formed a core part of the proposals for consultants and juniors.

Supported by good staff engagement strategies, it is the overall employment offer, not just pay, that helps the NHS to attract and keep the staff it needs.

The DDRB also said,

“We support the continuation of national CEAs, and given the separation of local CEAs (to be reformed as performance pay, or payments for excellence), that the value of national CEAs will need further consideration.”

Next steps

Given the priority placed on seven-day services by medical leaders and patient groups, I was hugely disappointed that the BMA union walked away from negotiations at such a late stage last October when proposals had been developed. The DDRB has stated that its recommendations and observations,

“provide a roadmap on what could and should be achievable in the interests of everyone with a true stake in the NHS.”

We have lost a year in which we could have been moving towards changes that are in the interests of patients, doctors and the NHS. We cannot afford any more delays.

That is why I am now asking the British Medical Association (BMA) to engage with us rapidly over the summer and to tell me, by mid-September, whether they will work with us, without delay, to introduce modernised professional contracts for engagement and for training, focused on outcomes, on the basis of the recommendations and observations in DDRB’s report.

While we remain prepared to discuss a staged approach to changes for consultants, as recommended by the DDRB, we would be seeking immediate removal of the consultant opt-out, early implementation of new terms for new consultants from April 2016—moving existing consultants across by 2017—and the introduction of a new juniors’ contract from the August 2016 intake. We will also introduce a new performance pay scheme, replacing the outdated local clinical excellence awards so that we reward those doctors who are making the greatest contribution to patient care—the DDRB recommends that these be termed “awards for achieving excellence”. I will consult on removal of the current local scheme in the autumn, alongside proposals for a reformed national clinical excellence award scheme based on the recommendations previously made by the DDRB. We will be mindful of the importance of recognising those doctors who have national leadership roles in the NHS and the substantial contribution made by clinical academics.

The case for change, in the interests of all, is made. We would prefer to agree changes in partnership, as recommended by the DDRB and acknowledging its observation of the need to build mutual trust and confidence; but we will take forward change, in the absence of a negotiated agreement.

The NHS PRB said that the areas of agreement between the parties,

“should provide a positive basis for future discussions and progress on the expansion of seven-day services.”

I welcomed the agreement of the NHS trade unions earlier in the year to enter into talks on contract reform. The NHS trade unions have already agreed to a timetable seeing change beginning to be implemented from April 2016. I am now inviting the AfC trade unions to enter into formal negotiations with NHS employers, to that timetable, to agree a balanced package of affordable proposals for reform.

These reforms need to enable trusts to recruit, retain and motivate the staff they need to deliver high-quality safe care over seven days. All trusts must make the very best use of their pay bill, making every penny work for patients. I know most trusts prefer to use national pay frameworks provided they are affordable and fit for purpose. I recognise that, if national contracts cannot be reformed, it is likely that employers will feel that they need to use the employment freedoms they already have to take contract change forward.

In addition, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made clear in the Budget that the Government will continue to examine pay reforms and modernise the terms and conditions of public sector workers. This will include a renewed focus on reforming progression pay, and considering legislation where necessary to achieve the Government's objectives.

I therefore want these negotiations to build on the 2013 agreement on AfC pay progression and remove virtually automatic annual incremental progression from the NHS pay system—as is also proposed for consultants and junior doctors. Pay progression must be related to performance rather than time in the job and those who make the greatest contribution should see that rewarded in the pay system.

[HCWS114]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Disclosure and Barring

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): In April 2015 the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) informed the Home Office that information in a number of files they held on behalf of the relevant Northern Ireland departments had been destroyed between 2010 and 2013. The bulk of this action was undertaken as part of routine data management procedures by the service's predecessor organisation, the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA), to ensure compliance with data protection legislation. The disposal of the information was, however, in contravention of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the ISA and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland and the Department of Education, Northern Ireland. The MoU was developed in preparation for the ISA taking over responsibility for barring services for Northern Ireland from March 2009, and specified that the files were on loan to the ISA and that information was not to be destroyed.

While it is extremely regrettable that these files have been destroyed I can, however, assure the House that the disposal of this information does not present a safeguarding risk to the public. Nevertheless in the interests of transparency I wanted to inform the House of this matter.

The DBS has conducted a comprehensive internal review to establish the number of files affected. In addition, the Home Office's Permanent Secretary instructed the DBS board to commission an independent review to establish how many files had been destroyed, and their content where known. Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) were commissioned to undertake this work and a copy of their report on the first phase of the review, including the DBS's management response, will be placed in the Library of the House today and published on www.gov.uk.

PwC's report confirms that in total 826 case files were loaned. Four hundred and four files related to individuals who had been previously barred; and 422 files related to individuals where the decision had been not to bar. It concludes that 64 files were destroyed: 62 by the ISA; and a further two files by the DBS. It also confirmed that some information in a further 18 files had been destroyed and a further two files remained unaccounted for. In all cases where the file had been destroyed, the authorities in Northern Ireland had made a barring decision before the files were loaned. In 62 cases the individual had not been barred, and in two cases the individual had been barred. The ISA reviewed these two barred cases and decided that the two individuals should not be transferred onto the new barred lists in line with revised legislation. All cases are reviewed by the DBS if new information comes to light. In the additional 18 files where some information had been destroyed, the DBS confirmed that the information destroyed was not material to the case.

The DBS is taking further steps to identify whether they can locate the remaining two files that are unaccounted for. In both these cases the authorities in Northern Ireland had made a barring decision prior to the loan of the files and neither person was barred. In one case where the original file was unaccounted for, further information came to light and, following normal procedures, the ISA made a determination and the individual was then barred.

In her statement of 12 March 2015 the Home Secretary made it clear that the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, chaired by Justice Goddard, would have the full co-operation of Government and access to all relevant information. The Home Office has informed the inquiry secretariat about this matter and the relevant Northern Ireland departments have informed the Hart Inquiry.

On announcing the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse, the Home Secretary requested a moratorium on the destruction of material. Following this announcement the DBS revised its data retention policy to stipulate that information in any barring cases that identify sexual abuse should not be destroyed. Any further changes to this guidance will be approved by the Home Office. On 23 June the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse issued further guidance on the detail of what may or may not be destroyed across government and by other agencies. The DBS has assured the Home Office that the DBS will fully comply with the inquiry guidance.

The second phase of PwC's review will look at wider file management processes and provide a view on the relevant application of, and compliance with, data retention policies. I will make a further statement to the House when PwC's review is completed.

I also wish to announce that the 2014-15 annual report and accounts for the Disclosure and Barring Service (HC 309) is being laid before the House today and published on www.gov.uk. Copies will be available in the Vote Office.

[HCWS116]

Independent Police Complaints Commission

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): I am pleased to announce that today my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury and I are publishing the annual report of the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) (HC 286). Copies of the report have been laid before the House and will be available in the Vote Office.

This is the 11th annual report from the IPCC, covering their work during 2014/15. In this period the IPCC have made significant progress as they expand towards taking on all serious and sensitive cases by 2017. They have taken on more staff, restructured their operational work and have more than doubled the number of independent investigations taken on. At the same time they have eliminated their appeals backlog and closed more investigations than in any previous year. Progress continues to be made on the Hillsborough investigations and the IPCC are working towards increasing public confidence having developed their oversight and confidence strategy and responded to the Government's consultation on police discipline and complaints.

As well as covering the police, the annual report also includes a section on the discharge of their responsibilities in respect of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs.

[HCWS118]

Justice and Home Affairs Council

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): An informal meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council took place on 9 and 10 July in Luxembourg. I attended on the Interior day (9 July), and the UK was represented by senior officials on the Justice day (10 July). The following items were discussed.

The Interior day began with a discussion on counter terrorism, including a minute's silence in memory of the victims of the recent attacks in Tunisia and France.

Member states highlighted the serious and diverse nature of the terrorist threat and the role of social media and technology. One member state called for greater exchange of counter terrorist intelligence at EU rather than national level. Most, however, emphasised the national rather than EU nature of intelligence sharing in this area. A number of member states also called on the European Parliament to make progress on the passenger name records (PNR) directive.

I spoke of the recent cowardly attack in Tunisia, the need for member states to help that country and the importance of the EU providing funding to assist with that effort. I stressed that national security is a matter solely for member states. I also called on member states to engage with their MEPs ahead of the European Parliament vote on the PNR directive.

The meeting then received a number of presentations on cyber security and terrorism. The Commission highlighted the role of Europol and the importance of public-private partnerships. It also stressed the work it was doing at EU level to protect critical national infrastructure.

The informal Council then moved on to migration issues. The Presidency announced that member states (together with participants in the Schengen system who are not EU members) had agreed to resettle approximately 20,000 refugees from outside the EU, following the Commission's recent recommendation.

I explained that the UK expects to resettle approximately 2,200 people in need of international protection over the next two years, and that this includes a modest expansion of our Syria vulnerable persons scheme. I emphasised that the actual number would be needs based rather than target driven, and that we would decide for ourselves how many people to resettle. The UK will not participate in any European resettlement scheme or in any EU quota system for resettlement.

Discussions then took place on implementing the June European Council's decision to relocate 40,000 migrants from Italy and Greece to other member states on a voluntary basis. These discussions will resume at a special JHA Council meeting in Brussels on 20 July. The UK will not participate in this relocation scheme.

In the migration discussions, I highlighted the need for a holistic approach to the situation which avoided creating additional pull factors. I also emphasised the UK's support for the Europol JOT- MARE regional task force to tackle the migrant smugglers and traffickers.

Justice day began with a discussion of the draft Directive on the protection of the Union's financial interests under criminal law ("PIF Directive"). The Presidency sought member states' views on whether fraud affecting VAT should be included within the scope either of the Directive or of the proposed European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO). This issue has led to stalemate in negotiations between the Council and European Parliament.

The overwhelming majority of member states opposed the inclusion of VAT in the scope of the PIF Directive, though some were willing to explore including it within the proposed EPPO. The UK opposed its inclusion in either measure, while making it clear that we will not participate in any EPPO.

Discussion then moved to the proposed EPPO itself. The Presidency sought member states' views on the authorisations that should be required from national courts before the EPPO can commence cross-border investigations, and the competence of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) to rule on the EPPO's procedural acts. The majority of participating member states agreed that authorisation from the courts in one member state should be sufficient for cross-border investigations, and that the ECJ should have some limited jurisdiction over the proposed EPPO.

This was followed by discussion on the Brussels IIa Regulation on conflict of law issues in family law, where the Presidency invited member states to comment on priorities for the Commission's forthcoming proposals. The Presidency proposed that the revision should focus on the aspects of the Regulation relating to children, and should cover the free circulation of judgments, the

procedure for an effective and swift return of abducted children, and co-operation between central authorities. The Commission, the European Parliament and the fundamental rights agency highlighted the importance of this measure, particularly in the protection of vulnerable children.

While there was overwhelming support for the revision of the Regulation, including the proposed areas of focus, there was no consensus on the abolition of the process by which judgments or orders from one member state are declared enforceable in another (the *exequatur* procedure). It was agreed by all that the best interests of the child must be paramount in decisions on return, and member states supported better co operation between central authorities. The UK highlighted the need to respect different legal systems, and the importance of safeguards in any revision. The UK also highlighted that improvements could be made in relation to divorce proceedings. The Presidency concluded that the discussion had shown the usefulness of Brussels IIa and that the revision should provide more legal certainty, with the interests of the child at the centre.

Under any other business, the Commission set out its intentions on handling infringement proceedings in respect of EU legislation on judicial co operation in criminal matters. The Commission noted that many instruments were still not fully transposed or the information submitted by member states was incomplete. It would therefore be proactive in taking further action in the autumn, including with pilot cases for non-notification and non-compliance.

[HCWS143]

Police Remuneration

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The first report of the Police Remuneration Review Body was published today. In line with my letter setting the body's remit, it has made recommendations on pay and allowances for police officers up to and including the rank of chief superintendent in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In addition, the first supplement to the 2015 report of the Senior Salaries Review Body (SSRB) making recommendations on the pay of chief police officers has also been published today. I have considered the recommendations of both reports insofar as they relate to police officers in England and Wales.

I have accepted in full the recommendations of the PRRB. I have also accepted the main recommendations of the SSRB. These will be implemented with effect from 1 September 2015 as follows:

- a 1% increase to base pay for all ranks.
- a 1% increase to the London weighting payment.
- a 1% cent increase to the dog handlers' allowance.

The proposals are consistent with necessary pay restraint, targeting increases within a 1% average award, balanced with the need to recruit and retain the very best officers.

I wish to express my thanks to the chairman and members of both review bodies for their work on these reports. I am grateful for their observations about the longer term view of police pay and we will continue to work with both bodies and with other partners to ensure that the evidence base is as clear as possible.

The Police Remuneration Review Body report (Cm 9085) and the supplement to the Senior Salaries Review Body report (Cm 9080) have both been laid before the House and copies are available in the Vote Office. The reports are also available to view on gov.uk.

[HCWS117]

Undercover Policing

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): On 12 March 2015, I made a statement to the House announcing the establishment of the statutory inquiry into undercover policing and the appointment of Lord Justice Pitchford as its Chairman. The inquiry is to be undertaken by Lord Justice Pitchford alone as Chairman. I also said that my officials would consult Pitchford LJ and those with an interest in the inquiry over the coming months on setting the terms of reference, with a view to making a further statement as soon as possible after Parliament resumes.

This has now taken place and the terms of reference for the undercover policing inquiry are:

Purpose

To inquire into and report on undercover police operations conducted by English and Welsh police forces in England and Wales since 1968 and, in particular, to:

- investigate the role and the contribution made by undercover policing towards the prevention and detection of crime;
- examine the motivation for, and the scope of, undercover police operations in practice and their effect upon individuals in particular and the public in general;
- ascertain the state of awareness of undercover police operations of Her Majesty's Government;
- identify and assess the adequacy of the:
 1. justification, authorisation, operational governance and oversight of undercover policing;
 2. selection, training, management and care of undercover police officers;
- identify and assess the adequacy of the statutory, policy and judicial regulation of undercover policing.

Miscarriages of justice

The inquiry's investigations will include a review of the extent of the duty to make, during a criminal prosecution, disclosure of an undercover police operation and the scope for miscarriage of justice in the absence of proper disclosure.

The inquiry will refer to a panel, consisting of senior members of the Crown Prosecution Service and the police, the facts of any case in respect of which it concludes that a miscarriage of justice may have occurred as a result of an undercover police operation or its non disclosure. The panel will consider whether further action is required, including but not limited to, referral of the case to the Criminal Cases Review Commission.

Scope

The inquiry's investigation will include, but not be limited to, whether and to what purpose, extent and effect undercover police operations have targeted political and social justice campaigners.

The inquiry's investigation will include, but not be limited to, the undercover operations of the special demonstration squad and the National Public Order Intelligence Unit.

For the purpose of the inquiry, the term “undercover police operations” means the use by a police force of a police officer as a covert human intelligence source (CHIS) within the meaning of section 26(8) of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, whether before or after the commencement of that Act. The terms “undercover police officer”, “undercover policing”, “undercover police activity” should be understood accordingly. It includes operations conducted through online media.

The inquiry will not examine undercover or covert operations conducted by any body other than an English or Welsh police force.

Method

The inquiry will examine and review all documents as the inquiry chairman shall judge appropriate.

The inquiry will receive such oral and written evidence as the inquiry chairman shall judge appropriate.

Report

The inquiry will report to the Home Secretary as soon as practicable. The report will make recommendations as to the future deployment of undercover police officers. It is anticipated that the inquiry report will be delivered up to three years after the publication of these terms of reference.

In addition, Mark Ellison QC has submitted his review “Possible miscarriages of justice: impact of undisclosed undercover police activity on the safety of convictions” (HC 291) to the Attorney General. I have today laid the report before the House and copies are available from the Vote Office and on www.gov.uk.

[HCWS115]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Annual Report and Accounts

The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening): I have today published and laid before Parliament the Department for International Development’s Annual Report and Accounts for the year 2014-15.

The report provides information on DFID’s activities during 2014-15 in line with the International Development (Reporting and Transparency) Act 2006 and includes a full set of accounts for 2014-15. The report will be placed in the Libraries of the House of Commons and House of Lords for the reference of Members and copies will be made available in the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office. It is also available online at: www.gov.uk.

[HCWS130]

Development Capital

The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening): I am pleased to announce that I have agreed with my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Greg Hands MP) to inject new capital into CDC Group plc—the UK’s development finance institution—to create jobs, boost growth and in doing so help end aid dependency across the developing world.

A new investment of £735 million over the next three years represents the first capital injection the Government have made into CDC in 20 years.

It will place CDC’s investment expertise at the vanguard of our efforts to eradicate global poverty by creating jobs, long term economic growth, better access to basic services and increased tax revenues in developing countries.

This is not only the right thing to do, it is firmly in Britain’s own economic interest as it will help build future markets for British and other businesses to compete in.

Our new investment will allow CDC to support many more businesses throughout Africa and South Asia, building on its already considerable successes. CDC’s latest annual review, published last month, showed that CDC’ backed business have helped create nearly 1.3 million direct and indirect jobs in developing countries last year, while the companies in which CDC invests in Africa and South Asia paid more than £1.5 billion in local taxes.

This investment comes at a crucial time. There remains a considerable shortfall of investment capital across the developing world, particularly in countries and sectors where there are higher levels of risk. This is stifling the potential of promising businesses and keeping countries locked into poverty. Estimates for total investment needs in developing countries range from £2.1 trillion to £2.8 trillion every year.

We know that CDC is ready to take on this challenge. The changes the Government made to CDC in the last Parliament have ensured CDC’s support is now targeted to countries and investments where it is needed most and where it can have the greatest impact. CDC will target job-creating sectors in areas where the shortage of capital is particularly acute and the investment climate is challenging.

In time, this new capital will be redeployed as successful investments deliver financial returns back to CDC to be reinvested in further promising businesses, making every pound go even further in delivering development impact.

This investment is an important element of my Department’s strategy to end aid dependency through job creation, economic growth and tax generation, and will form part of the £1.8 billion we will spend on economic development this financial year. There is clear evidence to show that economic development is the only way we can ultimately defeat poverty. Wherever long-term per capita growth is higher than three per cent, poverty falls significantly.

No single Government or donor can solve this problem. The finance needed to achieve the new sustainable development goals is estimated by the UN at approximately £1.6 trillion every year, but current investment levels are less than half of that.

The Financing for Development Conference, which concludes today in Addis Ababa, has shown global recognition of the importance of public money leveraging private investment. CDC will play an important role in making this happen.

Britain is a nation that stands tall in the world. This new investment will ensure the best of British expertise in finance, development and investment can create a more prosperous world and make a real and lasting difference to people’s lives. This is the right and the

smart thing to do, as we help countries to end poverty while building markets that British businesses can benefit from in frontier and emerging markets.

[HCWS122]

JUSTICE

Chief Coroner's Annual Report

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenge): I am pleased to lay and publish the Chief Coroner's second annual report to the Lord Chancellor, under section 36 of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 ("the 2009 Act").

The report covers the Chief Coroner's work in 2014 and the first half of 2015 and is his second annual summary of the operation of coroner services following the 2009 Act's reforms which went live on 25 July 2013.

In particular the Chief Coroner's report sets out:

His work to promote consistency in the resourcing of and practices in coroner offices across England and Wales;

The training and guidance he has facilitated for coroners and their officers, supported by stakeholder events for local authorities and bereavement support organisations;

His plans for the coming year to improve services further.

His Honour Judge Thornton QC has continued to develop the excellent work set out in his first annual report as Chief Coroner, which was published a year ago.

I am very grateful to Judge Thornton for building on his first year's achievements so effectively. I am grateful too, to coroners and their officers and other staff, for having supported the Chief Coroner to improve services for bereaved people.

I look forward to working with the Chief Coroner in the coming year.

Copies of the report will be available in the Vote Office and in the Printed Paper Office. The document will also be available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chief-coroners-annual-report-2014-to-2015>

[HCWS137]

Victims Code

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): The previous Government updated the code of practice for victims of crime (the Victims' Code) in 2013 to give victims clear entitlements—including the right to ask to read their personal statement to the court—and to give greater flexibility to core criminal justice agencies to tailor services according to individual need. We are investing more than ever before in services and support for victims of crime but we can, and should, do more.

We have said that we will introduce measures to further increase the rights of victims of crime and we will publish draft clauses in due course.

Before we do so, I am pleased to announce that the Government are consulting on some additional changes we plan to make to the Victims' Code as part of our commitment to implement the EU Victims' directive by 16 November 2015.

It is crucial that the needs of victims of crime are put first and the proposed changes will entitle more victims to receive services from a bigger number of organisations.

The first main change we propose is to broaden our definition of a victim so that victims of all criminal offences are entitled to receive support and information under the Victims' Code. Currently, victims of offences such as careless driving and drink driving are not entitled to receive such support and we propose to close this gap.

The second main change is to extend the Victims' Code to apply to relevant agencies outside the core criminal justice system who provide services to victims of crime. Most crimes are dealt with by the police and Crown Prosecution Service but there are other organisations with powers to investigate and prosecute. I want to make sure that the victims of crime these agencies deal with are eligible to receive services under the Victims' Code.

The third main change will entitle victims who report a crime to the police or other competent authority to receive a written acknowledgement which states the basic elements of the criminal offence concerned.

We are also proposing to make a number of smaller amendments to the Code, mostly to clarify it in places or to reflect more accurately what happens in practice.

The consultation documents have been published today and can be found on the Ministry of Justice website at:

<http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/revising-the-victims-code>.

A copy of the consultation document and draft Victims' Code have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS141]

HM Courts and Tribunals Service

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara): On 23 June 2015 the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice announced his intention to work with the judiciary to reform the courts and tribunals in England and Wales. Reform will bring quicker and fairer access to justice and create a justice system that reflects the way people use services today.

Progress towards a modernised service is already being made. Wi-fi and digital screens have been introduced into many court buildings and a digital case management system for the administration of criminal cases is well under way.

This is encouraging progress, but more needs to be done. There is a broad consensus that the current system is unsustainable and that we have an opportunity to create a modern, more user-focused and efficient service.

Increased use of technology such as video, telephone and online conferencing will help drive these improvements. Straightforward, transactional matters, such as paying a fine and obtaining probate can be dealt with using digital technology to make the processes as straightforward

as filing a tax return. Many straightforward cases do not need face to face hearings which should be reserved for the most sensitive or complex cases.

We can only provide better access to justice if we take difficult decisions to reduce the cost of our estate and reinvest the savings. As the Secretary of State told Parliament, this means,

“a significant number of additional courts will have to close.”—
[*Official Report*, 23 June 2015; Vol. 597, c. 755.]

I am today announcing a consultation on the closure of 91 courts and tribunals in England and Wales. I am also announcing the integration of 31 courts and tribunals in England and Wales.

Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service operates 460 courts and tribunal hearing centres across England and Wales. The estate costs taxpayers around half a billion pounds each year, and at present, it is underused. Last year over a third of all courts and tribunals were empty for more than 50% of their available hearing time.

Today's consultation puts forward proposals that aim to reduce this surplus capacity. The buildings being consulted on represent 16% of hearing rooms across the estate which are, on average, used for only a third of their available time. That is equivalent to fewer than two out of five days in a week.

The majority of these courts are not used for at least two thirds of their available time, and one in three is not used three quarters of the time.

Attending court is rare for most people. It will still be the case that, after these changes, over 95% of citizens will be able to reach their required court within an hour by car. This represents a change of just 1 percentage point for Crown and magistrates' courts and 2 percentage points for county courts. The proportion of citizens able to reach a tribunal within an hour by car will remain unchanged at 83%.

To ensure that access to justice is maintained, even in more rural locations, we are committed to providing alternative ways for users to access our services. That can mean using civic and other public buildings, such as town halls, for hearings instead of underused, poorly maintained permanent courts.

We are reforming the courts and tribunal service so that it meets the needs of modern day users.

As we bring in digital technology for better and more efficient access to justice, fewer people will need to physically be in a court.

This means that we will need fewer buildings, and with many already underused and in poor quality, now is a good time to review the estate.

The consultation will begin on Thursday 16 July and run for 12 weeks. A response to consultation will be published following proper consideration of all views submitted.

A copy of the consultation will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS28]

Judicial Conduct Investigations Office

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove): With the concurrence of the Lord Chief Justice, I will today publish the second annual

report of the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office (JCIO). The JCIO provides support to the Lord Chief Justice and myself in our joint responsibility for the system of judicial complaints and discipline.

Over the past year the JCIO received 2432 complaints and 613 written enquiries, with 75 complaints resulting in disciplinary action. A first substantive response was provided within 15 working days in 98% of all cases and regular monthly updates given to all parties in 97% of cases.

Copies of the report are available in the Libraries of both Houses, the Vote Office and the Printed Paper Office. Copies of the report are also available on the internet at:

<http://www.gov.uk/publications/judicialcomplaints.judiciary.htm>.

[HCWS140]

Prison Communications Inquiry

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Andrew Selous): On 11 November 2014, the previous Justice Secretary made a statement about the apparent recording and monitoring of confidential communications between a prisoner and their Member of Parliament (MP). It was thought that the communications between prisoners and 32 MPs had been monitored by prison staff. Nick Hardwick, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, was therefore asked to conduct an independent investigation into this issue.

Today, the final investigation report is published. The report concludes that there is no evidence of deliberate or widespread attempts to monitor confidential communications with MPs. The monitoring which is believed to have taken place was in the main conducted in error and in ignorance of the rules. Concerns highlighted by HMCIP about failure to follow correct procedures in specific cases are being investigated by NOMS.

I wish to apologise to the House on behalf of the Ministry of Justice for the monitoring which is believed to have taken place. Prisoners and hon. Members should rightly expect these conversations to be confidential.

While I am content that the recording of these communications was done in error rather than by intent, it is unacceptable that this issue was not identified sooner. Since discovering this, we have taken urgent steps to ensure that prison officers have the correct training and processes in place to make sure this will not happen in future.

HMCIP makes 19 recommendations, which have all been accepted. These are aimed at improving levels of understanding among staff and prisoners, ensuring greater consistency in procedures across the whole prison estate, and better systems of governance so that problems are identified sooner.

Since the issue first came to light, NOMS has taken effective steps to ensure that there can be no recording of telephone calls from prisoners to their MP. This was an important first step to provide reassurance both to prisoners and MPs that their communications were confidential.

In response to this report, NOMS will now undertake further work to introduce revised policy and training for staff. NOMS will also revise the information provided

to prisoners so that they better understand their responsibilities to identify phone numbers, including their MPs, which are confidential. Checks will be introduced to ensure that any human error is picked up sooner and dealt with promptly.

Recommendations to improve the prisoner telephone system are reflected in the plans for a new prisoner telephony contract, which is due to be let next year. In the meantime, NOMS will work with the current telephone provider to see if any further short terms solutions can be introduced.

NOMS meets regularly with the Interception of Communications Commissioner's Office (IOCCO), who carry out an inspection process and work will be undertaken to see if more can be done to identify errors through the inspection process.

I want to assure Members that NOMS will learn from the criticism and past mistakes to ensure that there is absolute confidence in the future that confidential communications are guaranteed.

[HCWS119]

Data Protection

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): My noble Friend the Minister of State for Civil Justice, Lord Faulks QC, attended the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 16 June, where a general approach was agreed on the general data protection regulation. Notwithstanding serious concerns, the UK voted in favour of the general approach, with a view to mitigating the negative implications of the text during the subsequent trilogue discussion, and without prejudice to our decision on the final outcome of negotiations.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department, provided a written ministerial statement on 23 June. This updated the House that the UK supported the general approach on the General Data Protection Regulation Council text as a basis for negotiations with the European Parliament. It is with regret that I am informing you of a scrutiny override on this dossier because the Commons Scrutiny Committee had not yet been formed when the Justice and Home Affairs Council took place.

[HCWS126]

Information Commissioner

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): On Tuesday 25 November 2014 the triennial review of the Information Commissioner's Office was announced in Parliament. The review was publicised on my Department's website and stakeholders were invited to contribute through a call for evidence. I am grateful to all who contributed to the triennial review. I wish to inform the House that it will not be ready for publication before the recess but Ministers will write to the Select Committee when it is published. It will also be available online and placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS144]

Whiplash

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): My noble Friend the Minister of State for Civil Justice has made the following written statement.

"In response to widespread concerns about the high number of whiplash claims and the impact they have on the price of motor insurance premiums, the Government have recently implemented a whiplash reform programme. A key component of these reforms was the introduction of an independent IT Portal for the sourcing of medical reports. All initial medical reports used in support of whiplash claims must be obtained through the new portal which is operated by MedCo Registration Solutions (MedCo) an independent industry led not for profit company. The new system makes sure that solicitors are no longer able to obtain a report from an organisation with whom they have a financial link, while maintaining competition between MROs in the market.

The Government committed to undertake a review once six months worth of useable data were available. However, since the Portal went live on 6 April 2015, issues relating to a number of new business practices within this sector have emerged which have the potential to undermine the Government's policy objectives and public confidence in the MedCo Portal.

Today, therefore, I would like to confirm that the Government are bringing their planned review forward and I invite all stakeholders in the personal injury sector to participate in the public call for evidence which will form a key part of the review process. The review will specifically seek evidence on whether the MedCo IT Portal meets the Government's objectives, and the evidence provided will be analysed to identify whether changes need to be made to the portal or to the framework of rules underpinning it in order to achieve those objectives.

The Government seek views from stakeholders across the medico-legal reporting services sector in respect of whiplash claims, including representatives from the claimant lawyer, medical and insurance sectors. A report with recommendations for action—if required—will be published in the autumn.

Copies of the Call for Evidence have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The document is also available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/consult.justice>."

[HCWS139]

PRIME MINISTER

Interception of Communications Commissioner

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I have today laid before both Houses copies of the half-yearly report from the Interception of Communications Commissioner, the right hon. Sir Anthony May, who is appointed by me to keep under review the compliance by public authorities with part 1 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) 2000. Section 6 of the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act (DRIPA) 2014 requires the Commissioner to report on a six monthly basis.

The report includes details on progress of the implementation of DRIPA, the findings of the Commissioner's investigation into the serious communications data errors which he identified in his March 2015 report, his oversight of directions issued under section 94 of the Telecommunications Act 1984 and various issues relating to the revised acquisition

and disclosure of communications data code of practice. The Commissioner finds that two police forces have acquired communications data to identify the interactions between journalists and their sources in two investigations without obtaining judicial approval, in breach of the code of practice introduced in March this year. This was a serious error. The Commissioner's investigation into these cases is not yet complete. I look forward to receiving more information about them in the next report.

I am grateful to the Commissioner for identifying and detailing the 17 serious communications data errors and for making recommendations to reduce the chances of similar errors occurring in the future. Any error is regrettable and particularly these serious errors that the Commissioner identified. The oversight and scrutiny provided by the Commissioner plays an important role

in minimising the chances of errors occurring and ensuring that appropriate steps are taken when they do.

I am also grateful to Sir Anthony and his office for producing another clear, thorough and detailed report. I hope this report will play a part in better informing the continuing debate about the role of the security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies, their use of investigatory powers and their oversight. This is Sir Anthony's last report as Commissioner. I would like to thank him for his important work over the past few years which has been exemplary.

Attachments can be view online at:
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2015-07-16/HCWS123>.

[HCWS123]

Petition

Thursday 16 July 2015

OBSERVATIONS

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Closure of fire stations in South Staffordshire

The petition of residents of South Staffordshire,

Declares that the petitioners note that there have been proposals by Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service to close fire stations in South Staffordshire; further that the petitioners believe that a reduced fire service across Staffordshire and the closure of the fire stations would impact on the safety of the residents; and further that the petitioners believe that these proposals should be rejected and the fire stations kept open.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to request that Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service ensures that fire stations in South Staffordshire remain open.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Gavin Williamson, *Official Report*, 8 July 2015; Vol. 598, c. 418.]

[P001533]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government:

Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority have been consulting on options for providing fire and rescue cover as part of the Integrated Risk Management Plan process, as required by the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England.

The Department considers that decisions of this nature are best taken by democratically accountable fire and rescue authorities, after a period of consultation. Under the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England, fire and rescue authorities are required to be transparent and accountable to their communities for their decisions and actions.

In accordance with this Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority held a 12 week public consultation on their service delivery proposals, giving people the opportunity to help plan their local service. The Authority itself considered the result of the consultation on 13 July.

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