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9 September 2015**

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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Wednesday 9 September 2015

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Her Majesty the Queen

Mr Speaker: We begin today with speeches to mark Her Majesty the Queen becoming our longest serving monarch.

11.34 am

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): Today, Her Majesty the Queen becomes the country's longest reigning monarch. It is of course typical of her selfless sense of service that she would have us treat this day just like any other. While I rarely advocate disobeying Her Majesty, least of all in her own Parliament, I do think that it is right that today we should stop and take a moment as a nation to mark this historic milestone and to thank Her Majesty for the extraordinary service that she has given to our country over more than six decades.

Her Majesty the Queen inspires us all with her incredible service, her dignified leadership and the extraordinary grace with which she carries out her duties, and I would like to say a word about each.

On her 21st birthday, in a radio broadcast from Cape Town, over four years before she would accede to the throne, she then Princess dedicated her life to the service of the Commonwealth. She said:

"I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service."

It is one thing for a 21 year old to utter those inspiring words, and another to live by them for more than 60 years. For all of us in this Chamber who seek to play our part in public service, it is truly humbling to comprehend the scale of service that Her Majesty the Queen has given to this country.

The reign of Queen Elizabeth has been a golden thread running through three post-war generations. She has presided over more than two thirds of our history as a full democracy with everyone being able to vote. When I was born, Her Majesty had already been reigning for 14 years. When the Father of this House—our longest-serving Member—was first elected to this Chamber, Her Majesty had already been Queen for 18 years.

In 63 years and 216 days, she has worked with 12 Prime Ministers, six Archbishops of Canterbury and nine Cabinet Secretaries. She has answered 3.5 million pieces of correspondence, sent more than 100,000 telegrams to centenarians across the Commonwealth and met more people than any other monarch in history. And yet whether it is something we suspect that she enjoys, such as the Highland games, or something we suspect that she might be less keen on, such as spending new year's eve in the millennium dome, she never, ever falters. Her selfless sense of service and duty have earned her unparalleled respect and admiration not only in Britain, but around the world.

Turning to her leadership, Her Majesty exemplifies the unique combination of tradition and progress that has come to define us as a nation. She has been a rock of stability in an era in which our country has changed so much, providing an enduring focal point for all her people. She has also recognised the need to embrace change. As she said in an address to both Houses of Parliament back on her golden jubilee in 2002:

"For if a jubilee becomes a moment to define an age, then for me we must speak of change...Change has become a constant; managing it has become an expanding discipline. The way we embrace it defines our future."

Her Majesty's contribution to shaping the future of the Commonwealth has been particularly extraordinary. Some doubted whether this organisation would succeed, but she has assiduously supported it, growing it from just seven members in 1952 to 53 today. She has played the leading role in building a unique family of nations that spans every continent, all the main religions and nearly a third of the world's population. As a diplomat and an ambassador for Britain, it is hard to overstate what she has done for our country. She has represented us on 265 official visits to 116 different countries, including making 22 visits to Canada alone. From her post-apartheid visit to South Africa to her state visit to Ireland, we have seen time and again how the presence and judicious words of Her Majesty can build partnership and progress like no other. Her Majesty is held in deep affection by leaders around the world, and even ardent republicans fall under her spell.

As we commemorate this historic milestone, I know that Her Majesty would want us to pay a particular tribute to the service and support of her whole family, not least the Duke of Edinburgh who has stood by her side every day of her reign. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

Throughout her long service, the Queen has carried herself with an extraordinary grace and presence. She has led a gentle evolution of our monarchy, bringing it closer to the people while maintaining its dignity. She pioneered the first televised Christmas day message more than 30 years before we allowed cameras into this House. She opened up the royal collection and palaces, and she invented the royal walkabout, so that she could meet more people on her visits. People who meet the Queen often talk about it for the rest of their lives, and I am sure that I speak for all of my 11 predecessors when I say that going to see the Queen to form a Government and then meeting her once a week is one of the most enjoyable, inspiring and humbling honours of this office.

When I joined Her Majesty for her state visit to Germany earlier this year, I learnt that there are many female sovereigns that the Germans call "die Königin" but there is only one they call "die Queen". In fact the German dictionary, the Duden, provides as its example sentence "the Queen is coming on a state visit to Berlin" and then offers one key grammatical prescript: there is no plural.

The Queen is our Queen and we could not be more proud of her. She has served this country with unerring grace, dignity and decency, and long may she continue to do so.

11.40 am

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I am pleased to follow the Prime Minister's tribute to Her Majesty the Queen. As he did, I want to start with her words when she was 21 years old:

[*Ms Harriet Harman*]

"I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service."

Those words, remarkable from such a young woman, were a solemn vow to this country that she has kept through the 63 years and 218 days of her reign. She had not expected to succeed to the throne, but even before she was crowned she was clear that her life would be dedicated to the service of her country.

There can be no doubt about the commitment that she has made and the public service she has given and continues to give. Even today, at the age of 89, she is undertaking a public engagement. Her life has been a great sweep of British history—the second world war, the cold war and the fall of the Berlin wall—and she has presided over the transition from empire to Commonwealth. Her reign spans profound changes in all respects: in work life, family life, our communities and technology. She has gone from sending telegrams to sending tweets. At a time of so much change, her reign is the reassurance of continuity, a defining feature of this country both at home and abroad. At home, she has done thousands of official engagements, including visits, walkabouts, meeting and greeting the public and welcoming thousands to Buckingham Palace every year. In the one year of her golden jubilee, she visited 70 cities and towns across the country. There is a great commitment to her in every part of this country.

Abroad, she has been tireless in her international engagements, and in her long reign she has made official visits to more than 116 countries. It is no exaggeration to say that she is admired by billions of people all around the world, particularly in the Commonwealth, including those who come to live here in the UK, like many in my constituency of Camberwell and Peckham. People respect the fact that she has stayed fastidiously neutral and above politics, yet at times she has played a significant role in key political moments, such as the extraordinary personal generosity she displayed during the peace process in Northern Ireland.

She is now on her 12th Prime Minister, although we on the Opposition Benches had hoped that she would now be on her 13th. She reigns over more than 140 million people, a huge number, nearly as large as the number of registered Labour party supporters. It is entirely characteristic of her that she has let it be known that she does not want a fuss to be made about today, but we are making a fuss, and deservedly so. We send her our warmest congratulations, our appreciation and, above all, our thanks.

11.43 am

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): I contribute to this tribute to Her Majesty with some trepidation, but as the Member responsible for the home of the British Army I hope that I might be allowed to say just a few words.

Her Majesty has been an absolute inspiration to our armed forces and her leadership and commitment to her duty has served our armed forces well. I endorse everything that the Prime Minister said, as I am sure we all do. She has been the embodiment of duty. When I look at my own diary, as I am sure we all do, and find that I have an invitation to that great event in the Aldershot constituency social calendar, the Farnborough

donkey derby on bank holiday Monday, and when I consult Lady Howarth and ask whether we should go to the donkey derby, and she says, "But we went there last year," I say, "And Her Majesty does all sorts of things every single year." Her Majesty has done a fantastic service to this nation.

Every coin of the realm proclaims that Her Majesty is Queen, but there are two other letters and most of our people do not know what those two letters mean. They are FD. She may be the First Lord of the Treasury above my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, but they do not stand for finance director. They stand for Fidei Defensor—Defender of the Faith. I think Her Majesty has lived up to her coronation oath more faithfully than any former sovereign of this realm, and she has been an inspiration to us in her faith.

All of us sit down at Christmas time and enjoy Her Majesty's Christmas message not just to us and our constituents, but to the entire Commonwealth and the world. It is her faith which shines through unequivocally but quietly in her Christmas message, and it is her faith which has given her the strength to do all that she has done for our country. We should be a very grateful nation indeed to be served by a sovereign of such faith and commitment as Elizabeth II.

11.45 am

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I well remember the day when King George VI died and the Queen flew back from east Africa, where she was undertaking a visit. She left this country as a Princess and she came back as a Queen, and her reign over this country ever since then has been exemplary not simply to our own country, but to the all the world.

The Queen manages to combine stately behaviour with thorough hard work. She maintains this country as a democracy in a way that no President could conceivably do. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] It is not simply that she is impartial, but she is beyond politics. She makes it possible for us to have a stable, democratic Government. I am not saying that she makes it possible to have an admirable Government, but that the great quality of Her Majesty is that we do not know what she thinks of the Government. She simply maintains it in a way that makes this country the greatest democracy in the world.

Not only does the Queen do her job carrying out public engagements, as she is doing today, but she works hard at carrying out those jobs. Recently she came to my constituency and visited Gorton monastery, a majestic building which had fallen into dereliction but which had been brought back to fruition as a public venue. She made herself available to people, she met people and she lunched with the people who had come, but what struck me most was the fact that she knew everything about the renovation of Gorton monastery and was able to discuss with those people who had brought it back into use the most minute facts about how that had happened. She is a wonderful Queen, she is an upholder of democracy, she is a hard worker, and we send our heartfelt wishes to her on this day.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. It might be for the convenience of the House to know that there are a further eight colleagues seeking to catch my eye, so consideration for each other will help.

11.49 am

Mr Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the speeches that have already been made. I would like to state my gratitude to Her Majesty for a remarkable ongoing life of service and duty. Throughout her reign, she has served our country and our constituents with great grace and dignity.

I am one of only two MPs who represent Her Majesty's private estates; in my case, Sandringham in west Norfolk. Under her passionate guidance, Sandringham has been transformed from a sleepy agricultural estate to one of the most thriving and diversified estates in Britain. Sixty years ago, the vast majority of its income would have come from agricultural rents. Today, the majority comes from tourism, leisure, museums, public access and property rents, all overseen by Her Majesty's incredible eye for detail. Of course, there is still a very successful home farm, which sits alongside a world-class thoroughbred stud, where Her Majesty has meticulously built up numerous famous bloodstock lines.

Although Sandringham is very much a private retreat, the affairs of state are never too far away, with the relentless stream of red boxes. However, during her two or three visits a year, Her Majesty always finds time to attend a number of local events. For example, in recent years she has visited local schools, museums, charitable and other voluntary groups, and businesses. I have noticed that on these occasions, after she has talked with the mayor and the MP, she invariably wants to meet real people. As a result, there are probably more people in King's Lynn and west Norfolk who have met Her Majesty than in any other part of the country.

On behalf of my constituency and the local community, I would like to put on the record my deep gratitude to Her Majesty for enhancing the lives of so many people and bringing joy to so many families. Long may she reign over us.

11.51 am

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): It is a pleasure to take part in these commemorative proceedings on this important day on behalf of the Scottish National party. We have seen many remarkable landmarks over Her Majesty's long reign, during which there has been a transition from empire, with the independence of scores of nations, many of which have retained Her Majesty as Head of State, or which have a close connection through the Commonwealth.

Among all the statistics that I have seen, there is one exact figure that is missing—perhaps it is because no one could keep possibly tabs—and that relates to the literally millions of people the Queen has personally met. She has travelled the length and breadth of this kingdom over decades, performing her public duties and meeting people. She has regularly travelled to the 16 other states where she is Head of State, meeting people. She has visited 128 different countries during her 63-year-and-seven-month tenure. Since ascending to the throne in 1952, she has made 270 state and Commonwealth visits. Literally millions of people at home and overseas—over 4 million, by one account—have met her personally, and even more mind-boggling numbers have seen her on her visits and engagements.

Those of us who have had that honour will attest to her personal interest, attention, kindness and amazing ability to put people at their ease. That was evident the

first time I had the honour to meet her. On learning that I was the Member of Parliament for Moray, she inquired whether I listened to Mr Wogan on the radio. I must confess that I was totally stumped, because I could not think of any obvious connection between Moray and Terry Wogan's Radio 2 show. She saved me from my discomfort by explaining that Terry Wogan appeared to delight in the regularity of weather and traffic reports, which confirmed that the first road in the UK to close due to snow—probably in the autumn—was between Tomintoul in Moray and Cock Bridge, which is close to Balmoral.

Her Majesty, as we know, has a particular affinity with Scotland. She is known to delight in her stays at Balmoral, which is in the neighbouring constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Stuart Donaldson). It is fitting that her record-long reign surpasses that of her great-great-grandmother, Queen Victoria, who also had a tremendous affinity with Scotland in general, and with Balmoral in particular.

Today Her Majesty marks this landmark by being in Scotland, with the Duke of Edinburgh and the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, at the opening of the Scottish borders railway. It is the biggest rail project in more than a century, and perhaps since the reign of Queen Victoria. That the Queen is in Scotland on this special day, and working as usual, is much appreciated and totally in keeping with her remarkable record of public service.

Next year Her Majesty will celebrate her 90th birthday, and come 6 February 2022 she will become the first British monarch to celebrate a platinum jubilee. We look forward to that, wish her and her husband well for the future and share the appreciation for their public service over 63 years.

11.54 am

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mrs Caroline Spelman): On behalf of the Church of England, I would like to pay tribute in this House to the Queen as head of the Church for the faithful and inspiring leadership she has provided to the Church, regularly speaking about the importance of her faith in her personal life and in her role—not just in the Christmas broadcast but all through the year. In the House of Lords, the Bishop of Peterborough will be placing a tribute, and up and down the country churches will be celebrating her long reign with services and other events. We wish her many more happy years to reign.

11.55 am

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): We as one today in this House pay tribute to Her Majesty. Her example of service, dedication and duty is now as unmatched as the length of her glorious reign. The Queen has, as the Prime Minister said, seen many Prime Ministers, archbishops and others, and indeed nine Speakers, come and go—and I am sure there are more to come.

We admire the steadfast way in which she has reigned over us. We respect the deep faith that has helped her to do so. Perhaps today we should remember

the personal sacrifice involved. As has been mentioned, on her 18th birthday, in South Africa, the Queen swore, no matter how long or short her life, to devote it to the nation and to the Commonwealth. She has done so magnificently, with the enormous support of the Duke of Edinburgh. But her reign began sooner than she could ever have wished, as her beloved father, King George VI, who bore the crown in the darkest days of war, was taken from her and from us far too soon. That Her Majesty, in the face of such early sorrow, has never wavered is tribute to the strength of character we as a people have been so fortunate to enjoy in our wonderful monarch. We—her kingdoms, her subjects—are united in her, in love, loyalty and respect. Long live the Queen.

11.57 am

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is a great honour to be able to pay tribute to Her Majesty on this very important day. I have only managed to meet Her Majesty on two occasions; obviously in the years to come I expect an audience more regularly. On the first occasion I met her, she gave me advice on how to cope with casework. On the second occasion, on her visit to Kendal in Westmoreland, there was very nearly an incident when a very well-meaning local councillor, Councillor Walker, decided to—I can only say—lunge across a crowd of 30 or 40 people carrying a bar of Kendal mint cake to offer to Her Majesty, which she accepted with great grace, looking forward, I am sure, to enjoying it. I have to say that the security services were less excited—or rather very excited—by that lunge. I also thank Her Majesty for the occasion of her silver jubilee in 1977, when she gave me my first, and so far only, experience of being able to dance around a maypole.

We are, as a civilisation, very keen to categorise ourselves by our generations. Are we baby boomers; are we Thatcher's children; are we generation X? The fact is that all of us here are New Elizabethans. We have all have lived through that age—those 63 years and 216 days—when Queen Elizabeth II has reigned over us all. The values that she has embodied, which stand for all of us here, are about decency, about service, about civilisation, about stability, and about family. They are things that underpin our civilisation. It is all the more important that we recognise that Her Majesty occupies the most senior position in our society—indeed, the most privileged position in our society—but her conduct is marked by humility and service, not claiming the grandeur of office. On this great day, on behalf of my party and my county, I pay tribute to her service and her humility. Long live the Queen.

11.59 am

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): May I add the thanks of everybody involved in all the voluntary organisations and charities to which the Queen has given leadership and inspiration over the years?

Mr Speaker: A great speech—possibly the hon. Gentleman's greatest ever!

Oral Answers to Questions

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [901196] **Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 9 September.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, and in addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Julian Knight: I echo the sentiments expressed earlier by the Prime Minister and all in this place in relation to Her Majesty the Queen.

Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating parents of children who will attend the newly announced Solihull alternative provision academy, which will provide vital places for those with complex behavioural needs? Does he agree that Opposition Members who would scrap free schools would deny parents choice and children opportunity?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The free schools movement is bringing what we need in this country, which is more good and outstanding school places. More than 250 such schools are already in existence and we want to see 500 set up over this Parliament. So far a quarter of free schools are classed as outstanding. *[Interruption.]* We have heard Labour's Education spokesman, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt), speak out today. Perhaps he should praise the fact that a quarter of free schools are outstanding schools. They are not just what he has called, rather condescendingly, schools for “yummy mummies”; they are providing special schools and alternative provision schools. They are enhancing education provision in our country and we should be proud of the people who set them up.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): May I ask the Prime Minister about the refugee crisis? This is the largest movement of people across Europe since the second world war with, in just one month, more than 50,000 refugees arriving in Greece and thousands more setting off on foot to go from Hungary to Austria. The Prime Minister committed on Monday that we would accept 20,000 Syrian refugees over the next five years, but for these people 2020 must seem a lifetime away. Can he tell the House how many will be allowed to come to the UK by the end of this year?

The Prime Minister: First, before I answer the right hon. and learned Lady's question, I am sure the whole House will join me in paying tribute to her 28 years of Front Bench service as it potentially comes to an end this week. She has served with distinction in both Opposition and Government. Twice she has stepped into the breach as her party's acting leader, which is

never an easy job, but she has carried it out with total assurance. She has always been a robust adversary across these Dispatch Boxes and a fierce champion for a range of issues, most notably women's rights, where she has often led the way in changing attitudes in our country for the better. Although we have not always seen eye to eye, she has served her constituents, her party and this House with distinction from the Front Bench, and I wish her well as she continues to serve this House and our country from the Back Benches.

Turning to the specific issue the right hon. and learned Lady has raised, she is absolutely right: this is the biggest crisis facing Europe. We have to act on all of the areas she mentions. We have to use our head and our heart. We have committed to taking 20,000 people. I want us to get on with that. There is no limit on the number of people who could come in the first year. Let us get on with it, but let us recognise that we have to go to the camps, find the people, make sure they can be housed, find schools for their children, and work with local councils and local voluntary bodies to make sure that when these people come they get a warm welcome from Britain.

Ms Harman: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his generous words about my time on the Front Bench. It has been an absolute honour and a privilege to play my part in leading this great party.

We have to do all those things the Prime Minister has set out in relation to the refugees, but we still need to know, and we need a commitment, about the number we will take this year. This is an urgent crisis. If he cannot give us a number today, can he at least commit to go away and consult local authorities and throughout Government, and voluntary organisations and charities, and come back in a month and say how many this country will take this year?

It is welcome that the Prime Minister has said that we will take in Syrian refugees from the camps in the region, but he has ruled out taking in those who have made it to southern Europe. We understand his argument is that he does not want more people to put themselves in danger, but we have to deal with the reality. The reality is that thousands of people, including thousands of children without their parents, have already arrived in Europe. Save the Children has proposed that we take 3,000 of them into this country. Surely we should be playing our part to help those most vulnerable of children, even if they are already in Europe. Will he reconsider this?

The Prime Minister: On the number that we can achieve over the coming year, we have the first meeting on Friday of the committee that will be chaired jointly by the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. We will invite representatives of the Local Government Association and possibly some voluntary bodies to that meeting to make sure that we can plan. It is one thing to give a commitment to a number, whether it is the 20,000 that I think is right or something else; it is another thing to make sure that we can find these people, get them here and give them a warm welcome. I hope that the whole country can now come together in making sure that we deliver this effort properly.

The second point that the right hon. and learned Lady raised was about Europe. She talked about the reality in Europe. There is also a bigger reality, which is that 11 million Syrians have been pushed out of their homes and only 3% of them have so far decided to come to Europe. It is in the interests of the Syrian people and, indeed, all of us that we do everything we can to make sure that as many people as possible stay in the neighbouring countries and the refugee camps in preparation for one day returning to Syria. That is why Britain has led the way in funding the refugee camps, funding Lebanon and funding Jordan, and we will continue to do just that.

To answer the right hon. and learned Lady's point about children, we will go on listening to Save the Children, which has done excellent work. A number of other expert organisations warn about the dangers of taking children further from their parents. The overall point I would make is that those who have already arrived in Europe are at least safe. If we can help the ones in the refugee camps—the ones in Lebanon and Jordan—it will discourage more people from making the perilous journey. All I can say is that from the conversations I have had so far with the leaders of, for instance, France and Germany, it is clear that they can see Britain playing her role, funding the refugee camps, meeting the target of 0.7% of GDP and welcoming 20,000 Syrians into our homes.

Ms Harman: All that is very important indeed and we support it, but what about the thousands of children who are already many, many miles from their homes—those who are already in Europe but who have no home? Surely we can play our part in helping some of those children too. I urge the Prime Minister to reconsider.

Of course planning has to be done for receiving refugees from the camps. It is right that the Prime Minister should meet local government, but when he has developed the plans, he should come back to the House. A month is enough time to be able to come back to the House and say how many we will take this year. This is urgent.

May I ask about the situation of the child refugees from the camps who the Prime Minister has said will be allowed to come here? They need sanctuary and security. We must not leave them living with the threat of deportation hanging over them. Will he assure us that they will not automatically be liable for deportation when they turn 18?

The Prime Minister: I can absolutely give that assurance. The reason for resettling people with the five-year humanitarian visas is that it means we do not have to go through the normal asylum process. At the end of that, if people want to stay, they can make an application to do so and the assumption is that they will be able to stay. Some may want to go back to Syria, particularly if there is a settlement in Syria between now and then.

Let me answer the right hon. and learned Lady's other questions. Obviously I will come back to the House on a weekly basis to answer questions, as well as making statements and appearing in front of the Liaison Committee. I will commit to ensuring that the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government regularly update the House, because this is an enormous national exercise to ensure

that we give a warm welcome to these 20,000 people. I am happy for them to do that. I know that Members of the House want to feed into the process with offers and ideas from their local councils.

Coming back to the point about children, yes we will be taking vulnerable children, including orphans, from camps in the region, as we have already. All the while, we will listen to the advice of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who advises caution on relocating unaccompanied children and applies that to the children who have already come to Europe as well.

Ms Harman: But the UNHCR does not tell us not to take children who are in those camps in Europe without their parents. I do welcome what the Prime Minister has said about not having a threat of deportation for those Syrian children who do come here. As the number of those fleeing to Europe via Turkey and Greece grows, it is right that we do not lose sight of those who are still making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean from Libya. Our Navy has rescued thousands of them already, and it is important that this level of search and rescue is maintained. Can he update the House on that?

The Prime Minister: The update I can give is that so far, I believe, we have rescued 6,700 children. First it was done with HMS Bulwark, the flagship of the Royal Navy, which was then replaced by HMS Enterprise, which has continued this very good work. We will continue doing this work with allies and others as long as is necessary; we are also using the two Border Force cutters. But I think we should all be honest with ourselves and recognise that, particularly in the case of economic migrants leaving on the African route, we have to break the link between those people getting on a boat and getting settlement in Europe. All the evidence from these sorts of migration crises in the past, particularly the example of Spain and the Canary Islands, shows that you do need a way of returning to Africa people who are not fleeing for their lives but are leaving for a better life, because if you cannot break that link, an increasing number of people will still want to make that perilous journey.

Ms Harman: Of course, we do need to find ways of returning people where that is right, but we also have to make sure that we stop them drowning at sea when they are fleeing as refugees—I know the Prime Minister agrees with that. The EU must have a robust and realistic plan, and today the European Commission has announced further steps. The Prime Minister said he would look at whether there was a need for a special summit of EU leaders. We know there is one scheduled for October, but if there ever was a need for a summit of EU leaders that time is now. Will he call for one?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to keep this under review, and I discussed it with Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande in the last couple of days. The meeting of the Home Affairs and Justice Ministers will be taking place in just a couple of days' time. The British approach will be very clear: this must be a comprehensive approach. If all the focus is on redistributing quotas of refugees around Europe, that will not solve the problem; it actually sends a message to people that it is a good idea to get on a boat and make that perilous

journey. That is not just my view; the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, who is absolutely right about this, has said:

"The answer is not quotas. All quotas will do is play into the hands of those who exploit vulnerable refugees."—[*Official Report*, 1 June 2015; Vol. 596, c. 332.]

Of course Europe has to reach its own answers for those countries that are part of Schengen. Britain has its own borders and we have the ability to make our own sovereign decisions about this, and our approach is to say, "Yes, we are a humanitarian nation with a moral conscience, we will take 20,000 Syrians. But we want a comprehensive approach that puts money into the camps, that meets our aid commitments, that solves the problems in Syria, that has a return path to Africa and that sees a new Government in Libya." We have to address all those issues, and Britain, as a sovereign nation with its own borders, will do just that.

Ms Harman: But this is not about Schengen and it is not just about us as a sovereign nation doing what we can and should; it is about us working together with other countries. The refugee crisis presents a daunting problem that we are all striving to tackle, but we also have to address the underlying causes, which are conflict, global inequality and poverty. There are no simple answers, but we can address those only by working with other countries. The responsibilities we share, as well as the threats that we face, reach across borders in this globalised age. To be British is not to be narrow, inward-looking and fearful of the outside world, but to be strong, confident and proud to reach out and engage with the rest of the world. The Government should rise to this challenge of our time, and I urge the Prime Minister to do so.

The Prime Minister: I agree with every word that the right hon. and learned Lady has just said. I would say that Britain, uniquely among countries in the world, meets its 2% NATO spending target—so we can play a role in terms of defence and helping to secure these countries—and reaches its target of spending 0.7% of GDP on aid. No other major country in the world meets those two targets, and I am proud that we do.

The right hon. and learned Lady talks about going to the causes of these crises, and she is absolutely right about that. We have to be frank: the eastern Mediterranean crisis, in particular, is because Assad has butchered his own people and because ISIL has, in its own way, butchered others, and millions have fled Syria. We can do all we can, as a moral, humanitarian nation, to take people, spend money on aid and help in refugee camps, but we have to be part of the international alliance that says, "We need an approach in Syria that will mean we have a Government that can look after their people." Assad has to go, ISIL has to go, and some of that will require not just spending money, not just aid, not just diplomacy—it will, on occasion, require hard military force.

Q2. [901197] Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): The last exchange is the most important: with other countries, we have moral and practical responsibilities. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said that we are presently the only country meeting the commitment to the world's poorest and on military

spending, and it would be helpful if he could explain how each helps us to deal with the situation in Syria and the surrounding areas.

The Prime Minister: The point I would make to my hon. Friend is that the spending on aid is vital, because 11 million people have been forced out of their homes. Some of them remain in Syria and they need support, and some of them are in refugee camps and they need support. Many are being looked after in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, and those countries need our help. The aid budget has always been a controversial issue in our country, but people can now see the connection between the money we spend, the lives we save and the national security that we help to enforce back in the UK. The point I am making is not to change the debate now about what happens next in Syria, but we have to keep thinking about the fact that in the end nothing will make ISIL go away other than a confrontation, which we are seeing in Iraq and in Syria. We should be clear that ISIL being degraded, destroyed and ultimately defeated is in not just this country's interests, but the interests of civilisation more broadly.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): The threat level from terrorism is listed as "severe" in the UK, and there are many challenging decisions for the Prime Minister to take in protecting public safety and for Parliament to consider. It has taken four months to re-establish the Intelligence and Security Committee. Can the Prime Minister explain what role he hopes that Committee will fulfil?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the current level of threat is "severe"; that means that we believe that an attack is highly likely. These levels are set independently of Government. The Intelligence and Security Committee does very important work and there is a motion on the Order Paper today to see its re-establishment. I very much hope that he will be part of that Committee and will be able to be briefed in the way that other members of that Committee are briefed.

Is there a role for the Intelligence and Security Committee, which we have already expanded, to do even more to scrutinise the actions of the intelligence services and the Government? That may well be the case. As I announced on Monday, what we have done in terms of the strike against a British citizen in a country against which we are not currently at war is a new departure, and it is important that these things are properly scrutinised. I would argue that the first way to scrutinise them is for the Prime Minister to come to the House and for the House to question him—that is accountability. But is there a role for the ISC to look at these things—although not current operations? I am happy to discuss that with the new Chair of the ISC, who I hope will be appointed in the coming days.

Angus Robertson: The Prime Minister talked about the importance of the Intelligence and Security Committee and parliamentary oversight and scrutiny. We learnt this week of a new UK policy of drone strikes against terrorist suspects in regions where there is not parliamentary approval for general military action. Will the Prime Minister provide all relevant information to the Intelligence and Security Committee, so that it can conduct a review?

The Prime Minister: As I have just said, I am happy to discuss that with the Chairman of the Committee when they are elected—I said appointed, but I meant to say elected by the members of that Committee, because that is what rightly happens. I am happy to do that, with the only proviso that the Intelligence and Security Committee cannot be responsible for overseeing current operations. The responsibility for current operations must lie with the Government, who have to come to the House of Commons to explain that. I am not going to contract out our counter-terrorism policy to someone else: I take responsibility for it. But it is important that after these events have taken place, the ISC is able to make investigations.

Q3. [901198] Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): A slight change of tack. Over past weeks, I have met farmers across Taunton Deane facing severe difficulties owing to falling commodity prices in many sectors—lamb, beef, arable and dairy. These industries are the lifeblood of my constituency. Will the Prime Minister please give assurances that all efforts are being made to help these industries through this particularly tricky time? Farmers have campaigned on the streets recently to highlight their straits.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this, because low commodity prices are causing problems for farmers not only here in the UK but also right across the European Union. Yesterday, in the Council of Agriculture Ministers in Brussels, we led calls for urgent action, and there will be a €500 million package of measures to help farmers. Here in the UK, we have obviously taken steps to help, which include introducing the Groceries Code Adjudicator to make sure we get a fair deal with the supermarkets; steps to make sure we do more on public procurement, to make sure that, where possible, public authorities are buying British food, because it is of such high quality; and also, as the Chancellor said in the Budget, to make sure we look at the tax treatment of farmers to try to give them a better deal at this difficult time.

Q4. [901199] Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): Two weeks ago, the Work and Pensions Secretary's Department not only admitted to falsifying testimonies in leaflets, but published data on the deaths of people on sickness benefit, which showed that they are four times more likely to die than the general population. That was after the Secretary of State told the House that these data did not exist. Given that, and his offensive remarks earlier this week—referring to people without disabilities as "normal"—when will the Prime Minister take control and respond to my call for the Work and Pensions Secretary to be investigated for breaching the ministerial code?

The Prime Minister: First, let me deal very directly with the publication of this data. This data was published because I promised at this Dispatch Box that it would be published, in a way that it was never published under any Labour Government. That is the first point.

I also think we should be clear about what this data shows. It does not show people being wrongly assessed as fit to work. It does not show people dying as a result of their benefits being taken away. If you listen to the organisation Full Fact, it has said—[*Interruption.*] I have

to say to hon. Gentlemen shouting that two newspapers have printed that and had to retract it, so I think that people should actually look at the facts. A fact-checking organisation says:

“It was widely reported that thousands of people died within weeks of being found ‘fit for work’ and losing their benefits. This is wrong.”

Perhaps the hon. Lady should read that before asking her next question.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): In 2011, the Prime Minister quite rightly confirmed to the House that the Wilson doctrine, the prohibition on the electronic monitoring of Members of Parliament, was still in force. Unfortunately, on 24 July this year, the Government's own lawyer, Mr James Eadie, QC, stated in the Investigatory Powers Tribunal, in answer to a complaint from the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), that the Wilson doctrine is not legally binding, cannot work properly and accordingly places no obligations on the intelligence agencies. This is clearly inconsistent with the Prime Minister's previous statement. Can he clarify the status of the doctrine for the House today and confirm that it has real meaning?

The Prime Minister: I have got nothing to add to comments I have made about this issue before, but I am very happy to write to my right hon. Friend and set out the position.

Q5. [901200] Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The ongoing harrowing refugee crisis is fuelled by conflict, which in turn is powered in part by the global arms trade. The UK has supplied the weapons being used in many areas from which people are now fleeing, including Yemen and Libya. In the week that London will once again host the largest arms fair in the world, is it not time for the Government to recognise the link between arms sales and the terrible tragedy that we see unfolding around us?

The Prime Minister: First, we have some of the strictest rules anywhere in the world for selling arms to other countries. If the hon. Lady thinks that the reason why so many people are fleeing Syria is something to do with the arms trade, the fact is that it is because Assad is butchering his own people and because we have an Islamist extremist, terrorist organisation running a large part of two countries—Iraq and Syria. Those are the problems that we have to confront, rather than pretending it is about something else.

Q6. [901201] Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): TopicUK is a social enterprise in my constituency that is expanding into South Yorkshire and London. The northern powerhouse and devolution should be about developing growth and prosperity right across the north of England. When does the Prime Minister hope to see a metro mayor in our area, and how will devolution stimulate growth for businesses like this in the region?

The Prime Minister: There is a real opportunity in this Parliament to make some decisive steps towards rebalancing our economy and building the northern powerhouse that we have spoken about. A big part of

that is devolving power to local government and, specifically, to mayors who can be accountable to their local communities and have new powers and new resources to drive economic growth in their areas. We have already had over 30 areas, as well as city regions, making proposals. This is a very exciting development for genuine decentralisation in our country. I very much hope West Yorkshire will be in the vanguard.

Q7. [901202] Dr Eilidh Whiteford (Banff and Buchan) (SNP): I am sure the Prime Minister will be aware that more than 900 people at the Young's fish processing factory in my constituency in Fraserburgh currently face the threat of redundancy. There is a perception across the industry that the UK Government have been encouraging and supporting the company to relocate many of those jobs to Grimsby. What is the Prime Minister going to do to support the workers in Fraserburgh?

The Prime Minister: I am aware of this issue, not least because the local Members of Parliament in the Grimsby area have come to see me to talk about this industry. What matters is that we go on being an economy that wants to attract businesses, growth and jobs. That means keeping our inflation down, keeping our taxes down, keeping our corporate taxes down and, I would also argue, keeping our country together.

Q8. [901203] Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): As MP for the faithful city, may I associate my constituents with the tributes paid earlier to Her Majesty the Queen? Worcester's guildhall, which she visited on her diamond jubilee, will next week be hosting a jobs fair at which over 130 employers will be recruiting. In Worcester, we have seen unemployment at its lowest level ever and youth unemployment down by two thirds. Will my right hon. Friend update us on his plans and his determination to finish the job by eliminating youth unemployment?

The Prime Minister: I am very grateful for what my hon. Friend is doing and for what is happening in Worcester. We have seen employment rise by nearly 2 million and the unemployment rate fall for 25 consecutive months. But we have to be frank: the job is now going to get harder as we dig down into those people who have been out of the labour market for a long time and who have challenges in getting jobs. We need to work really hard to make sure the apprenticeships, training and help is there, and that is why what is happening in Worcester is so important.

Q9. [901204] Jo Cox (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Can the Prime Minister tell the House whether he thinks he has led public opinion on the refugee crisis or followed it?

The Prime Minister: I would simply argue that this Government are doing the right thing, and that we have done it consistently. To be frank, public opinion has not always supported the 0.7% of GDP that we give to aid. Even in the most difficult of economic circumstances, it was this Government, led by a Conservative Prime Minister, that kept the promises we made to the world's poorest.

Q10. [901205] Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): Will the Prime Minister join me in welcoming the Chancellor's announcement of funding to kick-start

improvements to the north Devon link road, and does he agree with me that this is a vital project if we are to continue with the economic growth and jobs that his economic policies are already delivering?

The Prime Minister: One of the things that struck me on the many visits I made to my hon. Friend's constituency in the run-up to the last election is that the communities and coastal towns in North Devon are completely reliant on the north Devon link road. It is an absolutely vital artery and that is why it is so good that there is this £3 million of funding to develop the business case for improvements. We will keep on this, because we know just how vital this road is.

Q11. [901206] Teresa Pearce (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): Every year, thousands of people have medical emergencies outside of hospitals. When it is a cardiac arrest, every minute without CPR—cardiopulmonary resuscitation—or defibrillation reduces survival chances by 7% to 10%. First aid is a true life skill. The majority of teachers and parents support the teaching of emergency first aid in schools. Will the Prime Minister look closely at my private Member's Bill, which aims to do that and make every child a lifesaver?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly look closely at the hon. Lady's private Member's Bill, because this is a real lifesaver. The availability of CPR equipment, whether in village halls, pubs, schools or sports clubs, can save many, many lives. That is why there was £1 million in the Budget for buying defibrillators for public spaces and schools and for training. I am sure that many schools will want to take advantage of this.

Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): The Prime Minister will be aware that the new owners of Eggborough power station in my constituency are consulting on the closure of a station that provides 4% of the country's electricity. This comes on top of the announcement that Ferrybridge power station, adjacent to my constituency, is to close, as well as Longannet in Scotland. Drax power station is taking legal action against the Government over changes to the tax regime. These power stations are being taxed out of existence, and we are potentially walking into power capacity issues next year. Will he meet me to discuss a way forward for the station and the industry and for the hundreds of people in my constituency whose jobs are under threat?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to meet my hon. Friend. I have discussed this issue with him before. I believe we have sufficient capacity in our energy market, but I have regular meetings with Ofgem and Energy Ministers to make sure that is still the case. We have this difficult situation of wanting to see, over time, a phasing out of unabated coal, which needs to happen if we are to meet our carbon emissions targets, and when it comes to replacing coal in these power stations with renewable technologies, of needing to make it affordable. We have to make a judgment about how much we are prepared to add to consumers' bills, because, in the end, this has to be paid for.

Q12. [901207] Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): The UK steel industry is currently facing huge challenges. In Scunthorpe, 25,000 people rely on steel. Will the Prime

Minister call a steel summit to show that his Government will stand up for steel and take the action necessary to secure its future?

The Prime Minister: I have discussed this issue with the hon. Gentleman before, and I am sure we will meet and discuss it again. The Government can help the energy-intensive industries with their energy bills, and we have put £35 million towards that. We have also set out, in our infrastructure plan, the infrastructure needs of the country so that steel producers can plan how much needs to be produced. We will go on doing everything we can to support this vital industry.

Q13. [901208] Andrew Bingham (High Peak) (Con): The rail stations of Glossop and Hadfield in my constituency are the third and fifth busiest in Derbyshire. The constituents who use those stations have just been advised of a change in the available rolling stock. What can my right hon. Friend do to ensure that the successful bidders for the new franchise can continue to offer as good a service as is available now, and perhaps even better?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this matter. The whole point about the process for the new northern franchise is to see an improvement in services. We have already spoken about getting rid of the Pacer trains, which I know will be very popular in the north of England, and we will be adding an extra 1,500 services a day. We want to increase the morning peak capacity by one third and, as I said, see those outdated Pacer trains retired. That is a good programme and one we hope to secure through this franchise.

Q14. [901209] Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Experts say that delivery of the electrification of the main line between Paddington and Swansea is slipping. How will the Prime Minister get this project back on track and budget by the delivery date of 2018?

The Prime Minister: We are committed to this electrification all the way to Swansea, and we are making record investments in our railway line. Many of us, including Opposition Members, were privileged to be at Newton Aycliffe for the opening of the Hitachi factory that will be providing the state-of-the-art trains—trains built not in Japan, but here in Britain, bringing 700 new jobs to the north-east of England.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend recall that in the debate about Syria two years ago there were voices around this Chamber arguing that the conflicts in Syria and elsewhere were nothing to do with us and should not involve us? Is it not clear that the failure of western security strategy in the middle east and elsewhere is the main driver of this migration crisis, and may I endorse his requirement for a full-spectrum response to ISIS? Will he consider setting that out in a comprehensive White Paper in order to lead world opinion?

The Prime Minister: First, we should be very clear about who is responsible for the refugee crisis in Syria. I would lay it firmly at the door of Bashar al-Assad, who assaulted his own people, and ISIL, who, even today, are throwing gay people off buildings, raping women,

terrorising communities and driving people to take to the road and leave their country. They are the ones responsible. But my hon. Friend makes an important point: when we do not involve ourselves in these issues and take difficult decisions, that is a decision in itself, and it has consequences. That is what I hope we can debate and discuss in the coming months. He talked about White Papers and so on. There are many different ways of presenting this information. I think we need to look at all the arguments for what he and I would call a comprehensive approach to these issues.

Q15. [901210] Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Our sixth-form colleges do a great job, but they are not protected by the education ring fence. That means a sixth-former in my constituency has lost almost 20% of their funding over the last five years—in some places, almost 30%. What has the Prime Minister got against sixth-form colleges?

The Prime Minister: I am fully in favour of sixth-form colleges. That is why actually, unlike previous Governments, we have gone quite a long way to equalise the funding between sixth forms in secondary schools and sixth forms in colleges. We have made a lot of progress.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): We are just days away from the start in England of the world's third largest sporting event—the rugby world cup. In addition to wishing luck to all the home nations, will the Prime Minister agree that this represents a great economic opportunity to my town, as we welcome visitors from around the world to the birthplace of the game?

The Prime Minister: I certainly look forward to the warm welcome that Britain will give to rugby fans from around the world, and I am happy to wish luck to all the home nations in what is going to be a compelling contest. It is always worth noting that this Dispatch Box was the gift to the House of Commons of the people of New Zealand. While we are very grateful for their gift, we want one of the home nations to win this tournament.

Mr Speaker: Last but not least, Mr Nigel Dodds.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The Prime Minister will be aware that the situation in Northern Ireland, already grave, following the IRA murder in August in Belfast, has escalated to new heights, with the arrest today of the chairman of Sinn Féin in connection with that incident—and, indeed, other leading members of Sinn Féin. We warned about this earlier this week. We have now reached the tipping point. Indeed, in my view, we have gone beyond the tipping point. The Prime Minister is aware that the First Minister has met the Secretary of State this morning. He has put a proposal to her. Does the Prime Minister now accept that unless he and others take action, we are in a very grave state as far as devolution is concerned? We want to see government, but only those committed to exclusively peaceful and democratic means can be in government. The people of Northern Ireland cannot be punished; it is Sinn Féin who should be dealt with. Does the Prime Minister agree?

The Prime Minister: First, I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that we are in a very difficult phase of these discussions in Northern Ireland. I obviously cannot comment on the police operations that have taken place, but let me say this. There is no justification for paramilitary organisations and structures in Northern Ireland—or, indeed, anywhere else in our country. They are a blight on our society; they are not wanted; they should be disbanded on every occasion and on every side.

I would, however, make an appeal in this respect to Democratic Unionist Members, Ulster Unionist Members, Social and Democratic Labour Party Members and the Sinn Féin Members, who do not take their seats in this House. As someone who sat on the Opposition Benches and watched while the peace process was put together and the power-sharing arrangements were put in place, it was one of the most inspiring things that I have seen as a human being and a politician to see politicians put aside their differences, put aside concerns about appalling things that had happened in the past, and decide to work together. The appeal I would make to all of you is, please have that spirit in mind. It was an amazing thing you all did in Northern Ireland when you formed that Administration and that Assembly. We will do everything we can to help you, but let us think of the nobler processes and the great noble principles that were put in place in the past—and let's do it again.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Points of Order

12.39 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On Monday, during questions to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) asked a question about the return to work of people with disabilities. The Secretary of State responded that

“the most important point is that we are looking to get that up to the level of normal, non-disabled people who are back in work.” — [Official Report, 7 September 2015; Vol. 599, c. 6.]

I am sure I do not need to point out to the House just how offensive and inappropriate that sort of language is.

We have worked hard to achieve non-discriminatory language, Mr Speaker. I seek your guidance on whether that sort of language is in order in the context of what is said in the House, and on whether, alternatively, you yourself could offer guidance to Front Benchers in order to avoid such offensive and discriminatory language in the future.

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. The short answer to him is that the language used was not disorderly—there was nothing out of order about it—and it therefore did not necessitate any intervention from the Chair. Everyone who speaks in this place must take responsibility for what he or she says. It is extremely important that we express ourselves with sensitivity, and in a way that will be viewed as such not just within the House, but beyond it.

I do not think I can go beyond that today. I recognise the upset that the hon. Gentleman and, perhaps, others feel. I do not think that I can say more than I have just said, but I am sure that what the hon. Gentleman has said, and what I have said in response, will be noted in the appropriate quarters. I hope that it will not be necessary to return to this theme.

Food Waste (Reduction)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

12.41 pm

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require the Secretary of State to make provision for a scheme to establish incentives to implement and encourage observance of the food waste reduction hierarchy; to encourage individuals, businesses and public bodies to reduce the amount of food they waste; to require large supermarkets, manufacturers and distributors to reduce their food waste by no less than 30 per cent by 2025 and to enter into formal agreements with food redistribution organisations; to require large supermarkets and food manufacturers to disclose levels of food waste in their supply chain; and for connected purposes.

Three years ago, I made my first attempt to introduce a food waste Bill. I am now returning to that topic, very aptly, in zero waste week. Although some progress has been made during the past three years—and, indeed, before that—we could do so much better if the Government were firmly in the driving seat.

I am not the only one who is saying this. In January, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee called for DEFRA to appoint a food security co-ordinator to spur a step change in the redistribution of surplus food to those in need, and, in its excellent report “Feeding Britain”, the all-party parliamentary group on hunger and food poverty suggested that redistributing and using surplus food would be

“the next big breakthrough... in eliminating hunger”

in the United Kingdom—although, as Mark Goodway, the founder of the inspiring Matthew Tree Project in Bristol, has said, the problem of food poverty is not lack of food:

“The lack of food is an indication that something else has gone wrong and this is what needs to be addressed.”

That, however, is a topic—a big topic—for another day.

It is estimated that about a third of the food produced globally is wasted. That puts pressure on scarce land and resources, contributes to deforestation, and needlessly adds to global greenhouse gas emissions. If food waste were a country, it would be the third largest emitter of greenhouse gases, behind the US and China. The sheer waste of our planet’s scarce resources is bad enough, but it is truly shocking that so much good food is going to waste when so many people on our planet are dying from hunger and malnutrition, and so many are living in food poverty here in the UK.

We hear much about the future challenge of feeding a growing population from a shrinking agricultural base, but we are already producing enough food: if we cut food waste by just a quarter, there would be enough to feed everyone on the planet. It is a scandal that we are not doing so. In the UK, we produce about 15 million tonnes of food waste annually, and about 400,000 tonnes of that is fit for human consumption. It cannot be right that good, edible food is thrown away, or turned into compost or energy, when people are going to bed hungry, skipping meals, or cannot afford to give their children a nutritious evening meal. I want to make it clear that this Bill is not primarily about household food waste, on which the public focus tends to be. More than half the food wasted is wasted by the food industry across the supply chain, and that is my focus today.

[Kerry McCarthy]

In the UK we redistribute only 2% of our fit-for-consumption surplus food. France redistributes 20 times more, so we could do an awful lot better. On Monday I visited FareShare's London depot to hear how it is supporting more than 200 organisations, including domestic violence refuges, homeless shelters, hostels, food banks, pensioners' lunch clubs, and breakfast and after-school clubs. According to FareShare, if we redistributed 25% of our surplus food, it would save the voluntary sector up to £250 million a year. This would make surplus food the second largest supporter of charity after the Big Lottery.

Let me turn now to specific measures in the Bill. It calls for supermarkets to be required to enter into formal agreements with food redistribution organisations to donate to them unsold in-date food. That is based on a recent French legislative proposal and Belgian law. It would address the so-called back-of-store and retail depot waste—food that has already made it into the store. However, that accounts for only about 2% of the food wasted. Waste in the supermarket supply chain is a much bigger issue.

Waste in the supermarket supply chain is generated because of things such as poor demand forecasting, over-ordering or cosmetic requirements—the need for fruit and vegetables to be free from visual imperfections. An estimated 20% to 40% of perfectly edible UK fruit and veg is rejected by supermarkets before it even reaches the shops. So my Bill also calls on large supermarkets and manufacturers to be transparent and to disclose the levels of food waste in their supply chain and reduce their own food waste by at least 30% by 2025. That is in line with the European Commission target of reducing all food waste by at least 30% between 2017 and 2025, which I hope will make its way into its circular economy strategy later this year, and in line with the sustainable development goal of halving per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer level—which is easiest to tackle—by 2030.

The Bill also asks the Government to look at possible incentives to encourage observance of the food waste hierarchy, so that ideally food waste is prevented from occurring in the first place, but if it does occur it is donated for human consumption if possible, or then for livestock feed, or then for anaerobic digestion, rather than going to landfill. At the moment it is cheaper and more convenient for supermarkets to send their surplus to AD or for livestock feed than donate it to charities.

In its "Counting the Cost of Food Waste" report last year the Lords European Union Committee recommended that the UK Government

"undertake their own assessment of how they might further promote the redistribution of food to humans by way of fiscal measures. Particular attention should be given to encouraging the redistribution of fresh, nutritious food."

The report highlighted fiscal measures, from VAT exemptions to tax deductions and tax breaks, which

"could help align economic incentives more effectively with the food use hierarchy."

The Government response to this was disappointing, and I hope my Bill will encourage further consideration of what measures could be adopted.

It is also worth noting that the AD industry receives Government subsidies as well as, for example, interest-free loans from the Green Investment Bank, yet food

redistribution receives no subsidies or support. The Government are effectively subsidising a food waste management system lower down the waste hierarchy, but are, as yet, providing no support for a more resource-efficient one.

Finally, my Bill calls on the Government to encourage all individuals, businesses and public bodies to reduce the amount of food they waste. We can all play a role. As the director general of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, José Graziano da Silva, has said:

"We can do a lot from the local to the global levels, from producers to consumers, from personal choices to policy decisions that create an enabling environment to reduce food waste and loss."

I am pleased to see the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in his place today and thank him once again for attending the launch of my Bill yesterday. Were he able to speak today, he would no doubt point to progress that has been made on a voluntary basis. Household food waste has reduced by 21% since 2007, partly due to the efforts of the Waste and Resources Action Programme and its "Love Food Hate Waste" campaign. WRAP needs to be properly resourced to carry on its valuable work.

Some supermarkets have started to rise to the challenge. Tesco, in a brave move, decided not only to publish its levels of back-of-store food waste, but to audit some of its best-selling products across the whole supply chain of. It has developed an app that notifies charities what surplus food is available for collection from its stores each day. I saw a demonstration of that on Monday, and it really simplifies the process and makes it much easier for charities to know what food is available to them.

However, not all supermarkets are rising to the challenge, and they should be. Indeed, at the recent Stockholm food forum, some companies said that they would prefer to be legally obliged to deliver the UN food waste target, so that there is a level playing field, where not just the good guys are rising to the challenge, but everyone else is required to do so too.

The Minister would, no doubt, point to the Courtauld commitment, but it is a purely voluntary agreement; it does not cover large amounts of waste higher up the supply chain and its targets are unambitious. Indeed, 80% of progress on its previous targets came from tackling household food waste. I hope that the fourth phase, Courtauld 2025, will be much more ambitious than previous iterations.

As I began by saying, I do not believe that voluntary action alone can drive the change that is needed. The current approach of nudging us along the way, with a few good initiatives, some education and some encouragement, is not enough when the imperative for action is so great. We have an example of what Government action could achieve: the last Labour Government's landfill tax was one of the most successful waste policies ever for driving behavioural change and for creating markets in more environmental forms of disposal such as anaerobic digestion.

We can do the same for food waste, moving up the waste hierarchy, pushing for prevention and much more donation, and that is why I urge the Minister to support the Bill and politely ask him to have a word with his Whips to allow it to be considered in Committee, so

that we can work together on this, drive forward the agenda in a really ambitious way and respond to the huge level of public support out there for action on this issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Kerry McCarthy, Caroline Lucas, Zac Goldsmith, Margaret Ferrier, Huw Irranca-Davies, Seema Malhotra, Frank Field, Steve Rotheram, Dr Alan Whitehead, Daniel Zeichner and Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck present the Bill.

Kerry McCarthy accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 January 2016, and to be printed (Bill 67).

Opposition Day

[6TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Humanitarian Crisis in the Mediterranean and Europe

[Relevant document: E-petition, entitled Accept more asylum seekers and increase support for refugee migrants in the UK, <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/105991>]

12.52 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House recognises the funding the Government has committed to the humanitarian initiatives to provide sanctuary in camps for refugees across the Middle East; calls for a greater international effort through the United Nations to secure the position of such displaced people; recognises that the Government has committed to accepting 20,000 vulnerable people from camps in Syria over the next five years but calls for a Government report to be laid before the House by 12 October 2015 detailing how that number can be increased, encompassing refugees already in Europe and including a plan for the remainder of this year to reflect the overwhelming urgency of this humanitarian crisis; further notes that refugees arriving in European Union territory also have a moral and legal right to be treated properly; and, given the pressure on Southern European countries, further calls for the UK to play its full and proper role, in conjunction with European partners, in providing sanctuary to our fellow human beings.

I am grateful to have the opportunity to move this cross-party motion in today's Scottish National party Opposition day debate. I urge all Members to look very closely at the Order Paper—I know that that does not always happen—to read the text of the motion and to note a very unusual sight. The motion is co-sponsored by the leaders of six parliamentary parties: the Scottish National party, the Labour party, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru, the Green party, the Social Democratic and Labour party, as well as the independent Unionist MP, the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon).

Although I welcome the Secretary of State for International Development and her Government colleagues to the Treasury Bench, I am disappointed, given the cross-party nature of the motion and the seriousness of the subject, that the Prime Minister is not here. I am sure that many people who care passionately about the need to do as much as we can in this humanitarian crisis will be saddened that he did not think it important enough to attend today's debate. That stands in sharp contrast to the all-party approach that we saw last week in Scotland, which included the leader of the Conservative party in the Scottish Parliament. That cross-party approach to making plans was chaired by the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, and included charities and others.

I do not want to dwell on that discordant point, because I would prefer Members, particularly Government Members, to look closely at the text of the motion. Perhaps unusually on an Opposition day, the motion is not aimed at identifying or highlighting shortcomings in the Government's policy. Given the gravity of the humanitarian situation and the fast-moving nature of developments in recent days, we who have sponsored the motion have worked hard in formulating a text to recognise what is being proposed, which we all welcome, and to encourage what must happen next.

On Monday, we had a significant update of UK policy by the Prime Minister, with commitments made to help many more people, and we welcome that. The scale of the humanitarian crisis is immense. Millions of

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people have been displaced from the conflict in Syria, to neighbours such as Lebanon and Jordan. Many of the hundreds of thousands of refugees who have been on the move are from other war-torn and oppressive countries.

Today, the European Commission has outlined its immediate plans to deal with the situation, and that does not come before time. We are told that it is the time for bold action by EU member states and institutions. I note the words “EU member states”—not just some of them: all of us, and that includes the United Kingdom. For the world, it is a matter of humanity and human dignity. For Europe, it is a matter for historical fairness.

Europe is a continent where people from nearly all countries at some point have been refugees at one time, fleeing war, dictatorship or oppression. There is a fundamental right to asylum. It is one of the most important international values, and we should not forget that. We should be proud of the fact that Europe is seen as a safe haven for those who are fleeing horrific circumstances. We should not fear this; we should be proud of it. It is true that Europe cannot house all the misery of the world—we know that—but we must put things into perspective.

How can it be that we are hearing from all sides, and justifiably so, that we should do everything to combat an insidious terrorist movement such as Daesh, but we are not prepared to accept those people who are fleeing from it? In the Mediterranean, as the European Commission pointed out today, every life lost is one too many, regardless of where those people are trying to get to. We know that efforts have been redoubled to dismantle human trafficking groups. We learn that fewer boats are under the control of smugglers on the perilous route. That is a good thing.

We must applaud the efforts of countries such as Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon. Those countries, which are far poorer than we are, are making huge efforts in moral and financial terms. We must recognise, however, that we—the United Kingdom; we Europe—have clearly under-delivered in the common solidarity we have offered to refugees who have arrived on our territory. Italy, Hungary and Greece alone cannot be left to deal with this enormous challenge. This is not a defining matter of whether or not one is within the Schengen zone.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Notwithstanding what the hon. Gentleman has just said, does he not accept that the UK Government have put nearly £1 billion into supporting safe refuges throughout the middle east—more than virtually any other country in the world—and that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development should be congratulated on her efforts in doing that?

Angus Robertson: In the spirit that I started, I agree entirely with what the hon. Gentleman says. I join him in applauding Ministers for delivering the amount of money that he notes. He could have gone on to say, of course, that other countries are providing significant amounts. I note that, this week, Chancellor Angel Merkel announced £4.4 billion to go towards refugees, and the lesson is that we must all do as much as we can.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): We should be clear. The hon. Gentleman says that we cannot let these countries alone help the refugees. Britain has provided more—not just in money, but in aid in helping displaced people live—than Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, France, Italy, Finland, Belgium and Ireland together, and they are nine of the 10 EU countries in the top 20 donors in the world. Should he not accept that we should all be proud of what we have done so far and that we can build on it as well, as the Prime Minister has announced?

Angus Robertson: I am disappointed in the hon. Gentleman. I do not know whether he has just come in, but obviously he has not been listening to a word I have said. I said from the beginning of this opening speech that I am not interested in a bidding war or a discordant note across the Chamber about the things we agree on, and I paid tribute—including following another prompting—to the Government for their effort, and I will continue to do so. I hope that the hon. Gentleman listens to what I am saying. We should ask ourselves, individually and collectively: “Are we doing everything we can?”

In May the European Commission announced emergency resettlement mechanisms that would encompass 40,000 refugees, and today it announced a second emergency mechanism that will involve the relocation of 120,000 refugees from Hungary, Greece and Italy. The Commission called on member states to come to a Commission meeting on 13 September and take a share of that 120,000. Jean-Claude Juncker of the Commission said he wanted “everyone on board”, which I imagine includes the United Kingdom—I certainly hope it does, because the door should not be closed on refugees. He said that action is needed, and action is being undertaken by the United Kingdom. We welcome that—let me say that again—and we ask what more we can do.

Our motion recognises the funding that the Government have committed to humanitarian initiatives to provide sanctuary for refugees in camps across the middle east, as that makes a real difference to people’s lives. It calls for a greater international effort through the United Nations to secure the position of displaced people, and recognises that the Government have committed—again, I stress that we welcome this—to accepting 20,000 vulnerable people from camps in Syria over the next five years. We are calling for additional action, and we hope that, in the spirit in which the motion has been drafted, Government Members will find themselves able to agree. We have called for a Government report to be laid before the House by 12 October 2015 when Parliament returns from the conference recess—that point was made during Prime Minister’s questions by the acting leader of the Labour party, and it seems entirely reasonable.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I do not want to detract from the reasoned tone of the hon. Gentleman’s speech, but is it not important to be absolutely clear that children accepted under the vulnerable persons programme will not be kicked out of the country when they reach 18? We were told today that that would not happen, but I understand it could well happen under the programme.

Angus Robertson: The hon. Gentleman is entirely correct in saying that it could happen, but the fact that we have had clarification from the Prime Minister

acknowledges that it would be totally unacceptable in the country for that to happen. I have not seen the official statistics, but when I last looked I think that 216 or 217 people were part of the vulnerable persons scheme. That is one reason why the Government had to look pretty quickly at updating their approach to the humanitarian crisis and its scale. We learned that there is not automaticity in vulnerable children who might come to the UK being able to remain in the UK, and we could perhaps have greater clarity in that area from the Government, and greater generosity in providing confirmation that children will not be sent back to countries such as Syria—potentially still in a civil war—when they turn 18.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Immigration is always about numbers and we all welcome the Prime Minister's commitment to accept 20,000 refugees. During yesterday's Home Affairs Committee we questioned the Immigration Minister about whether we could have a target for the number of refugees who could come this year—the Government do have targets, such as that for net migration. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that although we cannot have a precise figure, it would be extremely helpful to have a target for the number who come this year?

Angus Robertson: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the motion before the House because we are calling for an action plan by the Government to be laid before Parliament. When understanding the Government's figure of 20,000—which is, of course, significantly more than 216—many of us found difficult the fact that if that number is spread over the Parliament it equates to six refugees per constituency. I cannot speak for Members across the House, but my mailbag has been jam-packed with letters from people of good will saying "Please call on the Government to do more", and that is what we are doing today.

People are also making concrete offers of help and assistance, which has happened here and in other countries. There is Airbnb in Germany for refugees, and the Icelandic people are suggesting that they will take masses of people to stay in that country, which is smaller than Dundee. Offers of help are being made domestically and internationally, and the UK Government should go away and work with the English Local Government Association—we heard the Prime Minister commit to that—the Scottish and Welsh Governments and the authorities in Northern Ireland, and the churches. Working with others, how do we accommodate as many of the 20,000 as we can as quickly as possible? This is literally a life and death issue for people, and we must get on with it.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I commend the hon. Gentleman and his party for the inclusive way in which he is conducting this debate and the drafting of the motion. He rightly talks about the upwelling of public concern about and the will to do more. Does he agree that local authorities should be helped with funding beyond the first year? Many local authorities across the country want to do more, but they need to know that there is more than just one year of funding.

Angus Robertson: The hon. Lady makes a sensible point, and that is in part the answer that I gave to the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies).

This week the Government of Germany announced £4 billion—more than €6 billion—of support for local government and municipalities to do this thing. Of course, because of the scale of this issue it is perfectly understandable that one has to work in government with the civil service, other authorities and the third sector in getting it right. At this point in parliamentary proceedings we are here for only a week and a half, and we all understand that because of the scale of the challenge not everything can be sorted out and planned, and not every number can be crunched. The motion is clear in giving the Government an opportunity to bring back a plan. The Prime Minister generously said during Prime Minister's questions that he and ministerial colleagues would be coming back to this issue, and it would be helpful if those on the Treasury Bench listened to the suggestion on how a concrete plan can be advanced and delivered.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): Clearly, and unsurprisingly, the Government are already planning, because the Home Office document on the Syrian vulnerable persons resettlement scheme states:

"For planning purposes, we are working on the basis that overall the UK would take around 500 people (not cases) over the next 2-3 years - with around 150 in the first year."

That is where they were a few weeks ago. The Government are planning, but they need to upscale that planning.

Angus Robertson: That is absolutely true, and in the emollient spirit of today's proceedings, thank goodness that they re-examined those projections and reconsidered their paucity of ambition in helping people in need. Given the fast moving nature of developments, perhaps we will continue to see a programme of iteration and re-examination to work out exactly what can be accommodated and supported. As a first ask, it would be helpful for the Government to accept that it would be good for all of us, in government and opposition, to see a plan laid before Parliament detailing how the number can be increased to encompass refugees already in Europe, and a plan for the remainder of this year to reflect the overwhelming urgency of the humanitarian crisis. We have already had a concrete suggestion from the Scottish Government that 1,000 refugees can be accommodated this year. If the UK total, which is 20,000 over five years, is 4,000 in a year, we are talking about the possibility this year of a quarter of all refugees in the UK being housed in Scotland. Surely the rest of the United Kingdom would not wish to be left in a position where not as much is being done.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that the Prime Minister made it absolutely clear that the number will not be staggered on a year-by-year basis? It may well be based on need, which means that many more than 4,000 are accommodated across the United Kingdom. We must be careful not to make arithmetical calculations in that way.

Angus Robertson: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and I really hope that he is right, because we need to help people as quickly as possible. I am sure that he would wish that as many people within this 20,000 total, which we hope is not a final total, can be helped as quickly as possible. We have agreement on that point across the Chamber.

[Angus Robertson]

In yesterday's emergency debate on the humanitarian crisis, a very, very strong case was made. Unusually, I am looking towards the shadow Home Secretary. For those who were not in the Chamber, I encourage them to read her speech, which was extremely powerful and convincing, as were the speeches of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) and many hon. and right hon. Members. They talked about the urgency of the situation, the need for action and the fact that we should not discriminate between refugees.

The United Kingdom is part of Europe geographically and culturally. Regardless of our views on the European Union, we have responsibilities as Europeans and as human beings towards fellow human beings. It cannot be left to Sweden, Germany and Austria to take up disproportionate burdens. It cannot be left to Italy or, heaven help it, Greece, which is saddled with a massive austerity plan and creaking public services. Greece is having to manage disproportionate challenges simply because of geographic proximity.

May I just say on a personal note, as somebody who is half German and who lived and worked in Austria for a decade, how utterly remarkable and moving it is to watch the welcome given to refugees in those countries? It is an inspiration to people of good will elsewhere. The leadership and humanity of Chancellor Angela Merkel and Chancellor Werner Faymann is widely recognised and appreciated.

Today's motion notes that refugees arriving in European Union territory have a moral and legal right to be properly treated; and that, given the pressure on southern European countries, the UK should play its full and proper role, in conjunction with European partners, in providing sanctuary to our fellow human beings. Who can possibly oppose that?

The history of these islands stands as testament to solidarity with fellow Europeans and to people from further afield. I am talking about the thousands of Huguenots fleeing religious persecution, the thousands of Russian Jews fleeing the pogroms of the 19th century, the thousands of Basque children fleeing the Spanish civil war and the thousands of Jewish children in the Kindertransport. Incidentally, I am not sure why people do not ask why it was just a Kindertransport. Much has been said in recent days in praise—and I am praising it—of the good will in welcoming people. We should also not turn a blind eye to some of the siren voices of past decades that, among other things, restricted adults from Austria who were fleeing the Nazis in 1938. It is right that we should praise, and be aware of, the contribution that has been made in past decades. I am not just talking about the run-up to the second world war.

After the second world war, believe it or not, the UK took in people from the largest group of displaced refugees in world history; they were German. Think about that. Their city was bombed and significantly destroyed. In 1945, 1946 and 1947, the UK accepted as refugees those who had been enemy aliens. I have much to be grateful for as my mother was among those refugees.

Since that time, there has been a commitment to refugees, and that has not stopped. There were the Hungarians and Czechs after their uprisings in the

1950s and 1960s, the Ugandan Asians in the 1970s, the Vietnamese boat people, and the refugees from the former Yugoslavia, and on it goes.

It is well understood by most people of good will—and that is the overwhelming majority of people in this country—that a remarkable contribution has been made to these shores by those who originally hailed from elsewhere. If Members have not already heard the song "Scotland's Story" by the Proclaimers, I recommend that they listen to it. The chorus goes:

"In Scotland's story I read that they came
The Gael and the Pict, the Angle and Dane
But so did the Irishman, Jew and Ukraine
They're all Scotland's story and they're all worth the same."

I know that there are Members from other parts of the UK who can attest to similar sentiments and realities in their nations and constituencies. We celebrate refugees and their contribution and we remember the humanity of those who made past decisions, which were not always popular.

It is not that long ago that speeches were made about rivers of blood. Hopefully—I think certainly—we have moved beyond that narrow-mindedness, but we face a challenge. This is the biggest refugee crisis in Europe, if not the world, since the second world war. Just one week ago, the UK Government's position was that 216 people on the vulnerable persons programme were acceptable. Thank goodness that is no longer the case. What was unimaginable a week ago is now imaginable. We have to rise to the challenge of playing our part.

The UK Government have done much, and they are doing more. Today we are asking that they should not close their mind to doing more. Regardless of our politics and of those things that divide us, we, as human beings, share a responsibility to refugees. I am talking about not just refugees in camps in Jordan and Lebanon, but wee boys and girls and mums and dads in Greece, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Germany and Sweden. Wherever refugees are, we have a responsibility to work with our European neighbours and partners to help them. This is their hour of need. The motion before us today is one to build consensus to say that we are not closed to doing more. I hope that the Government will accept it, because they should.

1.17 pm

The Secretary of State for International Development (Justine Greening): There is no doubt that this debate comes at a time when the world is facing humanitarian emergencies of an unprecedented number, scale and complexity. Whether we talk about the Ebola epidemic that hit Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea last year, the devastating earthquake in Nepal in April, the current crisis in Yemen or the conflict that has raged in Syria for more than four years now, it is clear that these crises are not just events that go on half a world away unconnected to our own lives here in Britain. We saw that last year. The Ebola crisis that threatened to engulf west Africa was just a five-hour plane ride away from the UK.

Nobody can fail to have been struck by the tragic images of desperate people putting their lives in the hands of criminal gangs and people smugglers, risking and sometimes losing their lives for the chance of a better future. More than 360,000 refugees and migrants crossed the Mediterranean this year. The flow of people

has largely been driven by conflict, particularly the bloodbath in Syria that has now taken more than 220,000 lives and forced more than 11 million people from their homes. I recognise that the debate—not just here in the UK, but around Europe—shows that there are no easy answers to these questions of how to deal appropriately with these crises. Many countries, including the UK, are debating what the right response is. Indeed, many are taking and playing different roles in the overall response we need to see.

Since day one of the Syrian crisis, Britain has been at the forefront of the response. We have evolved our response—we have had to—as this incredibly complex crisis has steadily evolved. Britain has done and will continue to do a huge amount to help the Syrians who have been caught up in the crisis and, of course, our priority is to stop the senseless death of refugees and migrants making the perilous journey. Our assets, including Royal Navy ships, have played their part in the European response that has helped to rescue more than 6,700 people in the Mediterranean.

We are also working alongside other European partners to tackle the criminal gangs and trafficking networks that profit from this human misery, including by establishing an organised immigration crime taskforce that brings together officers from the National Crime Agency, immigration enforcement, Border Force and the Crown Prosecution Service into one team so that they can work collectively to address these challenging problems. Of course, we have provided sanctuary to more than 5,000 Syrian refugees since the conflict began and the Prime Minister has announced that we will provide resettlement for up to 20,000 additional Syrians in need of protection over the lifetime of this Parliament.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): Will the Secretary of State take the opportunity to say what the British Government are going to do to assist the refugees at Calais? We have heard much about Syrian refugees and I am pleased and grateful that the Government have changed their mind and done the right thing. In my constituency, huge amounts of clothing, shoes and other goods have been donated for volunteers to take them from North Down through the Republic of Ireland to Cork and across to Calais. I know that the Northern Ireland Office is under pressure politically as we have difficult times again in Northern Ireland, but as a sign of generosity and solidarity with the rest of the UK Northern Ireland wants to do something. This is a small token gesture to help refugees in Calais.

Justine Greening: I will follow up that point. I pay tribute to the work that the Home Secretary did over the summer with her French counterpart to try to work collaboratively to find a resolution to the problem in Calais.

I have talked about some of the challenges closer to our doorstep here in Europe in recent weeks and months, but we should not lose sight of the fact that we have also needed to and been right to help the overwhelming majority of Syrians who are still in the region. I have met many refugees from the Syrian crisis in my time in this role and I am proud that Britain has played a leading role in the humanitarian response to the crisis. We have pledged more than £1 billion to date, the largest ever response from the UK to any humanitarian

crisis, which gives a sense of how complex, wide-ranging and challenging the Syrian crisis is. That is also the biggest bilateral country support for the Syrian crisis, other than that from the US.

The picture inside Syria today is unspeakably bleak. We have debated, discussed and had questions about the Syrian crisis in this Chamber many times and it seems almost impossible that it can continue to get worse, but it does. For four years the people of Syria have been bombed, starved and driven from their homes. I have met children in the Zaatari camp in a little classroom where they can play and spend time with one another, but when they hear a supply plane overhead delivering supplies to the camp they dive for cover under the table because they are used to planes that are about to bomb them. I have met children in classrooms that Britain is helping to fund, with teachers whom we are helping to do double shifts so that they can teach not only their own Jordanian and Lebanese children but find time in the school day to accommodate the Syrian children who are now living locally. I have seen the pictures those children draw when they are asked to do art, and they are pictures of their homes having been bombed, of planes with bombs and of their friends having been bombed. Those children deserve the support of the United Kingdom and they are getting that support.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I do not think that any Opposition Member is criticising what the Government are doing, but what the Government are not doing, which includes their duty as a member of the European Union in respect of migrants in Europe. May I also raise the issue of refugees from Daesh in Iraq? We have a duty in Iraq and Yazidis, Christians and Muslims have had to flee in very similar circumstances. Will the Secretary of State extend the vulnerable persons relocation scheme to refugees in Iraq who cannot be catered for by the Iraqi Government?

Justine Greening: The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that Britain is playing our role in dealing with crises that go far more broadly across the middle east than the Syrian conflict. I can reassure him that we are working specifically to try to ensure that we support children who are part of the many millions of displaced people in Iraq. Let me give the House some sense of that, although I know that I need to make some progress with my speech. We are providing not only the medical assistance that they will often need but trauma counselling. That is not uncomplicated as the specialised support the children need and the language capability required of the people providing it are not easy to access, but we are part of ensuring that that is done as far as it possibly can be. We are providing and helping to fund safe areas within camps so that unaccompanied children and parents who have lost their children can easily link up with them again. More than 80% of unaccompanied children in Jordan have managed to be linked up with their families through such efforts. Out of sight, we are working incredibly hard in a range of areas, particularly to help children affected by the crisis. We will keep doing that.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend and the Prime Minister for what they have said today and for what they have been doing. The World Food Programme is, as I discovered at a meeting in Luxembourg that I attended as Chairman of the

[*Sir William Cash*]

European Scrutiny Committee on Saturday and Sunday, the centre of gravity, and it is quite clear that we not only have our 0.7% but are the second or third largest of all the donors to the programme. Germany, for all the hype, is way behind us over the past year and over the past five years. Does she accept that we have done an amazing amount of effective work in that programme? Will she comment on the implications of my International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014 and on whether it has any relevance to this matter?

Justine Greening: I pay tribute to the World Food Programme, which is operating alongside other UN agencies in some of the most dangerous places to get vital food and often other supplies to people affected by the crisis, and I have often met and talked to Ertharin Cousin who runs it. As my hon. Friend sets out, Britain has been one of the key funders of the WFP over recent years, more broadly as well as particularly in relation to the Syrian crisis. Agencies such as the WFP are having to make impossible choices about how to help the most people with limited resources, and I shall come on to that shortly.

My hon. Friend also asked about his efforts regarding gender equality, and I pay tribute to him for them and for how they fed into the UK response. I can reassure him that alongside his Act we had the UK Call to Action summit, held at about this time in 2013, which was about ensuring that we did not lose sight of the specific needs of women and girls. In these crises, the rates of forced marriage and sexual violence rapidly rise, and we have prioritised tackling that.

I been out to the region often, visiting camps and host communities in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. I have been to the camp at Kilis in Turkey, which is close enough to Aleppo for people to be able to hear the bombs there. Half the Syrian population—more than 11 million people—have had to leave their homes. Only around 3% of those have sought asylum here in Europe. The vast majority of those who have been displaced are trying to stay in their home or to rebuild their life in a neighbouring country closer to home. Many still hold out the hope that they will be able to go back home and they have remained in a place more familiar to them where they may have family links.

David T. C. Davies: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Government are right to target our help at those who are in the camps, who may be the most vulnerable people from the area, and not to do anything to encourage more people to hand money over to people traffickers and risk their lives coming to Europe in leaky boats, when we have done so much to provide them with places of safety?

Justine Greening: I shall make progress, but my hon. Friend's point is important. We have to think very carefully about how we can meet the dual objectives of continuing to support people in the region and helping refugees without inadvertently making the problem worse, which would be the wrong approach to take. That is why this is a complex problem to deal with. We need to think extremely carefully through those complexities to reach the right approach. I believe that that is what we have done as a Government.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP) *rose*—

Justine Greening: I recognise that it is the hon. Gentleman's party which has tabled the motion and I will give way to him shortly.

As we have heard, Britain has already given more aid, by some margin, than any other European country to help Syrians affected by the crisis. Our commitment to do that will continue, but we need other countries, both in Europe and internationally, to step up to the plate and do more too. As we have this debate in the Chamber today, the UN agencies involved in the Syrian appeal have looked at the scale of the need and the number of refugees, and assessed the resourcing that they would need to help provide support to those people. They totted that up and only 37% of it has been funded for 2015.

Angus Robertson: A number of leading charities in the UK have launched appeals, which are very welcome. I am sure we would all encourage as many people as possible to give. It is a mystery to me that the way in which we signal collectively the need for a significant fund-raising effort is through the Disasters Emergency Committee. It is for the DEC to decide what the criteria are to raise money for emergencies, but it seems to me that this is a pretty big emergency. Would the Minister support the Disasters Emergency Committee launching an appeal to all our constituents who want to help and support people in need?

Justine Greening: The Disasters Emergency Committee is a fantastic way of enabling some of the most incredible NGOs, which often happen to be UK NGOs, to come together and work effectively to raise funding. I would certainly support such a move if the DEC chose to do that. In the past it has done so. At Christmas 2013 we match-funded part of a DEC appeal in order to ensure its success, and we will continue to look at how we can use that as a mechanism to share the priorities of the British people, which we are already mirroring in the amount of effort we are putting into the Syrian crisis.

The point I was making was that in the end we need a broader international response. It is worth saying that the UN appeal this year was in the region of \$8 billion. The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) commented on the amount that Germany is spending on refugees who are in Germany, which, as he said, is around \$6 billion. We can start to see that we need to think carefully about effective funding of the UN appeal. We have been part of a sustained lobbying effort, particularly on the part of myself and the Prime Minister, to press other countries to follow that lead. We have helped to raise around \$6.9 billion for the Syrian crisis over the past two years. Last year we co-hosted a ministerial meeting at the UN General Assembly which alone raised \$1 billion.

We have to understand that these humanitarian emergencies do not clear themselves up over one or two years. That is part of a funding problem that needs to be fixed. The length of time that people spend as refugees is rising. In 1980 people could expect to spend perhaps nine years as refugees. Now they may expect to spend 20 years, so a child born in the Zaatari camp now

will grow to adulthood away from home. We need a step change in the way that the international community supports refugees.

Richard Graham *rose*—

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con) *rose*—

Justine Greening: I will give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham).

Richard Graham: The UK has a good track record in providing match-funding for good causes to help people in disaster zones. Would she consider arranging for match-funding for a new vehicle which would be available to everybody in the UK who wants to donate specifically to help Syrian refugees settle in this country?

Justine Greening: My hon. Friend has put an interesting and brand new idea on the table. I am sure it will not be the only proposal that we hear in the debate today. I will take all of them back and look carefully at the art of the possible to see what we can do and how we can knit together, as we already do in many other humanitarian responses, the amazing generosity of the British people with the work that the UK Government are doing, often with NGOs, to provide the support that we seek to give.

We need a step change in the way that the international community supports refugees. We must recognise that the existing model for crisis funding supports short-term need but not protracted displacement. What that means in practice is that we see food, life-saving medical support and shelter understandably prioritised. What is left out of that UN work when it is only half-funded is education for children, work on helping to provide skills for young men so that they have the prospect of a successful livelihood ahead of them, and the work needed by host communities, which may see their populations double. The UK is focused on providing a lot of support in that vein. The problem is that it cannot be done at scale when UN appeals are as underfunded as the present one is. That, I am sorry to say, is symptomatic of other appeals for which the UN does not have appropriate funding.

We must look down the line at the challenges that we will face. Even today, we heard the President of the European Commission talking about the need for stepped-up EU activity to address the wider root causes of the refugee crisis by fighting poverty, improving governance and helping to support sustainable growth.

Simon Hoare: My right hon. Friend encapsulates the general thinking of the country that that requires an international response. She is right to make that point. Given her historical and contemporary interest in Syria and the policies of President Assad, can she advise the House what steps Russia is taking to alleviate the crisis?

Justine Greening: I have set out the fact that the US and the UK, alongside other nations, have led on the humanitarian front. It is less clear what humanitarian role Russia is playing. We were pleased when we finally achieved consensus on the UN Security Council to pass a resolution on cross-border access for humanitarian supplies from countries such as Turkey into parts of

Syria. That required Russia's co-operation. It took some time to get it, but it was absolutely vital in enabling us to make progress. The key now—my hon. Friend alluded to this—is getting a political solution. The work that my Department does tirelessly every day is aimed at dealing with the consequences of the failure to do that. Ultimately, we will need a longer-term solution to the crisis if we are ever to see an end to the kind of suffering we have seen in the region—I have seen it myself—over the past four years.

Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Justine Greening: I will give way, but then I must make some progress, because many Members wish to speak.

Stephen McPartland: I congratulate the Secretary of State on the work she has done. Are we providing any support to the people who have been displaced and are trying to reach the refugee camps so that they do not have to use smugglers and other criminal organisations?

Justine Greening: Helping anyone inside Syria is incredibly difficult, which is one of the reasons I paid tribute to the work of the World Food Programme. We have seen the kinds of risks that humanitarian workers face while trying to get on with the amazing job they do. Some of them, including from Britain, have paid the ultimate price and lost their lives. The help that we can give kicks in the minute we get to people.

We have also worked with countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, which understandably have concerns about how they can cope with the huge influx of people across their borders and into their communities. I would like to put on the record my thanks to the people of Jordan and Lebanon, who have seen their communities literally double in size, but they have provided incredible generosity of spirit and support. That is why we are right to support those host communities, given the sheer number of refugees they have had to deal with in recent years.

Our response to this highly complex crisis has had to evolve. As the humanitarian situation has deteriorated, we have scaled up the UK's support—it increased fivefold from 2012 to 2014. When it began, our planning with UN agencies related mostly to the logistics of putting in place the supply chains to get the food, water, shelter and medical support to the flow of people coming out of Syria. Then it was about ensuring that they could get through that first winter, which meant providing the kind of shelter required for moving from searing summer temperatures to very cold winter temperatures.

We then turned our attention to the challenge of educating the children affected by the crisis, for example by getting them into local schools. Over half of all registered refugees are children. In 2013, alongside the UN and the then EU Commissioner, Kristalina Georgieva, I launched the “No Lost Generation” initiative, which aims to provide the resources needed to help schools in Jordan and Lebanon cope with the double shifts they are having to put on. We have already allocated £111 million to help provide not only education, but protection and psychosocial support for the children affected by the crisis.

[Justine Greening]

I have talked about the need, ultimately, for a political solution. I have talked about how hard the UK has worked, and will continue to work, on the UN Security Council to ensure that we can get on with delivering humanitarian support and, in time, play our role in reaching a political solution. I have talked about my visits to the region and the shocking things I have seen at first hand.

As has been noted, the evolving nature of the crisis has meant that our support closer to home has also had to change. A significant number of Syrians have now left the region. The last time I visited the Zaatari refugee camp, I met a man who only the night before had been texted images of his restaurant in Damascus, which had just been bombed. People see their prospects change in an instant and, like anyone else, reassess how to deal with the next stage of their lives.

In response to that, the Prime Minister announced on Monday that we will expand the Syrian vulnerable persons relocation scheme and resettle up to 20,000 additional Syrians who need protection over the lifetime of this Parliament. We have been very clear that we have come up with an overall number and are working hard to ensure that it is not only effectively targeted, but measured, so that we can cope with the number of people coming here and provide the kind of support they will need.

Hywel Williams: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Justine Greening: I will give way, but then I absolutely must make some progress.

Hywel Williams: Will the right hon. Lady tell the House how the Government arrived at the figure of 20,000? Other European Union countries are using a formula that is broadly based on GDP, population, the unemployment rate and the number of applications already processed, which seems a reasonable way of proceeding.

Justine Greening: We have tried to arrive at a figure that means we can have an impact and ensure that we are playing our role, but also one that we have a clear sense we can deliver. Already a number of local authorities have generously come forward and said that they want to play their role, and no doubt we will have discussions with the devolved Administrations in the coming weeks, which I very much welcome. The right thing to do now is ensure that we can deliver on our level of ambition. We are getting on with that not just in the work that is being done domestically, led by the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, but in the work we are doing on the ground with the UNHCR. We are helping the most vulnerable and needy people still in the region, many of whom could never make the kinds of journeys that others have made. We are identifying the people who most need help and assessing what packages of support will be needed if they are to be relocated to the UK.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Justine Greening: I will of course give way to the hon. Gentleman, whom I welcome to his new role as Chair of the International Development Committee.

Stephen Twigg: On Sunday the Chancellor of the Exchequer spoke about the funding for refugees settled here in the first year coming out of official development assistance, so it is not something new. Can the Secretary of State clarify that the Government are not proposing any change in the existing rules with regard to the ODA applicability of refugees who resettle here?

Justine Greening: Yes, I can. It recognises the fact that many of the host communities are in Lebanon and Jordan, and we are right to support them, but when refugees come here, there is an impact on our communities as well, so we should also use the aid budget, appropriately and within the rules—they are there precisely to enable this to happen—to provide support to communities here. I have talked about the need to work with local authorities. We should recognise that many of the refugees that our communities will be welcoming have been through very traumatic experiences, so we need an overall package of support to ensure that that works for everyone concerned. We know that the refugees will require a whole range of services, including healthcare, housing and education. We will stay within the ODA rules so that, quite sensibly, we can use the aid budget to fund such costs.

I think the House should be proud that the UK has delivered on its promise to spend 0.7% of gross national income on development assistance. We are seeing why that was the right thing to do, and why it was right that we enshrined it in law. I think that we are seeing how problems far away in another country can seem like they have nothing to do with us, but in the end they do.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): For 40 years UK Governments signed up to the 0.7% pledge and missed it, and that totals about £90 billion-worth of spending that could have helped prevent many humanitarian disasters. We congratulate the Government, but they keep pressing this point, yet they have only very recently met this target, so we need to continue to see action.

Justine Greening: As I said, I am proud that we have now met that target. I would urge the hon. Gentleman to put as much passion as he put into his intervention into going to other countries around the world and pressing them to do the same. It is incredibly important that Britain does not stand alone among the major economies of our world in meeting the 0.7% target. As he says, we need to think not only in the short term to tackle the impact of the humanitarian crisis in our midst because of the Syrian conflict, but in the long term.

The best way to protect against poverty and instability is through development—through people having countries that offer them opportunity and the potential to get on with their lives and feel like they can make a future for themselves, and their families in security and safety. That means growing up in countries that have the kinds of institutions that we have, such as our Parliament, where disagreement and debate happens in a democratic way and people have choices over their future. Alongside everything we have talked about today, the UK works on that every day of the week in very many countries. Later this month, we will sign off on the next set of global goals for the next 15 years, which we hope can eradicate extreme poverty once and for all.

We should all be proud of the UK's work in leading that effort. Whatever our debates on the details of how we respond to complicated crises month by month, I hope that we can continue to have consensus across the House on the 0.7% target and on Britain continuing to play its role in responding to the crises that we see around the world and in driving development.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. There are 26 Members seeking to catch the Chair's eye, so we are going to impose a 10-minute limit on speeches after the shadow Secretary of State has spoken.

1.52 pm

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): I rise to support the motion. I very much welcome the spirit in which the SNP has sought all-party support for it. The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) made a very powerful speech. Like him, I hope that the motion will win the support of the Government.

It is right that the House is debating how Britain should respond to this crisis, which, as we have heard, has been described as the largest movement of refugees since the second world war. But what is the reality? The reality is mothers and fathers and children, brothers and sisters, forced by bloody conflict, their homes and their schools destroyed, their relatives killed, to flee from the land in which they were born, to seek help from the kindness of strangers. From Syria, hundreds of thousands of people are trying to make their way to safety in Europe, taking to dangerous and overcrowded boats, climbing over fences that have been erected to keep them out, queuing outside stations and then, despite desperate exhaustion, walking mile after mile along roads and railway lines to try to reach a new life in a new country.

They do this for one simple reason: they are desperate. Everything they had and knew has been destroyed. They see no hope, no future, no life. Deep down, every single one of us in this Chamber today understands, because it is exactly what we would do if those we loved were confronted by the same horror. Human beings will brave many dangers because the human urge to survive is strong and when we see people in these circumstances, our human urge to help is just as strong. It is, after all, our moral obligation, especially when we know what others are doing; Germany and Sweden, in particular, have already been mentioned. The fact that we are not in Schengen does not mean that we should opt out of our responsibility to stand shoulder to shoulder with our European friends and allies in playing our part. I say this to the Secretary of State: why is a child who has made the same perilous journey that claimed little Alan Kurdi's life and is now in Greece any less deserving of our help than a child in a Syrian refugee camp? We should help both, and it is a false choice to argue otherwise.

As always happens in war, it is the neighbouring countries that bear the greatest burden. There are nearly 2 million refugees in Turkey. Jordan has seen its population increase by 650,000. Lebanon's population has increased by 1.2 million, or 25%. That is equivalent to the United Kingdom taking in 16 million people. Let us compare that with the number of refugees we have actually taken from Syria under the UN vulnerable persons relocation scheme thus far: 216.

Britain has given very considerable help in humanitarian aid to these countries; we are the second most generous donor in the world. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State and to the Government for everything that they have done. It has been as exemplary as the Government's initial refusal to take in a share of refugees, saying that we had done enough, was profoundly mistaken. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper), the shadow Home Secretary, I genuinely welcome, as did the hon. Member for Moray, the Government's change of heart.

But we have to turn that commitment into practical steps that will help change people's lives, and do so now, because the crisis is now. The families here in Europe need somewhere to live, somewhere for their children to go to school, and the chance to make something of their lives now, not in four years' time. That is why the question of how quickly we can fulfil the commitment that the Government have made is so important. Four thousand people a year, dividing 20,000 by five, is not enough. As my right hon. Friend said yesterday, there needs to be a plan for how we are going to take in those refugees, and it should include people who are already in Europe.

Simon Hoare: I confess that I fail to understand the logic of the right hon. Gentleman's argument. There are schools, hospitals, doctors and all the social infrastructure in the rest of the European Union; that is not a unique preserve of the United Kingdom. On what logic does he base his argument that when these people have found places across the continent of Europe, they should merely use that as a stepping-stone to come to the United Kingdom? Those European countries can provide succour just as well as we can.

Hilary Benn: I say in all honesty to the hon. Gentleman that it is about playing our part, including by taking those who have sought shelter in Europe and those who are still in the camps in the region. It is about doing our bit. It is not a competition between providing the generous help that the Government have given in humanitarian aid and providing help and succour to those, in particular, who have made such a perilous journey.

Mr Adam Holloway (Gravesend) (Con): I greatly admire the Prime Minister's attempt to help the maximum number of people in this desperate position in the fallout from the Syrian war. The amount of money that he is spending to help as many people as possible is a huge credit to our country. But I also admire the fact that he clearly understands that there are hundreds of millions of people in impoverished states in the middle east and north Africa—some, yes, in the grip of war—and realises that if we say to hundreds of millions of people, "Europe is open," at some point Europe will have to close, and before that point we will lose thousands more people in the Mediterranean and lose the emphasis that he has put on looking after people properly in the areas where they are, which is what we have to do. It is a scandal that the international community is not doing enough to look after these people.

Hilary Benn: I shall address directly the hon. Gentleman's point about the wider challenge of the movement of human beings around the globe, because he is right to raise it and it is important that we consider it. However,

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the specific question I am addressing in this part of my speech is what we do now to help those who are fleeing Syria, including those who have made the perilous journey to our shores.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that citing the possibility that hundreds of millions of people may be on the move as an argument against taking our fair share from the current migrant crisis is dishonest and an argument for doing very little, possibly nothing at all?

Hilary Benn: I agree with my hon. Friend, who makes the point that this debate is about taking our fair share. The Government have moved to acknowledge that, which I welcome.

Tomorrow my right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford will meet representatives of local authorities, and we now hear that the Government will meet representatives of the Local Government Association on Friday. If we are going to take on this responsibility, which we should, it is important that all of us, including Parliament and all local authorities—not just some—and charities, voluntary organisations and communities do our bit and play our part in making this happen.

Picking up on the point made by the International Development Secretary, we also need to persuade other countries to play their part in giving their share of humanitarian aid. The United Nations has warned about lack of funding for essential supplies. In July the World Food Programme—I echo every single word the International Development Secretary said about that extraordinary organisation, with which I too had the privilege of working when I held her position—announced that it had halved the value of the food vouchers being given to Syrian refugees in Lebanon because it does not have enough money to continue giving as much as before. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports that ration cuts, lack of electricity and people who are sick and cannot get treatment for themselves or their children are reasons given by refugees for making the journey to Europe.

Although we are understandably focusing on Syria today, as we speak another hidden humanitarian catastrophe is unfolding in Yemen, where according to the International Committee of the Red Cross just under 13 million people are food-insecure and 500,000 children are severely malnourished.

Keith Vaz: As my right hon. Friend knows, I am one of three Members who were born in Yemen, and as chair of the all-party group on Yemen for a number of years I have been very concerned about the situation. Does he agree that it is extremely important that none of the aid that will be spent here as a result of the Syrian refugee crisis should be diverted away from Yemen at this critical time in its history?

Hilary Benn: I agree with my right hon. Friend, who is very knowledgeable about that country. I am sure that is the Government's position. The practical problem in relation to aid to Yemen is access. Concerns have been expressed that some of the aid is being used for purposes

connected with the nature of the conflict. Humanitarian aid should be given to people on the basis of need, not on the basis of which side of the conflict they happen to be on or find themselves on because of where they happen to live at any particular moment.

I say to the Government that Britain's proud record on humanitarian aid gives us particular authority, which I know the International Development Secretary uses, to speak out and urge other countries to do their bit. We cannot run the international humanitarian system on the basis of insecure and intermittent funding. That will not work.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): My concern is that if we are to speak with authority and ensure that the support these families need is delivered, the process needs to be ongoing. We need sustainable, ongoing community support for people who are traumatised, who need language skills and who need school places. That is vital and all Members on both sides of the House need to support local authorities.

Hilary Benn: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. The Government will use the international development budget, as the official development assistance rules allow, in the first year to support local authorities, but she raises the question of what will happen the following year. I have no doubt that one of the first questions local authorities will ask Ministers when they meet will be, "If you're going to help us in the first year, how are we going to sustain that support?" Every one of us knows the extraordinary pressure that local authority budgets are under.

Turning to the cause of the crisis, the Prime Minister was right to say that it will be solved only when peace and stability return to Syria. Despite considerable efforts, no progress has been made and yesterday the UN envoy, Staffan de Mistura, said there was no more time for a long political process, and he is right. He urged Saudi Arabia and Iran finally to start talking to each other, as Russia, the United States and other countries are doing. We need an urgent diplomatic effort, under the auspices of the United Nations, to work out a future for Syria. It is time that Syria's neighbours started trying to solve the conflict instead of continuing to fuel it. They should also discuss—I understand that this is extremely difficult in Syria—whether it is possible to establish safe havens to help those who are fleeing violence, and they should talk about the humanitarian funding crisis that we have just discussed.

We also have a responsibility, as part of the international coalition, to defeat ISIL/Daesh, politically and militarily, and to confront its brutal ideology. We should be unashamed in proclaiming our values of openness and respect for others in direct opposition to its brutality and ignorance, which have forced so many people to flee for their lives. One of the best ways in which we can give expression to the best of British values is to welcome and take in those who have fled, because we have a long and honourable tradition as a nation of giving shelter to those fleeing further persecution.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene. What really concerns me is that within Syria there are huge numbers of would-be refugees. In my experience people who

have no resources whatsoever, who are traumatised and terrified and who are being beaten up and killed are stuck. It is our duty, as the shadow Secretary of State has said, to sort out what is happening on the ground in Syria as part of an international effort.

Hilary Benn: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, who has great experience in these matters and is a true humanitarian. We need to put as much effort as possible into putting pressure on those who hold in their hands the future of this conflict and its resolution.

I want to reflect on what else this crisis and the wider points it raises tell us. It shows us that the Dublin agreement, which says that people entering Europe should seek asylum in the first country in which they arrive, and the Schengen agreement, which allows free movement but does not apply to the United Kingdom, are both creaking at the seams. It is unsustainable—this was the argument I made to the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) when he intervened earlier—for some countries, just because of their geographical position, to bear the full weight of responsibility for refugees when they clearly cannot cope.

It shows us that the idea that leaving the European Union would somehow make the problem go away is absolute nonsense. A refugee fleeing with her family and her children is not suddenly going to stop at Calais and say, “Ah! Britain’s not in the European Union any more. I’m not going to take another step forward.”

It reminds us that we live in an increasingly interdependent world: what happens in one country will affect all of us who live in another country, even if we happen to be far away. In the 21st century we cannot, as human beings, shut the doors and close the curtains and wish that the rest of the world would go away.

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Hilary Benn: I will give way and then I will bring my remarks to a conclusion.

Nicola Blackwood: A fleeing refugee will stop in the first place they feel safe, and the problem is that many refugees do not feel safe in the camps we are providing. We need to address the insecurity for women and girls in many of the camps. This is a short, medium and long-term problem that we are not yet solving.

Hilary Benn: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Reflecting on my experience of visiting refugee camps in Darfur, that was absolutely the issue. Women were going out to collect firewood and were being attacked or raped. We must provide security. I know that the Government have done a lot of work on that issue in recent times and, again, I applaud them for that. It is more complicated than people thinking, “We are in a place where those who were killing us and who led us to flee are no longer to be found.” Insecurity is about how people feel in their minds about whether they, their family and their children are safe.

We are in this together and the way forward has to be through co-operation with our neighbours, including the rest of the European Union. We are confronted with the painful truth that the world has to be much more effective in dealing with conflicts like this before they

turn into brutal and bloody civil wars. The responsibility to protect was meant to be about that, but let us be honest: in Syria, no responsibility has been taken and nobody has been protected.

We have to recognise that as well as refugees—I come to the point made by the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr Holloway)—many, many other people are seeking to move across the globe to find a better life, in part because of conflict. They are coming not just from Syria, but from Eritrea, Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan and other countries where there is poverty and a lack of economic opportunity. We talk about economic migration, but that is the story of human history.

Mr Holloway: As a television reporter, I lived in the Sangatte camp in Calais and joined people who were being ethnically cleansed in the Balkans. There is an enormous difference between an economic migrant and a refugee. Surely the Prime Minister is absolutely right to focus our cash on places where we know people are refugees and on looking after them, rather than exposing our borders to hundreds of millions of people who are making the perfectly rational decision to seek a better life in Europe.

Hilary Benn: I am well aware that there is a difference; that is precisely the point I am making. However, I am trying to make a broader point about the challenge that this small and fragile planet of ours is facing and will face increasingly over the years ahead.

I am making the point that our human story is a story of economic migration. Whether anyone would describe William the Conqueror as an economic migrant, I do not know, but America, the land of my mother’s birth, certainly was built on economic migration. The story of movement within the European Union is also one of economic migration.

We must look ahead. The world’s population is 7.2 billion people. It is forecast that by the end of this century, it will be 11 billion people. Look at how the population of Nigeria is going to grow. We can already see the tensions and conflicts in countries across north Africa that are created by a lack of jobs, lack of hope and lack of opportunity. We see a generation in those countries who are looking at other parts of the world and seeing opportunity, jobs and hope for the future because of technology. This is the century in which every single one of us is having to lift our eyes to look beyond our own borders and see the lives of others.

Then there is the threat of global climate change. If people can no longer live where they were born because their houses are under water or because there is no water any more, they will do what human beings have done throughout human history: they will move to try to find a life somewhere else. The wave of economic migration we have seen in Europe these past few summers will be as nothing compared with the wave that is to come if we do not act on these issues—to tackle climate change, to fight conflict, to promote economic development and to fight poverty—so that people can build a life for themselves and their families in the land in which they were born.

All of these things are the expression of the fundamental interdependence of humankind. We will not be able to deal with them if we pull up the drawbridge, if we say

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that we have done enough, if we think that they are somebody else's responsibility or if we deny entry to some people because they are supposedly of the wrong religion.

I spoke at the beginning about the reality of the mass movement of refugees, but the rest of us have to face our own painful reality. There has been unanimity of purpose and the expression of generosity so far in this debate, but let us be honest that there are other voices in Europe that are not so generous and who say, "It is too hard for us to help those in trouble." We have a responsibility to say to them, "It is infinitely harder for those whose lives have been changed by circumstance—war, famine, disease—in the most profound way." Our job—the Government's job—is to tell the truth and to lead, because by doing so we have the best chance of giving full expression to that fundamental wish to help that represents the best of our character as human beings.

2.15 pm

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Clearly, this is the worst problem that faces Europe and, quite possibly, the world at the moment.

I listened carefully to the speech by the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson). There is a lot of agreement between his party and the Government. Putting compassion at the heart of our response is central. The Scottish National party wants there to be a compassionate approach and so do the Government. The disagreement is about how we implement the mechanisms to improve the situation for the Syrian people and those who live in neighbouring countries.

I think that we would all accept that there are no simple solutions to this problem, but we need to tackle the problem at source in order to deal with it effectively. We cannot tackle the problems that Syria faces exclusively from outside Syria. We have to go to the root of the problem. We will not find solutions to Syria's problems in Europe. The downside of encouraging refugees to come into this country and processing them here is that it gives a green light to people smugglers and those who wish to exploit refugees further.

Stuart C. McDonald: Is that not the crux of the debate about the balance between relocation and resettlement? Over the past couple of days, I have heard from a number of Government Members the idea that by taking part in EU relocation programmes, we will incentivise other people to make the journey across the Mediterranean. However, the UK has been making it clear for weeks that it will not take part in relocation schemes and it has not deterred a single person from making the crossing. Whatever the terms of the debate, this myth should not be part of it.

Gareth Johnson: I would argue that if we send out a green light to people by saying that if they come over to mainland Europe, they will find sanctuary, there is a huge danger that we will inadvertently encourage people to make the perilous journey that has cost so many lives. It is clear that if we suggest to people that all will be well if they come over the Mediterranean to mainland Europe,

it will encourage more people to take the journey and hundreds more people will die in the boats, as has happened before.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that that was exactly the catastrophic rationale that lay at the heart of the decision in autumn 2014 to suspend Mare Nostrum? That decision was taken on the basis that rescuing people was encouraging more people on to the seas. The decision to suspend Mare Nostrum exacerbated the problem and cost many, many lives, and the folly that he is stating will do the same.

Gareth Johnson: I have to disagree with the hon. Gentleman. There will not be a long-term solution to this problem until we sort out the problems that Syria faces within Syria. If we ensure that there is a safe place to live there, the necessity to make the dangerous journey will go away. That is the positive way forward.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I understand the argument that the hon. Gentleman is making. My problem is that I cannot see how we can give people a sense of hope and a sense that remaining in Syria is their future, when what we are offering to do is either bomb Assad or bomb Daesh. Bombing either side would only strengthen the other, and in the middle there is nothing that can fill the vacuum and provide people with a sense of hope that they can have a safe future in their own land.

Gareth Johnson: I argue that we can give some hope to the people of Syria by investment through the overseas aid budget and by ensuring that it continues. I am very proud of the 0.7% commitment, on which there was almost an all-party consensus. Only one major political party in this country disagreed with that, and its representative is not here in the Chamber—I refer to the UK Independence party. That party was wrong to take that approach, and this whole crisis has illustrated why it is right for this country to provide 0.7% of its GDP to help overseas countries.

Mrs Moon: That international development money is going into the camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey—it is not keeping people in Syria. It is impossible to put international aid into Syria, because there is no one to give aid to there.

Gareth Johnson: I would argue that that money has been spent on education in Syria, on running water in Syria and on improving the quality of life of people living in that region. We have seen time and time again that with the overseas budget we are able to ensure a greater degree of stability. What I have found from refugees is that ultimately they want to go back home. The only way we can give them the hope that the hon. Lady mentioned is by ensuring that there is a chance that one day they can get back home. They will not have that hope unless we have a stable country for them to return to, and we will not get that stability without the investment we are giving.

Angus Robertson: The civil war that has been visited on the people in Syria has, apparently, knocked that country back 40 years, as cities have literally been flattened and entire populations have left. I know that

this is not necessarily within the scope of this debate, but do we not need to begin thinking not only about the scale of the refugee crisis—the humanitarian crisis that we need to address—but in Marshall plan terms, to do for Syria what we failed to do in Libya, where we spent 13 times more on bombing it than we did on winning the peace, and indeed we failed to do in Iraq and Afghanistan?

Gareth Johnson: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman mentioned the example of Iraq, because one lesson that came out of the Iraq war is that there was no plan for what would happen afterwards. He was right about that, and it shows why the investment in those countries is essential. He also rightly said that Syria is going to take years to heal itself after the evil of ISIL and President Assad, which is why it is crucial that we keep investing in the area. The Secretary of State made the point that this is the greatest investment of humanitarian aid that this country has ever made, and it is right that we recognise the importance that this Government have placed on ensuring that that investment is in place and that people are receiving it, because that is the only way, in the long term, that we will resolve this situation.

Simon Hoare: Does my hon. Friend share my concern, which I believe is held by many others, that if we take the argument of those who are supporting this afternoon's motion, we are, in effect, giving carte blanche to Assad and to leaders of other countries to cause widespread disruption and destruction within their own countries because others will just take in the people they do not want? Keeping those Syrians close to Syria in well-run humanitarian camps means that they are a constant reminder to the international community and to Assad as to why Assad and ISIS must be defeated, so that we can then start building peace.

Gareth Johnson: I think we are encouraging people by encouraging the people smugglers and human traffickers to allow people to come over to the Mediterranean and be exploited in that way.

The world response to this problem emanated from the picture that we saw. It is probably unprecedented for a picture to change the way the world sees a particular problem. That painful picture of the young boy is testament to the fact that his family, like many others, believed that the only option open to them was to take that ill-fated journey. The message we have to send out from here and from around the world is that it simply does not need to be like that. We do not need to place obligations on refugees to take a hugely dangerous journey, forcing them to pay people traffickers.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): As the hon. Gentleman may know, one reason why refugees have to take this dangerous overland journey is a European aviation directive which prevents them from flying at a quarter of the cost. The directive means that the criminal gangs will grow, and these people have to cross overseas and are risking their lives. Is there an argument for suspending that directive, with the aim of saving life and ensuring that these people can get to a sanctuary, with the hope of returning to Syria some day? They have to live in order to do that.

Gareth Johnson: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, but my argument is still that the solution to this problem, if there is one, lies in Syria—it does not lie in mainland Europe.

The people who are in the worst situation are those in the camps in Syria. Those in Europe are certainly in need, but they are away from the evils of ISIL and President Assad. I come back to my central point: we have to tackle this issue from its source. I voted for military action in Syria and I would be persuaded to do so again. We have to take direct action against the fascism of ISIL, which, if left unchecked, will continue not only to destabilise the middle east but to act as a launch pad for attacks on the UK.

Let us be clear where the responsibility for this crisis lies. It lies with the actions of ISIL and President Assad, as they have created this exodus of people from Syria. They are currently the greatest threats to the security of this country, so it is right for us to take defensive, direct action against those who mean us harm. Sadly, this is how modern warfare has evolved, and we cannot just ignore people who plan to do us serious harm. We have to tackle the root causes of this problem. There will be occasions when a military approach is right, but it is also right that we do what we can to stabilise Syria and the wider region.

In conclusion, I come back to the speech made by the hon. Member for Moray at the beginning; I think this House has come together in its desire to see compassion for the people of Syria and of the wider region. The difference of opinion is on how we actually achieve that. It is on how we achieve a solution in the short, medium and long terms for the people of Syria and how we stabilise the whole region. It is essential that we ensure that the people of Syria have their future protected and we do not see the sorts of pictures that we have seen, and that we do all we can for the people who live in that region.

2.27 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson), who began and ended his speech with a call for unity, reminding Members that we have heard some powerful speeches about this desperate situation and that even though we, sitting in this Chamber today, cannot solve this problem, it is critical that we discuss it as often as we can.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) on leading this debate and congratulate the Scottish National party on reminding the House over the past few months of the very slow progress that has been made on the Syrian resettlement programme. I offer a mea culpa from me and the Home Affairs Committee, because we have not monitored as we should have done, but we will do so in future, as in order to make progress on resettlement we need to know that the process is actually working. I also commend my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), because many months ago she initiated an Adjournment debate about the Mediterranean crisis.

Two years ago, the Select Committee visited the border between Turkey and Greece, where we saw for ourselves that 100,000 people were crossing the border every year. The real organisation and institution that

[Keith Vaz]

has failed the refugees is not this House or this Government, but the European Union, and I say that as one of its great supporters. The failure of the EU to put together a strategy over the past few years to deal with an inevitable crisis is a very serious indictment of that organisation. Although we have had many speeches from Mr Juncker and others in the last few weeks, if they had acted sooner we would all have been better prepared. Greece and Italy have been asking for support for many years. Greece has been saying that it needs additional financial support. Those refugees who cross from Turkey to Faliiraki in Greece were allowed to stay there for only six months. They then travelled to Athens and they headed to northern Europe. Some 92% of those who cross into Italy come from the failed state of Libya, and the Italians have been asking for support over the last year but it has never been forthcoming. Now it is a crisis for the whole of the EU.

It is right that we should congratulate the Prime Minister and the Government on announcing that we will take 20,000 refugees. I am not convinced that the timescale is appropriate to the crisis, and that is why yesterday the Home Affairs Committee—the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins) was also present—pressed the Minister for Immigration for a target for each year. He was unable to give us a target, and I think that is wrong. We need to make sure that we hold the Government to account, not because we do not trust them to deliver on the 20,000 in five years, but because Ministers' officials will understand the seriousness of the situation only if we have constant scrutiny and a desire to make things work. If we can have a net migration target, I do not see why we cannot have a target for the number of refugees to enter this year. That can be done and is deliverable, and if the Minister puts his mind to it at his weekly meetings with his directors general he can make sure that the target is implemented. What better way to convince the House of the sincerity of the Government's pledge—the Prime Minister has been very sincere—than to come back before the House at the end of this year and give us a figure that we can all be very proud of? It would be easy to do that, and I hope that the Government will do so.

The second issue I am concerned about is the fact that the resettlement of the Syrian refugees will be led by Cabinet Ministers who are already very busy. I welcome the committee that has been set up under the joint chairmanship of the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, but what we need is a proper resettlement board. We saw that for ourselves in Leicester when Idi Amin expelled the Ugandan Asians. Without the structure of a resettlement board—independent of Whitehall but of course drawing its authority from Parliament and the Government and necessarily getting resources from the Government—to deal with the people who come here, we will have many problems in dealing with the resettlement of Syrian refugees.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): On my right hon. Friend's point about organisation, as a former council leader I know that council leaders have so much on their minds at the moment and that dumping this in their laps would be completely the wrong thing to do. We also know about the important interface with

the NHS, especially with counselling services. Demand for those services is huge at the moment, and I am particularly worried about the influx of non-English speakers—in the Leicester situation, many of the arrivals spoke English. I am also worried about specialist counselling services for people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Keith Vaz: We all share those worries, and that is why it is important that a proper structure is created.

My final point is about north Africa and how we deal with it. I have just come back from Tunisia, where I visited the hotel at which 38 British citizens were sadly murdered. I had meetings with Tunisian Ministers about how they were dealing with the migration crisis. They were doing well. They were showing great humanitarian support and deploying their navy to ensure that the people traffickers in their waters were dealt with, and economic migrants were returned to their countries humanely. We should compare that with Tunisia's neighbour, Libya, where there is no control and the criminal gangs are operating.

I know that the Minister for Immigration is focused on what is happening in Europol, and we need to give it more resources. The Secretary of State for International Development talked about the taskforce that has been set up, but it has not been set up yet—it will be set up by November. It will be based in Sicily and will involve the National Crime Agency and other organisations. Europol is the only organisation that can deal with all the countries of the European Union and bring to the table expertise in dealing with criminal gangs, but it has not been given any additional resources for that task. I hope that the Minister for Immigration or the Home Secretary will make the point at the meeting next week about the importance of supporting that organisation. Unfortunately, Frontex has been a bit of a failure in dealing with those issues—we cannot of course be in Frontex formally because we are not in Schengen—and has not alerted others to the problems caused by the migration crisis.

We need to make sure that something is done to deal with the criminal gangs. The Prime Minister and others are keen not to send messages to the people traffickers by accepting people who have already arrived in the European Union, and I understand that. I understand why recruitment has to be direct from the camps, but there will be exceptional cases, such as Syrian refugees who have made it all the way to Calais—as the House knows, the mayor of Calais appeared before my Committee yesterday. To expect them to go all the way back to the camps in order to come to the United Kingdom would be unfair. I accept the general principle—once we announce we will take people from everywhere, the traffickers will take €10,000 from people to get them across the Mediterranean—but we need to be able to make exceptions for exceptional cases. We need to address that lack of flexibility.

Stuart C. McDonald: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that applies in particular to those at Calais who have family and friends in the United Kingdom? As we both know, the mayor of Calais confirmed yesterday that in her experience significant numbers of those in Calais were in that situation.

Keith Vaz: I agree absolutely. People have those links and they choose to make the journey all the way to Calais because they want to come to the United Kingdom. We should not be in a competition over which country welcomes refugees better than others. As a migrant who came from war-torn Yemen with my two sisters, I think this is the best country in the world. The support and encouragement that Leicester, which is now a mirror of the world, gives to those who come as migrants is second to none, so we do not need to take any lessons from anybody about the way in which migrants are treated, but we need to be cautious about setting our face against sensible measures just because they do not fit a particular norm.

Mr MacNeil: The right hon. Gentleman perhaps embodies my point. There is often concern when we think of refugees and migrants arriving, but a short while later they become indispensable within the community and we could not imagine the place we live in without them. He typifies that point.

Keith Vaz: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right—*[Laughter.]* We take compliments when they are given. The community has gone around the whole country, whether in Putney, Leeds or the constituency that I cannot pronounce—I will say Banff and Buchan instead—as I have seen from the entries for the Tiffin cup this year, and has contributed so much.

We have a leadership role to play on this issue. The Prime Minister has played an important role. He cares about the migrant community in this country, as I have observed over the last five years—I have attended many functions of the ethnic minority communities with him in that time—but this issue will be a defining moment. Making the pledge to take 20,000 is not the same as receiving 20,000. That is why I go back to what I said at the beginning of my speech. Hard though it is for Ministers to tell officials, we need targets and we need a substantial number coming in by the end of this year, not just for our reputation, but for our conscience and for the wishes of the British people.

2.39 pm

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): I am pleased to follow the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), with whom I had the pleasure of attending an oral evidence session yesterday. I welcome the Prime Minister's statement on welcoming 20,000 more refugees directly from camps in Syria and giving a further £100 million in aid to bring our financial assistance in the region to more than £1 billion.

The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), who is not in his seat, urged us to look at the text of the motion. I have done exactly that, and I must confess that I am disappointed by its title "Humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean and Europe". I believe that this is a worldwide humanitarian crisis that demands a worldwide humanitarian response.

Other hon. Members will no doubt focus on whether countries outside Europe are doing what they can to help people in need in Syria, but the fact is that the United Kingdom is leading the world in this. We have already invested £900 million in refugee camps, which is

the second highest figure in the world and higher than that of any other European country. Frankly, that figure is unimaginable. What does it mean? It means 400 million relief packages, clean sanitation for nearly 7 million people and food rations for 18 million people. It is helping many more people in the region than any resettlement programme can hope to help in Europe. Moreover, that real, practical help in the region has been happening since February 2012.

I am pleased that the further £100 million will mean that more children and families are helped in the immediate vicinity of their home country. It is a genuinely compassionate response to help people near their homes. We must have an eye to the future. As I pointed out on Monday, when the Prime Minister made his statement, Syria will need its brightest and its best to help rebuild its future. By helping people near their homes, we are maximising the chances of that happening.

As a new Member, I am very conscious of the collaborative approach in the Chamber today, so I hope that what I am about to say is taken in the sense in which I mean it—as a genuine inquiry. The hon. Member for Moray and the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) have focused on the number of refugees we are accepting, but we are taking the different approach of focusing on need, rather than numbers. The sobering reality is that there is no magic number. Syria has 11 million displaced people. The United Kingdom cannot possibly absorb all the people in Syria who need help; frankly, neither can the continent of Europe. That is before we begin to look at other parts of the world that are suffering from conflict.

Yesterday, under the eminent chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Leicester East, the Home Affairs Committee discussed the issue of Calais with the mayor of Calais. She told us that 3,500 people in Calais are currently seeking refuge, coming not just from Syria, but from all sorts of troubled parts of the world, including Eritrea, Sudan and Yemen. To put that into perspective, the population of Eritrea is 5 million and the population of Sudan is 40 million. We cannot possibly hope to give a home to every person in places of great difficulty and trouble, no matter how much we wish we could.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): I offer this response in the spirit in which the hon. Lady is speaking. It is a mathematical truth that one is more than none and that each additional life that we can make better is an improvement on what we have been doing. The problem is that the Government have been too slow and helped too few.

Victoria Atkins: I will come on to the hon. Lady's point in terms of what can be managed locally, but if I may, I will continue to talk about the text of the motion, which I hope will develop my argument and counter her point.

The text refers to refugees in Europe being absorbed as part of the humanitarian response. Given what the mayor of Calais said yesterday, how do we choose who to take out of the 3,500 people currently in Calais? How do we say to someone, "No, we're not going to resettle you or give you a home because you are from Eritrea rather than from Syria"?

[Victoria Atkins]

We must also take into account the very practical problems on the ground in Calais, such as the deliberate destruction of paperwork. When people are trafficked, the criminal gangs tell them, “Destroy your paperwork—then they can’t tell where you come from and send you back.” Although I understand the call to accept refugees who are already in Europe, how on earth can that be accomplished realistically, given such practicalities? Is not the much better approach to take people who we know are Syrian refugees in refugee camps in that area? They are in desperate need, because they are the most vulnerable and are often unable to make the journeys that some people in Europe have made.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a very important and impassioned speech. She has made the important point that this is not just about Europe, but is wider than that. Does she share my pleasure that the Prime Minister said in his remarks on Monday that, as well as Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, he would encourage other Arab nations, such as Saudi Arabia, to take on further responsibilities to ensure that not only countries in Europe but those in the region take greater responsibility for this very important task?

Victoria Atkins: Indeed. As I have said, this is a worldwide humanitarian crisis and it demands a worldwide response. We would hope that other nations in the middle east, who are closer than we are to Syria, could begin to play their part.

We must not ignore the role that criminal gangs play in this incredibly important and emotive issue. They are profiting from this situation. In my previous life, I prosecuted serious organised crime. A couple of years ago, I worked on a case in which we prosecuted the biggest gang trafficking people from Iraq. At that time, although it may since have changed, the going rate for each person trying to get from Iraq to the UK was £15,000. Let us not do anything to help these criminals, but make it as difficult as possible for them to operate and to ply their trade. That is why I believe it is so important to focus on refugee camps, rather than on people who are already in Europe. By focusing on the camps, we can help to prevent people from making such treacherous journeys across from Syria to European soil.

What should our approach be in the UK? We must ensure that every offer of help from our local councils and charities is part of a clear-headed and realistic approach to accommodating such people and giving them the care that they need not just now, but in the years ahead. We must listen to our local areas to ensure that they are asked to help only in ways that they can manage. Frankly, some areas will be able to help more than others, because of the availability of housing stock and so on.

I am very pleased to have had many conversations with the leader of my council, East Lindsey District Council, to see what we can realistically do in the years ahead. There have been lots of conversations in the House about how we can help locally. One idea I may propose is for my council to set up a fund to which local people can donate money so that it can be used to help Syrian refugees. I would be interested to hear the ideas of other hon. Members.

Any help given locally must be manageable, not just now but in the longer term. Sadly, this issue is not going to go away. The issue of humanitarian and refugee needs will remain with us for as long as there is conflict in the world. A measured, reasoned and principled approach is therefore vital. That is why I am so pleased by the measures announced by the Prime Minister this week and the action we have taken in the past two years.

2.50 pm

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): I see Conservative Members looking irritated, confused even, by the criticism from Opposition Members. I understand that. We see things a little differently. They believe they are being philanthropic, charitable even, and we believe they are simply fulfilling a moral obligation. They come from a political ideology that says individuals should be encouraged to keep as much as possible of the material goods they gather. We believe we should share those material goods when we have them with those who do not. It is shades of grey, of course. Many of us on these Benches probably do not share as much as we say we want to; and of course Government Members do believe in some wealth distribution, otherwise we would have no welfare state—such as it is—no NHS and no public schooling.

The fundamental difference, however, is that Conservative Members see a generous Government who were the first to meet the UN target on overseas aid and who on Monday offered refuge to an additional 20,000 people. Credit where credit is due, as others as have said. The former is an achievement of which they should be proud, with the caveat mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), and the latter means that we will indeed welcome 20,000 men, women and children who, I expect, will be forever glad of that decision. It is much better than where we were a few days ago.

The trouble for those of us who offer criticism is partly the number of refugees. After all, Germany can take 800,000, which is 40 times what we are prepared to take. Germany is not 40 times our size, and, to my knowledge, it is not 40 times richer. It is more about attitude. Had it not been for the public outcry and the political pressure, the clear indication was that this Government had no intention of taking anywhere near that number.

Catherine West: I am not sure if the hon. Lady is aware that there will be a national day of action in London this Saturday. I am sure many colleagues will not necessarily be in London, but it will add voice. It is being organised by a constituent of mine, Ros Ereira. I hope that others will be able to join in, or at least spread the word by tweets and so on, so we can do a bit more awareness raising on the importance of this crucial issue.

Anne McLaughlin: I think I have tweeted about that. There is also one in Glasgow and one in Edinburgh. I think they being called the same name as part of a bigger thing.

The point I was making is that the annoyance on the Opposition Benches comes from the Government appearing not to be doing this for the right reasons, but just to get the politicians and the public off their back.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): Will the hon. Lady not acknowledge that the UK has been one of the largest donors on the ground in many of the countries where there are refugees? That is thanks to the actions of this Government.

Anne McLaughlin: That is in the wording of the motion. Of course I accept that, otherwise I would not be speaking in support of the motion. I think I have made it clear that this is not just criticism for the sake of it. I have given credit where I think it is due.

Yesterday, during the debate on refugees, some Conservative Members were constantly barracking Labour Members with the words “How many? How many?” For those Members, it seemed to be simply about scoring points. I understand why Labour Members did not want to put a figure on it, because surely it depends on need, as the hon. Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins) pointed out—although I think we are taking a slightly different tack on that one. That is not me saying no limits on numbers; I am saying let us work out a minimum, and work with other countries—again, something this Government seem loth to do—and then let us respond to the need.

It is not just in the mismatch between words and action that this Government’s rhetoric has been a disgrace. The Government and the Prime Minister have repeatedly used dehumanising rhetoric to discuss the desperate plight of these refugees. I am not going to repeat that dehumanising rhetoric.

I would like to turn to the incredible response from the people of the United Kingdom, including organisations such as Scotland Supporting Refugees, which made clear its desire for its Government to respond. I am, of course, delighted that many people new to the debate have become among the most passionate advocates for asylum seekers. The image of a three-year-old child, his body lying motionless washed up on a beach in Turkey, has awakened something in the public consciousness. I have heard those people be accused of jumping on a bandwagon—not from anyone here, it has to be said. I would not criticise people who previously took no interest. Caring is hard work. It takes up a lot of emotional energy. There are so many atrocities and there is so much pain that I do not blame people who previously chose to believe the rhetoric that suggested that many seeking refuge were simply “at it”. Sometimes it is easier to believe that than to face up to the fact that this can be a terrible, terrible world with many wicked and powerful people in it. Once you face up to it and open your eyes, however, there is no going back. You either have to harden your heart or you have to do something. And thousands of people have chosen to take action. They are now very aware of the reasons why so many people take their lives in their hands in search of a safe haven.

I appeal to all of those caught up in the wave of support for the refugees currently arriving in Europe and currently waiting in Syria for sanctuary to spare a thought for the many already living among us in the UK. I know a woman, a Kurdish woman, who lives in Glasgow. She is a lovely quiet woman. She does not have much English, but she is very friendly. She smiles a lot and nods to everyone she passes in the street. She is a quiet, unassuming woman who is content to shop every day for bits and pieces, feed her children and smile at her neighbours. Three years ago, I visited Kurdistan.

I found myself in what had been Saddam Hussein’s headquarters where many people had been held, tortured and sometimes murdered. I discovered that this lovely unassuming Glasgow woman, who appeared not to have a care in the world, had spent years in the very room in which I was standing being brutally tortured for refusing to give up her beloved husband to Saddam Hussein. The torture rooms now form part of a museum. The curators took a decision not to remove the blood stains. Some of that blood will have been hers. She is no exception. She is here as a refugee, but she is not an exception.

I had to choose, from the many people I know, whose story to highlight today. The right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) talked of the horrific journeys that people go through to get sanctuary. I appeal to hon. Members and to the wider public to remember that it is not possible to see inside someone’s head. It is not possible to see the memories that they will live with forever. There is no way of knowing the terror your neighbour, colleague, school friend or even your postman has experienced. So please, keep aside a little kindness and friendship for those refugees not being featured on Facebook, who do not talk of what they have been through to get here but who are already part of our communities and trying do their best to live decent lives here in the United Kingdom.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that the Prime Minister is right to also concentrate on the 11 million who have been displaced in the region, the quality of those refugee camps that Britain is paying for and to make sure that we are not saying, “Make the journey to Europe.” What we are saying is, “If possible, stay in the region, in these camps.” Is it not also right to take firm enforcement action against the people smugglers? They are the criminals responsible for the death of young Alan Kurdi. He was killed because they cast him adrift in a dinghy in the Mediterranean.

Anne McLaughlin: I think the hon. and learned Member knows very well that I did not say anything that would disagree with either of those premises.

Alison McGovern: I want to support what the hon. Lady is saying. She did not say anything to disagree with that. Rather, she did something profoundly important, which is to share the lived experience of those we are here to represent. That is why we learn the lessons of this outpouring of support for the refugees, and we shape our country according to those moral values.

Anne McLaughlin: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention.

My city of Glasgow is built on the back of those fleeing crisis: cleared highlanders whose houses were burned down so they could never return; Irishmen and women looking for refuge after the famine; Jewish families from the Baltic fleeing pogroms under the Tsars; and more recent refugees who have come and established themselves in Glasgow, many in my constituency.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for making such a passionate speech. I have not heard anyone mention—perhaps I just missed it—those

[Jim Shannon]

countries that have not accepted any refugees, such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates. Do countries in the region not need to accept people and take some of the pressure off everyone else?

Anne McLaughlin: I do not disagree. I think my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart McDonald) made that point yesterday. Of course I am not saying the United Kingdom is the worst country in the world at taking asylum seekers and refugees. There are countries that are not doing anything and should be doing something.

It is always worth repeating—and I do it now—that Glasgow welcomes refugees and Scotland welcomes refugees. I am probably not going to win many fans today by admitting that for once I was not too upset to see my beloved Scotland football team being beaten on Monday evening. [HON. MEMBERS: “What?”] If that is the response, I think my hon. Friends and the many Scots on the other Benches might feel I have gone a step too far when I admit that part of me even cheered on the team that beat us—I am sorry. In all seriousness, if we had to lose—and it seems that for a change we did—I cannot currently think of a better country to lose to than Germany. The way in which the German Federal Government and, more importantly, the ordinary people of Germany have opened their borders, their homes and their hearts to fellow human beings in desperate need has been nothing short of inspirational. And if my team wants to let them win at football by way of thanks, so be it.

The United Kingdom has the capacity to do so much more in this crisis. The people of the UK have made it clear that they want the Government to do more to save lives. I urge the Government to think about how they would like their response to this humanitarian disaster to be remembered in the history books and to act accordingly.

3.2 pm

Caroline Ansell (Eastbourne) (Con): I am afraid I am obliged to disagree with the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) on a variety of points, not least Scotland's lack of success. It might be little known on the Opposition Benches that I have Scottish heritage, Walter Smith being part of that extended family. She does well to pay tribute to Germany's contribution, but we must be incredibly careful, as previously said, not to enter into a bidding war. We must not compare, like for like, each country's contribution. Germany is in a distinctly different position. It has a falling birth rate, whereas ours is rising significantly. It is the same with land mass. Across Europe, each country is differently placed to provide help in the current crisis.

Yesterday, we heard many excellent contributions, and today likewise. Yesterday, the shadow Home Secretary closed with a call to each of us to remember the Kindertransport and everything it meant. There are huge parallels with that moment in history—the tyranny, persecution and crisis—but there is a further parallel to draw that has significant resonance to the matter at hand: people being driven from their homes and communities and separated from their families. That is

what we are seeing today. I will return later to those particularly important themes of home and family in conjunction with what we must do.

We stepped up, back in the day. Opposition Members have been good enough to recognise the lead the Prime Minister has taken in the crisis and acknowledge that we should be proud of our contribution. What is our aid doing? It is reaching millions: we have provided 18 million food rations; 1.6 million people have access to clean water; and 2.4 million have access to medical consultation, relief packages and sanitation. These are hugely important interventions we are making. In addition, the Home Secretary did full justice to our work safeguarding and protecting the most vulnerable victims, notably women and girls.

It was asked at the start whether we were doing everything we could, and that means more than humanitarian aid. This can be no better put than in the words of Oxfam's chief executive:

“Providing life-saving support to the millions of people affected by this devastating conflict is essential but it is not enough.”

Resettling refugees from Syria will not solve the crisis. They and we must dig in for a long-term, sustainable political solution. It will be head and heart. In that spirit, we must address the root causes of the crisis, including Assad's tyranny of the Syrian people. We must also degrade and defeat ISIS and not pump-prime the trafficking gangs pedalling human misery. Before Syria loses too many more of its sons and daughters, we must provide lasting help—to return to the Kindertransport—and that means homeland. We must champion the millions of people left behind, as well as providing urgent care and support for those making the journey. It is right that we focus on that pressing and desperate need.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North East talked of irritation on the Government Benches. I hear compassion and a difference of opinion about how best to meet the challenge, but surely we can recapture the unity with which we started this debate, because this is so much bigger than all of us—bigger than this Parliament, bigger than this country. I urge a return to that unity. I was pleased that the shadow Home Secretary talked, alongside humanitarian aid, about the need for military support to re-establish peace and stability. We will need unity around that also. Yesterday in the House, we heard of two known extremists who presented a real and present danger to people in our country, and there was question and challenge—quite properly—about that situation. In addition to compassion for those in need, we need courage in relation to the very many more who have a greater need than that.

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): The hon. Lady says we have to tackle the problems, but as Jean-Claude Juncker said yesterday, what is the point in fighting Daesh if we are not willing to accept those fleeing Daesh?

Caroline Ansell: And so we are. We have already accepted 5,000 under normal asylum-seeking processes, and we are to accept a further 20,000 more—not the 10,000 proposed by Oxfam, but 20,000 more. That is a considerable contribution, alongside our considerable humanitarian aid. With that, I end my speech.

3.10 pm

Martin John Docherty (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in what I believe is one of the most important debates that has taken place here for some years. I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) for bringing it to the Floor of the House. Before I proceed, I would also like to commend the comments of the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), with which many on the SNP Benches will of course agree.

We are all aware of the raft of statistics that underpin this debate. At the moment, while many will have welcomed the Prime Minister's statement yesterday, what we are offering is still technically below the average among European Union members for asylum applications per head of population. As we all know, until recently, only 216 Syrian nationals were resettled in the United Kingdom through the Syrian vulnerable persons relocation scheme. If Members wish to question that, I would direct them in the first instance to the Library, where they will find the document published on 7 December that clearly stipulates it.

I appreciate that we are being conciliatory in this debate, but it is sometimes hard, given my nature, to do that. While the British Government seem like bystanders in this calamity, as we speak, swathes of humanity from the foot of Mount Ararat itself to the Berlin Hauptbahnhof are reaching out across the European continent seeking shelter and refuge—yet not here, not now, although perhaps by the end of what will be called, to our eternal shame, “the refugee Parliament”. I am told that I can take six in my constituency, and they are more than welcome—the more, the merrier.

I am sure that Members, or at least those of us old enough to remember—my hon. Friend the Member for Moray spoke about this earlier—have a feeling of impending déjà vu, as we have been here before. Who here could easily replace boats of Syrians and Libyans with those fleeing the collapse of the former Indo-China and the disaster of communism as it lapped across Cambodia, Laos and, of course, Vietnam, bringing Europe and the world face-to-face with the boat people?

As it did then, this Parliament—and, I am afraid, the Government—limits the ambition of the communities across all of these islands for those who even now seek to reach out beyond the limitations of this place and its perverse choices. Communities such as my own in West Dunbartonshire are even now adopting a cross-party approach through local community-led co-ordination and leadership, seeking to assist and give refuge, when and if the opportunity is afforded us, to those in peril who are fleeing aggression and, yes, even economic catastrophe. Speaking as the vice-chairman of the all-party group on civil society and volunteering, I am sure Members will agree and recognise the voluntary action that my community, along with so many others, are undertaking at this grave moment in our history, as mentioned by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon).

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): In the hon. Gentleman's role as the champion for the voluntary sector, is he aware of any other places, apart from own Hornsey and Wood Green constituency, that are making similar efforts? My constituency is going to

acquire and provide aid to refugees the weekend after next. There is also a bookshop collecting goods, as well as a school where the children are spending their own pocket money to buy blankets, books and so on. Is he aware of any other constituency where there is so much of an effort to help refugees in this crisis?

Martin John Docherty: I am grateful for that intervention, but I am sure that we are all aware of those types of organisations and individuals committing their time through volunteering to help those in need. I have also heard about food banks in Scotland deciding to donate food parcels to those in Calais.

I am sure that some in this Chamber could do without a history lesson, but if this House were ever in need of a history lesson, it would be now. It is a lesson in mass migration, brought about, from my perspective, by failed and inept historical foreign policy. Important choices made go as far back as the peace of Versailles, which brought about the very construction of Syria and so many other nations of the middle east. The decision was taken in 1953 to overthrow a democratically elected Government and to replace it with a truly despotic monarchy in Iran. Then there is the holding up of the regime of Assad and, of course, the invasion of Iraq. This is a hard lesson, one fraught with the disaster whose name we all know—radicalisation. It is a disaster at the expense of the poor and vulnerable—women, children, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. I hope that the Minister will recommend that the Secretary of State engages in broad discussions with charitable and voluntary groups, including LGBT community organisations across the United Kingdom, about how they can play their part in the debate, especially when some people are fleeing persecution that is based on their sexual and gender identity.

It will be a dreadful and historic failure, as recognised by many on the Opposition Benches, if our inaction is continued. I can speak for many of us on the SNP side as the children and grandchildren of the lowest of the low in this debate—economic migrants, just like so many now seeking refuge from Syria, north Africa and across the globe, as Members have mentioned.

SNP Members and those who elect us have long memories. We can smell the stench of poverty that underpins this crisis, and we at least will find some comfort that our Government in Edinburgh are seeking to accept 1,000 refugees—not as a cap or limit, but as a starting point in opening our doors to the world. We in Scotland, like so many across these islands, stand ready in the best traditions of Scotland to offer sanctuary to those desperately in need. We are, after all, “Jock Tamson's bairns.” This is not the first time that this House has debated such a catastrophe and such appalling suffering. From the very distant past, those debates in this House should inform our debate today.

It is to those very debates that I turn to plead with the British Government on behalf of the destitute and the poor fleeing economic catastrophe and aggression. They are in your hands, and in your power. If you do not save them, they cannae save themselves. I solemnly call upon you to recollect that we predict that many will perish unless you come to their relief.

I am no Daniel O'Connell, yet his plea in 1847 in this very Chamber, prompted by the economic catastrophe that was the plight of the famine, rings as true today as

[*Martin John Docherty*]

it did then. Our response to him is “let them in”. My own constituency finds its heritage sullied and darkened by that great episode as it stretched across the entire isle of Ireland and across swathes of Scotland and the north of England.

This Government must act without delay. I tell the Minister that I am very much aware of the personal commitment and passion of the Secretary of State on this issue, which I hope he will take back to the Secretary of State, but we must opt into the EU relocation scheme and allow this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to play its part in the true understanding of a family of nations. The UK Government must critically fulfil their leadership in New York this month, as they sign the impending sustainable development goals. They are the rallying cry for this debate: “leave no one behind.”

3.20 pm

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin John Docherty). Let me gently mention to him that I speak as the daughter of a South African migrant nurse who left apartheid South Africa in the early 1970s and arrived here with £5 in her pocket.

The International Development Secretary is right to say that this is not a distant crisis, but one for which we bear a moral responsibility, and, moreover, one that we feel is closely connected to us. That is certainly how many people feel in my constituency, where there has been a surge of support and where offers of help have come from all sides. I agree with the motion's call for clarification on straightforward practical fronts, because the decisions that we make in this place to take more refugees, and the offers of help that are pouring in, will need to be co-ordinated and delivered by our local authorities. They do that willingly and they do it generously, but what we are asking will be challenging, and we must be as clear as possible, as soon as possible, so that we can deliver effectively what we promise.

We have heard a great deal today about our tackling the problem at source, and about the drivers of the crisis. In 2013, two years into the Syrian crisis, I visited Lebanon and met refugees in makeshift camps in the Beka'a valley and in the Shatila camp in Beirut. Already 80,000 had died in the conflict, and already refugee numbers were reaching a fifth of the Jordanian population and a quarter of the Lebanese population. No one can question the generosity of our humanitarian response to date. As we have heard, we are the second biggest bilateral donor, and the biggest donor in the European Union. No one in the Chamber should take this lightly, for that money saves lives: it saves the lives of people who are in the greatest peril.

In Lebanon, I met schoolteachers, business owners, police officers and aid workers. Some were local, while others were experts who had been shipped in from hotspots elsewhere to troubleshoot. I was trying to get a sense of how a country copes with that kind of influx, but it is not those conversations that have stayed with me. In Shatila, I met women and girls who had fled

from southern Syria. They told me that they had received warnings over the internet that their community was about to be attacked. All the women and children had left on foot that night. Four days later, their entire village was razed to the ground. They did not know what had happened to their husbands and brothers, some of whom were still in Syria fighting.

Menal, a beautiful 19-year-old, sat there silently. She was not crying, but tears were falling down her face. Eventually I asked her what was wrong, and she said that she felt in danger all the time, and that in the camp the Lebanese police had no jurisdiction. All that she wanted to do was go back home to Syria, but she now had no home to go to: it had been bombed out of existence. Her final words to me should haunt us in this Chamber, and should remind us of the despair that drives this crisis. She said, “I was going to go to university next year. What will I do now?”

Without exception, all the Syrians to whom I have spoken since the crisis want their country back. They want their lives back. The Syrians whom I met in Lebanon were anything but economic refugees looking for new lives in Europe; they wanted to stay as close to home as possible, ready to go back and rebuild their country as soon as it was safe. Since then, however, the fighting has dragged on, and the situation has deteriorated markedly.

As the International Development Secretary says, our refugee response models do not match the scale and the time frame of this crisis. Insecurity for women and girls in the camps means that we are seeing families face the terrible choice of having to marry off 11 and 12-year-old daughters to strangers just to keep them safe. In countries such as Jordan, which is trying to maintain a delicate political balance, refugees are not permitted for fear of destabilisation. Unsurprisingly, the majority of refugees in Jordan have chosen not to live in the camps, and many are trying to eke out a living illegally in the cities. As we have heard, access to primary education—let alone secondary education—can also be hard to come by.

Given that context, it is not surprising that some refugees are losing hope, putting themselves at extreme risk at the hands of people-smugglers, and coming to the European Union in search of safety and some kind of future. We must ensure that refugees who are already in the EU find sanctuary, but I, too, accept the core principle set out by the Prime Minister in his statement on Monday. As we seek to do everything we can, we must not act as recruiters for criminal gangs and people-smugglers who are preying on the most vulnerable people. However, I also accept the principle that was set out by the shadow Foreign Secretary, that our humanitarian response must be on the basis of greatest need. That is why I think the Prime Minister is right to say that we will take 20,000 refugees from UNHCR camps in the region.

There can be no doubt that those camps, where refugees face insecurity, lack of education and no job opportunities, are the point of greatest need. There can be no doubt they are entirely unsuitable for the most vulnerable refugees—victims of torture and chemical weapon attacks, and unaccompanied children. I also share the view of the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) that the principle of greatest need may well extend to exceptional cases from the EU.

Let me end by saying that if we are to have any hope of genuinely tackling the problem at source, our efforts to combat ISIL and disrupt people-smugglers will have to be matched by the delivery of a new model of humanitarian response that is fit for a crisis on this scale and with this time frame. We need camps that are safe for women and girls, we need primary and secondary education to be available to refugees in the region so that girls like Menal do not despair, and we need innovative solutions that offer job opportunities to refugees.

I completely understand why countries such as Jordan are trying to preserve a delicate political balance, and do not want refugees to enter their labour market, but de-skilling an entire generation of Syrians—the very Syrians whom we want to return and rebuild their fragile post-conflict countries—is in no one's interests. I encourage the Minister to consider the proposal by Paul Collier, a pre-eminent development economist, for job havens. That is a solution which the EU could offer now, and which would restore hope to many.

This country has a proud history of giving sanctuary to those who are fleeing conflict, and of protecting the persecuted. In the midst of one of the worst forced migration crises in our history, it is our job to find new and better ways to respond. We must not be the generation that fails this test of humanity.

3.27 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The Government are correct to emphasise what they are getting right: the 0.7% of gross national income spent on development, the £1 billion allocated to relief around Syria, and, indeed, the 20,000 refugees who will now be welcomed to Britain—although I believe that, without the public pressure, that would not have happened. However, as the motion says, it is too little, and it is misconceived to look at a five-year period when the immediate crisis is now and we do not know what the crisis will be in five years' time.

I hope that Members will understand if I choose to concentrate on what the Government are not getting right at the moment. There is a rigidity in their approach, a desire to hold the line at the concessions that they have made so far. I do not think that that does any service either to the refugees or to our reputation internationally.

Three points particularly troubled me in the statements made in this debate and yesterday's debate and the Prime Minister's statement on Monday. The first—this goes to the heart of the motion—is the idea that we should opt out of the crisis in Europe and look only at the situation in the camps bordering Syria. Yesterday my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) referred to her experience of helping out at a refugee station in Kos earlier this summer, and the conditions she described there are at least as bad as those in the camps in Lebanon or Jordan. Some 50,000 refugees arrived in Greece in one month, and we know that Greece simply cannot cope. We are dodging our responsibility as a European nation and EU member. It is not fair to draw a line at the channel, and to be one of only three of the 27 EU countries not prepared to act collectively. I fear that this is more to do with the internal politics of the Conservative party or indeed European referendum politics. It is frankly embarrassing to hear refugees speaking in English in European countries

about the German Chancellor and the people of Germany as their salvation when for centuries our country has been the leading light for Europe in providing refuge to those who are dispossessed.

Secondly, while understanding the priority given to Syria where the refugee crisis is worse than anywhere else, the Government are wrong and illogical to limit the relief simply to those who are refugees in Syria. I refer specifically here to the situation in the north of Iraq. It cannot be lost on anyone who has listened to the Prime Minister or the Defence Secretary that the Government see little or no difference between the causes of the refugee crisis in Iraq and that in Syria, and in particular the role of Daesh in terrorising and persecuting anybody who does not adhere to its perverted fanaticism.

The Yazidi, Shi'a, Christian and many Sunni citizens of Mosul and the occupied areas have suffered terribly at the hands of Daesh and thousands have fled, principally to Kurdish-controlled regions. Despite the hospitality and military protection afforded by the Kurdish people, the plight of these refugees is desperate. Many countries including France—including even Australia—have recognised this; Britain has not.

In particular, the vulnerable persons relocation scheme has not been extended to Iraq. This has been a completely inadequate scheme so far—only 250-odd people have benefited from it—but I am hopeful in the light of the Prime Minister's announcement that it will now function. It should, however, function for Iraqi refugees from Daesh as well, not least because there are a quarter of a million Syrian refugees in Iraq as well as in other surrounding countries. I hope the Prime Minister and the Minister responding today will deal with that point. The Prime Minister certainly did not do so when I asked him the question on Monday and he said that Iraq has a Government. That is perhaps literally true, but it is no comfort for those refugees, and I am afraid the Secretary of State has not answered the point either. Nor have I had a response to my letter to the Foreign Secretary on this subject of 7 August. It would be nice to receive one.

I declare an interest thus far in that the Iraqi Catholic community in the UK is based at Holy Trinity church in Brook Green in my constituency, and it is a settled, prosperous community who would wish to welcome their relatives who are currently suffering so greatly. However, I do not make a special case for Christian refugees any more than for Muslim or those of any other religion or of none; we have a duty to refugees in Iraq as much as to those in Syria. My constituents in Hammersmith—46% of whom were, at the time of the last census, born outside the UK—absolutely understand not only our moral obligation but the wealth of experience and indeed the economic power of refugees, and that refugees have in great part made this country what it is today. This is an act of generosity, but it is also an act of self-interest. I cannot see that that is inconsistent and that is why I find the Government's actions surprising.

The third and potentially most troubling point is the Government's conflation of military action and the refugee crisis, which we heard in the Prime Minister's statement on Monday. I agree with the Prime Minister that we have to address the long-term causes of the refugee crisis, and that requires a stable Government in Syria which means not only Daesh but Assad have to go. The UK can assist in that process in many ways, but

[*Andy Slaughter*]

the lesson of recent history is that military action by western powers is unlikely to do so. If we have not understood that from Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, we certainly should have done. That is why I have grave concerns about what the Prime Minister said in the second part of his statement. We are very far from establishing the legality of the drone strike that was reported, either under article 51 or indeed under the common law of self-defence. The Prime Minister certainly mentioned necessity and proportionality in his statement, but he did not mention the imminence of the threat.

Issues about the chronology of that event have come to light since. A number of former Directors of Public Prosecutions, Attorney Generals, non-governmental organisations, such as Reprieve, and leading Members of both Houses have expressed concerns. As the Prime Minister conceded in answering questions on Monday, it is a significant change of policy, so the House deserves an explanation. If we are moving to a shoot-to-kill policy and towards the tactics adopted by the Israeli and US military, the House has the right to know. At the very least, we need an investigation, either by the Foreign Affairs Committee or, indeed, by the Intelligence and Security Committee, in so far as these matters need to be confidential; but we also need the Law Officers to come to the House to explain the legal principles, to explain what their role has been, to explain what their advice has been so far, to explain what the process for that decision making has been and to say what their role would be if any further action were contemplated.

The Government do not have a mandate for military action in Syria—quite the contrary. The House made its view abundantly clear two years ago. The Prime Minister said that he got it at that point. I suspect that the reverse is true and that, in fact, he has been looking to reverse that policy ever since.

Mrs Moon: Does my hon. Friend share my concern about mission creep in Syria? We have just had a drone strike, killing British citizens, but before that, we were told that British pilots were taking part in missions over Syria, again with no authority from this country, but on the basis that they were embedded with other forces, which has never happened before.

Andy Slaughter: My hon. Friend, who is an expert in these matters, anticipated that my next word was going to be “embedded”. I am afraid that we have seen the hand of both public opinion and the House being forced by actions taken—first, British forces being embedded and the substantial increase in drone activity generally. Perhaps 40% of drone activity in the region is now over Syria. Now, of course, the drone strike has been reported. This is a way to pre-empt a decision that, no doubt, the House will debate in the autumn. These actions will have a direct impact on the refugee situation.

My final point is on the illogicality—this seems to be lost particularly among Government Members—of now deciding to take military action against Daesh. The main beneficiary of that will be Assad. However horrific and disgusting the actions of Daesh have been, the fact remains that the majority of abductions, torture and murders of civilians and the destruction of Syria’s infrastructure are the responsibility of the Assad regime.

In the past month, 1,600 barrel bombs were dropped by that regime. While we are attacking Daesh, we are making Assad stronger. Of course both need to be tackled. Of course a co-ordinated response is needed. That has been singularly lacking, and that is one of the roots of the refugee crisis. But I would regret seeing the Government rush to arms when they are so tardy in addressing their humanitarian duties.

3.37 pm

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Our country has a proud history of accepting the vulnerable into our society. That has not only saved lives, but enriched our culture. My family certainly owes a debt of gratitude to this country, for giving it refuge when it faced persecution. In times like these, we must live up to our international and moral obligations, but we must remember three important things when considering the crisis that faces us. First, our responsibility is not only to provide a safe haven. The task that faces us is not simply to offer a land in which the refugees can live; it is to give these people the chance of a future, and that means so much more than simply giving them the right to live here.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

Lucy Frazer: Let me finish the point, because I am responding to the point made by the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) when he said that each life lost is important. Equally, each person’s quality of life is important. As the motion recognises, refugees have a moral and legal right to be treated properly, and that means integrating them into our communities as soon as they arrive, giving them homes, providing access to learning the language and access to study, to work and to medical facilities. Many voluntary organisations already do a fantastic job in holding the hands of the vulnerable in times of need. But when we take 20,000 refugees, including many children and women who have suffered violence and abuse, we must bring together local communities, charities, and local and central Government so that we provide advice, homes, interpretation facilities and the kind of care that we give to our own vulnerable families.

Roger Mullin: The hon. Lady is making a very fine speech. I particularly enjoyed her earlier comments about the need to think about the future and about the importance of education and the need to build up capacity so that people can return to help build that future. In the light of that, does she agree that the one thing the Government can do in addition to what they are promising to do is encourage our universities and colleges to open their doors to the young people so that they can learn the skills to enable them to go back? That commitment could easily be made in addition to the 20,000 target.

Lucy Frazer: First, it is important that we work with our local communities, which we are doing, and to use our foreign aid budget to do that. This is a very separate issue. I think what the hon. Gentleman is saying is that we should open our doors to people who are not refugees, because if we are giving people asylum or

refuge, they will have access to our education facilities anyway; that is part of the process. Secondly, international co-operation is not only important, but essential. Yesterday, the shadow Home Secretary started her speech with a reference to the Kindertransport. But the challenges posed by Nazi Germany in the early 1940s were taken up not by one country, or even by Europe, but by the UN. Forty four countries signed a declaration in November 1943. An international effort on a significant scale is needed here. Britain leads the world in committing 0.7% of its budget to foreign aid.

Alison McGovern: The hon. Lady is making an excellent case for the Government to join the UN resettlement scheme, but they have refused to do so. Does she wonder why that was?

Lucy Frazer: The Government have already taken people in through a UN scheme and they are committed to take more. They have already taken refugees through asylum. Of course we need to work at European and international levels, but the UN and countries around the world need to do more. We must call on other countries to live up to the commitment of 0.7%.

Stewart McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Lucy Frazer: I will continue. We need to provide the funding that the UN bodies need to carry on their vital work on the ground. As the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) rightly recognised, people are leaving Syria simply because they do not have the basic provisions in their own country. The £1 billion that we have already provided in international aid is vital. We have provided 50% more than Germany and 14 times the contribution of France. We must also work with local partners to seek a solution to the political crisis in Libya and Syria.

Finally, although we will benefit greatly from the huge talent that the refugees offer, the longer this crisis goes on the more Syria will lose out from this incredible human potential. We must work in the UK and in the camps to provide people with the skills that they need to rebuild Syria. We cannot deprive Syria of its brightest and its best. That is not a long-term solution. I am proud to be British and to offer a home to the most vulnerable, but let us not underestimate the scale and complexity of the task ahead. I am confident that this is a challenge that Britain can live up to.

3.44 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): I pay tribute both to the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), who is not in his place at the moment, for his speech and to the Scottish National party for its collegiate approach to this debate; it is massively to its credit. The language of this debate has been thoughtful and positive. We must acknowledge that over the past couple of months the language has not always been so conciliatory or so thoughtful. Only six weeks or two months ago, we heard people, including the Prime Minister, use phrases such as “migrants swarming through Europe”.

I took the opportunity at the beginning of August, during the recess, to go to the Jules Ferry camp in Calais and spend some time there. That does not make

me an expert, but I discovered a number of things. First, I found that these “swarms of economic migrants” included far fewer people than the media presented. They were not economic migrants, not that there is anything disgraceful about that, but were by any sensible definition refugees from Syria, Eritrea, Sudan and Afghanistan—from places that meant they were fleeing war, tyranny and instability. It was clear to me that although the vast majority of the people were men there were far more women and children than appeared from what was being presented.

I took the chance to talk to about 20 or so refugees and quiz them about their desire to come to the UK. Their answer was that they wanted to come to the UK because it represents the good life—“Ah!” I hear from some on the Tory Benches, “They are coming here to sponge off us.” But no, when I drilled down about what the good life meant to those people I found that it meant stability, peace, an absence of conflict, civilisation and being able to bring their kids up and work their socks off without the fear of losing their home or their family. That is what Britain’s good life is and that is why we are an attractive place to be. Let us not decry that; let us be dead proud of the fact that we have that reputation.

Volunteers in the camp are painfully aware of where Britain stands, and of the fact that, when it comes to asylum applications, France takes more than twice the number we do every year and Germany five or six times the number. The thought that we are being targeted to be sponged off by economic migrants swarming through Europe is dishonest and not true. I came away from Calais with the overall impression that the Prime Minister, the Government and indeed others were reacting not to the reality—they have no excuse not to react to it as they have far better access to research than I do—but to the political story. That is shameful. When they react with dogs, tear gas and fences, that is a political reaction and not the way to solve the problem and make things better.

I said that language is important, but a picture is important too. A week ago, the decision by *The Independent*, in particular, to print the absolutely heartbreaking picture of the body of Alan Kurdi was one of the most powerful things any journalist could choose to do. There are times when we are critical of the media, but we should be dead proud that that newspaper and others chose to print the picture. It was edgy, it was appallingly hard to look at as a father—I find it hard even to imagine it now—but it changed the tone of the debate in this country. A week ago, there was no plan whatsoever from those on the Government Benches to make the kind of proposals that were made yesterday. They were made because they were led by British public opinion and I am proud of the British public and how they led that change in the debate.

We all have our own stories, but we should all be proud of the values shown in the response of the British people, whatever part of the United Kingdom we come from. In my patch, hundreds of people have offered accommodation, food, money and other things, and that is a reminder that this is not accidental, not a rare thing. It is true to our character as a nation and as a family of nations. It is 70 years since half of the children from Auschwitz arrived—where? It was on the banks of Windermere, believe it or not, in probably the least diverse constituency in the country. Between Windermere and Ambleside, on the banks of the lake,

[Tim Farron]

were 350 survivors from the camps at Auschwitz and elsewhere—mostly 13, 14 and 15-year-old lads, including the great Ben Helfgott, who went on to lift weights for Britain in the Olympics in the 1950s but came as a little lad from Auschwitz. The reception of the people in the south Lakeland area to those people was immense. It was true to their character then and the response to today's refugee crisis is true to their character today. I am proud of them.

I also share a sense of admiration, and even a little envy, when I look at the German response and leadership of the response to the refugee crisis. For what it is worth, I am always up for Scotland, and that support is always repaid, I know, when Scots are so fervently up for England when we play games of various sorts.

Germany's response to the refugee crisis has added to its standing in the world, it has made it more relevant in the world, and it will clearly be of economic value in the years to come. The Liberal Democrats welcome the plan set out by the Government yesterday to take up to 20,000 refugees, but we are bound to criticise many of the details, not least the fact that we are proposing to take up to 20,000 over five years, so over five years we will take, at best, as many people as the Germans will take in a weekend. We are also critical of the fact that no hope is offered for those in transit. Those are many of the people who are in most danger, under most threat, and for whom we should have most concern.

I am one of two people in the Chamber who would make the point that the commitment of 0.7% of GDP to international aid was achieved with the Liberal Democrats in government, with our unanimous support. Although the Secretary of State and others rightly claim credit for it too, I can point out that there was nobody on my Back Benches decrying the Government commitment to that 0.7%.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is outrageous that the Conservative party claims that we tried to cut the international development budget, on the back of a report in the *Daily Mail*, which is hardly a supporter of the Liberal Democrats?

Tim Farron: My right hon. Friend is correct. It is a great shame. The story of the coalition on this issue is that all the Liberal Democrats and all the Conservatives who were in Government positions supported that target, but there were dozens and dozens of Conservative Back Benchers who, if they had had their way, would have taken that money away.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The Liberals and the Government are taking credit for the 0.7%. We have all played a part—the Labour party played a part when in government. More importantly, does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is vital that refugees are resettled in such a way that they fit into the community and that ghettos are not created through lack of resources? Previous Governments have used urban aid budgets to do that.

Tim Farron: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. It was exactly the reason why I raised the issue of the DFID funding. It is right that

funds should be given to local communities to allow for that resettlement. My key concern is that we are taking from the DFID budget, and therefore taking from that 0.7%, in order to fund this work. That money should come from other sources. We ought to remember that the 0.7% commitment to international aid is about conflict prevention, to make sure that the refugee crisis does not get worse in the years to come. It is short-sighted to raid the DFID budget in order to fund refugee settlement; the money should come from other sources.

I am bound to decry the fact that this Government refuse once again to co-operate with others in the European Union on a collective approach. That affects our standing in the EU and the world. We are seen as a country that turns its back on its neighbours, that is not a good team player and that is not able to roll up its sleeves collectively to try to make a difference. The Prime Minister will spend time over the coming months in the capitals of Europe trying to build the case for concessions so that he can make the case for a yes vote in an EU referendum. What chance has he now of getting concessions from people who believe he has been such a non-team player over this most critical issue? He has damaged Britain's standing and he has potentially put at greater risk Britain's membership of the European Union.

Lucy Frazer *rose*—

Tim Farron: I will not give way; I want to make progress.

By limiting the number of refugees we will take to a maximum of 20,000 over five years, the Prime Minister lets down many thousands of refugees. As others have said before me, we support Jean-Claude Juncker's proposals for an EU common plan. That makes sense and would add to the UK's stature in these matters. As was mentioned earlier, the UK's response has been tardy and has not been good, although it is better today than it was a day or two ago. However, there are others whose contribution is utterly risible, not least Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. They are wealthy countries that our Government have close connections with. What moral authority do our Government have in banging those countries' heads together to get them to play a role when they themselves have been dragged to the table so reluctantly? This is about moral authority as much as anything else.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Tim Farron: I will not give way.

We expect our Governments to lead and not to follow, but over the past week we have found that this Government have followed. I am glad that they have, but it is a great shame that it took months, and the public outcry after that tragic photograph, to bring them to the table. In the past 24 hours or so we have seen the Government commit to what I suggest—forgive me if you think this is cynical—is the least they think they can get away with in the face of public opinion. I want to encourage us all to commit to the most we can do, for the benefit of our collective humanity, for those refugees and for our nation's standing in the world.

3.55 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Last week's heartbreaking images united the country in horror and compassion. I have been deluged with letters

and emails from constituents wishing to express their compassion, and I am sure the same is true for all hon. Members. This House has shown an unusual unity on the issue and has brought it on to our agenda for three days in a row. I welcome the tone of the motion tabled by the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) and his support for the Government's long-term humanitarian commitment. I was rather disappointed that the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) set a contrasting tone and that he feels less pride in Britain's long-term commitment to humanitarian support for refugees.

Personally, and on behalf of many of my constituents, I welcome the Prime Minister's commitment to taking in 20,000 more Syrian refugees, on top of the 5,000 already here, and particularly the fact that they will be taken directly from the camps. That gives a safer route for the most vulnerable refugees, who would be unable to make the trek across Europe to Calais.

My constituency, and Kent overall, has felt the consequences of people making that trek across Europe in recent months. In particular, we have seen a large increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and they need looking after. Kent County Council has worked extremely hard to find homes for those children, but it has run out of foster homes for them and for local children. Other councils have helped, but not nearly enough. In the coming weeks and months we need the rhetoric from local authority leaders across the country to be matched with action, with them taking in more families and, in particular, more children. I hope that we will now see a nationwide response, and that response needs to be centrally co-ordinated to ensure that those children are given homes across Britain, as the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) suggested.

Although it is wonderful to welcome refugees, there is a cost. Kent County Council has estimated that there is an unfunded cost of £6 million in taking in extra asylum-seeking children this year. That financial burden needs to be shared across the country, not just in the areas that take a greater proportion of refugees. I welcome the proposal to use the foreign aid budget to help contribute to those costs.

Alison McGovern: The hon. Lady makes an important point. I think that I am right in saying that the north-west of England has taken the most refugees, so I agree that our job is to ensure that all parts of the country have the resources they need to welcome refugees should they want to.

Helen Whately: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. She is right that we need not only to welcome refugees in what we say, but to plan how to care for them properly. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer) said, we need to give them the chance of a good life in this country.

As the Opposition parties have recognised, the UK has made a huge contribution to helping refugees through our £1 billion aid commitment, which has not always been as popular as it is now. It is good to see that the country is rallying behind the virtues of making a contribution on that scale. However, we need to make sure that our emotional response to the images of last

week does not cloud the reason in our response. I believe very strongly that we should concentrate our help where it can do most good. Most of the 12 million people displaced are still in the region, with 7.6 million in Syria, 1.9 million in Turkey, and 1.1 million in Lebanon. Being in those countries means they are more likely to return home when eventually their homes are safe, and then they will be in a position to help rebuild Syria, so we would be right to focus our aid there.

Stewart McDonald: May I make a suggestion that will not cost the Government a single penny? Will the hon. Lady join me in calling on the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), who is in his place, to get on the phone to the Saudi Arabian embassy here in the UK and ask that country to start taking some refugees, and Kuwait and Qatar too, because they do not even recognise refugees in their constitution? Many Members have mentioned Lebanon, but it is a fraction of the size of Saudi Arabia, so perhaps the Government could start to look at that side of things as well.

Helen Whately: Indeed, the other neighbouring countries, not just Lebanon and Turkey, should be taking refugees. I understand that in fact Saudi Arabia is taking some refugees and that families have invited other families to come and live with them. There may be more happening than we are aware. However, the hon. Gentleman makes an important point.

I want to talk about how our aid could be used in the refugee camps. It is important that it is used not only to provide shelter and food but to make life in those camps bearable. As we have heard, it is far from that now; in fact, many refugees do not even feel safe in them. My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood) described this from the experience of her own visits to refugee camps. We must try to ensure that refugees have some quality of life. I recognise that the Government are doing what they can. A quarter of a million children are benefiting from having support for their education, thanks to our aid. I have read of a figure of £10 million being used specifically for building local capacity and longer-term stability in the region, but that sounds like a rather small share of £1 billion. More must be done to give refugees in the camps a chance to work, to learn and to develop their skills so that they will be able to contribute as and when Syria is safe to return to, and to give them purpose and a sense of hope.

Martin John Docherty: The hon. Lady mentions £10 million. Perhaps the Government would take up the point that rather than replacing Trident on the Clyde with £500 million, they should send that money to deal with some of the refugee crisis issues that we are facing.

Helen Whately: That is a completely separate debate and it is not appropriate to have it as part of this debate.

The battle against ISIL is ideological as much as military. We absolutely must win hearts and minds. As this is Britain's largest ever humanitarian effort, it must not just be about providing sanctuary but must also count towards future peace and stability across the region.

4.3 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I am very grateful for the opportunity to speak on this hugely important issue.

This is the most challenging refugee crisis since the second world war. It has brought some of the most miserable and wretched images to our television screens and newspaper front pages, but it has also brought out some of the best qualities in so many people across the UK and Europe. As other hon. Members have said, it is impossible not to have been impressed—indeed, bowled over—by the efforts of local organisations, community groups and individuals. It has also been clear to many in this Chamber that how we handle the global movement of refugees, including in the Mediterranean, is one of the rare issues that will come to define the legacy of this Parliament, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin John Docherty) said. This is a test of policy and of leadership, but, more importantly, we are being tested on our humanity.

I fear that to date the Government have fallen short of pass marks, although, as the motion recognises, they do deserve credit for their support for humanitarian initiatives in the middle east. Of course, like colleagues, I give a warm but somewhat guarded welcome to the change in approach that has been signalled in the past few days—in particular, the decision to increase the number of Syrians being resettled in this country, as announced by the Prime Minister a few days ago. Nevertheless, I share the view that in many ways the Government have been too slow to respond and their response still falls short. If they listen to the arguments being made today by the united opposition and to the very clear message coming from people across the United Kingdom, they will still have a chance to salvage their position and, indeed, to help save more lives.

What more could and should the Government do? On the issue of resettlement from the middle east, I welcome the plans to increase the number of Syrians to be resettled directly in the UK. However, as many have made clear, people cannot wait until 2020 to reach safety, so we will scrutinise the Home Secretary's forthcoming statement closely. We need to resettle more people and to resettle most of them very soon, not in five years. As the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) has said, we need a strong target for this year.

We also need to think again about the position of unaccompanied minors who will come to the UK under the Government scheme, particularly the nature of the status they will be granted and their prospects for settlement and stability, which they need immediately. It is all very well to say that it may be possible for them to apply for settlement in the future, but many children's organisations say that they need settlement and stability immediately.

I also wish to raise the issue of "double refugees." I understand from people working in refugee camps in Lebanon that a significant number of refugees there have previously fled from Palestine and had been protected as refugees in Syrian camps. They have had to flee again and, despite not being documented as Syrians, that is the country from which they have been forced to flee. Is there not a powerful case for including them in the resettlement scheme? Let us consider the scope of the programme very carefully.

The key question is the relocation of people who have already reached Europe. Other Members have already set out in considerable detail the conditions of squalor, tension and sometimes even violence that vulnerable people arriving in Europe too often have to endure. My own constituents have contacted me to speak about their horror on seeing such situations at first hand when visiting places such as Kos and Lesbos.

The people arriving on these islands and in the EU need our help. They need a co-ordinated EU response and the UK should play its part. For two or three countries to take on 350,000 people arriving in desperate circumstances is an impossible task. Among a union of 500 million people it is a challenge, but an eminently surmountable one, representing just 0.5% of the population.

Whatever our differences on the balance to be struck between relocation and resettlement, the one argument I cannot accept from Government Members is the claim that taking part in European Union programmes will encourage more people to take on the dangerous journey. First and foremost, that view fundamentally misunderstands the nature of the crisis. People are being driven to cross the Mediterranean through fear of persecution and human rights abuses and through desperation, not because of some distant possibility of relocation to the United Kingdom. Of course, back in May the UK shied away from the first EU attempt at agreeing 40,000 relocations. Has that stopped a single person making that trip? Of course not, so it is time for this myth peddling to stop and for the Government to step up to the plate by working with their European Union neighbours.

There are other ways in which the Government can respond to this motion's call for them to play their full and proper role in providing sanctuary to our fellow human beings. At the very least, will they consider the call from Save the Children that the UK Government

"takes its fair share—3,000 of the most vulnerable children who are arriving in Europe—those who have arrived without family members, completely alone"?

As the charity says:

"We must ensure these children are safe and protected."

I also hope there can be broader consensus on the need to reconsider how refugee family reunion rules apply in this particular situation. I appreciate that the Minister for Immigration will have already heard this two or three times this week, but one group of people for whom surely the UK is the most appropriate place to be is those with family members who have already been granted refugee status here. As they stand, the UK's family reunion rules are tightly drawn. For example, a 19-year-old girl in a refugee camp in Lebanon, or who is stranded alone in Turkey, whose father has managed to make it to the United Kingdom and is recognised as a refugee will not usually be able to come here under those family reunion rules. Her family would be sorely tempted to resort to people smugglers to get her here.

Surely the Government will agree to look again at how the family reunion rules are being applied to those who are caught up in this crisis. The argument for that has been made forcefully by the Refugee Council, the Scottish Refugee Council, the Red Cross and many others. I note that Sweden and Switzerland have extended their family reunion programmes.

Additionally, we need to see what further steps can be taken to provide practical support for those who wish to make family reunion applications. Lawyers and charities that are working for families here speak of the impossible bureaucracy when people approach UK embassies in the region. Let us make it as easy as we can for people to exercise their family reunion rights.

Finally, does this situation not illustrate how outrageous it is for refugees to be included in any net migration target? The Government appear to be incentivising the rejection of refugees. Is that not the worst possible signal to send out?

This was a chance for the Prime Minister to show leadership in one of the defining moments of his time in office. I regret that he has been guilty of belatedly following, instead of leading. He still has a chance to lead and I hope, for the sake of the refugees from Syria and elsewhere, that he grasps it urgently.

4.11 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to talk about an issue that defines this summer and probably a longer period.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) on tabling a motion on this humanitarian issue, which is vital not just to all of us here, but to many of our constituents. I would argue that the underlying issue is broader than that laid out in his motion. Why are there so many failing states in the middle east and north Africa? How can we help to prevent those states from reaching the chaos where so many millions of people are displaced, mostly outside their own country? What is it that states such as Jordan and Morocco have that makes them so much more successful? How can a region take ownership both of its people, as Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey are doing so spectacularly with help from the west, and of its stability and security? Those are critical questions, but I recognise that they are for another day and I hope that it comes soon.

The hon. Member for Moray introduced his motion with moving reference to his own story about the arrival of his mother in this country, which helps to explain his commitment to helping other refugees. There is much to agree with in his motion. It recognises the Government's huge contribution to the camps for refugees from Syria and the commitment to take on 20,000 vulnerable Syrian refugees from those camps. It calls for a "full and proper role" for the UK in providing sanctuary.

However, the motion is very short of detail in some ways and divisive in one critical way. It calls for

"a greater international effort through the United Nations to secure the position of such displaced people",

but what does that mean? The hon. Gentleman did not shed any light on what he expects the United Nations to do. Does it encompass the proposal from my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) for safe havens inside Syria? Is the hon. Gentleman thinking of no-fly zones? He said nothing about what he wants from the United Nations. I offer the thought that perhaps the most successful intervention by the United Nations in a state that had been through civil war was in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was run by the United Nations for a period of years before being successfully returned under democratic elections. We need to look at that more closely in the longer term.

The line that reveals the divisiveness of the motion is that which calls for the Government to report on

"how that number can be increased".

That comes only two days after the Prime Minister's announcement that our country would take 20,000 refugees. The hon. Member for Moray denied that this was a bidding war, but that is exactly what it looks and feels like. A cry goes up, "Something must be done." A Labour leadership candidate agrees and says, "Yes, we should take 10,000." The Prime Minister agrees and announces the framework and terms for taking 20,000 refugees, but the SNP, on its Opposition day, asks how that number can be increased, without mentioning a figure—neither the hon. Member for Moray, nor anybody else speaking for his party today has done so. We can be sure that if the Government did come back to raise the figure, whatever it was raised to would not be enough, and the SNP and others would ask how we could increase it further.

Hywel Williams: If it is a bidding war, how did the Government reach a figure of 20,000, rather than 20,001 or 19,999? I did ask the Secretary of State that precise question earlier—I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman was in his place then—and she was unable to give me a proper answer.

Richard Graham: I am not sure whether there was a question in there, Madam Deputy Speaker, although there may be one for the Government to offer on. The important thing I was going to say is that we should not get obsessed with a particular figure. We have heard moving speeches this afternoon from Members echoing what I believe to be the core point of the motion, which we all share: the requirement on the nation and on all of us to respond with compassion to an international disaster.

Several Members, most movingly my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), in an echo of what the hon. Member for Moray said, have told us that they are from immigrant families. I was working on aid projects in Africa almost 30 years ago, helping displaced people from neighbouring countries around there, and I was in Hong Kong when its Government, on behalf of the British Government, were trying to deal with the Vietnamese boat people. It is incredibly easy for people to be critical of situations involving refugees if they are not dealing with it themselves and do not have the responsibility at the time. We should recognise that, as many Members have said. This nation does have a strong record, and we should be pulling together and doing our best to help people in the ways that we can.

On that note, I thought the most discordant speech heard in this Chamber for a long while—it was almost a disgraceful speech—was that by the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron). He seems to have entirely forgotten that his party, when in coalition government with my party, was responsible for bringing together this considerable increase in our commitment to international development, which has led to our being able to provide huge sums in funding and help hundreds of thousands of people, if not more than 1 million, in the refugee camps just outside Syria. It was extraordinary that all he could bring himself to say was that this Government "react with dogs" and barbed wire, in a reference to Calais. He made no reference to

[Richard Graham]

what is being achieved for the refugees from Syria. Unfortunately, a number of Members have descended into making party political points, especially the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), who sounded the most extraordinary, tribal note, referring to a “rush to arms”, which is not even the subject of this debate. Instead of doing that, we should be focusing today on what we all share and what we can achieve together.

On that note, I wish to make a practical suggestion that I believe would make a real difference to this nation's handling of the refugee crisis. I touched on it earlier in an intervention on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. The most practical thing we can do is encourage the leading charities and non-governmental organisations, perhaps in that meeting on Friday with the Government, to come together to create a new Syrian refugee fund, perhaps administered by Save the Children in particular, although others should be involved. Such a fund would allow so many of our generous constituents around the whole country to contribute, and it should be matched pound for pound by the Government. That would enable a significant fund to be available to help the refugees when they come to this country. It could be disbursed through local government authorities or it could be done directly, but all these are issues that should be resolved. We have done this before. We did it successfully in response to the typhoon in the Philippines about 18 months ago, when many people in our constituencies contributed. St Peter's school in my constituency raised funds and gave a lot of time towards doing so. Such an approach helps the people of Britain to realise that the Government share their sympathy and compassion, and will match what they give pound for pound. That is a practical suggestion that would help us.

Some hon. Members have intimated that we should do almost everything that Germany is doing. It seems to me extraordinary that we should feel obliged to get into some form of bidding war with Germany, of all nations. We should surely recognise that Germany is dealing not only with today's humanitarian crisis—*[Interruption.]* The SNP would do well to listen—but with her own modern history. We should respect and admire that but not see German commitments as a competitive challenge.

We should recognise that each country can contribute differently. For example, the role of the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean in saving more than 6,000 people who might otherwise have drowned is not something that many countries in the European Union could emulate, and certainly not Germany. We should recognise that we can all make our own separate and different contribution to the crisis. We should pull together; make sure that we get on with implementing what has already been announced by the Prime Minister, and not try to split hairs about numbers of refugees; encourage the charities to create the fund in which the Government will match what individuals donate; locally capture significant offers of help through the asylum and refugee offices in our own counties; and make it happen.

4.21 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): It is good to speak in this important debate. I listened carefully to the contribution from the hon. Member for Gloucester

(Richard Graham) and the remarks that he made about whether numbers matter. Of course, it is not numbers that matter, but need. If some of us are exasperated about numbers, it is because the Government are not doing enough and we are trying to encourage them in that direction.

I want to send out a message from this House that I hope everyone will agree with. It was a fine innovation when we decided that it would not just be for the Government to dictate our agenda, but for the public. Hundreds of thousands of people have signed e-petitions and the House has listened and put the issues that matter onto our agenda. One of those issues is one that the British people care about not for their own sakes, but for the sake of others. It is testimony to everybody who bothered to sign the petition that they are changing politics today.

One of the great moral puzzles is working out what we owe to others who are far away—who are not of our own family but of someone else's family far away—and the Secretary of State answered that question in her contribution. She has met refugees and she told us about them. She has met people who have fled Syria, and she told us what she had heard from them. I ask whether anyone can hear those stories, or the contributions from the hon. Members for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) and for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), and not wonder if we can do a little more.

When we meet people, we realise they are just like us. I want to read out the words of Hassan, who is 14 and from Syria. He said:

“The children in Syria need help. They need help because they are being tortured, shelled, shot at. They take children and put them in front of them. They create a human shield of children. They know that the people in the town will not shoot their own children. I saw this with my own eyes.

I want children in Syria to escape. They should run away so they don't die in the shelling.

What do I remember of Syria? I remember that whenever shelling took place we ran to a shelter. Inside, children shouted and wept a lot, they were so afraid. I remember that so many children were being tortured.

Because of what is happening in Syria we don't play any more. I miss my house. I miss my neighbourhood. I miss playing football.”

Football, the universal language. The more we find out about the refugees, the more we realise that we are just like them, and that is why we need to help them.

The problem is that progress feels painfully slow. Back in 2014, we had a debate about whether the Government should join the UN resettlement scheme. The Government said that they would not join it, and in the end they came up with their own scheme. As Member after Member has said, that scheme has taken insufficient numbers. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) mentioned the debate I held about refugees. In June, I asked the Prime Minister whether he felt that we were doing enough to help vulnerable children from Syria. In his words, he said that he was “convinced that we are”. It took the events in August to make him realise how wrong he was. Forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I am a little bit infuriated at times at such very slow progress.

I want to make two brief points and then say a final word. First, I know that the Government are capable of listening. The Secretary of State for International

Development has listened and, as evidence has come before her, she has changed her position. She is a reasonable person who has done the right thing. I know that Ministers are prepared to do the right thing, so I say this to them. Let us be a part of Europe. Let us see what is happening on the southern coast of our continent, in Greece and in Italy, and say to the people there, "We stand with you. We know that you cannot deal with this alone." Let us in this House listen to Matteo Renzi's call to be a part of Europe and to demonstrate our European values by saying that we believe in freedom, tolerance and respect, as well as a place to live and a decent life for each and every person. Let us show some leadership. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East, the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, said that leadership has been lacking. Let us change that, because the rest of Europe is crying out for the UK to play a role, in part by offering sanctuary to some of the people who, perhaps in exceptional circumstances, are already in Europe.

Mark Durkan: My hon. Friend may recall that she questioned the Prime Minister in October 2013, following the EU Council, on precisely these issues in the Mediterranean. At that time, the Prime Minister told her that

"we should try to avoid the sense that there are...front-line states...that are under particular pressure."—[*Official Report*, 28 October 2013; Vol. 569, c. 664.]

He went on to use Hungary as a comparator to show that the UK was taking its fair share of the burden.

Alison McGovern: In this debate, several hon. Members have reminded me of my previous contributions, and I thank them for doing so. I will not shut up about this because these people matter. In response to what we said in 2013, 2014 and this year, the Government have demonstrated that they have the capacity to change their mind. All I ask is that they show what sensible, reasonable people they are and change their mind again.

We need to play such a role in Europe. We need to demonstrate—whether in exceptional circumstances, or under whatever definition we set—that we are prepared to help our friends in Europe. The UK needs to be

"a piece of the Continent, a part of the main",

as John Donne, one of our country's finest poets, said.

Secondly, we need truly to respond in policy terms to the outpouring of good will towards refugees and victims of the conflict in Syria. Never mind the numbers; let us show that we have heard what the people of Britain think and take refugees out of the migration target. I think that the Government have failed on their migration target, which was ill-conceived for loads of reasons to do with the place of universities in our economy and the needs of great businesses, such as Unilever in my patch. It was a bad idea, but they are the Government and they have a right to do it. What they do not have the right to do is to say that we should decide whether we are living up to our duty towards the people coming to our country needing our help and needing sanctuary on the basis of some arbitrary statistical target that they have set for themselves in the heat of an election.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on her incredible and hugely impassioned speech. Does she agree that this is not about numbers?

We must stop talking about such people as numbers; they are human beings. This is a human tragedy, and it needs a human response. Every time somebody has to flee their country as a result of what is happening, it is a tragedy. I share her views.

Alison McGovern: I thank the hon. Lady for her contribution. She makes my point for me perhaps more eloquently than I was able to when I said earlier that one is better than none. For each person we can help, we should be glad we have done so in the knowledge that immigrants to this country make a massive contribution and build us up to what we are today.

I ask the Government to think again. They have shown they can do it. They have shown that they are prepared to listen. I ask them to show that compassion and reason once more. It makes no sense to say on the one hand that we will decide whether somebody can claim asylum and seek sanctuary in this country based on need and based on their circumstances, while on the hand counting in refugees with a migration target that is essentially just a number that has been decided for other reasons. We should decide each case based on its merits.

I do not underestimate the size and scale of what we are asking local authority leaders to do. I do not underestimate that for a moment, and I thought the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) made some serious and excellent points on that, but that is why it is all the more deeply impressive that local authority leaders, such as Richard Leese and Joe Anderson in the north-west of England, have stood up to be counted. They have said that their parts of the world will welcome refugees and will do all that is necessary to provide sanctuary for them. Of course, the Government will have to work hard to make sure there are resources and we need to empower local communities so that they feel able to welcome refugees, but working together we can do it. As it happens, DFID resources have often been spent, as necessary, on people in this country. We need to find different ways to fund this effort, but I applaud all local authority leaders who have shown that they are prepared to welcome refugees into their city, town or county.

In closing, I want to say a final word on refugee camps. I have never visited a refugee camp, but the Secretary of State has and she made an excellent case for why they are not the best idea in terms of sanctuary. They are temporary and they are unsafe. They can be good places where people can get medical care, but in the end it comes down to this: nobody's home should be a camp. That is why we need to truly understand what it means to give sanctuary. It does not just mean, "Here's a roof over your head for the moment," necessary though that is. It does not just mean a way to feed somebody's children and give them medical care, absolutely necessary though that is. It means: here is the place where you can belong. That is sanctuary, that is what we should offer refugees, and that is why we will keep asking the Government until they do more.

4.23 pm

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Thank you for allowing me to join this important debate, Madam Deputy Speaker. I welcome the considered remarks from across the House, particularly those from the Secretary of State. I was particularly interested in the views of my hon. Friend

[Mims Davies]

the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) on post-war Bosnia. I visited Bosnia in 1999, after the war, and it was a fascinating place to be. Street by street, house by house, people were rebuilding their lives alongside our boys and girls, who were working so hard alongside colleagues from the UN. It was fascinating to see how things can be built fairly quickly after the breakdown of communities. My hon. Friend's practical suggestion is very important and I hope note has been taken of it.

I am proud of my Government's commitment to build on further international development work and take 20,000 refugees. I am sure we have all had a huge amount of correspondence on this issue—I certainly have. The question today is: are we doing everything? One of my councillors, Elizabeth Lear, personally wrote to me and the local borough council to suggest we take at least five families from the camps. She is just one person who wants to act and do the right thing. She sees the challenges in local government, as I did up until May, of housing, schools and integration—things we should be very mindful of.

People in Eastleigh and across the UK have watched the humanitarian crisis unfold this summer and over the past four years and are asking what we are doing about it and whether we, in this Chamber, are doing everything that is right to help. The Government have rightly answered them with a robust plan. Eleven million humans—as we have heard today, these are humans, people—are affected, and 3% of them have made the perilous journey to the sanctuary of Europe, often by exploitative means, but in the camps in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan many still suffer greatly.

The crisis is large, as are our moral and practical responsibilities. In Lebanon, Syrian refugees now account for one quarter of the population. Let us just think about how to manage that day in, day out. It is therefore right that Britain is providing 18 million food rations and that 1.6 million people now have vital access to clean water. This summer, people in this country suffered from not having clean water because of bacteria in the supply, and we saw how difficult it made day-to-day life. It is right also that Britain is providing education to 250,000 children. Those children are benefiting because of this country. I believe that we, as one of the leading aid supporters in this crisis, are doing our bit. The world looked with horror at the tragedy this summer of those making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean, and I am sure that the whole House rightly pays tribute to the work of our men and women in the Royal Navy rescuing the people and families desperate enough to make the journey. To date, it has rescued 6,700 people from the sea.

Like others, I want briefly to dwell on the root of the problem—the foul actions of Assad against his own people. We also need to stop Daesh, or ISIL, which enslaves, butchers and terrorises. Its people systemically rape women, commit atrocities and murder; they are callous and reprehensible. We must not forget, therefore, that many of these refugees are fleeing exactly that. However, we must not be left with a simple choice between Daesh and Assad. I believe we can help to provide a better future for Syria. It is possible. It need not be a choice between two evils; there can be a future of stability and peace such as we have seen in Bosnia and Europe. That should be our ultimate goal.

This country must help to stabilise the countries from which refugees are coming by busting the criminal gangs, seeking out new solutions and using our aid budget to alleviate the suffering. Where evil continues to flourish, we must exercise our moral and humanitarian duties, and use our influence at the emergency meeting on the 14th of this month of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers to get a comprehensive plan on refugees, on making other countries meet their aid obligations and on stopping the exploitative criminal gangs.

I echo the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood) about the right kind of sanctuary. We must recognise this new type of all-encompassing humanitarian crisis. The many hon. Members who have spoken about their refugee background have rightly highlighted the diversity of our history and our enduring ability as a country to do the right thing. This reminds us of when our country stands tallest, such as in the past when we have gained people their freedom, and the British people have seen wrong abroad and without consideration for national, ethnic or other identifiers said, "Enough is enough."

Our children's safety and security depend on the actions and choices of this House, as does the future of the Syrian children. We must continue to work for a true and comprehensive approach across Europe, as highlighted by our Prime Minister. This true humanitarian nation does not merely help its own, but helps others in need, and I stand proudly behind that tradition and the actions of our Government.

4.39 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Before I start, I would like to say to the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), who bemoaned the comparison between what we are doing here and what is happening in countries such as Germany and Sweden, that competition sometimes breeds excellence. If we are in a competition to be better humanitarians and to deal with the issue in a better way to be better human beings, I am glad to be in such a competition.

The overall tone of today's debate has been very good and constructive. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) for setting that tone across the Chamber today, which reflects the mood of people in the wider part of our communities across the countries of the United Kingdom.

I noticed that the Prime Minister opened his statement on Monday by continuing the rhetoric that we are "facing a migration crisis". It still tends to come through that we are somehow still in this crisis. That is not the case, as this is a humanitarian crisis. The seminal and harrowing image of a little boy washed up on a shore in Turkey was mentioned earlier. It shocked and stunned not only the constituents whom I represent, but constituents across Scotland and across the nations of the UK. Sometimes an image of just one person brings the focus and clarity that politics simply cannot serve. The people in our communities know that this is not a migration crisis; they have seen a human image—one image that illustrates the many.

In his statement, the Prime Minister put a number on the refugees who we would welcome to these shores—20,000 people over five years. We have rehearsed the benefits or otherwise of using numbers, but the Prime

Minister said this morning that there would be “no limit” within the 20,000 for this year. In that case, let us review right now what we can do to accommodate people in desperate straits now. As we sit in this Chamber, more than 6.5 million children are fleeing bombs, persecution, devastation and despair in war zones, and over 350,000 refugees have already crossed the Mediterranean this year, risking life and limb. To provide some context for the 20,000 figure, 17,036 people is the most recent estimate of the number of refugees who have drowned trying to make it to Europe. Around 20,000 is the number of refugees welcomed to Germany—not in five years, but last weekend!

I cannot provide an exact number of my constituents who have already been in touch to offer help and to ask for my support. Why not? Because it has risen to many hundreds, and it is showing no sign of stopping. Constituents such as John and Claire from Inverness have told me that the image highlighting the tragedy of this human crisis haunts them when they close their eyes. It was that image that made them contact me, to offer not only their spare room, but their caravan, their time, their money and, most of all, their humanity. For others, it has been the reports of countless drownings of the tired and desperate or of people crushed and dead at the back of a lorry, having been prepared to do anything in the hope of escape and a chance of life. Sometimes, it is simply the scene of a smashed Syria, showing the scattered debris of life in a landscape of utter destruction—places from where any possibility of hope has been smashed by bombs—that affects people.

These isles have a history of offering children and families refuge from extreme crises, but we also have a darker history of people born and making their lives here being forced to find sanctuary on foreign shores. Although a recognition of the changing public perception is welcome, the Prime Minister’s response is not yet enough to satisfy my constituents, and I am sure that many in this Chamber and beyond will have a similar story to tell. We can find inspiration in times from these isles’ history that speak of the generosity and kindness of our people, suggesting that the numbers do not lie.

Some of those episodes were rehearsed yesterday, when Members talked of the 100,000 French Protestants who fled persecution. There were also the tens of thousands of Russian Jews, about whom we heard earlier today, and the more than 200,000 eastern European Jews who found refuge here. We offered sanctuary to 10,000 Kindertransport children: several Members have given that great example, and we have heard many stories of personal contact today. After the conflict in Europe we welcomed 300,000 Poles, and in the 1970s, more than 42,000 Ugandan Asians. They, too, could not have waited for five years.

It is at times like these that my constituents ask me why there is such a lack of ambition, such a short call on humanity. To them, all that is required is for our ambition to match the scale of the challenge at hand. They have not lacked ambition or shirked the challenge; they have shown leadership. In my constituency, volunteers from groups such as CalAid Badenoch are out and about collecting donations for the refugees. As well as accepting deliveries to schools, churches, private businesses and village halls, volunteers are out collecting donations from people’s homes. Our communities have pulled together and shown solidarity with the refugees. They have

not faltered; they have done what is needed, and what is right. I ask the Government not to hide behind the five-year window. Helping our fellow human beings in a crisis is not to be done with a drip-feed. The Prime Minister said “no limit”, so let us see that delivered.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) has made a sensible point a couple of times in the Chamber when she has issued a plea for money and support for councils throughout the United Kingdom to help them prepare. Councils are already doing their bit, and others are preparing to do so. I too call for leadership, and support the hon. Lady’s call for funds to help local authorities to act.

In Germany, Angela Merkel said that the Federal Government would contribute €6 billion for new shelters, extra police and, crucially, language training in 2016. They see this humanitarian crisis as an opportunity to build for the future, to make the refugees welcome as part of the wider community, and to draw on their skills and talents as an opportunity for the future of the German economy. We should not have to look to Germany for an enlightened view or, indeed, for competition. We could have such a view here, with the right will. We need to stop lagging and dragging. This is an opportunity for us to lead.

SNP Members understand the Prime Minister’s view that we need to tackle the root causes of the crisis. We support the aim of aiding stability, and any sensible measures to attain that. However, we cannot ignore our responsibility for the thousands of refugees in Europe who are seeking sanctuary now—not over the next five years, but now. This most human of crises is not playing out over years; it is playing out over days and hours, and it is on the minds of those at the sharp end every minute of every day.

Although the bar has been set at a high level by countries like Germany and Sweden, who have imposed no restrictions on numbers, I do not expect that we will follow their lead in its entirety. However, there are things that we can and must do. The First Minister of Scotland has said that Scotland will take her share, starting with at least 1,000. That is a figure for now. Spending on aid is welcome, but it does not deal with the crisis today. We need an approach that involves a short, a medium and a long-term plan for rebuilding.

I call on the Government to stop investing in razor wire, and to think of a better way of dealing with those who are in desperation in Calais. Much has been made of the new command and control centre, but how about simply setting up a hotspot processing centre, diverting the focus from the fences and the tunnel towards the action of helping to identify those in need, and granting access to those who are victims of this humanitarian crisis?

4.49 pm

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): First, may I thank the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) for the tone of his opening remarks and say what a great privilege it is to speak in a debate in which so many powerful contributions have already been made? It is important to recognise that humane and compassionate people can differ on what is the best response to a crisis of this nature. It is also worth recognising that the full consequences of the decisions that are made may not be known for many years, and therefore an element of diffidence is always appropriate.

[Alex Chalk]

At its heart this motion calls for steps to be taken to increase the number of refugees to be accepted into the United Kingdom; it puts no figures on that, interestingly, but that is the broad thrust. It may be that implicit in the motion is the idea that the UK should admit the 650,000-odd, let us say for the sake of argument, which pro rata would be similar to the position Germany has mentioned, but even that gesture would be dwarfed by the scale of the crisis we face, because 11 million people have been displaced from Syria alone, 4 million of whom are refugees in neighbouring countries while the remainder are internally displaced. The unpalatable truth is that there is no sensible figure that this House can settle on that will bring a complete solution to this problem. Instead, it is our duty as a humane country to do all we reasonably can to help and to do so in a way that does not make the matter worse. I believe, respectfully, that the Government's approach meets that challenge.

While of course respecting alternative views on this topic, one reason why I think the Government are right to proceed as they have is that we have to recognise that there may be future calls on us. That poor boy found washed up on the shore last week could just as easily have been Libyan or Afghan or any other nationality. He could have fled from any other benighted country, and refugees from those nations are no less deserving. We should make sure they are not forgotten in the course of this debate. That is important, because we must make sure that in future we are in a position to help them as well. The truth is that the middle east is unstable and it is unlikely that we have seen the end of this crisis. We must bear that in mind.

Mention has already rightly been made of the support we have given to people living in the region—and it is important to say that the SNP has recognised that effort—but I want to dwell on it for a moment. We must not forget that of the 11 million displaced Syrians, just 3%—a very modest proportion—have attempted the journey to Europe and the remainder, many of whom are not as strong or are not in a position to pay the people traffickers, have remained. By making the enormous contribution we have made—far more than any other EU country; over 10 times more than France or Italy, which have similar GDP to ours—we have helped stop a humanitarian crisis become a humanitarian catastrophe. It is through the efforts of the British people that there have been 2 million medical consultations for emergency trauma and primary health care cases and 3 million relief packages have been distributed.

That support is right for the obvious reasons, but there are three other important purposes too. First, it has ensured that aid is provided to some of the most vulnerable people—the weak, the old, the tired, the ill. Secondly, it has helped protect many minorities, including Christians, who might otherwise have found an existence in border camps very difficult. Thirdly, and almost most importantly of all, it has given those who want to stay to rebuild their country the option to do so when the time is right. Whatever we think about our country and how wonderful it is—and it is a wonderful country—the overwhelming majority of Syrians want to go back to their homes once conditions allow, and the efforts of our country will help them to do that. Crucially—the House will forgive me for pointing out something that is

obvious—the support also provides shelter for those who might otherwise have felt that they had no option but to press on, on that perilous journey to countries further afield.

It is the measure of a country how it behaves when the cameras are not rolling and the world is not watching. While the world's attention of the past years has flitted from one issue to another, our country has been doggedly applying itself to the task of bringing humanitarian relief where it is most needed. I am proud of the fact that, while many countries talked a good game at the Gleneagles summit back in 2005, this country, the United Kingdom, actually delivered on its pledge to spend 0.7% of GDP on international development.

In conclusion, what we see from the UK is a compassionate response from a humane country. It is a response that, as the Prime Minister has said, shows our heart, yes, but our head, too.

4.55 pm

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I congratulate my friends in the Scottish National party on initiating this important debate. I particularly congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) on the content and tone of his excellent speech. I am proud that we are collectively spending a very large amount of money supporting people in Syria and in neighbouring countries. I am glad that we are taking in refugees. That is very praiseworthy, as far as it goes.

There is a pithy Welsh proverb: “Nid da lle gellir gwell.” My rather clunking translation is, “The good is insufficient where better can be achieved.” That is the position we are in. We are spending lots of money, but we can do better. So I say plainly that admitting 20,000 people is not enough, not least given the UK's position and responsibilities as a world leader and as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. We should be taking in more people, and on a different basis.

I referred in an earlier intervention to how other European Union countries have decided on the total number of people that they will take in. They have used formulae that are dependent on GDP, population, the unemployment rate and applications already processed or considered. There are ways to do this. When I asked the Secretary of State for International Development earlier how we chose the figure of 20,000, she seemed to say that that was what we could support and afford with the resources that we had. The hon. Members who have spoken this afternoon have nearly all talked about the offers of help that have come from their constituents. I am sure that we can afford to take in more than 20,000, and I would impress that point most strongly on the Minister and the Secretary of State if she reads the report of this debate.

Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (SNP): I am enjoying the tone of the debate this afternoon. I want to draw attention to something that we have not talked about particularly, because not only are our constituents and organisations in our constituencies doing work. I have already been approached by the housing associations in my constituency, which were doing preparatory work before the Government grudgingly came to their position on Monday. I think that the hon. Gentleman would agree that that is welcome and that constructive work is

being done by organisations that have the vast majority of the responsibility to house these people in our constituencies.

Hywel Williams: The hon. Lady makes a very good point. Unsurprisingly, yet again, the third sector is quicker off the mark than the Government or even local government. Third sector and voluntary organisations in my constituency are already preparing. I am looking forward to the opportunity of speaking in a rally in Carnarvon on Saturday, organised by local voluntary organisations concerned with Calais and the refugee crisis that we are discussing this afternoon.

We will grant entry to 20,000 people under the vulnerable persons relocation scheme, which, I understand, has already relocated 216 people. Again, I referred to this earlier in an intervention. I have three questions for the Minister. I refer to a Home Office document—the Syrian VPR scheme document—which says in respect of numbers and types of cases:

“We expect that the caseload will include families (with both parents), women and children at risk cases (i.e. single parent families—female headed) and medical cases.”

Will the same sort of criteria be applied to the 20,000? I am thinking particularly of the phrase “with both parents”. Are we expecting the 20,000 to include both men and women? The document says:

“We do not expect unaccompanied children to form part of the initial caseload”.

That was how things stood when the document was released earlier this year. Will we now take unaccompanied children? I expect that we will. The document then says:

“and if they do, these will be brought across under separate arrangements”.

What are those separate arrangements? Are those arrangements superseded by the decision that the Government have now taken on the 20,000?

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): If it might help, we are looking closely at the criteria that will be applied in conjunction with the UNHCR. Obviously, the criteria referred to applied to the vulnerable persons relocation scheme as was, but with significant scaling up and some of the Prime Minister’s comments on reflecting on how that is being done. This is precisely one of the issues that we will be discussing with the UNHCR.

Hywel Williams: I thank the Minister for that intervention and look forward to his response to my other questions about the VPR scheme. On Monday I asked the Prime Minister a question about that scheme, and said that at the request of many organisations and my constituents I had written to the Immigration Minister in July about the matter. In his reply the Minister referred to the VPR scheme, stating clearly that it

“was designed to focus on need rather than meeting a quota.”

I think that need is a good and humane yardstick. The need in the current circumstances is undoubtedly very large; indeed it is perhaps enormous. Applying need as a principle for action allows for a timely and measured response and for the use of discretion. However, the Prime Minister has announced that we will take 20,000 refugees. I am sure that those people will be in great

need, but 20,000 seems to be a fixed number. On Monday I asked him what he will say to the 20,001st person who applies and who has a provable and legitimate need.

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): A UNICEF report indicates that at least a quarter of those seeking refuge in Europe are children, and in the first six months of this year more than 106,000 children claimed asylum in Europe, up 75% on last year. The Prime Minister made assurances today during Prime Minister’s questions that Syrian children will not automatically be returned when they are 18. That is a welcome instruction, but we would like assurances because the issue will remain deeply concerning for children who come to this country unaccompanied. Can the Minister provide assurances that they will also be protected?

Hywel Williams: I will pose that question to the Minister and thank the hon. Lady—in fact, she is blessed with clairvoyance because I was going to ask that question myself.

I referred to a question that I asked the Prime Minister on Monday about the 20,001st person, and his response was disappointing. Indeed, it was either dismissive or even alarming. He said merely that we should concentrate on the 20,000—that is all he said, period. I am all for concentrating on the 20,000 to the extent of offering entry to as many genuine cases as possible as soon as possible, and not over the five years that the Government intend, but 20,000 looks to me like a quota. Hon. Members will recall what I said about my answer from the Immigration Minister and the VPR scheme being based on need and not a quota. By their very nature quotas inevitably lead to artificial and possibly brutal cut-offs, and pit one person’s genuine need against that of another as they both join the queue. I do not think that is a humane way of doing it.

The Prime Minister’s reply suggests to me either that he and his colleagues have not thought the matter through, or that they have done so and are reluctant to engage with the real consequences, which are not hard to imagine. For example, one can envisage a popular campaign in the press, perhaps in favour of admitting an injured child as No. 20,001. One can imagine a campaign in favour of admitting siblings or other relatives of people already admitted, or, as the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) said, at the end of five years and the current terms of the VPR scheme, a campaign not to send a young person who has thoroughly adopted a British identity back to a strife-ridden country. One can imagine the problems that will arise with that artificial cut-off. I was glad to hear that the Prime Minister is looking at this matter because it is serious and needs considering.

This is easy for me to say, but I would not have started from this point. As many hon. Members have said, one root cause of our current predicament is the Government’s reluctance to engage earlier with the UNHCR Syrian resettlement scheme, which led to the setting up of the VPR scheme in the first place. Therefore, there are some causes that we can discern, and there are ways forward.

Briefly, let me mention a couple of points from my own party’s policy on this matter. We wish to see a Welsh migration service set up to co-ordinate migration into Wales and Wales recognised as a country of refuge.

[Hywel Williams]

Finally, I have a question for the Minister on the response of the Welsh Government. I hope that I will not be seen as partisan in this matter. On Monday, the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) asked the Prime Minister about the response of the Scottish Government. The Prime Minister said that

“in the letter the First Minister of Scotland wrote to me, she said that Scotland would be willing to take 1,000 refugees.”—[*Official Report*, 7 September 2015; Vol. 599, c. 57.]

That is very praiseworthy indeed, and we have heard that that is a starting point and not an end point. When the Minister winds up, will he tell me—or perhaps put it in a letter—whether he has had a similar offer from the Welsh Government?

5.5 pm

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): Man’s inhumanity to man is the cause of the crisis unfolding in Syria and the *raison d’être* for the 1951 refugee convention. It is also the legal basis of our duties to offer sanctuary to those fleeing persecution. It is the cornerstone of humanitarian protection and the source of timeless values.

We have heard many passionate speeches from all parts of the House over the past few days, but I am proud to be a member of a governing party that is delivering on its international duties in the face of such catastrophe. However, the premise of this debate and the criticism from the Opposition Benches are unjustified. This is a time not for political point scoring, but for consensus and support. Despite difficult economic conditions, this Government have stuck uncompromisingly to their 0.7% of GDP aid budget, unlike many other western countries. They are providing a threefold response, involving the Department for International Development, the Home Office and a coherent defence strategy.

What we are witnessing in all three respects is the largest ever response by this country to such a disaster. When those on the Opposition Benches argue that we are not doing our bit, or that we are not playing our part, I beg to differ. I am talking about £1 billion of aid, 18 million people fed, a Royal Navy taskforce, 6,000 people rescued from the Mediterranean and resettlement for 20,000 refugees. All those things paint a starkly different picture.

Incidentally and more widely, we can be proud of our aid record. Both the current Secretary of State for International Development and her predecessor should be recognised for their leadership. I visited Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Bangladesh with international development teams and saw at first hand how our aid has been spent on vital projects to rebuild those states, involving governance, the rule of law, and health and education, and we are maintaining that philosophy in the face of this emergency.

From the legalistic perspective, I speak with professional experience. Before coming to this place, I worked as Treasury Counsel, defending the Home Secretary in asylum and immigration cases. In the UK, we have a fair system for processing asylum claims, providing housing and support for asylum seekers and refugees, mainly in the form of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. Those rules are in place to ensure fairness and legitimacy and to prevent abuse of the system. Here,

applicants claim refugee status under our obligations in the 1951 convention and may be granted leave to remain as a step on the path to settlement. They may also be granted humanitarian protection, which can lead to indefinite leave to remain.

From a technical perspective, I have to make it clear that this Government inherited an asylum system that was in a critical condition. The backlog of 450,000 asylum cases was worrying and considerable progress has been made in shifting that burden. That 450,000 was more than just a statistic; it meant 450,000 people with a precarious immigration status in this country, 450,000 who could not take up fixed employment and whose cases still needed to be checked. The fact is that we cannot just ride roughshod over the rules in the name of compassion. The consequence is injustice and unsustainability.

Echoing the sentiment so eloquently expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), let me refer to the story of my father, who fled to the UK in 1968 as part of the east African Asian diaspora. He was only 20 years old and he had nothing. He did not want to come to this country. He did not want to leave his family, his friends and his beloved homeland to be flung to the other side of the world with nothing to his name. He was granted a British passport in Nairobi and that was his way out from persecution. The UK was able to extend sanctuary to him and thousands of others because the system commanded confidence. He came here legitimately and with the knowledge that he went through a procedure that maintained its integrity.

We all agree that the crisis demands a compassionate response, but rigour, integrity and fairness are essential to enable kindness and humanity.

5.11 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I sat through the debates yesterday and today and want to address a number of the points that have come up rather than just rely on some of the helpful and poignant briefings we have received from so many people.

One of the first things I want to do is acknowledge the tenor and content of the speech made by the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) as well as the scope of the motion. Contrary to the attempts by the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) and others to misrepresent it, people need to recognise that the motion clearly listened to the points that many Government Members made in yesterday’s debate, when they said that in all the focus on the refugee crisis as it is manifesting itself in Europe we should not forget the refugee crisis in the camps in some of the countries surrounding Syria or the significant commitment that the Government are making to the efforts to support people affected by conflict in Syria and elsewhere. The motion clearly does that. It attempts to achieve consensus on some of those concerns and on the valid points made by Government Members yesterday.

The most questionable point made by the hon. Member for Gloucester was when he complained that the motion “calls for a Government report to be laid before the House by 12 October 2015 detailing how that number can be increased” and stopped there. He forgot to say that the motion continues:

“encompassing refugees already in Europe and including a plan for the remainder of this year to reflect the overwhelming urgency of this humanitarian crisis”.

That is the point. If those of us who have signed the motion had been saying that we wanted to see refugees who are already in Europe admitted as part of the 20,000 the Government are looking to admit over the next few years, Government Members would say that we were trying to deny people in the camps the opportunity to be part of the that number. Our concern is not that people who are in the camps should not be admitted—we welcome the Government's interest, although again we would welcome an increase in the numbers—but that we cannot ignore those who are already in Europe. It was the overtone of disqualification in the Prime Minister's statement the other day that particularly concerned me.

In the debate yesterday and today, many hon. Members touched on what prompted so many of our constituents to mobilise and get in touch with us. A little over a week after the media were full of the photographs of the Prime Minister on a beach in Cornwall, a different beach photograph emerged in the media. It brought out those words of Seamus Heaney about something having the ability to

“catch the heart off guard and blow it open.”

That is what that photograph of Alan Kurdi did.

We heard the response from so many of our constituents and we know what the response has been internationally, but let us be clear. That photograph stirred our constituents and in turn seemed to spur the Prime Minister into altering his tone, but let us think about another Alan who might arrive on a beach or somewhere else in Europe, having survived his perilous journey, but alone and unaccompanied. What is the message in the Government's response to that Alan? “He is disqualified. He is outside our consideration.” We even heard from the Prime Minister today that, yes, we do have to take care as to what we do with unaccompanied children and how we treat them, but being careful is no reason not to show them care and consideration, which appears to be the Government's position. That needs to be revised, improved and altered.

I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister has had his attitudes to this long-running problem reconditioned. Remember, he was one of the leaders at the EU Council who went along with the idea that Operation Mare Nostrum was somehow encouraging people on to the seas. The line back then in autumn 2013 was, “If we run rescue operations, we will only be encouraging more people on to the seas.” At least now, thankfully, we have the Royal Navy, the Irish navy and others helping to rescue, but it took the disasters of April this year to force that rethink. The same caution from the Government Benches that we have heard in the past two days—that we have to be careful not to encourage people to make those perilous journeys—was exactly what was behind the disastrous decision in relation to Operation Mare Nostrum, which did nothing to discourage the perilous journeys and meant that people were not saved and too many lives were lost.

Mr MacNeil: The perilous journeys would, of course, be ended if people could fly. Sadly, they cannot because an EU aviation directive prevents that, which means that at four times the cost they are taking those perilous journeys.

Mark Durkan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for making that point, which is correct. We know from Amnesty and others that a cogent case has been made in relation

to a number of deficiencies in the Schengen agreement and the Dublin regulation, which clearly need to be overhauled in the light of recent events.

I agree with so many Government Members on a number of points that they have made, not least the hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer) and the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood). We need to recognise the scale of the whole humanitarian crisis and not concentrate just on those who are arriving in Europe. We have to meet our responsibilities in relation to those who have made it to Europe and in relation to the wider crisis.

The Secretary of State for International Development spoke of her concern not only that other countries were not matching the 0.7% aid target, but that there was a significant shortfall in so many relevant UN appeals. Some of us would say that one of the ways to deal with that is through a global financial transaction tax. Part of the aim of those of us who have supported that idea is precisely to support funding for the sort of international mechanisms and measures that are needed, rather than different UN funds having to busk around different countries trying to gather money for programmes. Although we have heard in these debates about the very good work in the refugee camps and elsewhere that is being funded through DFID and so many NGOs, let us also be clear that UN funding in a number of those camps is being reduced. The level of food aid in some of the camps is being reduced, and education support is not what it should be.

In the previous Parliament the all-party group on protecting children in armed conflict, led by Fiona O'Donnell, produced a report that drew heavily on the lessons being learned from what is happening in Syria, particularly in relation to the millions of children who have had to flee. It noted that when DFID and other organisations respond to such emergencies, in the first order of things little thought is given to education. That might be understandable, but when we consider just how long term many refugee camps have become for other conflicts—look at the Palestinian experience—we see that clearly more needs to be done. The world must respond not only to the immediacy of the refugee crisis, but to the wider lessons about the inadequacy. Obviously the convention on refugees will have to be overhauled, and so many other rules, such as Schengen and Dublin, will have to be revised.

Of course, these islands are outside Schengen. One of the things that I would like to see the UK Government do, along with the Irish Government, is convene a meeting of the British-Irish Council to co-ordinate across the devolved Administrations and with the Irish Government what the response will be across these islands in order to meet our responsibilities for accommodating refugees. That would ensure optimum co-ordination across jurisdictions and between services so that there is no fall-down, breakdown or confusion facing international agencies or domestic charities when it comes to responding. The Government might find, as a result of the information and ideas that would emerge from such collaboration, that they are in a position to reconsider the number of refugees they are taking and the time scale, not least by accommodating some of those who are already in Europe.

Let us be clear that the Government, having previously been averse to engaging with the UNHCR resettlement scheme, and then having been very dilatory in relation

[Mark Durkan]

to the vulnerable persons scheme, have now moved to strike a tone of some urgency in this regard, but of course limits have been put on it—the Prime Minister appears to have put the guard up on his heart again. The Government must be prepared to do more, but those of us who are criticising them for the number of refugees they will admit or on the time scale must face the wider question about the scale of the problem in the camps, about other conflicts, not least in Sudan and South Sudan, that are driving people into refugee status, and about the need for a much bigger and longer-term response, including proper support for the UN, and a global financial transactions tax would be a good start.

5.22 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I rise as a member of an Opposition party in this House and in support of a motion that is the collective endeavour of six Opposition parties. I ask the Government Members sitting opposite to consider the approach we are taking this afternoon. It is normally the Opposition's job to harry and harass the Government, and even to expose and embarrass them, when they get the opportunity to do so. This afternoon we have laid aside those conventions and are not engaging in what is the normal practice in this place.

Instead, we are adopting a different approach. To use an American phrase, we are “reaching out” and trying to find a consensus with Government Members, because on this occasion our desire to see this country make a bigger contribution to the humanitarian effort that is required to face this crisis is greater than our desire to score political points. I ask the Government Members here to reflect on that and consider an appropriate response.

There are now six Conservative Members in attendance, and fewer than 30 have participated over the past four hours. I make that observation not to judge, but to ask them to reflect on whether that is an adequate level of participation and attendance, given the seriousness of the debate. That matters, because when the Division bells ring at 7 o'clock, if 300 of their number come here from their offices and other places in the Palace to vote down the motion in the Lobby, having heard neither the content of the debate, nor the tone with which it has been argued, that will do a disservice to this debate and show contempt for the point we are putting forward. That will reflect very badly on the Government, so I urge Conservative Members not to do that.

There has been much talk about the scale of this crisis, but I still think that many have not quite grasped just what we are dealing with. Since the civil war began in Syria, half the population of 23 million people have had their houses destroyed. Four million of those people are now exiled from their homeland. They are joined by 2.5 million from Iraq, 1.5 million from South Sudan, and many millions of others from other conflicts in the region. There are 9 million people in holding patterns in refugee camps in the middle east. It does not take a mathematician to know that 20,000 can be nothing but a start to tackling that problem, rather than the end point. That is why the motion asks the Government to review that figure, take time and come back in four weeks with a plan to expand it.

Much has been said about the situation in the camps and refugees in Europe; clearly, there is a relationship between the two. The Government are right to consider the question of funding for the camps, because those organising them point to a shortage of funds. There can be no doubt that deteriorating conditions in the camps would be one incentive for people to make the journey into Europe. However, let us not pretend for a moment that well-funded refugee camps in the middle east will be the answer to the crisis that we are facing by itself, because there is a much bigger factor at play that relates to the efficacy of those refugee camps—that is, many of the people who went to them have nowhere to return to. The conflicts that created their situation show no sign of abating. In fact, it is arguable that in some areas, such as Syria, it is going to get worse before it gets better. The homes in which they lived no longer exist. Those communities—those villages and towns—are no longer there. People are now beginning to realise that if they cannot go east they will have to consider going west. That is the powerful driver now at play among the refugee populations in the middle east. Unless we seriously think that the answer to that is to build refugee camps that will hold people for a generation, we need to do an awful lot more thinking about where these people will move on to from the refugee camps.

A lot of people have already taken this decision for themselves. We might well ask what drives a person to take the risks and put themselves and their families into the conditions that we have seen. Why would you even think about getting on a dodgy boat run by a criminal gang where you probably have a one in 20 chance of you and your children drowning en route? Why would you think about being locked into a container and driven for thousands of miles across a continent knowing that you could suffocate in the process? The answer is simple: because the terror in front is not as great as the terror behind. That is why people are driven to take these incredible steps. It is disgraceful for us to get into a situation where our response to the people who have flown that terror and tried to protect their families is to say, “We will not even recognise you in our policy. You stop there, you turn round, and you go back.” As the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) said, that is not an adequate response to the situation. We need a policy that addresses the refugee problem in the round—the people in the camps and the people not in the camps who have now migrated to our continent.

Some Conservative Back Benchers have talked as though the game is to try to prevent the crisis from happening in Europe by containing it in the middle east. I have to say to them that the crisis is already upon us in Europe. It is not only the third of a million people who crossed the Mediterranean this year, but the many hundreds of thousands in the previous few years, that have led us to a situation where we have over 1 million refugees in European Union states looking for a home. It is simply not good enough to turn our back on our European partners and say that we will do nothing about that. We do need to do something about it. I cannot believe that the Prime Minister of this country will go to next week's meeting of European premiers and say that this country will make no contribution to the plans that Jean-Claude Juncker announced this morning for 120,000 or more permanent resettlements of refugees already within Europe. We have to do something. As I have said, we are not here on this

occasion to chastise or berate the Government, but to ask them to take a month to think about this problem and to then come back and lay before this House proper plans to deal with the whole situation.

Mr MacNeil: I heard from the Danish ambassador this lunchtime that last year Denmark—a country the size of Scotland—took 13,000 refugees, 4,000 of whom were from Syria. In the context of what the UK is doing, that shows we could do an awful lot more.

Tommy Sheppard: I agree completely with my hon. Friend. It is worth noting that we are talking about accepting the equivalent of 0.01% of our population as refugees in the face of this crisis, while 25% of Lebanon's residents are refugees.

My hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) mentioned Alan Kurdi. That image moved the nation's heart last weekend and has led to a public change of attitude in this country, which is welcome. I concur with my hon. Friend. Is our response to the people who saw that image on their television screens and in their newspapers to say that if that child had not drowned and had survived that journey, he would not be welcome here? Surely we cannot say such a thing with any decency or absence of shame.

I appeal to the Government to think about the manner in which this debate has been conducted and to reflect on and come back with expanded plans. I think that in doing so they will be commended warmly by the people of this country. I think that all of us have been surprised and humbled by the attitude of ordinary people up and down this country. As of the weekend, in just one council ward in my constituency of Edinburgh East, 27 people—probably the equivalent of more than 100 in the constituency as a whole—have rung up to say that they would house a refugee family in their own home, and that was before anybody even asked them to do that. Imagine what the response would be if the Government, local government, the Churches, political leaders and civic leaders said, “Let us rally as a nation and do something to help these people who are in such dire need.” I think that tens of thousands of our citizens would say that we welcome refugees to our country, city and home.

5.32 pm

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) for his speech. I share his passion and was very moved by how he spoke with personal commitment about the plight of individuals. Many of his colleagues have spoken with great humility and humanity about the personal challenges faced by migrants. I commend the SNP for calling this debate and for allowing enough time for a detailed discussion.

I also pay tribute to the International Development Secretary. Although we disagree on many issues, including the key issue of the number of people allowed into this country, she spoke with great warmth and insight about not only the individuals she has met when visiting refugee camps, but the plight of those in crisis.

This crisis has at its core two huge challenges: war and mass migration. War is chaotic and unpredictable, and mass migration has brought these challenges to our doorstep. As we have seen, this is also a time when the best and the worst of humanity are on display.

I was an aid worker in the Balkans and eastern Europe throughout the 1990s, and in that time I saw a lot of places impacted by war and refugee crises. I worked in Albania from 1992, which was years before the refugee crisis, and got to see at first hand a country being impacted by refugees when the Kosovan war broke out. I worked in a town called Korçë in southern Albania. In the late 1990s, when people started fleeing the murderous intentions of Slobodan Milošević, the town took in 50,000 refugees in a single night. The population of the entire town was doubled overnight and we took part in the operation that cared for those people. It was extraordinary not only that the host town, in one of the poorest countries on our continent, responded with extreme generosity, but that the international community supported it in that endeavour. It was also interesting to see how the next-door country, Macedonia, responded very differently. We have seen how different countries on our continent have responded differently over time.

I do not want to talk in detail about those experiences, other than to point out a few lessons from my time dealing with refugees and humanitarian crises up close. The first issue that I would like to raise with Ministers is the role of the UNHCR. In my experience, the UNHCR is one of the most underfunded and overstretched humanitarian organisations, certainly within the United Nations. In one crisis that I worked in, it took three weeks before the UNHCR was capable even of deploying staff to an area that had received 50,000 refugees in a single night. When the staff did arrive, they were few in number and it took time to build the resources to get an operation up and running.

The Government are placing most of the responsibility on the UNHCR to co-ordinate the refugees who will come to the United Kingdom. I would like assurances that the Government are ensuring that the UNHCR has the right resources behind it to carry out that function with enough diligence and to make it an effective operation.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): It is always a privilege for the House to hear from a person with experience in these matters. We heard the Prime Minister say the other day that the UNHCR will be tasked with sifting refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. From his personal experience, does my hon. Friend feel that the UNHCR has the resources to undertake all that additional work?

Peter Kyle: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. He has predicted something that I was about to say.

Stephen Pound: Oh, sorry!

Peter Kyle: No, I welcome that because it is an important point. I was about to say that the Government are relying on the UNHCR to sift the people who will come here, and to ask for reassurance, because this is a good opportunity for the Government to reassure the House that the UNHCR has the resources to carry out the sifting in the right way. That process is incredibly important. My experiences are a little out of date so I cannot talk about how the UNHCR operates today, but based on those experiences, I think that it is cause for concern and something that the House needs to be reassured about.

[Peter Kyle]

The second issue I want to raise is the population that remains behind. When sifting happens in a refugee population, it is quite often the people with skills who are taken first. Sometimes, the population that will be left is not given due consideration. In a camp of 5,000 or 10,000 people—or even more, as is sometimes the case in the current situation—it is important that the population that remains after a sifting process has all the skills that any population needs, even more so considering that they are living in encampments that have very basic conditions. I hope the Minister can reassure the House that the UNHCR is being encouraged, on behalf of the British Government, to give due consideration to the population that remains.

The spotlight is on the generosity of the British people, because this crisis is unfolding on British soil. That brings aid work closer to home than it usually is. This crisis is challenging both abroad and at home. I do not see this as a zero-sum game. When we have said that not enough people are being welcomed to these shores, some people, particularly on the Government Benches, have pointed out that money is being given abroad. It should not be an either/or situation. The fact that we are being generous abroad should not stop us being generous at home.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making an impassioned speech, drawing on his great expertise. Does he agree that one striking thing about this crisis is the number of people from different sorts of communities right across the country who are being supportive? That is happening not just in the big multicultural cities, but in small towns and villages. I think of the village of Coedpoeth in my constituency, where the Plas Pentwyn centre is already organising collections. There is a massive response across our country.

Peter Kyle: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, because it highlights just how much generosity there is within the British public at the moment, and that should be absolutely commended. At a time when anybody can get into their car to deliver aid to people in need, we must ensure that this is done in a structured way. I encourage people who are tempted to do this to co-ordinate with humanitarian organisations that have experience, because people who are fleeing war do not just need the clothing that is on offer. That is incredibly important, but many will need specialist emotional support, too. We need to make sure that they get access to both.

Brighton and Hove, the city I represent, has that generosity in abundance. The council is preparing to take five families, which is a modest contribution but it is what is being asked of it at the moment. It is also making contingency plans to take many more. We will rise to the challenge. The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) is in her place, and I am sure that she, like me, has been inundated with offers from the general public to take people into their homes. That is symptomatic of the huge generosity that exists in the population at the moment, and I pay tribute to their humanity and generosity. We must also accept that this situation could be here for the long term. Many people will have emotional damage and will need specialist

care. People who are offering to take people into their homes need to be cognisant of that and make sure that they are equipped to give the care that is needed into the long term.

Caroline Lucas: The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful case. He referred to Brighton and Hove, the city we both represent, rightly saying that many people there want to help. Does he agree that we need to put more pressure on the Government for the funding, particularly for local authorities, and for them to guarantee that it will last beyond the one year? I am really concerned that one year is not enough.

Peter Kyle: I certainly share the hon. Lady's concerns and she makes a pertinent point. It is incredibly important that when the Department for International Development funding runs out, councils get the commitment into the long term, in order to continue their efforts.

I have seen what it takes to make somebody leave their home, their community and the people they love—they do not do that lightly. The push of war is greater than the pull of Britain. This crisis involves hundreds of thousands of people—it is into the millions now. When there is a crisis involving that number of people, we can find in that population anything we like, because every ounce of human characteristics will be on display. People who look for criminality will find it, and people who look for economic migrants will find them. The job of this House is to take decisions in the round and see that, overall, this group of people need help, are fleeing their country because of war and are turning to us for help in all sincerity. We can argue about numbers but there is one basic question: are we doing all we can as a nation on our own soil, or is there more we can do? There are more people who need to come here, the British people are prepared to take more and it is the Government who are getting in the way. On that basis, I am happy to support today's motion.

5.42 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in the SNP Opposition day debate about this very important issue of the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean and Europe, and I am proud that it has commanded the support of six parties across this House.

Last week, the world woke to shocking images showing the lifeless body of a three-year-old Kurdish Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, lying face down on a Turkish beach. There is no doubt that that image was a turning point in this entire debate. Of course, everyone in this House welcomes the Government's plan to accept 20,000 Syrian refugees, and as we debate this issue we must remember with humility that while we debate, people continue to suffer and to die. It is important that we do more. It is important that the UK Government do more, and our constituents rightly demand that we do more.

The Government must set out a clear timetable for welcoming refugees as soon as possible. Efforts must be twofold, helping those people within the region and those who have fled. Although we wish to conduct this debate in a constructive manner, it is not helpful to link this debate—this humanitarian crisis—to talk of migration and immigration targets. The UK has done much in providing aid to Syrian refugees in the region, but it is

rightly recognised that there is a moral responsibility also to resettle a fair share of refugees in the UK. The UK must continue to provide significant aid contributions to Syria and neighbouring countries, and persuade all those it can to give generously.

Long-term solutions to the root causes of conflict in Syria are required, and the United Nations Security Council is central to resolving the current crisis. The UK Government should continue to advocate a sustainable and inclusive political solution and to push for an immediate ceasefire. We must work to ensure that all parties to the conflict stop any arms transfers and guarantee humanitarian access. Alan, the child whose tragic picture was seen across the world, was only one of more than 350,000 migrants who have attempted to cross the Mediterranean this year and, tragically, one of more than 2,600 who have lost their lives on that perilous journey. A further 1,000 have lost their lives along various other migration routes, including the Sahara desert and in the Bay of Bengal. That must be a matter of extreme concern to all of us, not only as MPs but as human beings, and to our constituents.

Far from being economic migrants—the mantra still being trotted out in some quarters—62% of those who reached Europe by boat this year, according to figures compiled by the UN, were from Syria, Eritrea and Afghanistan, countries ravaged by war and religious extremism. The scale of the suffering faced by those fleeing violence and barbarism is almost beyond the comprehension of anyone in this House. Driven by blind panic and motivated by a desire to protect their families, they fall into the hands of villainous people traffickers who herd them on to crowded and dangerously unseaworthy vessels. The outcome is often depressingly predictable and leads to the sort of appalling images we saw in the media last week.

The debate is not helped when we do not take care with the language we use. Insensitive language serves only to remove the human element from the tragic story unfolding. Of course, we all face challenges in our own communities in terms of tackling poverty and in delivering public services, but those pale in comparison to the scale of loss and suffering being experienced across north Africa and the Mediterranean.

The number seeking refuge in Europe equates to less than 0.05% of the continent's population and, as the world's richest continent, we could and should be more accommodating to those in need of our protection. In recent days, more and more people are realising that we could and should do more. We have all read the emails and post from our constituents, and we know what public opinion is on this issue.

It must be remembered that, far from being the chosen or favoured destination for asylum seekers, Britain is by no means on the front line of the migrant crisis. Indeed, the migrants at Calais account for as little as 1% of those who have arrived in Europe so far this year. Estimates suggest that around 3,000 migrants have reached Calais, which is a fraction of the more than 200,000 who have landed in Italy and Greece.

As the world's richest continent, we could do much more to address the unfolding tragedy. We must applaud the exceptional efforts of the German Federal Government, who are preparing to take in 800,000 asylum seekers this year, and recognise that a growing number of people in this country wish that the UK Government would adopt a more proactive role. As we have heard

repeatedly in this debate, there is no doubt that the UK could comfortably provide sanctuary to many more asylum seekers, because UN figures show that the number of refugees in the UK has fallen from 193,600 to 117,161 over the past four years.

Despite the fact that UN figures show the number of refugees in the UK falling by more than a third over the past four years, only a handful have been granted asylum this year. Sadly, that is in sharp contrast to the action by the German Federal Government. There is no doubt that, as one of the largest and wealthiest countries in Europe, we are capable of playing a serious role in alleviating the crisis. First Minister Nicola Sturgeon has indicated that Scotland is more than ready to assist in meeting that challenge. Indeed, my own local authority, North Ayrshire Council, has expressed its willingness to play its part. The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) made the point very well that central Government funding is essential.

I take this opportunity to urge Members from across the House to sign my early-day motion—some have already done so—calling on the UK Government to show decisive leadership in ensuring a fair proportion of refugees are allowed to seek shelter across the UK. I and other SNP Members are confident that if we, along with our European neighbours, play our part, we can help to provide safe passage and sanctuary to those like Alan. His family simply wanted him to have a life not lived in fear, but his life was tragically lost so close to safety.

It is time for the UK to play a fuller part to help mitigate this unfolding human tragedy, which is on a scale not seen since world war two. It is time for the Government to lead, instead of being dragged into doing more by public opinion. If the UK Government do not do more, history will quite rightly judge them very harshly indeed.

5.51 pm

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): I speak in support of the motion to which I was proud to add my name.

No human life is more or less valuable than another. This country has an obligation to take a humanitarian and compassionate approach to resolving the current and acute refugee crisis not because we are bound by international law and bilateral or multilateral agreements, but because each of us—here in Parliament and across the British Isles—has a responsibility, with our European neighbours, to our fellow human beings to provide help and support to those in such desperate and dire need.

The Somali poet Warsan Shire recently said:

“No one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land.”

Who among the parents in the Chamber could possibly contemplate the horror of putting their children on to dangerous and overcrowded boats to cross the Mediterranean sea, knowing that more than 3,000 others have perished so far this year attempting such a treacherous path to safety? How terrible must this situation get and how many more lives must be lost before this Government step up adequately to their responsibility?

The Syrian war has killed about 250,000 people to date, of whom half are believed to be civilians. Assad and Daesh have combined to bomb crowded cities and

[*Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh*]

towns, and human rights violations are widespread. In this environment, it is difficult for many to access basic necessities, such as food and medical care. The UN estimates that 7.6 million people are internally displaced, and 4 million Syrians have fled. More than half the country's pre-war population of 23 million are now in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, whether they still remain in the country or have escaped across the border.

Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that, because of the war and the terror in Syria, many young people are escaping to avoid being conscripted into the various warring armies in the region? It is quite understandable that many of them want to get away from a future full of nothing but terror, fighting and war.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: I agree with my hon. Friend, who passionately articulates the sentiments felt by us all. As a parent, I want to be able to explain to my children that I—that we—did all we possibly could to help. Our children are asking questions, and we should not be ashamed of our answers.

A practical humanitarian response to this tragedy requires three main strands of action. First, the UK must take its fair share of refugees. It is right that we should seek to relocate those families and individuals in Syria and in the region who are in immediate peril. I welcome the action from the Government. I agree that we should do more to support these people, but we must also play our part in responding to the immediate crisis in Europe itself. It is the right thing to do. When the other great nations in Europe are standing side by side to work together to tackle the largest humanitarian crisis in decades on our shore, the UK should not seek to stand back from our responsibility, distancing ourselves from the collective responsibility of European membership. European membership is about democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. It stands for pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice and solidarity, and we should fulfil these very principles. When the leaders of Europe meet, the UK must discuss with our allies and partners what we can do to play our maximum part.

In Scotland this week, over half of our councils have stepped up to pledge their support for those affected by this crisis. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has had an overwhelming and unprecedented response from local authorities on this issue. Every party leader in the Scottish Parliament supports further action. I will not be the only Member here who has been inundated by calls, letters and emails from constituents pledging support or seeking ways in which to give support directly. By every measure, there is a clear majority of people across Scotland and the UK who support a compassionate and proportionate response from this Government.

Secondly, this humanitarian response must not be used as a cover or pretext for military action in Syria. The deterioration in the security of the region can be traced back directly to the disastrous decision to join with George Bush in pursuing illegal military action in Iraq. We must not make that same mistake again here. How could we possibly fathom another UK Prime Minister, in his second term of office, pushing for a

military solution to a humanitarian crisis? An increase in offensive military action against Assad or Daesh would not stabilise the situation within Syria. Instead, what must happen now is that the UK must seek the support of the other permanent members of the UN Security Council to secure safe corridors and camps for refugees throughout the middle east. I know that this approach has already gained support from across the House, and I welcome that progress. When SNP colleagues and I met with a range of stakeholders in Scotland last week to hear their experience of working in Syria, there was wide support for such an approach. Action on this basis would be the antithesis of previous military campaigns in the region, as it would be defensive in nature, have a clear and achievable objective, and would be underpinned by international law.

In March 2011, the Prime Minister stood in this House and said of the situation then facing Libya:

“Do we want a situation where a failed pariah state festers on Europe's southern border, potentially threatening our security, pushing people across the Mediterranean?”—[*Official Report*, 14 March 2011; Vol. 525, c. 27.]

At that point, the Prime Minister was determined to prevent a humanitarian crisis on the periphery of Europe. As we now know, the total additional cost of Operation Ellamy in Libya is estimated to be about £320 million. In the past, this Government and others before them have spared no expense in pursuing military action. We are engaged in military action against Daesh. On this basis, we should be prepared to welcome those who are fleeing its tyranny.

Angela Crawley: The threat of reprisal against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people who live under Daesh, or as refugees who have fled the area, is particularly salient. Will my hon. Friend join me in urging the Government to commit to appointing a special envoy to ensure that international attention does not forget the plight of these especially threatened people?

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: I absolutely do, and I hope that Ministers take up my hon. Friend's excellent suggestion.

I agree with EU President Juncker, who spoke so passionately about this issue today. For the world, this is a matter of humanity and human dignity. For Europe, it is a matter of historical fairness. This is a continent where so many have been refugees at one time or another, fleeing war, dictatorship or oppression. We need to treat others as we would hope to be treated ourselves. I am proud that Europe is seen as a safe haven for those fleeing horrific circumstances. We should not cower in fear from Europe's reputation as a beacon of democracy and justice in a dangerous world. As President Juncker pointed out today, Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon—countries far poorer than the UK—are making huge efforts in moral and financial terms to address this crisis. One in five people in Lebanon today is a refugee. Italy, Hungary and Greece cannot be left alone to deal with the enormous challenge facing us in Europe.

Victoria Atkins: The hon. Lady has cited countries such as Turkey that are doing such a lot to help with the refugee crisis, but does she accept that the £900 million in aid the UK has given is helping those countries do exactly that?

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: As the motion details, we welcome what is already being done, but we are saying it does not go far enough or fast enough. That is the point of the motion. The motion calls on the Government to commit to take our fair share of responsibility, as a member of the EU, in resolving the tragedy unfolding before us. I implore all Members to support the motion.

6.1 pm

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): I, too, thank everyone in the House. The quality and detail of the debate, from Opposition Members and some Government Members, has been outstanding. Benjamin Franklin said:

“By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail.”

To me, this sums up our current Administration's attitude. What a confusion the Government are in! Meanwhile, human tragedy fills our television screens and newspapers daily. We watch in amazement as party leaders morph from one policy to another—so if Members do not like this one, they should not worry, because another one will be along in a month. It appears that the Prime Minister has no vision, no strategy, nor planning; all is short-termism. Westminster has been practising short-termism for decade upon decade, and it has taken the heartbreaking photograph of a drowned boy to force the Government into action. It is totally shameful.

The Government's inertia is baffling. Across the UK, people cannot understand such a lack of decision making and leadership in the face of these urgent world events. While we welcome the Prime Minister's recent announcement to welcome Syrian refugees, the amount of time and debate it took to reach this point is embarrassing, and it is still not good enough. As said earlier, Westminster has all the resources to react quickly and decisively to urgent situations, but it never, ever seems to be ready. Why do we need another plan? This place should have a plan in place to deal with humanitarian situations. Where are the strength, the clarity of leadership and the strong voices that truly affect and reflect what the citizens of these, our islands, actually want?

In Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon was quick to outline plans to offer aid. Rather than dithering as people died, she urged the Westminster Government to act. On our behalf, she wants to reach out a hand and actually do something substantial. Surely to goodness, amid such a human tragedy, the UK needs a leader who demands fairness, compassion and, importantly, action from Ministers.

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab) *rose*—

John Mc Nally: I have nearly finished. I will keep my comments short. Mr Speaker likes it that way—or so I am told by his former secretary's secretary, who now works for me. *[Laughter.]* I might be cheating, as I have inside information, but I will put it to good use. There is no time to be lost while young lives are being lost: this is a time to act.

Lastly, I want to thank my Falkirk constituents for their prompt action. They are preparing themselves: they are meeting tonight, organising themselves and getting ready as quickly as they possibly can. Where action is required, they are prepared to react.

6.5 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): As the pictures of young Alan Kurdi appeared on our screens, I found it difficult to comprehend quite what had happened in Europe that allowed that to happen. I sat up all night and replied to all the emails I received from my constituents who had also seen the images and were desperate to do something to help. They wanted their MP to stand up and say, “This should not be happening on our shores; we should do everything we can to help.” I held my own children tighter that night as they slept in their beds, and I kept my own son away from the newspaper racks in the morning because I could not explain to him how that could have been allowed to happen in Europe.

I noticed this morning that UNICEF had published some photographs taken by children who were living in the refugee camps of Lebanon and Palestine in 2013 and 2014. It is interesting to observe their perspective, seeing life through the eyes of those children. What did they see in those camps? Just other families and other friends—ordinary families living lives in extraordinary circumstances that we would not wish for our own families and children. They saw heat; they saw mud; they saw snow; they saw filth; they saw weddings. Those were the sorts of things the children were seeing in those camps, but they should not have been living their young childhoods there. They should not have had to face that as their reality.

All things are not equal in EU countries today. While we are able to cope to some degree with refugees coming to our shores, people in Hungary are unable to cope. I looked through some photographs on social media and found that the refugee camps being set up in Hungary are woefully inadequate to deal with the numbers, the needs and the circumstances that people face. There are families there with pregnant women and sick and injured people who need a great deal more support than they are able to receive just now.

Médecins sans Frontières has described the current situation in Lesbos as “a pressure cooker”. There are boats going to take people away from those Greek islands because the infrastructure there cannot cope with the circumstances. People came there fleeing terrible circumstances and paid a lot to get there, but things are still terrible for them. We need to look to our European partners to see what help we can give because the infrastructure is incapable of coping.

Both Médecins sans Frontières and the Migrant Offshore Aid Station are operating in the Mediterranean. On their busiest day, some six days ago, 1,658 people were rescued by the two boats that those organisations are operating. They are rescuing people from different circumstances all day through from 7 o'clock in the morning. We need to look to our own resources; what resources can we bring to this? What could our Navy and our fisheries protection vessels be doing to help so that more people do not drown when they could be saved?

Stuart C. McDonald: Earlier this afternoon, I received an answer from the Ministry of Defence that, in tandem with another answer from the same Ministry, shows that the first ship we deployed in the Mediterranean rescued an average 527 people every week over nine weeks. Today, however, we learn that the second ship we

[Stuart C. McDonald]

deployed, HMS Enterprise, has rescued fewer than that—453 migrants in total over the same period. Does my hon. Friend share my concern about what that means for our ships in the Mediterranean and what we are asking them to do? Do we not deserve a detailed explanation of their exact role in the Mediterranean?

Alison Thewliss: I certainly agree with my hon. Friend. It is very poor indeed if it is true that charitable organisations operating on an absolute shoestring are rescuing more people than our Navy is able to rescue, given the facilities and investment that go into our Navy. We need to do a good deal more.

Those refugees are not coming solely from Syria; they are coming from Eritrea, Somalia, Libya and a range of other countries, and we must do all that we can to support each of them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Ms Ahmed-Sheikh) said earlier, no one puts their child on a boat unless the sea is safer than the land. We must bear that in mind when we think of the difficulties and challenges that people are facing, and the fear that must drive them and their families out on to the sea.

The response in Glasgow has been absolutely amazing. I have been inundated with emails, because so many organisations are trying to help. Groups of people have come together to form organisations such as Scotland Supporting Refugees. Other organisations are well established, such as the Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees and Positive Action in Housing. Strathclyde University's student union is collecting for refugees, and the Clutha—a bar which, as many will know, faced tragedy itself—has been raising money for the Scottish Refugee Council. All those organisations are coming together, but what would be incredibly useful would be a wee bit more guidance on what people should be doing to help. What can people give? Should they donate money, clothes or bedding? Where can they go to donate, and how can we best support the offers from ordinary people who are desperate to do something to avert the tragedy that we are seeing?

I have also received a request from a woman who is involved in Scotland Supporting Refugees. She is desperate to try to help by taking items to Greece, but she has found it incredibly difficult to persuade the airline—in this instance, Flybe—to provide the extra baggage allowance. I hope that Ministers will speak to airlines that are already operating charter flights to Greece to use whatever leeway they have to allow people to take extra items. All the airlines should be trying to support this humanitarian effort.

I have been trying to help a constituent who has been seeking status in this country for some time, having fled from a very dangerous situation in Yemen. He got in touch with me, regardless of the extreme personal difficulties that he has been experiencing—he has faced destitution, not for the first time—to ask, “What can I do to help? I do not want anyone else to have to face this situation.”

I urge the Government to do more. It is great that finance has been coming, but a good deal more needs to be done to support people who are in the most desperate of circumstances.

6.12 pm

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I apologise to the House for the fact that, although I was in the Chamber for the opening speeches, I have not been present for the whole debate.

Let me say at the outset that I am no Tory Mr Gradgrind, gnashing my teeth and moaning and groaning about things—not, I must add, with universal support in North Dorset. I am a huge supporter of the 0.07% of GDP, and I hope that economic growth can continue so that that figure can rise. It is testimony to our history, our heritage and our humanitarian outlook, and we as a nation should be proud of it.

I think the fact that the House has discussed this issue, both as a result of the Prime Minister's statement on Monday and in the debates that have taken place yesterday and this afternoon, illustrates the huge amount of interest, concern and support in the House.

An earlier speaker suggested that this was probably the first occasion on which public policy, both here and elsewhere, was being shaped or formed by a photograph. I am not entirely sure that that is correct. Quite a lot of people will think back to the photograph of that little girl during the Vietnam war, and how it helped shape and change public opinion. The photographs of figures in holocaust camps, consisting of skin and bone held up by rags, changed the view as well. However, I have to say, without becoming too maudlin about the matter, that as the father of three daughters—one of whom happens also to be a three-year-old—I was very struck by that photograph. As I flipped through recent pictures on my phone of her splashing in the waves during a family holiday in north Pembrokeshire, I tried to put myself in that father's position. He had lost everything, and was wondering who or what was there to help and support him—and, indeed, whether the world understood what on earth was going on.

I think what is happening in the UK is desperately important, and it is indicative of our DNA when it comes to these issues. Whenever there is an international crisis with a humanitarian aspect, our country and its citizens, charities and voluntary sector always rise to the occasion and do so magnificently, often through small people doing small things that they hope will make a big difference.

In the three sessions of debate on this issue, a number of Members have referenced what their councils are doing. I am pleased to say that even in rural, somewhat sleepy Dorset, which does not have a very racially mixed demographic, the chief executive of North Dorset district council, Matt Prosser, is convening discussions with other council officers to see what Dorset can do to help.

If this motion is pressed to a Division, I will oppose it, however, because it asks us to help those who are already in Europe. It is a fundamental principle that we must stand first against that. There are several reasons why. The kernel of my concerns is the issue I raised with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on Monday—security. There is a downside to having 20,000 people over a five-year period rather than immediately. If I was an ISIS recruiter wishing this country ill, I would be trying to find ways to infiltrate and get my people in on those transports bringing people to the United Kingdom. We know because that is how they work. We know

because we have seen it in other refugee camps where political or religious intimidation is rife. It would be wholly negligent of Her Majesty's Government to adopt a policy that brought such people into this country. The sole purpose is the relief of suffering, but that would bring in people who wish to cause harm and discord.

Stuart C. McDonald: Our policy on asylum seekers and those seeking refuge has been driven by ISIL. ISIL has already won.

Simon Hoare: I have to say that I think that, unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman is in some respects right. Part of the downside of what has been an instinctive humanitarian response is that we are doing President Assad's job for him by clearing away the results of his devastating policy on his country, and some could construe that as waving a white flag to ISIL, too—saying, "We cannot defeat you; we haven't the resolve or the resource and therefore we are going to absorb those people who have been displaced by your actions." I therefore agree with the hon. Gentleman in that I could see that being a very easy interpretation of some of our actions and some of these proposals.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): We have a desire to help those on European shores. We are a member of the EU. We should stop hiding behind Schengen and accept our responsibilities to work with our partners to give sanctuary to those who need refuge. That is the priority.

Simon Hoare: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, and I repeat a point I made in an intervention on the shadow Foreign Secretary: there are hospitals, doctors, schools and the whole network of social infrastructure in each and every European country. There may be qualitative differences, and there may even be quantitative differences, but those networks exist.

Martin John Docherty *rose*—

Simon Hoare: Let me finish this point. It would be a retrograde step if people could say, "I have arrived in Europe, I am free of persecution, but I am now going to do a pick 'n' mix of which country in Europe is best for me." I also have to say that it is deeply insulting to those countries in Europe who themselves are striving to deal with this issue to say that we can do it better than them. There is a smack of imperialism—

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Simon Hoare: At the mention of a smack of imperialism, I seem to be infested by Scots. I will give way to the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin John Docherty).

Martin John Docherty: I am grateful for the infestation of Scots; I am delighted that 56 of them are Scottish nationalists, especially in this debate today. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman would agree that the nations that might require the greatest assistance are great nations such as the Republic of Greece, which founders on economic disaster, yet opens its doors without question to those seeking refuge in the most dreadful conditions; and if we are to support them, we should also give them additional investment.

Simon Hoare: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but the sovereign Government of Greece signed up to an arrangement of open borders, which they now have to justify to their people. Her Majesty's Government, on previous occasions, took a different point of view.

Mark Durkan: The hon. Gentleman has clearly overcome whatever emotions afflicted him when he scrolled through his family photographs by conjuring up the most bizarre rationale. Does he not understand that many of us fully accept why Government Members want at every opportunity to stand outside a common currency in Europe, but not to stand outside common decency?

Simon Hoare: With the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman—I do have a huge amount of respect for his views on many issues—I think that point seeks to deliberately debase the debate. This is nothing at all to do with either decency or indecency. The difference between opposition and government is that Opposition parties can let only their hearts dictate the narrative; the governing party has to use heart and head. I shall come on briefly to some of the issues—whether we are talking about 20,000 and whether they will come from within the camps or elsewhere—that are pertinent for Ministers to consider.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hoare: I have given way quite enough. Let me make a little progress in the time remaining.

I was a district councillor for 11 years, so I find it heartening that through the Department for International Development's budget for the first year, funding will be made available to local authorities. I suggest that there would be an even more active response from local government if Ministers gave a further indication of the sources of funding for years 2 through to 5. That would be productive.

We should always continue to ensure that countries closer to Syria and the camps do their bit. We must ask Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and others to play their part, because the quicker we can get people back to a country that is peaceful and where civil government is reinstated, the better. It will be much easier to do that from countries nearer to home.

I fear that the slightly open-door policy advocated by the shadow Foreign Secretary and the SNP is the greatest recruiting sergeant to those whom the whole House abhors: those who profit from people trafficking. I think that it will just encourage people. *[Interruption.]* Opposition Members from a sedentary position shout "shameful", and I absolutely agree. It is shameful that in the early part of the 21st century, we have people—fellow human beings—who seek to profit and make their living from selling and transporting human cargo in degrading and horrible circumstances, where they are ripping people off, cramming them into boats and causing even more unnecessary suffering.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hoare: I will not give way.

[Simon Hoare]

Finally—and this is where we should be careful not to be media-dominated—there are lots of humanitarian crises across the surface of the globe. Some have mentioned Yemen, and there are others. We need to be very careful that we do not do too much too quickly, because that raises expectation and gives the green light to those who are fundamentally anti-democratic and anti human rights.

6.24 pm

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): I was going to speak about the consensual tone of the debate, and then the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) returned to the Chamber. I have two things to say to him. First, he would have benefited if he had been able to listen to the other 29 speeches in the debate. There was a lot in them, but he will have the opportunity to see that if he reads *Hansard*. The second and more serious point is that, realistically, the threat from Daesh does not lie in its sticking a few operatives into groups of asylum seekers or people seeking refuge and sanctuary. The threat from Daesh is that its poisonous ideology will affect people born and bred in this country. One thing that will enable that is a suspicion or belief, founded or unfounded, that we judge asylum on whether people are Muslim, brown, black, or just look suspicious. I ask him to reflect on whether the attitude that he struck in his speech will help or hinder the battle of ideas, which is central to the assault on terrorism.

The 29 speeches that I heard—I sat through every single one—were a credit to this House and to this Chamber. Of course there were disagreements. Incidentally, this motion is the most consensual motion that I have ever had a hand in drafting in this House. I can absolutely assure the Chamber of that. This motion is not just about what is in it, but about what has not been put in it. Government Members will notice that there is no mention of the imperial legacy in the middle east, which is the fundamental cause of many of the issues. There is no mention of the illegal war in Iraq, which is the more immediate cause of destabilisation and radicalisation. There is not even any mention of our recent experience in Libya.

Government Members might ask what we did wrong in Libya. Of course there was a strong argument on humanitarian grounds for intervening in an air campaign to protect people against the dictator, but where does the argument lie given that the House of Commons Library has explained to us that this country committed £320 million to that air campaign and committed £25 million to the rebuilding and reconstruction programmes after the immediate conflict? Thirteen times as much was spent on a military campaign as on a reconstruction campaign.

I did not mention the arms trade in the motion and the reality that, in this conflict as in every conflict, British armaments and munitions will be used by both sides. This motion was aimed at concentrating on areas where we could build a consensus.

I said that this was the most consensual motion in which I had been involved in this House. I was involved in a number of consensual motions in the Scottish Parliament as First Minister when I led a minority

Government; I felt that the necessity of numbers often required me to temper my enthusiasm for certain areas of policy and I tried instead to build a consensus. I did so on issues such as climate change remarkably successfully.

This Government have a majority in this Chamber, but I caution them to reflect on the fact that the leaders of six opposition parties and the Independent Unionist Member of Parliament have put their names to this motion. Having a majority in this Chamber does not necessarily represent a majority opinion in the country. There is the strongest evidence that the majority position in the country is more reflected in this motion than in the Government's disagreements with it. We tried to emphasise in the motion not just what more we think should be done but what has been done, and we tried to accord it full credit and our support.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Anne McLaughlin) reminded us of dehumanising language and the dangers it can have in such debates. It was significant that for the overwhelming bulk of the debate, at least, there was no dehumanising language. There was no mention of “hordes”, or “floods”, or “swarms” or anything like that. The context of the debate, the reason why we are here today and the reason why there has been this overwhelming surge from the grassroots of each and every one of our constituencies to do more is that picture of Alan Kurdi. Rather than making the debate about tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands or masses of migrants, that picture humanised it. It made the debate about an individual, small child lying dead, face down in the waves of the Turkish beach. That was what humanised the issue for our constituents and, in all honesty, it is why the Government are at the Dispatch Box today.

That context combines two things: the instinct to survive that is the most profound of all human emotions, as mentioned by the spokesperson from the Labour Front Bench, the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn); and the anxiety to help that is a profound human response to seeing our fellow human beings in extremity. As a Chamber and as a House we should reflect on the point that if the purpose of the Kurdi family had been to go not to Canada but to the United Kingdom and if, by some wonderful act of fate, Alan had survived rather than dying in the sea, that three-year-old child would have been refused refuge in the United Kingdom, either because he landed in Turkey, and we therefore do not think that that accords with our obligations, or because we are not prepared to play a part or make a contribution with other European partners to taking responsibility for part of the problem.

As for leadership, we have this opportunity because our constituents are exercised and energised on this issue. We have heard from almost every speaker about the experience in their constituency of the anxiety and willingness to help. That gives us the opportunity for real leadership, and we should do more in this House. We should do that.

The nub of the debate and the issue that has divided opinion, even among those who are anxious to help but who none the less have a legitimate argument against the motion, concerns what Conservative Members have cautioned against: the green light, as they put it, that would be signalled to traffickers and displaced people in the middle east if the UK joined our European partners in accepting refugees.

Victoria Atkins: In giving evidence to the Home Affairs Committee yesterday, the mayor of Calais was very clear that family members of immigrants—economic immigrants as well, I fully accept—write to their relatives in their countries of origin telling them that Britain is a land of fairness and freedom and encouraging them to come over. Does the right hon. Gentleman not understand that criminal networks want to make—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Unfortunately, we need short interventions rather than speeches. If the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) wants to give way again, he may do so.

Alex Salmond: I understand the point, as I heard the counter-arguments from a number of Members with great experience. I heard the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan), for example, point out that exactly the same logic was used to withdraw the naval patrols in 2013, resulting in people dying. I heard from people with practical experience. The hon. Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) pointed out that the push of war rather than the pull of the UK is the motivation for people taking the desperate gamble of going across the Mediterranean. In realistic terms, does anyone seriously believe that, given that the German Government's policy of offering sanctuary to hundreds of thousands of people is in place, others would be motivated if this country were prepared to accept a share of the responsibility? That is an extraordinary argument.

Those on the Conservative Benches should reflect on the speech of the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), which shone out like a beacon among the contributions from Conservative Members. She pointed out from her own experience that the conditions in the camps are also what motivate people to leave—the hopelessness of not having any prospect of returning to Syria or any of the other benighted countries, and the lack of opportunity for education. We heard two statistics. The Secretary of State herself told us that only 37% of the necessary funding was available for the food programme. The Opposition spokesperson pointed out that the food ration had been cut by 50%. The camps cannot be regarded as the only solution to the problem.

Mr MacNeil: My right hon. Friend is making a good point about why these people will come and will have to come. As my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) said, the terror behind them is so much worse than what is in front of them. With the UK closing the door or being ham-fisted, our European partners have to take more refugees, as we would wrongly pass by on the other side. I urge the UK Government not to do that, but to play their full part and ask, "What more can we do?" as my hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) said in his opening speech.

Alex Salmond: I agree with my hon. Friend.

When the Prime Minister goes to the European summit next week, or when he deals with our partners in the United Nations, what position will he adopt in asking others to fulfil their obligations to help support people in the camps in the middle east? Will he approach others by saying, "We're having nothing to do with our European partners in their programme of resettlement",

or by saying, "We will share that burden and we expect you to share the burden of support for refugees in the camps"? Which position will accord this country the greatest influence and the greatest prospects of success? Surely logic tells us that it is the co-operative position.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con) *rose*—

Alex Salmond: I give way for the last time.

James Cleverly: I genuinely appreciate the right hon. Gentleman giving way. From the phrases that he has just used, the inadvertent implication of the motion—I take it that it is inadvertent—seems to be that our priority would be to help our European partners alleviate the burden of their immigrant and refugee crisis, rather than helping the people in the refugee camps on the borders of Syria. Surely that cannot be his intention.

Alex Salmond: I suggest the hon. Gentleman reread the motion. Also, if he had been here for the debate, he would have heard that explained many times.

That brings me to my final point of argument before I sum up—that is, whether the situation would be manageable if we made a contribution. In some of the speeches I heard, Members were worried about whether we could cope with an issue of such magnitude. Recent experience, never mind post-war experience, tells us otherwise. In 2001 the number of asylum applications in the United Kingdom that were granted—not the number that were made, but the number that were granted in a single year—was 31,641. Last year the number was 8,150.

Even in our recent experience we have coped properly, morally and responsibly with far larger numbers than even the Government's renewed suggestion of a resettlement scheme implies. It is important for us to understand that we have the capacity to deal with the situation, as shown not just by the case of the Ugandan Asians or Vietnamese boat people, but by very recent experience. President Juncker made an excellent, if belated, speech this morning to the European Parliament, pointing out that at the end of the second world war 20 million people had to be resettled on the continent of Europe. Surely now we can find it within ourselves to make a contribution with our European partners to address the issue of refuge in Europe, as well as encouraging them and the rest of the world to act directly on the situation in the camps in the middle east.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman makes a critical point about the camps. The UNHCR, the World Health Organisation and other organisations working in the camps are at breaking point, so we must also look at how we support them.

Alex Salmond: I absolutely agree, which is precisely why the motion argues for an attitude of co-operation with our European partners, so that we will be in a position to encourage them to join us in taking further action in support of UN efforts.

I have two further points to make, but I will make them quickly because I want to give the Minister plenty of time to answer the questions that so many contributors to the debate have asked. I recently became a member of UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation's board, which is

[Alex Salmond]

chaired by Sir Peter Bazalgette on a cross-party basis. During the first meeting I attended I made the point that the organisation must be about more than having a memorial, as crucial as that is. It must ensure that the memory of what happened in the holocaust is never lost and that information about it is available to future generations, but it must also celebrate the contribution that those who were saved from the death camps have made to this country, in medicine, science, business and the arts.

Although this debate has not been guilty of using dehumanising language, not enough has been said about what an opportunity this is. That is surprising, given how many Members pointed out that they themselves are the sons, daughters or grandchildren of immigrants or refugees. This is not a burden, a problem or a drag; it is an opportunity. Every family, every child and every human being that we contribute to saving has an opportunity to do great things for this country, just as the refugees who were saved from the death camps have done. Let us change our attitude and see the potential in doing the right thing, not just the problems.

Finally, the Prime Minister said today—I think I am quoting him correctly—that he was putting “no limit” on the first year. I am not sure that is accurate, in the sense that there is the limit of 20,000 over five years. None the less, he said that he would not put a limit on the programme in its first year, which should make Conservative MPs pause for thought. He also said how pleased he was that we can exercise sovereignty because we are not in the Schengen agreement. I have spent my political life arguing for sovereignty for the Scottish people, so I really do understand its importance. But having sovereignty is about having the right to choose and not to be ordered to do things. I think that it is a good thing not to be ordered to do things, because we should not have to be ordered to do this; we should choose as a nation to do the right thing, and we should choose to support this motion.

6.42 pm

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): We have had a good, broad and wide-ranging debate on an issue of real concern not only to this House but to the whole UK. Indeed, it should extend to Europe and the world as a whole, given the flows of people we are seeing and the challenges that presents. A number of important themes came through in the debate, and they were apparent in all the contributions we heard. There is recognition and understanding of those challenges, and indeed support for a number of things that the Government are doing. We welcome the points of the motion that underline that. In the spirit with which the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) opened the debate, I recognise that in the points of the motion that he highlighted.

In that spirit of understanding and agreement, I urge all right hon. and hon. Members to do their bit to support the resettlement scheme that the Prime Minister announced earlier this week, to ensure that local authorities and the devolved Administrations come forward and play their part, and indeed to find ways of channelling that passion and the contributions that the individuals who have contacted us can make. I will come on to the

structures and statements that will follow and what we are doing to ensure that this work is undertaken at pace to give effect to the rightful expectations of this House and the country as a whole. These themes of compassion and humanity have been raised by Members in all parts of the House, and that has been the motivating factor for the actions of this Government too.

We are witnessing mass migration across Europe on a scale not seen since the end of the second world war. We have seen harrowing pictures that serve as a tragic reminder of the risks that people take when attempting to make dangerous journeys to Europe, and a stark reminder of the exploitation by smugglers and organised criminal gangs who put people's lives at risk, put them in harm's way, and, frankly, do not care whether they live or die. It is that loss of life that Members across this House take so seriously, and it is a further point we can all agree on.

I want to return to the opening speech by my right hon. Friend the International Development Secretary. Many Members—certainly Opposition Members—have said, “We're looking for leadership.” Well, this Government are showing leadership in being the only EU country to fulfil its pledge to provide 0.7% of GDP for international aid. We should be proud of that. Through that leadership, this country is showing that it has a sense of where need is required to be met and the difference that is making. This is not about simply saying, “It's millions of pounds”, although it is; it is about the fact that it is delivering real benefit to so many people. UK support has delivered over 18 million food rations, each of which feeds one person for a month, provided access to clean water for 1.6 million people, and provided over 2.4 million medical consultations in Syria and the region. This country can be proud of that.

Angus Robertson: The record will show that just a few moments ago the Minister said that the United Kingdom is the only member state of the European Union to fulfil an obligation of 0.7% in terms of international development aid. Is he saying that the Netherlands, Denmark and other EU and Scandinavian countries have not fulfilled the 0.7% obligation? They have done so for a number of years, yet the UK is only now beginning to do so, having promised to, in the first instance, from 1970.

James Brokenshire: We are the only major developed country in the G7 that is making this contribution—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Mr MacNeil, you have been doing very well this Session—let's not spoil it.

James Brokenshire: I say to the hon. Gentleman that we should be proud of this. In his opening speech, he highlighted the real benefit that we as a country should look to—

Mr MacNeil: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it in order to have two classes of partner in the European Union whereby the Government decide that some are major and some are minor?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I do not need to worry about a point of order on that.

James Brokenshire: It is important to come back to the point I was making on the difference that aid is making. The £100 million that was committed in July is providing vulnerable people inside Syria and across the region with food, clean drinking water, relief assistance, health support and shelter. There is a focus on education, including an increase in funding up to £20 million for education in Lebanon this year in preparation for school enrolment in September to help ensure that refugee children and Lebanese children alike can benefit from an education. I hope that everyone agrees with the need to provide hope and a future for the refugees in those camps, who have been displaced into that region. That gives a sense of how we can rebuild, while recognising that this is a challenge beyond the shores of Europe. The International Development Secretary clearly indicated in her opening remarks the other steps required.

Ian Blackford: Will the Minister define what he described as major and minor and explain why it is important?

James Brokenshire: I am genuinely sorry if the hon. Gentleman finds fault in the way in which this Government—or, indeed, this country—are providing aid and assistance. This is a really serious and important matter. The point I am underlining is the leadership this country is showing, and we should not talk it down or diminish it, because it is making a real difference.

Nicola Blackwood: I thank the Minister for giving way: he is being very generous. I want to take us away from the statistics to the things that will actually help the refugees in the camps. Does he agree that the humanitarian crisis response model is not fit for a long-term crisis and that responding with short-term assistance does not give hope to refugees? We need to address problems of insecurity, long-term education and job opportunities. That will address the drivers of this crisis.

James Brokenshire: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, whose speech I commend for underlining the importance of examining the long-term future of the region. This debate has focused on that serious issue and it is important that we continue to do so.

Most of the debate has focused on the pressure in the Mediterranean as a result of events in the middle east and north and sub-Saharan Africa. The UK works closely with international partners to tackle the conflicts in Syria, providing support to the region and fighting the criminal gangs who exploit people. We continue to play a huge role in international search and rescue efforts to save lives at sea. HMS Enterprise and the Border Force cutters are still patrolling the waters, supported by a helicopter, and the combined response that the UK has generated has saved more than 6,700 lives to date.

We recognise that many people are refugees fleeing conflict. That is why the Prime Minister announced on Monday that the UK will resettle up to 20,000 Syrian refugees over the lifetime of this Parliament, building on existing schemes. That is in addition to a further £100 million of humanitarian aid for those in camps in Syria, Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, bringing our total

contribution to more than £1 billion. The UNHCR views our contribution on resettlement as serious and substantial.

Stuart C. McDonald: The Minister will have heard me say earlier that the Ministry of Defence revealed this afternoon that HMS Enterprise is rescuing people from the Mediterranean at less than 10% of the scale that HMS Bulwark achieved. Is there an explanation for that, and how is it consistent with what the Prime Minister and the Chancellor said in June about continuing to play a full role in search and rescue?

James Brokenshire: The Royal Navy and Border Force continue to provide support to the efforts of Operation Triton to save lives in the Mediterranean. HMS Enterprise is also supporting the effort against trafficking, identifying those vessels that are linked to people smuggling. On 22 and 23 August, HMS Enterprise contributed to a major rescue of migrants in the Mediterranean, working with the EU-led mission, which saved about 4,400 people in a single day. It is contributing as part of a wider network of vessels and is absolutely playing a role in dealing with the immediate issues in the Mediterranean.

I want to move on to how we will ensure that the resettlement programme works effectively. The Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government will hold their first meeting on Friday to discuss the arrangements and the Home Secretary will update the House next week. We are listening to the representations of the devolved Administrations and local government, and are keen to ensure they are reflected in our proposals. This is not only about speed and delivery, but about ensuring that the support we provide is effective and will deliver the welcome that we all want to see for those who arrive here. That point was highlighted by a number of Members.

We will continue to work with our European partners to solve the immediate issues, but the EU needs to deal collectively with the causes of the crisis, not just its consequences. That can be done only with a comprehensive solution. That is why we need to continue to build stability in source and transit countries, and to develop economic and social opportunities by targeting development aid and increasing investment. We need to continue to assist those who are in genuine need of international protection and swiftly return those who are not.

We also need to tackle the organised crime networks that facilitate people smuggling. Organisations such as Europol have an important part to play in that and we are working closely with them to put in place the intelligence flows that are needed to go after the people traffickers. Equally, we must understand the way in which those organised crime groups are using social media, so that we can disrupt them and take direct action against them.

Bob Stewart: Is any effort being put into the fractured society in Libya, perhaps through aid or money, to get it to try to stop the boats leaving its shores?

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We are working at a number of levels to create stability in Libya, which will be a key part of the solution to the problem of these flows across the Mediterranean.

[James Brokenshire]

The UK has a strong history of protecting those who flee persecution. We granted asylum to about 12,000 refugees last year alone and have resettled from overseas more than 6,300 refugees over the past 10 years in direct co-operation with the UNHRC under our gateway programme. We have granted asylum to more than 5,000 Syrians since the start of the humanitarian crisis. That is in addition to providing protection to people under the UK's Syrian vulnerable persons relocation scheme, which was launched in January 2014. That scheme has made a life-changing and potentially life-saving difference to hundreds of the most vulnerable refugees, including women who have been subject to abuse, children traumatised by war and those in need of specific medical assistance. Again, that scheme will be extended after the Prime Minister's announcement earlier this week.

The Government have made clear their view on the relocation of asylum seekers within the EU on many occasions. We think that it is the wrong response and will not take part in a mechanism for relocation within the EU, whether temporary or permanent. We judge that criticism of this decision misses the point. All member states in the EU have a duty, both moral and legal, to provide refuge to those who need it and to provide the support that those people require. Many member states have not done that and it is time that they stepped up to the plate.

On the issue of notification raised in the motion, the Government will keep the House fully updated on this issue. The Home Secretary is due to provide a detailed update next week, and through our transparency agenda we have committed to providing quarterly data on the vulnerable persons relocation scheme. We see no reason therefore formally to lay a report—

Mike Weir *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

Question agreed to.

Question put accordingly (Standing Order No. 31(2)), That the original words stand part of the Question.

The House divided: Ayes 259, Noes 311.

Division No. 67]

[6.59 pm

AYES

Abrahams, Debbie	Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina	Blenkinsop, Tom
Ali, Rushanara	Blomfield, Paul
Allen, Mr Graham	Boswell, Philip
Anderson, Mr David	Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Arkless, Richard	Brennan, Kevin
Ashworth, Jonathan	Brock, Deidre
Austin, Ian	Brown, Alan
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Brown, Lyn
Bardell, Hannah	Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Barron, rh Kevin	Bryant, Chris
Beckett, rh Margaret	Buck, Ms Karen
Benn, rh Hilary	Burden, Richard
Berger, Luciana	Burgon, Richard
Betts, Mr Clive	Burnham, rh Andy
Black, Mhairi	Butler, Dawn
Blackford, Ian	Cadbury, Ruth
Blackman, Kirsty	Cameron, Dr Lisa

Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Healey, rh John
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Hendrick, Mr Mark
Champion, Sarah	Hendry, Drew
Chapman, Douglas	Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Cherry, Joanna	Hillier, Meg
Clwyd, rh Ann	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Coaker, Vernon	Hoey, Kate
Coffey, Ann	Hollern, Kate
Cooper, Julie	Hopkins, Kelvin
Cooper, Rosie	Hosie, Stewart
Cooper, rh Yvette	Howarth, rh Mr George
Cowan, Ronnie	Huq, Dr Rupa
Cox, Jo	Hussain, Imran
Coyle, Neil	Irranca-Davies, Huw
Crausby, Mr David	Jarvis, Dan
Crawley, Angela	Johnson, rh Alan
Creagh, Mary	Johnson, Diana
Creasy, Stella	Jones, Gerald
Cruddas, Jon	Jones, Graham
Cryer, John	Jones, Mr Kevan
Cummins, Judith	Jones, Susan Elan
Cunningham, Alex	Kane, Mike
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Keeley, Barbara
Dakin, Nic	Kendall, Liz
Danczuk, Simon	Kerevan, George
David, Wayne	Kerr, Calum
De Piero, Gloria	Kinahan, Danny
Docherty, Martin John	Kinnock, Stephen
Donaldson, Stuart	Kyle, Peter
Doughty, Stephen	Lammy, rh Mr David
Dowd, Jim	Lavery, Ian
Dowd, Peter	Law, Chris
Dromey, Jack	Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Dugher, Michael	Lewis, Clive
Durkan, Mark	Long Bailey, Rebecca
Eagle, Ms Angela	Lucas, Caroline
Eagle, Maria	Lucas, Ian C.
Edwards, Jonathan	Lynch, Holly
Efford, Clive	MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Elliott, Julie	Mactaggart, rh Fiona
Elliott, Tom	Madders, Justin
Ellman, Mrs Louise	Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Esterson, Bill	Malhotra, Seema
Evans, Chris	Mann, John
Farrelly, Paul	Marris, Rob
Ferrier, Margaret	Marsden, Mr Gordon
Fletcher, Colleen	Maskell, Rachael
Flint, rh Caroline	Matheson, Christian
Flynn, Paul	Mc Nally, John
Fovargue, Yvonne	McCabe, Steve
Foxcroft, Vicky	McCaig, Callum
Gapes, Mike	McCarthy, Kerry
Gardiner, Barry	McDonald, Andy
Gethins, Stephen	McDonald, Stewart
Gibson, Patricia	McDonald, Stuart C.
Glass, Pat	McDonnell, John
Glendon, Mary	McGarry, Natalie
Goodman, Helen	McGinn, Conor
Grady, Patrick	McGovern, Alison
Grant, Peter	McInnes, Liz
Gray, Neil	McLaughlin, Anne
Green, Kate	Meale, Sir Alan
Greenwood, Lilian	Mearns, Ian
Greenwood, Margaret	Miliband, rh Edward
Griffith, Nia	Monaghan, Carol
Haigh, Louise	Monaghan, Dr Paul
Hanson, rh Mr David	Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Morden, Jessica
Harpham, Harry	Morris, Grahame M.
Harris, Carolyn	Mulholland, Greg
Hayes, Helen	Mullin, Roger
Hayman, Sue	Murray, Ian

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

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

Tellers for the Ayes:
Marion Fellows and
Owen Thompson

NOES

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

Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, Alun
Cameron, rh Mr David
Carmichael, Neil
Cartledge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Mr Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey

Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Mr Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Michael
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark

Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heapey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyins, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Lumley, Karen
Mackinlay, Craig
Mackintosh, David
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Mr Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Mathias, Dr Tania
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark

Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
Offord, Dr Matthew
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Philp, Chris
Pickles, rh Sir Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Mr Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Selous, Andrew
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian

Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Solloway, Amanda
Soubry, rh Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Thomas, Derek
Throup, Maggie
Timpson, Edward
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrrie, rh Mr Andrew
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watkinson, Dame Angela
Wharton, James
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Craig
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
Jackie Doyle-Price and
Guy Opperman

Question accordingly negated.

DEFERRED DIVISIONS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 41A(3)),

That, at this day's sitting, Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply to the motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament.—(*Sarah Newton.*)

Question agreed to.

INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT

Ordered,

That Sir Alan Duncan, Mr Dominic Grieve, Mr George Howarth, Fiona Mactaggart, Angus Robertson, Mr Keith Simpson and Ms Gisela Stuart be appointed to the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament under Section 1 of the Justice and Security Act 2013.—(*Dr Thérèse Coffey.*)

Business without Debate

COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS

Ordered,

That Sir Paul Beresford, Mr Christopher Chope, Mr Geoffrey Cox, Mr Dominic Grieve, Tommy Sheppard and Jo Stevens be members of the Committee on Standards.—(*Anne Milton, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Question agreed to.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Mr Winnick, you have missed the motion, which is without debate.

Mr Winnick: On motion 3.

Mr Deputy Speaker: You have missed it. I have gone well beyond that. We are actually on the presentation of petitions.

PETITION

Refugee Crisis

7.15 pm

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I wish to present a petition from 1,200 residents in the Hull area who have signed a petition in support of the Government providing more help to refugees. In particular, I want to thank Councillor Colin Inglis, Councillor Daren Hale and Councillor Rosemary Pantelakis and all the volunteers over the weekend at Hull's Freedom Festival for their efforts in obtaining signatures.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Kingston upon Hull,

Declares that there is a global refugee crisis; notes that the UK is not offering proportional asylum in comparison with European counterparts; further declares that the petitioners believe that the UK should not allow refugees who have risked their lives to escape horrendous conflict and violence to be left living in dire, unsafe and inhumane conditions in Europe; and that Britain must do its fair share to help.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons calls on the Government urgently to increase its support for asylum seekers and refugees in Europe.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P001542]

Mr Winnick: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I wonder if I could clarify the situation over motion three on the Order Paper. I would be grateful for your advice. I was sitting here and waiting for the opportunity to speak. Clearly, the matter went on without my being able to catch your eye. I wanted to object to the method

of appointment, to point out the need for elections to that Committee and to put the case accordingly. In those circumstances, I wonder if you can advise me on how I can pursue this, since I was not able to make my remarks today.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): First of all, it was not that you did not catch my eye. You caught my eye after we had voted on it and we were on to the next part. I was at the petition when you decided to stand. It is not about catching my eye. You were not on your feet and unfortunately, as one of the most senior Members of the House, you know the rules quite clearly. The bottom line is there is nothing we can do now. It has gone through and I suggest that you take up through other channels the way you feel the Committee should be appointed. As we know, that is not prescribed in the House rules and the rules would have to be changed accordingly.

Vehicle Speed Outside Schools

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Sarah Newton.)

7.18 pm

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): I want to start this adjournment debate on road safety by reading from a letter written by one of my constituents, Lydia Morley, who is a 10-year-old pupil at Morley primary school in my constituency of Mid Derbyshire. She starts by recognising the two top priorities a school must have. It must provide

“an extraordinary place for developing the minds of young children”

and

“safety”

for those who attend. Her next words summarise effectively what today’s debate is about.

“Not all motorists adhere to the speed limit outside our school, and some drivers don’t see the danger in driving over the 30 mph speed limit. This is such recklessness as this could cause a fatal accident. The evidence clearly shows that the proximity of the 40 mph sign is far too close to the pelican crossing which all the parents and children use on a daily basis.”

She says she strongly agrees with the campaign to move the 40 mph sign to the other side of Church Lane, Morley. Lydia ends with words I want everyone in this Chamber and the decision-makers at Derbyshire County Council to hear:

“Your actions could change the lives of the pupils at Morley School and we will no longer have to look left and right in fright.”

It is for the reasons raised by my young constituent that I am grateful to have secured this debate on road safety outside Morley primary school. After visiting the school in June and on several other occasions and after speaking to staff about the problem of speeding traffic and poor traffic safety measures, I knew that a debate was vital to ensure that something was done. I fear, however, that a child will be killed before any action is taken.

The problem is simple: Morley primary school is located on a busy A-road, the A608, which runs to and from the centre of Derby. I believe it is the only school in Derbyshire to be located on an A-road with no drop-off area on the school side. Parents have to park at the pub opposite, leaving children no option but to cross the A-road at the puffin crossing. As an added safety precaution, the school has purchased and installed safety railings near the puffin crossing, where the children wait for the beeping and the green man to appear, but they are still at severe risk given the speed of cars going past the school.

There is currently a 30 mph speed limit on the road outside the school, but it is ignored by a worryingly high number of motorists during the peak hours in the morning when motorists travel into and out of Derby for work. A survey of traffic speeds conducted by the casualty reduction enforcement support team, undertaken between 3 June and 18 June, showed that over half the vehicles driving past the school during the day did so above the speed limit, with 85% moving at an average speed of more than 36.3 mph. The total number of cars surveyed was 192,802, meaning that over 163,000 cars were speeding.

During the morning school run, between 8 am and 9 am, when we should be keeping children safe on their way to school, 85% of traffic travels at an average of

[Pauline Latham]

33 mph, which, while not as fast as in the rest of the day, is still above the speed limit. It only takes one speeding car to hit a child for us to have a preventable tragedy on our hands. I do not want the death of a child on my conscience. All the county council can say is that there have been no fatalities outside the school so far.

Of course, the morning run is not the only time children have to cross the road. They do so when they leave school at the end of the day and for any outside activities, such as swimming lessons. That is a minimum of 200 crossings a day. The school, whose campaign I will get to shortly, has conducted its own checks. In a 40-minute period, while a police van was visible and children were using the crossing, one vehicle showed a maximum speed of 59 mph and four travelled in excess of 40 mph. I have been outside the school and witnessed the heavy traffic and the speed at which it travels. Some cars did not even stop at a red light, and parents had to grab their children to prevent a fatality.

The facts on speeding cars are stark. The risk of death from being hit at 30 mph is 50%. It is approximately four times higher at 40 mph. On rural A-roads, such as the A608, fatal accidents are four times more likely than on urban A-roads. These statistics relate to adults. Children are much more likely to die from being hit by a vehicle—even one travelling at 30 mph. The campaign I am supporting and wish to promote here calls for a reduction in the speed limit outside the school to 20 mph and an expansion of the 30 mph speed limit zone in the surrounding areas. Reducing speed limits to 20 mph has been shown to reduce the number of child pedestrian deaths by 70%, and 20 mph zones are now relatively widespread, with more than 2,000 schemes in operation in England alone.

A speed limit of 20 mph puts people, not cars, first, which is important when thinking about road crossings for young children. These zones are also low cost and high benefit. For example, Portsmouth converted 1,200 streets in the city to 20 mph zones, at a cost of just over £500,000, and here in London, Transport for London estimates that 20 mph zones are already saving the city more than £20 million every year by preventing crashes.

Vital to this plan is better signage leading up to and inside the 20 mph zone. At present, motorists travelling at 40 or 50 mph on the A-road do not have enough time or distance to reduce their speed safely. It is also confusing for motorists to see signs for 40 mph followed quickly by signs saying they have to travel at 30 mph. An increase in the size of the 30 mph zone before it goes into a 20 mph zone would go a long way towards reducing confusion and giving motorists enough time to reduce their speed.

The other necessary measure is better enforcement of the speed limits, with those going over them knowing that they will be fined. I think attitudes towards speeding outside the school would change very quickly if motorists knew they would be seen and fined. It is no good fining people after the event. Just as an unworn seatbelt is pointless, so an unenforced speed limit makes almost redundant any efforts to keep children safe. It will take only one child to be killed for this to go from a hypothetical problem to a conversation with a grieving parent to explain why we had done nothing.

Derbyshire County Council recently promised it would look into installing cameras at school crossings to replace school-crossing patrols. The problem, as highlighted by my Conservative colleagues on the council, is that there is a big difference between people saying they will do something and actually doing it. The parents of pupils at the school who drop their children off in the morning and collect them are behaving very responsibly, parking away from the road to avoid congestion and giving children a safe place from which to exit their cars. The children are well trained on road safety, waiting patiently at the crossing for the beeping to start, but when the all clear is given, they understandably rush in excitement to get to other side of the road and into school. If a car has not stopped by that point, they will run straight into it.

I reiterate that this is not a concern solely of parents and pupils at Morley primary school. A 2011 study by the campaign group, Living Streets, showed that speeding traffic scares over a third of children and young people walking to school, and that one in five is concerned about the lack of safety crossing-points on their journey. No change is going to stop the possibility of injuries completely, but let us reward the sensible behaviour of children and pupils with sensible behaviour on our behalf.

This Government have already led the way in focusing on encouraging children to walk to school and making provisions for that. In July, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), commenced the cycling and walking investment strategy, which will look at how to get more children walking to school. I look forward to seeing the results of that study.

A number of policy proposals are out there, including park-and-stride schemes, but the county council will really have to listen to what is happening in the area it purports to represent. There is another problem—this does not concern the school—because Broomfield Hall college is based further down the same road, and students have to cross it with cars going in excess of the speed limit of 40 mph. They are taking their lives in their hands as well. This road is very dangerous so I would like to force the county council to look at the problem again. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

7.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Pauline Latham) on securing this debate on the important subject of vehicle speeds and speed limits outside Morley primary school. I thought she made a strong case, as indeed did the words of her young constituent. I should like to assure the House that we take the safety of children—and, indeed, all road users—very seriously. Road safety is a top priority for this Government, and I have listened with great interest to my hon. Friend's points.

We have some of the safest roads in the world, and we should be proud of that record. Over the past 10 years, there has been a 35% reduction in the number of child pedestrians killed or seriously injured. However, even one death on our roads is, of course, one too many, and it is important that everyone plays their part to continue to improve road safety.

As my hon. Friend noted, the Government want more people to choose walking, especially for shorter journeys, and that means encouraging more children to walk to and from school. Walking to school not only constitutes a healthy way to start the day, but helps to reduce congestion during the school run and improves air quality in our communities. Of course, while we want people to walk more, they will not do so unless they feel safe. It is important for roads outside schools to be safe, and part of that is ensuring that the speed for traffic is appropriate.

It may be helpful if I briefly outline the current position relating to local speed limits, and the role of the traffic authorities in setting them, before describing the broader work that is being done to improve safety on our roads.

There are three national speed limits: 30 mph on roads with street lighting—sometimes referred to as restricted roads—60 mph on single-carriageway roads, and 70 mph on dual carriageways and motorways. National speed limits can be applied to most roads, but in some circumstances they are not appropriate. Speed limits need to be suitable for local conditions, and councils are best placed to determine what those limits are, on the basis of local knowledge and the views of the community, and having regard to guidance issued by the Department.

Speed limits should be evidence-led, and should seek to reinforce people's assessment of what constitutes a safe speed at which to travel. They should also encourage self-compliance. Local factors, such as the presence of a school, shape the appropriate speed limit. In this instance, it was eminently sensible to reduce the limit to 30 mph. I know that the A608 is a very busy road, and is a major feeder into north Derby. Driver awareness of the additional risk factors that a school can present is vital, which is why good signage is such a useful tool. My hon. Friend made that point very strongly.

Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): The neighbourhood of Brympton, in my constituency, contains an estate where a school off Stourton Way was not provided with road safety protection and signage to slow traffic on a major and fast estate road. The Liberal Democrat council failed to address that at the time of approving the planning, and has failed to deal with it since. Will my hon. Friend please look into the issue, and tell the House what steps can be taken at national level to ensure that existing and new developments are subject to appropriate measures, including signage, near schools?

Andrew Jones: I shall deal shortly with the Department's powers to enforce speed limits. However, the details of that particular case sound very worrying, and my hon. Friend is right to draw it to our attention. If he writes to me, I will certainly see what can be done to improve the situation. Safety is most important, and should certainly be a key consideration in all planning matters.

The Department gives advice on the spacing of speed limit signs in chapter 3 of the "Traffic Signs Manual", which is a weighty tome. It covers transitions from one speed limit to another, and gives good-practice guidance on how often speed limit repeater signs should be placed. It is for local authorities to ensure that the guidance is applied appropriately on their roads. The visibility of signs is important, ensuring that drivers can

see them in good time to act on them. Signs need to be in the right position, and need to be properly maintained to ensure that their visibility is clear. Over-provision of signs can reduce their impact—essential messages can get lost in a profusion of communication—and the Department encourages local authorities to de-clutter wherever possible to ensure that only the necessary signs are used.

Traffic authorities also have powers to introduce 20 mph speed limits that apply only at certain times of day. Those variable limits may be particularly relevant when, for example, a school is located on a road where a full-time 20 mph zone or limit is not appropriate.

The constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire is primarily rural, and it was disappointing and sad to note that last year about two thirds of fatal traffic accidents happened on rural roads. Much of the rural road network is subject to the national speed limit of 60 mph on single-carriageway roads and 70 mph on dual carriageways. On many of these roads the majority of drivers are, of course, travelling below, and sometimes very significantly below, the speed limit because of the characteristics of the roads. Our guidance suggests that a local limit of 50 mph may be right where there is a relatively high number of bends, junctions or accesses, and that 40 mph could be considered where there are many bends, junctions or accesses, substantial development, or a strong environmental or landscape reason, or where there are considerable numbers of vulnerable road users.

Speed limits should be considered as only one part of rural safety management, but a very important part. The nature and layout of the road, including the mix of traffic, should also be considered. The guidance recommends a two-tier approach to rural roads which differentiates between strategic roads and those with a local access function. If high collision rates persist despite these measures, lower speed limits may, and should, be considered. Again, to achieve a change in motorists' behaviour and compliance with the limit, supporting physical measures, driver information and publicity or other measures are likely to be required. Last year we ran a successful Think! campaign highlighting the hazards of country roads and we will be rerunning that campaign later this year.

Traffic authorities are asked to keep their speed limits under review with changing circumstances, and to consider the introduction of more 20 mph limits and zones, over time, in urban areas and built-up village streets that are primarily residential, to ensure greater safety for pedestrians and cyclists. The Department expects a 30 mph speed limit to be the norm in villages, but it may also be appropriate to consider 20 mph zones and limits in built-up village streets. Local authorities have been given a greater say in setting speed limits and have powers to introduce 20 mph speed limits and 20 mph zones on their roads if they believe it appropriate to do so. Traffic authorities also have powers to introduce 20 mph speed limits that apply only at certain times of day. These variable limits may be particularly relevant where, for example, a school is located on a road that is suitable for a 20 mph zone or limit for part of the day but not others.

My hon. Friend mentioned speed cameras. Speed safety cameras, in the right place, can help manage safety risks by encouraging drivers to conform to the speed limit. They can achieve substantial reductions in

[Andrew Jones]

collisions and casualties. Local authorities have the discretion to decide where these cameras should be sited and how to use them, in discussion with the police and others. It is right that the local authority has agreed to consider the installation of a camera at the school crossing outside Morley primary school, and I hope the work on that can progress to a solution for the school.

My hon. Friend also talked about school route audits. In July 2014 the Department for Education published updated home-to-school travel and transport guidance for local authorities which recommends school route audits as good practice. A school route audit allows pupils, their families, teachers and local community staff to identify the barriers to walking to school that most concern them and then work together to find solutions. I wonder whether that process might be a useful tool in the situation raised tonight.

While it is surely right that local authorities are allowed to make decisions and develop solutions that are tailored to the specific needs and priorities of their own communities, there is still a crucial role for national Government in providing leadership on road safety; delivering better driving standards and testing; enforcement; education; and managing the strategic road infrastructure.

The Department for Transport plays an important and active role in promoting the safety of children. We have made available to all schools a comprehensive set of road safety teaching resources, so that schools have good-quality materials that they will want to teach. Think! Education—part of the Think! campaign that I mentioned earlier—is aimed at four to 16-year-olds and covers all aspects of road safety, from car seats for young children to pre-driver attitudes for secondary schools. It includes materials for teachers, pupils and parents and can also be used by out-of-school groups such as the Cubs or Brownies.

Many local authorities deliver road safety education to their schools. We provide educational resources for

use by road safety professionals, including road safety officers and the emergency services. We provide a range of materials, free of charge, including posters, booklets and reflective tags.

As well as ensuring that children and young people understand how to stay safe near roads, it is important to ensure that we tackle unsafe drivers. In August 2013, the fixed penalties for a number of motoring offences were increased. For failing to wear a seatbelt, using a mobile phone while driving, failing to stop at a red light and speeding the fine was increased to £100. Careless driving was introduced as a fixed penalty offence, with a £100 fine and potential points on a licence, and the police continue to enforce against drink and drug driving.

Many initiatives have built on the success in tackling road safety issues nationally, but in no way should we ever be complacent. The Government are looking at the best ways to improve road safety during this Parliament and beyond, and local campaigns, such as the one that my hon. Friend has brought to the House this evening, play a vital role.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for introducing this debate. I consider child safety to be of paramount importance. Indeed, the first piece of work that I commissioned as a Minister was on road safety. I believe that that indicates my personal commitment to the issue. I will write to Derbyshire police to highlight the speeding taking place outside the school and ask them to take enforcement action. The point that my hon. Friend makes on that is eminently sensible and needs to be taken forward, and I hope that some of the suggestions that have been discussed during this debate may also help to do so. I congratulate my hon. Friend on highlighting this issue, and I wish her every success with the campaign.

Question put and agreed to.

7.42 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 9 September 2015

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Affordable Housing (London)

9.30 am

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): I beg to move,
That this House has considered affordable housing in London.

[*Interruption.*] We seem to have been attacked by some sort of ghost in the acoustic system.

As long ago as 1946, Anthony Eden laid out a vision of a property-owning democracy, describing ownership of property as

“a reward, a right and a responsibility that must be shared as equitably as possible among all our citizens.”

I hope that both Government and Opposition Members agree with that sentiment. Demand for housing in London is at record levels. The population of our city recently exceeded the pre-war high of 8.6 million, overtaking the peak in 1939. It is growing by 100,000 people per year. That rate is forecast to continue, and by 2030 the population of our city will exceed 10 million. That population growth means that each and every year we need to build 50,000 more homes in the city to keep pace with population demand. I ask Members to keep that number in mind as we continue the debate.

The challenge that our city faces is that for the last 20 years or so we have been building only between 15,000 and 25,000 new homes a year, meaning that each and every year we are building fewer houses than required to meet population demand. That situation is clearly not sustainable. I have done some calculations for the period since 2000: in that time, we have built about 300,000 fewer homes than required to meet population demands, so we have that accumulated under-supply in our city. As a consequence, there are enormous pressures on the availability and affordability of houses in this city, as Members know from their constituency casework. [*Interruption.*]

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. We have a problem with the acoustics. Will you try switching your microphone off? [*Interruption.*] I am told there might be no recording, so please turn it on again—we need a report. We shall carry on.

Chris Philp: As Members know from their constituency postbag, there is enormous pressure on the affordability and the availability of housing in our city. That is why 25% of 20 to 35-year-olds are still living with their parents. As the father of two-year-old twins, I very much hope that that is not the case in 18 years' time. The average age of a first-time buyer in this city has risen to 37, so there are real challenges to do with the availability and affordability of housing.

Some people, such as the hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), may talk about rent controls and so on, but at the most fundamental and basic level the issue is one of supply and demand: demand is exceeding supply. The demand side of the equation—

population growth—is hard for the Government to regulate, and the only component that they can influence is probably immigration, which is clearly a big driver of housing demand in London, so it is right that the Government should want to get immigration under control. The other side of the equation is supply. By increasing supply we can alleviate the pressures to which I have referred.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman want to qualify what he says? Supply is important, but supply for whom? What we need are affordable homes. With the average income at £32,000, I hope that he will say something about affordability.

Chris Philp: On affordability, basic economics dictate that as we increase supply relative to demand, prices will fall, so irrespective of tenure types, controlled rents and so on, increasing supply will tend to help affordability.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman address the point that in a capital city the demand is not only from people who live here, but from international developers, who see housing as a good investment? We could increase supply, but none of our communities would be able to muscle their way into getting some of those properties.

Chris Philp: Let me take the latter point made by the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) before coming on to the hon. Lady's. On affordability, supply and demand clearly drive prices. I am delighted that under the current Mayor of London we have delivered 3,000 council houses, whereas under the previous Mayor virtually none were delivered. Taken together, the number of housing association starts and local authority starts under this Government is 5% higher than under the Labour Government.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Philp: I would like to make a little progress first; I will give way in a moment. The Mayor of London, my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), has brought forward 94,000 affordable units during his mayoralty—a considerably larger number than was brought forward by his predecessor, Mr Livingstone. We have a good track record on affordable housing, but more clearly needs to be done.

On foreigners buying property in London, there are two elements: who is buying it, and are they occupying it? On foreigners buying it, the phenomenon tends to be concentrated in prime central London places, such as Kensington and Chelsea—

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): And Hackney.

Chris Philp: It is good that Hackney is a desirable place. Figures produced by Knight Frank suggest that 93% of new build stock in outer London and 80% in inner London is sold to UK residents. Savills estimates that in 93% of all transactions across London, the property, whether new or second-hand, goes to people who live here, so it is possible to overstate things. In 93% of property transactions, the property goes to Londoners.

[Chris Philp]

I am delighted to report that vacancy rates in London under this Government have dropped dramatically. Long-term vacancy—vacancies for longer than six months—stood at 34,000 units in 2010; that has dropped to 20,000 units, which is a reduction of 41%. That is good progress achieved under this Government.

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): May I suggest to my hon. Friend that the rather self-serving evidence from Knight Frank and Savills not be given too much credence? There are important points that all of us in London, across the political divide, feel strongly about, and making the debate rabidly party political is unhelpful, not only for London MPs, but for all those we represent.

Chris Philp: It is certainly not my intention to make the debate rabidly party political—I am not sure that I have been called “rabid” before, but I thank my right hon. Friend for introducing the adjective. I want this to be a non-partisan and constructive discussion about London’s housing. I hope there are things that we can agree on during the debate.

Andy Slaughter: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that his Government’s policies to force the sale of high-value council homes in London and to restrict or cut the rents without compensating councils, which is completely decimating council building programmes, are not helpful in providing more affordable housing?

Chris Philp: I am sure that the Minister will comment later, but the sale of valuable houses might provide councils with the opportunity to use the proceeds to build two or three new social housing units. For example, I used to be a councillor in Camden and some of its housing stock, such as some units in Bloomsbury, was worth well in excess of £1 million—one of those units was occupied by the hon. Gentleman’s former colleague, Mr Dobson. Were such a unit to be sold, we could have built two or three council or social housing units elsewhere in Camden or London. There is some merit in that.

On the rent reductions, making housing more affordable clearly means making rents cheaper, which will help housing association and council tenants to pay lower rents. There are opportunities to force efficiency savings in those organisations. Most branches of government—local authorities, the police, every Department—have made savings over the past four or five years, quite rightly, and it is fair to ask other organisations to make savings and pass those on to their tenants.

Andy Slaughter: The hon. Gentleman should have read his brief a little more carefully. In places such as Camden, it will often not be possible to find the land on which to build to replace those houses that are sold. If it can be found, under his Government’s rules, it is likely that the newly built homes will also have to be sold. The fact is that councils in London have tried hard to have house building programmes. The effect of the rent cut may be good in itself, but unless Government money is supplied to compensate for it, there will be no council housing building programme for London. He needs to address those points if we are to take him seriously.

Chris Philp: If there are challenges in inner London boroughs such as Camden and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, where it is difficult to find new sites, it is important that houses are built in the wider London area. The Mayor of London has strongly advocated having a London ring fence, whereby the proceeds of council house sales and the like are ring-fenced for use within London. I am sure the Minister will comment on that suggestion in due course.

Meg Hillier: I thank the hon. Gentleman for being so generous in giving way. He seems to be saying that in boroughs such as Hackney—where, under the Government’s proposed right-to-buy policy, large family council properties would need to be sold off, but over a fifth of residents under 16 will need those family homes—we should be content to encourage people to go and live in Ruislip or Mitcham. I am sure that those are fantastic places to live, but they are not where Hackney residents want to live; they would have to take their children out of school to do so, which they do not want to do. Is he saying we should be shipping people out of expensive areas to cheaper areas?

Chris Philp: No. I am simply saying that where there are very high-value council properties, it makes sense to sell them and free up money to build more properties. Ideally, those would be in the same borough, but if there is a lack of land—I am not sure that Hackney has a particular lack of land; that is more a problem for the inner London boroughs, such as Camden, Westminster and RBKC—and it is impossible to find new land in the borough, we should look a little more widely. That seems to be common sense. If we can sell one unit and build three, that seems to be a trade-off well worth—

Andy Slaughter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Philp: I will make a little progress. I have been unusually generous.

The Mayor of London has made progress during the seven years of his mayoralty. He has brought forward 94,000 affordable houses since 2008, which—to respond to the point made by the right hon. Member for Tottenham—is extremely welcome. The 20 housing zones established jointly between the Government and the Mayor of London, with £400 million of investment, are also extremely welcome. In those zones the local authority, the Mayor and the Department for Communities and Local Government get together to put in place the planning, infrastructure and support required to deliver large-scale housing. Those zones will help, and the £200 million London housing bank will help as well.

There are also specific projects that I am sure we are all keen to encourage. For example, the Mayoral Development Corporation is bringing forward 24,000 units on derelict industrial land at Old Oak Common in Ealing. We need to see far more schemes—

Andy Slaughter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Chris Philp: Is it partly in Hammersmith? [Interruption.] The fact that it goes over three London boroughs shows that we need MDCs to step in and make things happen when large numbers of public bodies are involved. In my own borough, the Croydon growth zone is important; it will, I hope, bring forward 4,000 houses. The Brent Cross regeneration project is another important scheme.

Those specific projects, in which the Government, the Mayor of London and the boroughs focus together on bringing forward large numbers of houses in a particular area, are very effective. I strongly encourage the Mayor and the Minister to do even more in that way.

I also commend the Greater London Authority for its programme of disposing of its public land for housing. Over the last couple of years, the GLA has disposed of 98% of the land that it owns—that excludes Transport for London, by the way—for public housing. That includes the site of the old Cane Hill hospital in my constituency—which is directly overlooked by my house—where Barratt Homes is currently building 650 houses. That is an example that other public bodies should follow.

In that vein, I welcome the London Land Commission, which met for the first time on 15 July. Its duty is to catalogue surplus public sector land that can be brought forward for housing. TfL has 6,000 acres that could be used across 600 sites; the NHS has 1,000 acres, 15% of which is potentially surplus to requirements. There is a huge amount that can be done by bringing forward public sector land for house building.

I also strongly support the idea of using local development orders to effectively grant outline planning consent on suitable brownfield land, even if the landowner has not applied for consent. The target is to get LDOs for 90% of brownfield sites by 2020. That is a really important initiative. One housing association estimates that there are 8,000 acres of developable brownfield land in our city. It is a matter of absolute urgency that we develop that land as quickly as possible, partly to create new housing and partly to take pressure off the green belt, which it is essential to protect.

I am conscious that other Members wish to speak. In closing, I will briefly put eight specific proposals to the Minister. The first is to consider extending the office-to-residential conversion scheme that has been in operation for the last two or three years, in areas where there is no pressure on office supply. Certainly some clarification is needed about the definition of change of use. At the moment, the change of use has to have occurred by May 2016, but there is a little ambiguity about what the change of use actually is, so some clarification would help developers and investors.

Secondly—this is more a matter for the Treasury than DCLG—the regime for buy-to-let mortgages is currently a bit softer than the mortgage regime for owner-occupiers. For example, most owner-occupier mortgages are repayment, whereas most buy-to-let landlords get interest-only mortgages. In my view, that means that buy-to-let landlords are unfairly advantaged relative to potential owner-occupiers. The Bank of England and the Treasury should look at that, to create a level playing field so that owner-occupiers can purchase on an equal footing to buy-to-let landlords. That would encourage home ownership.

Thirdly, local authority planning departments are often a serious bottleneck, leading to the missing of statutory deadlines for granting planning consent. I suggest that we should consider allowing higher planning fees to be charged in exchange for a guaranteed service level. Planning fees are quite low, and I am sure that many developers—particularly larger ones with big

schemes—would happily pay a great deal more money to get a quick, clear decision. That would bring planning consents forward more quickly and get us building.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): That is fine, but would the hon. Gentleman's party support speedier decisions if that meant less time for proper consultation with local residents?

Chris Philp: No. Proper consultation is clearly very important. Quite often, however, it is the process with officers that is slow. It is not the planning committee; the officers who prepare the reports and do all the work prior to the application can take a very long time, often because they are under-resourced, because of the understandable pressures on local government finances. I am sure that larger developers in particular would be happy to pay significantly higher fees to speed up the process. Some planning departments and councils are very good, but some are not, and when they are not performing and are letting local residents down by being slow in dealing with applications, we should consider outsourcing planning functions to a third party that can do the job more effectively. That could be paid for by planning fees.

Fourthly, we must make sure that the brownfield register being compiled for the LDOs is given real focus. I suspect that the GLA will play a role in supporting that process, and it may need some financial assistance. It is essential to get the list of brownfield land and develop those 8,000 acres as quickly as possible. I hope that the Department, the Mayor of London and the boroughs will put a huge focus on identifying that land and giving it outline planning consent over the next five years.

My fifth point is a more general one, about talking to developers. I should draw Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, as I have a previous and a current professional involvement in the area. Parts of the planning process put up barriers—things like bat studies and crested newt studies. They are less of an issue, I imagine, in Camden and Hackney, but in other parts of the country they can delay developments by months or years. Bats and crested newts are important, but building houses is important as well, and sometimes the balance struck between those considerations is not quite right.

My sixth point relates to the London Land Commission. Its current mandate is simply to identify surplus public sector land. I would go further and give the commission, supported by the Mayor of London and the Department, the power to take on surplus public sector land—whoever it happens to be owned by—and to bring that land directly forward for development. Some 50%, say, of the proceeds would go, with no restrictions, to the previous landowner—the NHS, Network Rail or TfL—and the other 50% would be ploughed back into housing. There would therefore be an incentive for such organisations to co-operate with the process, whereas if the money just disappears somewhere else, they may not be very co-operative. I urge the Minister to give serious consideration to granting the commission the powers I have described.

The seventh point is to make the adoption of a local plan by local authorities—both inside and outside London—mandatory. At the moment, a number of

[Chris Philp]

authorities do not have local plans, which makes it difficult to bring forward housing. If authorities do not bring forward a local plan by a particular point—for example, by 2017—the planning inspector or DCLG should simply develop one on their behalf. Authorities have had plenty of notice, but a number have not developed a plan.

My final point is that community infrastructure payments should be used for infrastructure that is relevant to the local community. When local authorities take community infrastructure levy money, it can disappear into a black hole, and there is a temptation to replace capital spending elsewhere, which causes resentment among local residents. In the case of the project close to my house, there is a £7 million CIL payment, but the money could disappear to the other end of Croydon, which would mean that any pressures on schools, hospitals and local roads were not necessarily alleviated. I think the local public will be more accepting of large-scale development if they can see that it is directly linked to infrastructure improvements in their locality, and that will ease the passage of development.

I have tried to make eight constructive suggestions to help to alleviate the house building issues that London faces. I hope Members on both sides will agree with my diagnosis of the problem and with some of the solutions I have mentioned. I hope colleagues will come forward with other ideas in the next hour and 10 minutes and that the Minister will be able to respond to them.

Our city faces problems on housing. Progress has been made, but there is more to do. I therefore hope that we can work together, as London MPs, with the Mayor of London, the boroughs and the Department to alleviate the pressures our city faces.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the next speaker, Helen Hayes, I remind Members that I will call the first of the three Front-Bench speakers at 10.30 am, so Members have about five minutes each. If everybody keeps to that, there will be no need for a time limit.

9.52 am

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) for calling the debate. The housing crisis is, indeed, the biggest issue facing London. More people than ever are on the waiting list for a council home, huge numbers of people are in expensive, insecure private tenancies, and there is a whole generation of people for whom owning their own home is an unattainable aspiration.

People with housing issues fill my surgery every week. The impact of those issues is wide-ranging, stretching from health problems, to educational disadvantage as a result of a lack of space to do homework, to young people being unable to put down roots in their communities because they are constantly subject to eviction following the end of private tenancies.

Within London's housing crisis as a whole, however, there is a sub-crisis—the availability of affordable housing. In that context, the Government are seeking to introduce

policies that will make delivering affordable housing much harder unless additional mitigating measures are put in place.

I wrote to the Minister for Housing and Planning on 21 July about the proposal to reduce social rents by 1%, and I am disappointed that I have yet to receive a response. I therefore want to bring to the debate the issues raised in that letter and to press the Government on them.

The London borough of Southwark, of which I represent part, is one of the largest social landlords in the country, responsible for 39,000 council homes and 15,000 leasehold properties. It also has the single biggest commitment to council house building of any local authority in the country, with a 30-year plan to build 11,000 new council homes. The plan was developed following an independent housing commission, which explored in detail housing needs and housing stock in the borough and the ways in which the council could best address the condition of current council homes and the need for current and future housing.

In 2014, as part of the 2014 spending review, the Chancellor set rents for the next 10 years at consumer prices index plus 1%. That clear financial position formed the basis for Southwark's long-term planning for current and future council homes. The announcement in the emergency Budget that social rents will now be reduced annually by 1% for four years will have significant consequences for Southwark Council's housing revenue account if the Government take no steps to mitigate the proposal's impact. The announcement was made without consultation with, or prior notice to, the housing sector, giving councils and housing associations no opportunity to evaluate its effects or to make representations to the Government.

The proposal represents a fundamental shift in Government policy and is the most profound of a number of changes that, cumulatively, undermine the principles of self-financing and the ability of councils and housing associations to meet their long-term investment needs and contribute to addressing the housing crisis. It removes previous resource certainty, which is a key factor for any organisation seeking to make investment plans, because rental stream is critical to the viability of social housing providers' business plans. It removes all local discretion and introduces de facto rent control for social housing, at a time when the Government are not looking at any measures to curb rents in the private sector.

The proposal's stated purpose is to curb the housing benefit bill, but impeding social housing providers' ability to build new social homes will significantly increase it, not reduce it. The emergency Budget contains no equivalent measures on the level of private sector rent or the definition of affordable rent—up to 80% of market rent in London—which have played by far and away the most significant role in increasing the housing benefit bill.

The proposal's compound effect over four years on Southwark Council alone will be an annual cut of more than £65 million from 2015-16 levels. In the long term, the loss of resources, which will be compounded over the business plan's 30-year life, will be of the order of £1.1 billion. That will have a staggeringly large impact on council homes in Southwark.

During the last Parliament, the Government provided financial support to enable councils to freeze council tax. In a similar vein, I seek confirmation that they will provide additional funding to compensate for the impact that the proposal to reduce council rents by 1% will have on housing revenue accounts, to ensure the council can continue to deliver new council homes and invest in its current homes.

Taken together, the Government's proposal on council rents and the proposal to extend the right to buy to housing associations—funded by the forced sale of high-value council properties—will mean a dramatic worsening of the housing crisis in London over the next five years, with no improvement whatever.

I am absolutely dismayed by the Government's proposals, which fundamentally belie the suggestion that they have any understanding at all of housing finance or of the practical ways in which the housing sector delivers new homes and contributes to solving the housing crisis. I therefore hope I will get a response today to the points that I raised on 21 July.

9.58 am

Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp). I did not wish to be unkind to him earlier; the point I was trying to make was that housing in London is a toxic, complicated issue. In many ways, it is one issue on which all of us, as London Members of Parliament, need to try to work together, although there will, of course, be party political differences from time to time.

I hope colleagues will forgive me for focusing my comments not on social housing, which is close to my heart—it is an issue even in my constituency—but on foreign ownership. Property ownership in Britain is a key component of the social capital that enables a free enterprise system to have popular legitimacy and to function effectively.

Foreign investment in London property is so desirable because property here is widely considered to be relatively low risk, while offering high returns. There are a great many reasons for that, mainly stemming from the inclusive and welcoming society created by this nation—our forefathers—over many generations. All this so-called social capital cannot simply be bought; it has evolved over many centuries.

As the international enclave expands in central London boroughs, prices have also been driven up in the outer suburbs. It is getting tough for even the highest paid professionals to buy homes, as population growth exacerbates supply issues. High rent gobbles up funds for deposits, and prices get a boost from artificially low interest rates. There is something very wrong, here in the capital, when hard-working residents, our own constituents, who play by the rules, are completely priced out of their own housing market. These are the sort of people who will maintain and build London's social capital and pass it on to the next generation. Property developers benefit from that social capital and it is only right that they play their part in preserving it.

Lest we forget, the fundamental purpose of residential property is to house people. It is a precious resource and should not routinely be locked away as part of an

investment portfolio. Housing is a key component of every city's eco-system and it may now be time to consider having residential developments that are open for purchase by only UK citizens and permanent residents. That would to some extent prevent non-resident overseas investors from bringing about what is, despite the honeyed words of Knight Frank and Savills, massive distortion of London's property market.

Nations such as Switzerland and Singapore have strict restrictions on the foreign ownership of property. Yet they are global players that still operate successfully as financial centres. In Switzerland, only Swiss citizens and permanent residents can own property. The property market is a free market that operates within those rules. In Singapore most Singaporeans live in Housing Development Board properties, which only Singaporeans can own, some of which are by any standards luxurious. Singapore also has unrestricted ownership of non HDB properties—mainly high-cost luxury properties, which are open to foreign ownership. However, high stamp duty and penal capital gains taxes are levied on speculative purchases, if the property is sold within four years of securing ownership. I fully appreciate that for London to remain a dynamic, global city we must continue to welcome people from abroad to live, work, study and build businesses here. They will make an important contribution to our city's culture. However, that is different from welcoming speculative capital that forces British citizens and other permanent residents who live and work here out of our city.

Another key aspect to examine is the reported reluctance of banks to lend money for residential property developments, so that developers look for off-plan purchasers, frequently in Asia, to deposit 20% of the value of their purchase to allow building to commence. That is an extremely complex issue and I fully acknowledge that, for example, Battersea power station would have remained derelict had it not been for the substantial boost afforded by some of that foreign investment.

Mr Lammy: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that another element of that foreign ownership is dirty money being trafficked through London from Russia and other places, with 3.7 square miles of London owned by offshore companies—we do not know whom—and that we need serious regulation?

Mark Field: There are two issues. There is clearly some dirty money; it would be naive to suggest there is none. That said, there is also significant investment from Russia and the middle east that is not dirty money at all. As for offshore companies, we should not necessarily assume that there is a direct connection there. There is a range of reasons for using offshore financial vehicles in an entirely legitimate way. The important thing is to have a registration process—although it need not necessarily be open, because that would lead to all sorts of other difficulties—so that the authorities in the Channel Islands or Cayman Islands, for example, are well aware of what is going on.

I appreciate that others want to speak but want briefly, if I may, to suggest some qualifications that we might have in mind as criteria for purchasing into the London market. An individual should be either a British citizen or permanent resident, and the purchase should not be for a buy-to-let investment, but a home to live in.

[Mark Field]

It should be possible to let the property out only after period of residency, and then only for a specified time before it would need to be sold. If the property were immediately sold, a penal capital gain would be levied, and it would have to be sold to people who qualified under the same criteria. Additional levies on speculative ownership and buy-to-leave-empty purchases might also need to be considered alongside a potential system for a higher non-resident council tax, which I have also discussed in the past.

I am trying here to provoke some thoughtful debate, and I recognise that some of my proposals will not necessarily prove entirely practicable. However, we should not lose sight of the foundations on which the high property prices in London are built. They have much to do with the huge amounts of social capital created by our constituents over many centuries. We are custodians of that social capital, and our duty is to grow it, improve it and bequeath it properly to future generations.

10.5 am

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp), one of my near neighbours, on getting the debate. London MPs have a serious job to do on behalf of our constituents. I want to make some suggestions about people's ability to own their home in London.

A survey in July by the *Evening Standard* suggested that 82% of Londoners who currently do not own their home believe that it will always be outside their price range. A significant number of those people have good jobs by any estimation and want to buy, but cannot. I think the reason for that is that we have lost the connection—in a moral, civic and party sense—between owning a home and using housing as an investment. That is why, while I fully support the Government in their Budget plan to reduce the tax breaks on buy-to-let mortgages, I do not believe that they go far enough.

The flawed principle that landlords can claim tax relief on mortgage interest will remain. Landlords will get a slightly lower tax relief. The Government's own documents on that cut suggest that they will save just £665 million a year by 2020. That is just one tenth of the £6 billion in mortgage interest claimed back in tax by landlords in 2012-13. A major contribution to tackling the root causes of the housing crisis seriously would be to get an even playing field between those attempting to get mortgages to buy, and those attempting to get them to let.

To touch on the issue of international investment in property, on which I would not want to compete with the knowledge of the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), it cannot be right that in a major new development in Thameside only a fifth of the properties were purchased by domestic buyers. In July a new £140 million development in Canary Wharf sold out in hours, and half the flats were bought by overseas investors not resident in the UK. A 2013 report by Knight Frank, taking a different tack, found that 28% of central London property buyers were non-UK residents. I challenge the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Croydon South that that is something that happens only in central London.

I represent a suburban London constituency that is cheap by London standards; 18 months ago I had an email from a constituent who said, "Siobhain, you need to know what is going on. My daughter and her boyfriend want to buy their first one-bedroom flat"—in a part of Mitcham that no one would regard as palatial. When they turned up to try to put in an offer, there were 32 people in that one-bedroom flat. The person next to my constituent's daughter and her boyfriend was a representative of a Chinese bank, which was interest in investing in it. How can that couple ever compete in that environment?

We need to find some solutions. I am sure there are many sophisticated suggestions. One that I want to suggest is a levy on property sold to non-UK residents. It would raise billions in tax revenue and that could be invested in affordable housing. Reducing demand from buy-to-let landlords and foreign property investors would also cut the spiralling housing benefit bill. Housing benefit paid to private landlords has now reached £9.3 billion, or 38% of the total bill. With fewer people able to buy homes, there is more demand in the private rental sector, which again puts up rents. If we removed mortgage tax interest from buy-to-let mortgages, we would release £6 billion. That is roughly the equivalent of grants to housing associations to build 100,000 new social homes—a real contribution to helping those who are having difficulties. We would also help the economy, because as we all know, for every £1 spent on housing construction, an additional £2.09 of economic output is generated.

I urge the Government to be more assertive in their efforts to encourage home ownership through the tax system, and to discourage the damaging crowding of the market by buy-to-let landlords and non-UK residents. We must enable people to fulfil that most basic of human desires—to own their own home—and so we must encourage and incentivise buying to live, and not buying to let.

We are all agents for change in our constituencies. I suggest that Members on both sides of the House look at the YMCA's Y:Cube, which is about going back to the prefabs. They can be built on bad, difficult, and small sites, and they can be constructed for only 25% of normal construction costs. They can be built within five months of receiving planning permission, and the money is paid back in around 10 years, so it is a great investment. If anybody wants to know more about Y:Cube, I have a pack here, but I am sure that the YMCA would love to talk to them. We need to be broadminded about the solutions and consider things that we may never have thought of in the past, because it is a huge problem.

10.10 am

Mr Nick Hurd (Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner) (Con): May I be opportunistic and place on record my appreciation of the Queen's public service to this country, Mr Owen?

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) is not so far down the road of public service, but he has done us a great service today by securing this debate on what one Member rightly described as the No. 1 political issue in the capital. It goes to the heart of the debate about what kind of London we want to live in and have our kids grow up in. I feel passionately that London, if it is to continue being the

vibrant, brilliant place it is, must be somewhere that people of all ages and incomes can afford to live in decent homes, in neighbourhoods that are not segregated by wealth, class or nationality. In particular, it must be a place where young people feel that they really have a decent chance of buying or renting their own space and have the chance to get on.

I think most of us are here because we fear we are heading in the wrong direction, and that the pressures in this context are enormous. For me, it is an issue of social justice and intergenerational equity. It matters enormously, and I have detected, as I am sure that other MPs have, enormous change in sentiment in the area I represent, which is a relatively affluent suburb on the edge of London. Now, people cannot buy a one-bedroom flat for less than a quarter of a million pounds there, nor can they rent one for less than £1,000 a month. This issue is really concerning for people. The debate has changed from 2005, when I stood on platforms trying to get elected. The question then was, “How do we stop the development?”, whereas it is now, “Where are my grandchildren going to live?”, and “How do we build what we need to build without spoiling the area?”

There is no easy answer to those questions, but this is a fundamental challenge for our generation of politicians, because as others have said, the problem is likely to get worse, given the demand pressures, not least due to population increase. This is one of the biggest challenges for our generation of politicians. The past is less interesting than the future, but we have to recognise that Governments of both colours have failed the capital in the past, in terms of building the number of homes required. As hon. Members would expect me to say, the coalition Government deserve a great deal of credit for stopping the rot. I will leave it to the Minister to give the roll call of achievements; I think it is substantial.

The Mayor of London is not here today, but I think he also deserves great credit for changing the tempo and ambition, and for some really interesting innovation, particularly in helping working families on low incomes and giving them the support that they need. There have been a lot of very interesting initiatives and very good projects that I hope his successor—with respect to other candidates, I sincerely hope it will be my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith)—will turbo-charge.

However, I guard against looking simply at incremental reform. I think we need to be more radical. The absolute priority is increasing the supply of affordable homes. This cannot just be about increasing the volume of building, because that will take too long. It is largely about what gets built. The starting point—if it takes a Conservative to point this out, so be it—is recognising that the market will not deliver, because, certainly in my area, it delivers what the market can afford, and not necessarily what the community needs. I believe that the state has to be more radical in terms of intervention. Local authorities have to get back into the business of building. We have to do big Conservative things to open up this market, which is too opaque. The power is concentrated in too few hands. We need more competition, more transparency and more innovation in how stuff gets designed, built and financed, and we need to bring in the public in a much bigger way, so that they feel a bigger sense of buy-in.

The debate is normally framed around power, land and money. I simply add a concern about skills. It was put to me by the director of a major development company that we can have the best policies in the world, but we do not have the people or skills to build what we want to build, and we need to address that.

In terms of power, I am a strong believer in decentralisation. I would like to see the next Mayor have more power, and we should be open to the idea of a new delivery agency. We need to question why Transport for London and the NHS think that they should be in the redevelopment business. I support the London Land Commission, but we need more clarity around the presumption and policy priority relating to public land. Is the priority to maximise the value to the taxpayer or to maximise value to the community? We are seeing that with the potential development of Northwood and Pinner cottage hospital in my constituency. The situation is too vague, and it is frustrating.

I am not at all sure that extending the right to buy is the right policy priority for London at the moment. I am open to persuasion. I want to be assured that it is compatible with a big increase in supply, and I certainly support the Mayor in his call for all proceeds of the policy to stay inside London.

Last but not least, I want to see much more innovation in design and financing. The hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) is entirely right. Organisations such as Create Streets show what can be done to redesign failing estates. We can build in different, modern ways. Laing O'Rourke is leading the way in the UK with important thinking on modular design that transforms the cost and timing of building. We should be doing more than dipping our toe into the waters of giving people the freedom to build their own home. We should be giving local authorities more freedom to explore new vehicles that give them more flexibility to deliver the homes that they see are needed. Enfield, Sutton and Ealing are leading the way with that.

We need much more creativity in giving opportunities for new sources of finance to come in that are not rapacious, but want to support and invest in infrastructure. Sir Merrick Cockell gave a fascinating speech in which he talked about the potential for London local authority pension funds to collaborate. They want to invest in infrastructure and they need new opportunities. He talked about the potential of municipal bonds and retail bonds to get communities involved in the opportunity to invest in their area. I was proud to lead our work in Government on developing social investment as an asset class. We lead the world in that, and there are pioneers in that area, such as the Cheyne Social Property Impact Fund, the Real Lettings Property Fund, and the Golden Lane Housing bond. Those organisations are looking for opportunities to invest for social benefit in this area, and what they are missing is opportunity. The problem is not supply of capital, but supply of opportunity, so I think there is a huge opportunity for local authorities, MPs and the Mayor to work together and reach out to designers, architects, developers, investors and pioneering local authorities who want to do things in different ways. That is what we need if we are to get serious about tackling the No. 1 issue in the capital that we love.

10.18 am

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): In the four minutes or so I have available, I want to acknowledge the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark—[*Interruption.*] Sorry, my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), who represents the borough of Southwark, because she painted exactly the picture in my constituency. She laid out very comprehensively the financial challenges of building homes for social housing providers. I find myself, perhaps not for the first time actually, in total agreement with the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), because there is a real issue in my constituency too about overseas developers, and I will touch on that.

I want to cut to the issues that I want to raise with the Minister, but I need to add that my surgeries, too, are full of people in great distress. When I started out in politics about 20 years ago, housing was a huge issue. It was a case of having to visit people in bed and breakfasts; there were all those sorts of problems. Things got a bit better, but they are now worse, I think, than they have ever been. People are so distressed. They are living in overcrowded conditions, and there is no way out. They are put in temporary accommodation a long way from home and have to remove their children from school. They are unable to get a foot on the housing ladder, find it a struggle to pay the rent and have no security of tenure in the private sector.

I should just alert Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, Mr Owen. I let a property, so I understand the technical side for landlords. There is a lot of bleating, frankly, from some of the landlords' associations about the challenges of keeping rents at a rent escalator level, so that when someone goes into a tenancy, they know how long they will be there and what the rent will be. I do not think that there is a problem for any landlord, big or small, in managing a business model along those lines.

Let me cut to the issues that I would like the Minister to address. I agree with the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster that we need to tax the overseas investors. I am not an expert in how that should happen, although the Select Committee that I chair may well end up pursuing that issue. It is a real issue. I commend to the Minister the map that *Private Eye* did. It simply looked at properties that were sold and whom they were sold to. The situation is shocking. Let me just mention my area. There are flats down the road from me. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) said, small properties that should be going to local first-time buyers are being bought by overseas companies. They are somehow getting a tax break for doing that. That is not the sort of investment that we need. I recognise that huge sites, such as Battersea power station, may need to attract overseas investment, but this is taking away from local people, so the Minister and the Government need to look at that.

The Government need to go back to the drawing board on the right to buy. As I said in my intervention, taking family-sized properties away from Hackney council to backfill for the sale of housing association properties is double-hitting the affordable housing stock in my area, where it is increasingly unaffordable for someone on the minimum wage even to rent a property, certainly

without housing benefit. I recently heard of a nurse moving into a new housing association development who was reliant on housing benefit from day one. That is my other point: the Government must grasp the nettle of housing benefit. Subsequent Governments of differing hues have not done that. When Sir George Young, who was formerly in this place, was a Housing Minister more than 20 years ago, he said, "Let housing benefit take the strain." Housing benefit is now taking the strain to a ridiculous extent. If that money were better invested, we would make a dent in the problem.

This is something the Minister could easily do. Certainly my party had discussions with the Council of Mortgage Lenders before the last election about allowing longer tenancies in the private sector. It is the mortgage lenders that, ridiculously, suggest that a year's contract is more secure. Frankly, a tenanted property in London often represents a more secure income for the mortgage lender than that from someone in a precarious job. That is something the Minister could quickly act on, and I urge him to do so.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): We are hearing a list of questions for the Minister, and I just want to throw in a few of my own, because although I am new here, even I am getting a sense of *déjà vu*. I led a similar debate almost exactly two months ago, and we did not have any answers then, so I just want to throw in three questions from then.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. I will do my best to fit the hon. Lady in at the end, but she must follow procedures. Make an intervention by all means, but do not ask a list of questions.

Dr Huq: It was just the mention of Sir George Young that reminded me, because he is a predecessor of mine.

Meg Hillier: In the 30 seconds remaining to me, I will rattle through my points. Shared ownership needs to be reviewed. Recently on the market in my constituency was a £1 million shared ownership property. One would need to earn £77,000 a year to get a quarter share in that property. That is not computing; it is not working, and it needs to be reconsidered in London.

The Government could and should consider co-operative ownership. The garden suburbs were on that model. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden said, there is an opportunity to think more broadly and innovatively. Perhaps there could be a competition for housing solutions, and that could be one of them.

We need to give London much more autonomy. We need to devolve more property tax, so that the London Mayor, whatever party they are from, has the control to be able to grapple with this issue in the London market. We need to have a much better strategy for public land. Hon. Members have already talked about this in the debate. Her Majesty's Treasury is demanding the highest pound return for the taxpayer. That sounds admirable, but the better dividend locally for communities would be to have affordable housing for local purchasers and local renters on the sites. It is common sense to look at the way land is dealt with, so the London Land Commission is a step in the right direction.

The Minister, I hope, will recognise that housing is a huge problem for our constituents. That has to be grappled with now or it will remain a problem for the

next 20 years. It is going to take a long time to solve as it is, and if he does not tackle it now, it will become worse. We will see London hollowed out, with key workers and people on low incomes unable to live in the areas in which they work and which they serve. That will be devastating for the social capital of London.

10.24 am

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) on having initiated one of the most important debates that we can have in London. I want to echo a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd), who talked about the changing dynamic in his constituency. I have no doubt that that is echoed all the way around London. When I was selected in 2008 to be the Conservative candidate for Richmond Park and north Kingston, the main emphasis in the hustings, in the open primary, that decided it in the end was who was going to fight off the inappropriate development best—who was going to take it to the developers. And the very same people, just a couple of months ago in the run-up to the most recent general election, were asking in the hustings, “How on earth are our children going to get on the housing ladder? There is no prospect of it at all.” There has been a sea change in public attitudes, and I do not think there is any doubt that housing is the No. 1 concern in London. The population is soaring and will continue to soar. We expect the population to hit 10 million over the next 15 years and we are not building anything like enough to match that demand, so volume does matter.

The average price for the first-time buyer in London is, as has been said, more than £400,000. That requires a deposit in some cases of about £100,000 and an income of about £75,000 or £76,000 to manage the mortgage. Rent is more than double the national average. Even in the least expensive postcodes in London, renters on the London living wage can expect to spend more than 40% of their income on rent, which means that they have no chance of saving for a deposit in order to get, eventually, on to the housing ladder. Therefore, Londoners are already being priced out of their own city. That is hurting families, but also our competitiveness as a city.

There is no single answer, but a lot can be done. In the two or three minutes that I have left, I will not be able to talk about some of the really meaty, interesting issues such as devolution of property taxes, which was touched on in the last speech, or another issue that I do not think has come up, which is putting empty homes back on the market. There are about 80,000 empty homes in London that should not be empty. The current Mayor has done more than, I think, any other British politician in living memory to bring empty homes on to the market, but we have a long way to go and we can be more robust.

However, the bottom line is, whether we like it or not, that we need to build more—45,000 to 50,000 homes every year just to avoid a crisis. The question then is how we do that. There is the problem of land banking, which has been raised. There are more consents to build than developments actually happening, but it is not just the private developers that are land banking. As has been mentioned, there is an enormous amount of publicly owned brownfield land—it is owned by the public sector. TfL alone owns the equivalent of 16 Hyde parks. The

NHS owns an enormous amount of land that it is not using. A typical local authority can own up to one third of the land in its borough. We can deliver the homes that we need in London without even touching the green belt—without encroaching on our green spaces at all. I strongly welcome the initiative by the Mayor and the Government. The London Land Commission will provide the inventory that we need. We do not have the information at the moment, but we will shortly.

However, to get building we also need to address a problem in the development sector, which is that it has increasingly become an oligopoly. A very small number of mega-developers account for the vast majority of the building that we see in London and, in turn, demand unrealistic levels of return based on often spurious “viability tests”. There is a need to open up the viability test and to help local authorities with the expertise they need to deal with the developers and with that process.

To build new homes, we need three things—I am aware that I have only two minutes left, so I am going to rush. We need land, which we have. We need planning, which, between the local authorities and the Mayor, we have. It is possible to de-risk development with the powers that the Mayor and the local authorities have between them. And we need finance. It is not difficult to get that finance, for precisely the reason that we have heard from a number of hon. Members. There is an overwhelming appetite among people around the world to invest in London. At the moment, that is causing serious resentment, because buildings are being built and then bought by people who have no intention of living in those buildings. “Safety deposit boxes in the sky” is how they are often described.

That appetite is there, but it does not have to be a negative; it could be a positive. If we channelled that investment in order to deliver the homes that Londoners need—affordable homes for purchase and for rent on publicly owned, publicly available brownfield land—we could turn that negative into an overwhelming positive. We could create a pan-London investment vehicle designed to attract that investment. There are people who, because of the volatility and dangers in the world around us, want to put their money somewhere safe—that is, in London property. We could create that investment opportunity for them and for the pension funds, which want nothing more than long-term investments—low risk and medium return. This is ideal for London property. We need to find a way of creating that vehicle to attract and then channel that funding in such a way that it does good.

I note the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field). I very much agree with the thesis that he put forward. We need to look carefully at the ideas that he suggested, some of which I think absolutely do need to be implemented.

In my remaining minute, let me say that one huge opportunity we have is to redevelop some of the poorly designed estates that were put up in the '50s and '60s. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner mentioned Create Streets, an organisation that has been looking closely at this. It takes the view that if we were to redevelop about half of London's 1950s and 1960s estates, we could increase density even while lowering the height of these buildings, which would improve their attractiveness and quality. By doing so, we could potentially provide the affordable homes

[Zac Goldsmith]

that we need for the next 10 to 15 years. There is an enormous amount of work to do there, and it is a massive opportunity.

Let me end by saying that whichever route we take, it is essential that we build well; that we work with, not against, communities; and that we build homes that enhance communities. We know how big the challenge is, and if we build badly—if we dump hideous buildings and disproportionate developments on communities—we will exhaust Londoners' appetite for the level of development that we will need if we are to have any chance of delivering the required number of homes.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. This debate has been oversubscribed, and just to be fair, the Minister has agreed to give two minutes at the end to the mover of the debate.

Chris Philp: One minute.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): It will be down to one minute. The Minister has offered two minutes, and we are using up time arguing over a minute or two. The hon. Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) and the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) will each make a two-minute contribution. If the Front-Bench spokespeople keep their contributions to eight minutes each, we will get everybody in. David Lammy—two minutes, and you will be cut off.

10.31 am

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): For the last time, the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) is cutting my time short. He demonstrates well why he should remain in this House.

I want to emphasise solutions. It is important to recognise that there has been a collapse in London for those who require social homes. If the average income is £32,000 in London, many Londoners will never be able to own a home of their own. If the Government continue to extend right to buy to housing associations, more social homes will come off the market. If they do nothing about those who exercise the right to buy, which for many is effectively a discount of hundreds of thousands of pounds from the taxpayer on social homes, there will continue to be a collapse in social homes. It is of concern to me that despite quite a lot of cross-party consensus, little is said by the current Government on social homes and where we will see them.

We need new solutions. What we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) was absolutely right—prefab, discount homes for young people at prices that they can afford. That is why, in my bid to be London Mayor, I have suggested that we issue bonds and enable people to build at a discount on public land. We cannot build in such a way on public land if we continue to sell it at best value to the highest bidder. TFL land and Scotland Yard have been sold off to the highest bidder. Local authorities are selling off land to the highest bidder. That is public money and public land, so it should absolutely be used to build discount homes that people can properly afford. We need a bond issue. Finally, we need to revisit green-belt designation.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order.

10.33 am

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I want to raise some questions that remained unanswered when we debated the subject in July, and I wonder whether we will have better luck with this Minister than we did with the previous one. I congratulate the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) on securing this vital debate.

The average age of an unaided first-time buyer in London is now 37, and at the debate in July I asked what the Minister predicted that would be by the end of this Government's term in office. I also raised the question of affordability. The hon. Member for Croydon South talked about Old Oak Common, where 24,000 dwellings are coming on stream. The Mayor of London's definition of affordable is 80% of market rent, but is that realistic or desirable? Can we change it? I had no reply to that question.

The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) made some interesting comments about overseas matters. I remember asking in the previous debate whether we would soon be "turning Japanese". In that country, people bequeath a mortgage from generation to generation. Do we foresee that happening? Regarding overseas investors, I asked the Minister who responded to the debate in July whether he would consider including a provision in his next housing Bill banning overseas and off-plan investors from buying future new builds, so that local London first-time buyers would at least have a chance. That was the No. 1 thing for me as a candidate, and it is the No. 1 thing in my postbag and inbox as an MP.

Recently, I posted a picture when I was door-knocking in Stephenson Street, NW10—a cobbled road of terraced housing that is often used in period dramas, and that was in the video for "Our House" by Madness. I posted it to say what a fantastic cultural heritage we have in East Acton ward, and somebody posted underneath asking, "Have you looked at what these are going for? The last one sold went for half a million." Those houses were not meant to be for rich people. I fear that London will experience a brain drain, and that in time it will be only for the oligarchs and the super-rich.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order.

10.35 am

Corri Wilson (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I thank the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) for securing the debate and bringing the matter to the House for discussion.

As a new MP looking for a flat in London, I encountered some of the problems that have been talked about today. The number of people living in London has increased by a fifth, while the number of homes available has not increased at the same rate.

As the third-party representative summing up the debate, I would like to share some points from north of the border, if I may. The right to buy will end for all council and housing association tenants in Scotland on 1 August 2016. In 2013, 185,000 people were on the waiting list, while only 54,000 council houses were available to let. Although the right to buy has driven up home ownership in Scotland, it has contributed to an

acute shortage of social housing. The abolition of the right to buy will keep 15,500 homes in the social sector for the next decade.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. I remind the hon. Lady that the topic under discussion is affordable homes in London. I would appreciate it if she addressed that. I understand that she wants to make comparisons, but that is the subject that we are discussing.

Corri Wilson: Absolutely. In Scotland, we have shown that investment in affordable housing can keep costs down, create jobs and, importantly, help people to live better lives. As has been mentioned, it is not only about buying. We have actually taken over abandoned properties, repaired them, brought them up to housing standard and let them out. The SNP MPs in Westminster will push for a funding boost for affordable housing from the UK Government to help build more homes in Scotland and across the UK. Specifically, we will call for the UK Government to put in place a new target to build 100,000 affordable homes each and every year.

10.37 am

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Mr Owen. I start by paying tribute to Her Majesty the Queen on becoming the longest-reigning UK monarch. I congratulate the hon. Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) on securing the debate. We know that this is an important and serious issue, not least because this is the second time that we have debated it in this Chamber in recent months.

The hon. Member for Croydon South carried out a forensic analysis of the lack of availability and affordability of housing in London. When he went through his eight points, I thought that he had lifted about five of them directly from the Lyons commission report that we produced before the last election, which was widely acknowledged as being a sensible blueprint for how we should go about increasing supply of, and access to, housing. I urge him to read the report again and to talk to people about it, because that would be very helpful.

I take issue with the hon. Gentleman on one point, which is the effectiveness of planning departments. Planning departments in this country are extremely effective, by and large. Figures from the Department show that 80% to 90% of applications are assessed on time. We need to acknowledge that planning departments are going through a really difficult time in many areas of the country, because resources are being taken away from them under austerity measures, but they are receiving more applications. How will the Minister ensure that planning departments are adequately resourced to carry out the tasks before them?

There is consensus on both sides of the Chamber on the problems facing Londoners in accessing not only housing but affordable housing, and it is good that that is the subject of this debate. There is also a strong degree of consensus on the solutions. I hope the Minister is listening and will take on board the suggestions from Members on both sides of the Chamber, but I will focus on the interesting comments made by the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field), my hon. Friends the Members for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), for Hackney South

and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier) and for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) on how to address international investors. They have suggested what can be done to reduce the number of homes sold to international investors, and I look forward to the Minister's response.

Affordable housing is a serious issue that we have often debated in this House. There is a significant problem with the supply of houses in London. The solution is not only about supply, but supply is important. Estimates of the need for additional house building in London fall within a range of 50,000 to 80,000 a year, yet there were only 21,900 net completions in 2012-13. That is obviously far below the required target, but the goal set by the Mayor's office leaves a lot to be desired. The Mayor's housing strategy contains an ambition to build 42,000 new homes a year for 20 years, which does not reach even the lowest estimated requirements. A consequence of that lack of supply and lack of building is that the cost of housing in London is rising.

London's population has increased by 14% since 2002, and the number of jobs has increased by 15%, but the housing stock has increased by only 9%. As many hon. Members have demonstrated, that 9% does not go to local people. A number of colleagues have demonstrated that people either cannot find affordable social housing or are unable to buy a home due to rocketing costs, yet the Government seem to be doing very little to stem the tide and, in some respects, are exacerbating the problem. Shelter and other organisations have for some time been highlighting how a whole generation of young people in London are being priced out of the housing market.

There is no way that supply will be able to meet demand if building affordable homes—I stress that we are talking about affordable homes—is not one of the Government's top housing priorities. Local authorities in many areas of London are doing amazing work in trying to build new homes for social rent, and I cite Islington as an example, but they are very concerned that, under the Government's new proposals, those homes will be sold off before they even house a social tenant, which cannot be a sensible policy. The number of homes being built for social rent has fallen to a 20-year low, against a rising population in London who require such homes.

For every 11 council houses sold last year, just one was built to replace them, which, as a number of my hon. Friends have said, raises questions about what will happen when the right to buy is extended to housing association properties. That is a real issue for the Minister to address today. What will the Government do to ensure that houses sold under the right to buy are not only replaced, but replaced in the areas where those houses have been sold? Otherwise, the replacements will not help local people to access social-rented housing.

The Chancellor's "pay to stay" scheme is also exacerbating the issue. By making households in London that earn more than £40,000 a year pay market rents, he is undermining the very concept of social housing. He is essentially pricing people out of a system that was designed to help them. The £40,000 London threshold could be met by two adults earning £20,000 a year, which is way below the average wage. If that is a family with children living in a two-bedroom home, they would be paying a weekly rent, at average market rates, of £322, which would probably be rising daily. They would

[Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods]

be paying some £1,300 a month, which is essentially the entirety of one parent's monthly pay packet. That is without including council tax, utility bills and household expenses.

London's economy depends on workers in lower-paid jobs, and we cannot expect people to be willing to stay to work in a city where all their wages are spent on rent. That point has been forcefully made by the Chartered Institute of Housing, which says that pay to stay would create

"devastating costs for social housing providers"

and put them in a

"precarious position ethically and in relation to their charitable status".

The Chartered Institute of Housing is saying that the scheme is unworkable. That charge is being made not by the Opposition, although we support what the Chartered Institute of Housing is saying, but by a respected housing organisation. What will the Minister do to address those points? The Government keep telling us that they want to get the housing benefit bill under control, but they seem to be doing very little to address the issue other than reducing rents, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) said, is creating ongoing problems for housing associations, possibly affecting their future building programmes.

What is happening to housing in London is fundamentally changing the city as people are pushed out of the central boroughs into outer London, even now, because of the pressure. And people are finding it increasingly difficult to afford housing in those outer boroughs, as my hon. Friends have demonstrated. How will people in London access affordable housing? What we need from the Minister are not one-off initiatives that do not add up to much, and often exacerbate the situation, but a long-term plan to create more affordable housing in London.

10.48 am

The Minister for Communities and Resilience (Mr Mark Francois): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. It is a privilege to be speaking in Parliament on the day that Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II becomes our longest-reigning monarch, which is a truly remarkable achievement. We all wish her well for the future.

A great number of points have been raised in this debate, and I will do my best in the limited time available to cover as many as possible. I recognise that the demand for affordable housing in London is challenging, and the Mayor clearly has a significant task ahead to meet the needs of the growing population in such an important world city. That is why the Government remain committed to working with him to address the issue, which is important to people across the capital. My remarks will focus in particular on affordable housing and our plans to help to increase supply in the capital over the years ahead.

I am pleased to say that we have an encouraging track record over the past five years in delivering affordable homes, with more than 260,000 delivered in England since 2010, including more than 67,000 in London, of

which more than 3,000 were delivered in the Croydon borough of my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp).

Ruth Cadbury: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Francois: I have a lot to cover. If the hon. Lady is patient for a moment, I might be able to give way later.

We exceeded our 2011-15 affordable homes target by 16,000 homes, delivering nearly 186,000 affordable homes during the period. In fact, more council housing has been built since 2010 than in the previous 13 years. To give one example in my hon. Friend's constituency, the Cane Hill development, which he mentioned, will include up to 675 homes, including 25% affordable homes and 80% family-sized homes. It will also bring back into use three local listed buildings, which are currently derelict, and provide new open public space. It is a very good example of the kind of mixed use development that can take place in London and that can help boost affordable housing along the way.

Several hon. Members mentioned foreign ownership of properties. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field) made a number of suggestions on that point; I am not sure that I agree with all of them. I think that he was provoking debate and I suspect that he succeeded. He referred to capital gains tax at one point. On that specific point with regard to overseas purchasers, he will know that the autumn statement 2013 announced that from April 2015, the Government will introduce capital gains tax on future gains made by non-residents who sell residential property in the UK. That change addresses a significant unfairness in our capital gains tax and property tax regime. That is perhaps one point of comfort that I can offer him, and of course, given the timings, that change is in effect now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd) mentioned, among several points, the so-called skills gap in construction. It is worth mentioning that the Construction Industry Training Board has reported a rise in apprenticeships. In a 40% increase on 2013, 15,010 new apprenticeships started in 2014, so in fairness the CITB is playing its part to bring people, including young people, into the construction industry to provide the skills that we need for the future.

I talked about initial steps for affordable housing, but we need to go further. We have a big ambition to deliver 275,000 new affordable homes over the course of the Parliament. It will be the fastest rate of affordable housing building in the past 20 years. Delivery in London will be a vital element of that programme, and our officials are working with the Mayor, the GLA and London Councils on increasing capacity to make that ambition a reality to benefit the people of London.

Nearly every Member who spoke talked about the need to increase the rate of affordable house building in the capital, so I will come to that point specifically. The Mayor aims to build at least 42,000 homes a year. The 2015-18 programme is already under way. The initial programme was announced last summer, including the Mayor's housing covenant 2015-18, and the GLA are inviting further bids. Last year, the Mayor exceeded the target for the number of affordable homes to be built in London, building 17,914 affordable new homes. That was the highest number of affordable homes delivered

since current records began in 1991. The Government have invested £3 billion through the GLA from 2011-12 to 2014-15 in housing, Olympic legacy and economic development. An additional £1.45 billion will be invested in housing delivery for the period 2015-18.

In addition, to boost the supply of affordable housing, the Mayor has announced 18 out of a promised 20 housing zones in London, bringing the total number of homes to be built as part of that specific initiative to more than 50,000, of which nearly one third will be affordable to buy or rent. The Mayor expects to confirm two further zones—to complete the 20—later this year.

As several Members mentioned, we have launched a new London Land Commission, which first met in July, with a mandate to identify and release all surplus brownfield land owned by the public sector in London. Led jointly by the Government and the Mayor, the commission will take a central role in driving the delivery of new homes. For example, with the amount of property held by Transport for London, there is a possibility of developing housing, including affordable housing, around some of the stations across the capital.

Ruth Cadbury: *rose—*

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con) *rose—*

Mr Francois: I will take an intervention from the hon. Lady first and then one from my hon. Friend. I must be quick.

Ruth Cadbury: I thank the Minister for giving way. The Minister for Housing and Planning wrote to me last month to confirm that the Government believes that

“the best way to encourage affordability”

—his term—is by “increasing supply”. I thank the Minister for his description of the supply he is bringing. If that is the sole policy driver, I would like to know what formula the Government are using to deliver that market-based policy. To put it another way, by what level will private rents in London come down with the delivery of that 42,000?

Mr Francois: On the formula, to help with the increasing supply of affordable homes, we are making debt cheaper for housing associations to deliver more affordable housing through the affordable housing guarantee scheme. It aims to deliver up to 30,000 homes through guaranteeing up to £3.5 billion of debt.

A number of hon. Members mentioned the matter of buying property in London.

Stephen Hammond: The Minister is absolutely right that the London Land Commission has the ability to be transformational. I urge him to use the good offices of Government to ensure that the whole of the public sector complies. Parts of the public sector have a history of dragging their feet in bringing the land forward. The Government can play that inspirational and effective role.

Mr Francois: My hon. Friend knows a lot about the subject and his point is well made.

The Mayor’s London housing strategy includes a commitment to double the number of First Steps homes—the single brand for shared ownership products in London—delivered in the capital by 2020, and to double it again by 2025, helping 250,000 Londoners into home ownership.

Several hon. Members mentioned planning. The Localism Act 2011 gave the Mayor strategic housing and regeneration powers and enabled the establishment of mayoral development corporations to support the regeneration the Queen Elizabeth Olympic park—it is very fitting to mention that today—and Old Oak Common and Park Royal. Since then, the Government have invested more than £3 billion and housing delivery has increased. In 2014, 52,000 homes were granted planning permission in London, up from 45,000 in 2013. Those figures include both minor and major schemes and are consistent with the national total of 253,000 for 2014.

The Government have helped to unlock major regeneration sites in London to deliver new housing. Those include the Greenwich peninsula, with 10,000 new homes, including approximately 3,270 affordable homes for rent or part-rent, 600 student beds, and 3.5 million square feet of commercial floor space. Of the 10,600 new homes at Barking riverside, 31% will have three or more bedrooms and more than 40% will be affordable. Of the 10,000 new households at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic park, around one third will be affordable housing, with many built for long-term rent, as well as to buy. Five new neighbourhoods provide play areas, schools, nurseries, community spaces, health centres and shops, with places to relax, play and exercise all within easy walking distance.

Some hon. Members mentioned changes in rents and the pressure on housing associations. It is important to bear in mind that housing associations generated a surplus of about £2.4 billion in 2014. The sector is financially robust and will be able to deliver the efficiency savings that the change in rental costs implies. To help them further, the regulator will be on hand to help housing associations consider how they can deliver greater efficiency and value for money.

In the few minutes that I have had, I hope that I have managed to outline the number of initiatives under way to increase the supply of affordable housing in London. The Mayor has an extremely proactive programme of attempting to do that. There is a step change in the number of affordable houses being aimed for in London. He is rolling that programme out and making progress. It is incumbent on us all in this debate, which has been conducted in a relatively non-partisan manner, to encourage the Mayor and his successor—whoever they may be—to continue the programme of providing affordable housing in London and giving the people who live in our great capital city a good place to live. On that point, I will keep my word and give just over one minute to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South to conclude the debate.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): I am grateful to the Minister.

10.58 am

Chris Philp: I thank hon. Members on both sides for coming today and contributing to a very important debate. We heard how challenging the affordability climate is and how hard it is for our constituents,

[Chris Philp]

particularly young constituents, to get on to the housing ladder from the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner (Mr Hurd). It is in the interests of our country and our city to address those issues, principally by bringing forward more supply. We heard a lot about bringing forward brownfield projects and public land projects, to which the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) referred. I was struck by the comments about overseas buyers from the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mark Field); that would be an interesting area for further research, at least to know the facts, which are not completely clear. Doing more work to confirm the exact figures would be productive.

The debate has been very productive. I thank the Minister and hon. Members for joining us this morning.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered affordable housing in London.

Contaminated Blood Products

11 am

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered contaminated blood products.

I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship Mr Owen. I am also pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), is here to respond to the debate.

To set the context—[*Interruption.*]

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. Could those leaving the Chamber please do so quickly and quietly?

Ms Ritchie: Thank you, Mr Owen.

To set the context for this debate, it is my duty and responsibility to acknowledge the very good work of the all-party group on haemophilia and contaminated blood. One of the joint chairs of the group, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), is here today for this debate. The all-party group published its report on contaminated blood products in January and clearly outlined the requirements of Government in respect of this very vexatious issue.

I secured this debate to highlight the cause of the victims of contaminated blood and blood products, in particular my constituent, Brian Carberry, a haemophiliac from Downpatrick in South Down. Along with all the other victims, he has waited too long for truth and an acknowledgement that the Government, through the Department of Health, imported such contaminated blood products from the USA in the 1970s and 1980s. The victims have waited a long time for proper compensation and access to drugs that are currently being assessed by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, and they need those drugs before stage 2 of the illness, which causes liver dysfunction, sets in.

I hope the Minister can today provide a detailed outline of how she will address this issue once and for all. Two thousand people touched by this tragedy have already died, and that number is rising, as people die waiting for the Government to make a final determination. I urge the Minister today to bring this prolonged delay to an abrupt close with a programme of action, including a commencement date for the consultation, which was announced back on 17 July, and the moneys to help those who have endured endless pain, suffering and anxiety for so many years.

In the '70s and '80s, around 7,500 people were infected with hepatitis C or HIV as a result of treatment with blood products provided by the NHS. Many of those people were being treated for haemophilia. Those viruses did not just transform their own lives; their families' lives were also turned upside down, and some of them, including my constituent, can no longer work.

The several thousand people treated with contaminated blood and blood products by the NHS have been denied the real financial security, and the health and social care that they need. The support currently in place is only partial and does not offer the full and final settlement that those affected and their families need to live with dignity, and it falls far below the equivalent compensation

in the Republic of Ireland. The development in support, financial and otherwise, over the years has been haphazard and has been delivered much too slowly. Contaminated blood victims already face substantial financial demands because of the nature of their infections and the inadequacy of their financial compensation.

One lady suffering from the infusion of contaminated blood products told me last week that some sufferers are denied even the basic stage 1 payments, even though they have a weakened and compromised immune system, and suffer chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, depression and unexplained rashes, with a potential link to breast cancer for women. This lady also had an ileostomy, as her bowel burst, and she had a stillborn child, with all the attendant trauma attached to such an incident. Unlike other contaminated blood patients, she has been denied stage 1 Skipton fund payments. Needless to say, she did not receive the Caxton payments either.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Between 1970 and 1991, almost 33,000 people were infected with hepatitis C; between 1978 and 1985, 1,500 haemophiliacs were infected with HIV, and some of them were co-infected with hepatitis C as well. The issue of compensation is a big one, and I congratulate her on bringing it forward for consideration—the number of people here in Westminster Hall today is an indication of its importance. Does she agree that, regardless of the stage of a person's illness, compensation should be given to them?

Ms Ritchie: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his very helpful intervention. That is the case that I am trying to make—that there needs to be a full and final end to this issue, with a good story for the people affected, not only through compensation, but with proper access to the right drugs that will help them and ease their journey.

In the Commons on 25 March, the Prime Minister pledged to help “these people more” after the publication of the Penrose report, promising that “it will be done” if he was re-elected. He was re-elected, but that inquiry, which scrutinised events between 1974 and 1991, has been branded as failing to get to the truth by Professor John Cash, who is a former president of the Royal College of Physicians of London and a former director of the transfusion service.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I thank the hon. Lady for taking my intervention, and I congratulate her on securing this important debate. I am here on behalf of several of my constituents, particularly Andy Gunn, whose whole life has been blighted by this unimaginable injustice. Despite several promises that we should expect a comprehensive Government response to the report of the Penrose inquiry, we have heard nothing regarding the time scale. Does she agree that the Government must take immediate action to rectify that?

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Before the hon. Lady carries on, let me say that I understand that Members here have individual constituency cases, but this is a 30-minute debate and I want the Member who secured it to make her case as concisely as she can in the time given, and I want the Minister to have the time to respond. The hon. Lady will also have a couple of

minutes at the end of the debate to sum up. Let us see how we go; I am sure that the Minister will be generous with her time.

Ms Ritchie: Thank you, Mr Owen, and I also thank the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) for his intervention, which captured the crux of the problem. We want a full and final settlement for these people, accompanied by drugs for them, because they have suffered immeasurable and unimaginable pain and grief.

It is interesting what Professor Cash—a former president of the Royal College of Physicians and a former director of the transfusion service—has said. He asserts that the Inquiries Act 2005, which defines the parameters of public inquiries, enabled the executives responsible to avoid giving evidence. Apparently, the Act meant that there was a whole area that he could not address, and that is an area worthy of further investigation. I hope that the Government will not fall short in relation to that.

The Haemophilia Society was also critical of the Penrose inquiry report, saying that there had been systemic failures in public health and public oversight. Furthermore, we know that Lord Prior of Brampton made a statement to the House of Lords on Friday 17 July, which was reaffirmed in the Commons on Monday 20 July, when my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North asked her urgent question. However, so far neither Parliament nor the wider public, including the victims, have been told when the consultation announced on 17 July will take place. The victims of contaminated blood products are still suffering while the Government continue to procrastinate on this issue.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I just wanted to widen the debate. I have taken everything the hon. Lady has said, but I want to speak in particular for some of my constituents with contaminated blood who are supported by the Macfarlane Trust, to which I hope she might refer. My constituents are reporting that it is not working and should be dissolved, and they, too, want a final settlement so that they can live out their lives in peace. This is just one small group of people, and that the least we can do so that they can finish their lives, which were blighted unexpectedly, peacefully. I would very much like her to refer to that body.

Ms Ritchie: I thank the hon. Lady for her helpful intervention. The bottom line is that none of these trusts has provided adequate help or succour for those who have suffered immeasurably. These people need an acknowledgement of liability and a sum of money that will enable them to live independently and with dignity. Such a sum should be supplemented with ongoing payments to recompense them for years of lost income and for the physical and emotional trauma that the contraction of these viruses has caused.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): I support my hon. Friend and welcome this debate. Will she stress that, although we are giving voice to people in this debate, we are unable to give their names because of the continuing stigma? Those people include the “The Forgotten Few”, some of whom are constituents of mine, who are co-infected with HIV and hepatitis C. They and their families have lived for many years with not only the

[*Huw Irranca-Davies*]

financial hardship but the stigma. In every debate on this subject I have been unable to name them, but they deserve justice as well.

Ms Ritchie: I am grateful for that helpful intervention, which characterises the real emotional trauma and pain that people who have been given contaminated blood products have had to endure for many years. The uncertainty needs to be addressed as well. The only body and the only people who can address the problems endured by those affected are the Government.

There is concern that the compensation resulting from the consultation could come directly out of Department of Health funds. Nobody who is suffering as a result of contaminated blood products wants anyone else with any other type of illness to suffer because of a lack of resources. Dedicated funding should come out of the Government's contingency funds for people who suffer from this ailment, because these are special circumstances.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): One of the families from my constituency who are affected are present in the Public Gallery. Does the hon. Lady agree that in framing compensation it is important to look not only at the pain, suffering and misery that has already occurred, but at the future needs of those concerned?

Ms Ritchie: The hon. and learned Gentleman is absolutely right. People's future lives have to be taken into account, and we must also think of those who will contract these viruses at a later stage. The Government must consider the planning of resources and the availability and approval of medicine.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I am so pleased that my hon. Friend was able to secure this debate and congratulate her on doing so. Does she agree that the situation is intensely difficult for families, particularly because of the lack of transparency over the years?

Ms Ritchie: My hon. Friend has captured the anxiety and trauma of those affected and the need for Government compassion on this issue.

I will encapsulate the principal points. We need to know the commencement date of the consultation. It was supposed to be in autumn; we are now in autumn and we have not heard anything since the announcement on 17 July. We need the Government to detail how the £25 million will be spent and whether the various trusts will be dissolved and a lump sum made available. We need to know whether the Government will acknowledge liability and provide ongoing payments for victims and for the families who have been left with nothing following the death of a family member who contracted a virus or viruses as a result of contaminated blood products.

I say again: victims feel strongly that compensation should come not from the Department's principal budget but from the Government's contingency fund. Victims must have access to proper medicine, and drugs are required to be prescribed at stage 1 of the illness, before the onset of stage 2, in order to prevent liver dysfunction.

The Minister said in a statement that the Penrose report,

"together with over 5,000 documents from the period 1970-85...have already been published by Government",

and that the Government

"have also committed to releasing all additional documents from 1986-1995 late this summer."

When is "late this summer"? When will the documents be released?

These people, who are suffering so terribly, require truth from the Government. My constituent went to the Royal Victoria hospital in Belfast for continual reviews and was told that he had to get another test. He said, "Why do I have to get another test? Everybody knows I was born a haemophiliac, along with my two brothers." They said, "You have hepatitis C," and he said, "How did that happen?" It was because of blood products that were imported from the United States. That was the first he knew of it, 20 years ago. Members can imagine the trauma he felt, and that of his wife, children and wider family. Those blood products have meant that he has to attend hospital on a weekly basis and is without a job. He cannot do what he wants to do most: care for and bring up his family.

For the sake of Brian and many, many others, I urge the Minister to ensure that an abrupt close is brought to this matter, that a date for the consultation is announced, that interim moneys are made available, that full and final compensation is made available out of the Government contingency fund, and that all these terrible injustices are rectified once and for all.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Before the Minister responds, she has indicated that she would like to speak for about 12 minutes. She has a little more time, so I am sure she will be generous in taking interventions.

11.16 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): I will do my best, Mr Owen.

I congratulate the hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie) on securing this debate; she is a consistent champion of this issue. Many other colleagues present have also done so much important work over many years on this difficult and tragic topic.

During the '70s, '80s and early '90s, many individuals were sadly infected with hepatitis C, HIV, or both, from NHS-supplied blood or blood products before effective donor screening tests were introduced. To this day, many people continue to be affected by the grievous outcome of their earlier treatment, so it is right that the matter is given our attention and collaborative consideration. I know that I will not be able to satisfy all the points raised by the hon. Member for South Down, but I hope that I can at least give the House a very keen sense of how much I share the desire to move towards a better outcome and a conclusion.

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): Does my hon. Friend the Minister plan to address the subject of drugs? Can she put a rocket up the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence to get that part of the business in order?

Jane Ellison: I do intend to touch on new treatments, because that is one aspect of the landscape in this policy area that has changed profoundly for the better in recent years. I am also always happy to follow up on any issues with colleagues.

I know how much interest there is in this issue, as demonstrated by the presence of so many Members today. Many Members have heard from constituents, as have I, of the significant and devastating impact of this tragic matter on their lives. Successive Governments of all complexions have looked at and wrestled with this difficult issue. I have spoken directly to affected individuals and families and I read many letters—every single one that is sent to me—detailing people's concerns and frustrations with the current schemes of support and the situation in general.

I assure Members that the matter of infected blood and the reform of the payment schemes continues to be a priority for me. I meet regularly with my officials in the Department of Health, including over the summer, to maintain progress towards a better outcome. As I indicated in my statement before the recess, the Government are considering the provision of future financial assistance, and other support for those affected, within the context of the spending review and in a way that is sustainable for the future. It does need to be sustainable.

We will be consulting to help develop the shape and structure of any new scheme. Members know that, and we have said that before. I appreciate and share the frustration that we have not been able to move to publish a date. I cannot give Members a date today, but we still intend to consult as soon as possible.

Ms Ritchie: It is vital that the Minister gives us a date for the commencement of the consultation today. We are talking about a life and death issue for many, many people. I know the Minister appreciates that, but she has to understand that a date is the most compelling requirement, along with the compensation and access to drugs.

Jane Ellison: I am well aware of that fact, and I do not casually say that I cannot give a specific date today. The consultation will take place before the end of the year, as we have previously committed to. We are working on the detail of that, but I cannot give Members a specific date today. It is an absolute priority to bring it forward. The area is complex, both legally and in its proximity to the spending review, but we have made that commitment.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Will the Minister give way?

Jane Ellison: Not if it is on the same topic. I have said what I can today, and I have also said that I will inform Members as soon as I can when we have a date for the consultation. I have done everything in my power to keep Members informed on the issue, and I will continue to do so.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): In addition to a full, fair and final resolution to the issue, the victims also need clarity on access to drugs. Will the Minister clarify why NHS England has made access to drugs more complicated than it is in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with the networks of hospitals? Why is that required?

Jane Ellison: I will come on to drugs and access to drugs, although perhaps not quite in the detail that my hon. Friend seeks. I will now make progress and not take any interventions for a while to ensure that I get to the points that Members have raised.

Suffice it to say, I was strongly aware, as I was present for most of the urgent question on 17 July, that access to treatment is uppermost in Members' minds. Considerable time and attention is being given to the issue, and I will touch on it in my remarks. Following the consultation, we will take into account the views that we receive, and then look to work as quickly as possible to announce how the schemes will be reformed. Several thoughtful suggestions have already been made to me by MPs and patient representative groups on how we should approach the consultation. I am grateful for those suggestions, which I am considering carefully.

The Government are continuing to work with the devolved Administrations on the issue, and I hope that the hon. Member for South Down agrees that we should work as much as possible towards a four-nations approach. I suggest that, as part of that, it would be helpful if she shared her knowledge and insight with Ministers in Northern Ireland. We continue to do so at official level and we will ensure that appropriate ministerial exchanges happen.

While decisions have not yet been made on what the new scheme will look like, the House should be assured that, given the level of unhappiness with the existing schemes, we are considering root and branch changes, which I know is what campaigners are calling for. I would, however, like to be clear that while we are working to establish a full and fair resolution, liability has not been established in the majority of cases, so it would not be appropriate to talk about payments in terms of compensation, particularly on the scale that some campaigners and colleagues envisage. I know that Members are not happy with that, but I need to say that for the record. We will continue to fund ex-gratia payments, but we will look to reshape those following consultation. It is my hope that, pending decisions after the consultation, transition to a new scheme can begin from April 2016.

While many individuals may feel frustrated at the expected timescale for scheme reform, it is important that we take time to get things right, because we need suitable and lasting changes. That includes identifying all the complexities involved in making changes to a system of support such as this, and the need in due course to consider consultation responses.

As colleagues have mentioned, in March 2015, the Prime Minister announced that up to £25 million would be allocated to support transition to a reformed scheme. As previously stated, I confirm that we do not intend to use that for the administrative costs that might be associated with reform of the existing schemes. We expect to announce our plans for that money once we have a better understanding of what the wider scheme reform might comprise. If it is necessary to roll that money into the next financial year, we will do so.

The announcement by the Prime Minister on the allocation of the £25 million came on the day the Penrose inquiry final report was published. I am aware that many campaigners have written to their MPs regarding

[Jane Ellison]

the Government's response to Penrose. We have fulfilled our commitment to implement the recommendation in the Penrose report to take

"all reasonable steps to offer an HCV test to everyone...who had a blood transfusion before September 1991 and who has not been tested for HCV"

by reminding GPs, nurses and other clinical staff of the matter, along with the NHS guidance to offer a hepatitis C test to those at risk. I can give Members details if they are interested in how we have done that. Those reminders will act to ensure that awareness is significantly increased across England and will help to identify anyone who is currently unaware that they may have been infected with hepatitis C. However, the House should be reassured that look-back exercises took place in 1991 and 1995 to try to identify those individuals, so I would not expect the recent action to result in significantly increased uptake of hepatitis C testing.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): I refer the Minister to the report by the all-party group on haemophilia and contaminated blood, which my colleague the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) chairs. It was an extremely comprehensive report. We heard from many hundreds of victims on how to reform the trusts and funds. Will the Minister make a commitment that, when she has some timeline details, she will make a ministerial statement on the Floor of the House of Commons, so that Members will be able to question her?

Jane Ellison: I have done my best to ensure that the House and individual Members are kept informed at all times. I have had a number of individual Member meetings. I will touch on this again, but I will of course look to keep the House informed on all important timelines, as we have to date. The all-party group, to whose comprehensive report my hon. Friend rightly referred, has informed our thinking, but there has never been a public consultation on any aspect of scheme reform. No Government have done that before, so this will be the first time that any formal public consultation has been undertaken.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Will the Minister give way?

Jane Ellison: No. I will touch on the issue of drugs, and if there is time afterwards, I will take another intervention.

Many Members are aware that a new generation of promising drug treatments is emerging that has the potential to offer an effective cure for many patients with hepatitis C. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence issued guidance recommending two of the drugs earlier this year, and those are now routinely available on the NHS for eligible patients. NICE is developing guidance on three further treatments and has recently consulted on draft guidance. NHS England announced in June that it has made £190 million available this year so that patients with confirmed cirrhosis from hepatitis C can benefit from the new treatment options. In previous debates, I have offered advice to Members on how constituents who are worried that they are not getting access to those options, yet meet the clinical guidelines, can get access. In particular, it is important that patients to talk to their hepatologist.

We estimate that around 550 individuals infected with hepatitis C through historical treatment with NHS-supplied blood and blood products can now access the new treatments under the NHS's interim commissioning policies. As the Secretary of State committed to on 25 March, the Department of Health is continuing to work to bring transparency to the matter of infected blood. The documents covering the period from 1970 to 1985 have been published in line with the Freedom of Information Act, and are available on the National Archives website. The Department is completing the transfer of the documents that we hold for 1986 to 1995 to the National Archives. Once those have been handed over, the National Archives will need to take the records on to its systems and make them available on its "Discovery" website. As to the precise date, we had hoped that it would be this summer, but for technical reasons the National Archives has indicated that it anticipates the documents being made available on its website after the January 2016 releases. I stress that that is only for technical reasons associated with the transfer of the documents.

I appreciate the House's frustration and I am sorry that I will not be able to let the hon. Member for South Down back in to respond at the end. I understand the sense of urgency and the need for change. In hoping to reach a conclusion as soon as is practicable, I have, through the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), offered parliamentarians a meeting ahead of the consultation so that I can hear their concerns and suggestions and so that they can contribute to shaping scheme reform.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

West Midlands Police (Funding)

[MR DAVID CRAUSBY *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered funding for West Midlands Police.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby. I am grateful to have secured this debate.

I begin by expressing my thanks to the officers and staff of West Midlands police, who do an extraordinary job under immense pressure. As the largest force outside London, West Midlands police are the people who walk the beat and respond to some of the most diverse and challenging calls in the UK. The work and effort that they put in is especially remarkable given the funding cuts that they have already had to endure.

It is widely accepted that the Government's approach to police funding over the past five years has seriously disadvantaged the big cities, where crime is often higher and more complex in nature. Our region has been hit harder than anywhere else. Over the past five years, disproportionate cuts have cost West Midlands police £126 million, which has led to one of the largest staff reductions in the country, in both numbers and proportion, with a 1,500 drop.

There are two big aspects of and reasons for such comparably high reductions: the region's low council tax precept and the Government's practice of formula damping. The council tax precept is the second lowest in the country, behind Northumbria, which means that West Midlands police is more reliant on central grant funding. A flat-rate cut in the central grant therefore has a disproportionate effect. Although central Government provide 86% of West Midlands police's budget, for some forces the percentage can be as low as 49%.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate, which is timely, to say the least. Does he agree that, with a 23% budget cut over the past four years and something like 5.8% of the overall distribution, rather than the 6.8% that other police authorities have been getting, West Midlands police has been discriminated against?

Richard Burden: My hon. Friend is right: West Midlands police really has been hit disproportionately. For example, compare West Midlands police with Surrey police, which has seen its total income fall by 12%. As my hon. Friend said, West Midlands police has already lost 23%, despite recorded crime having risen in the west midlands and fallen in Surrey. The cap on council tax rises, along with the huge costs associated with a referendum to go above that cap, leaves West Midlands police with no ability to mitigate cuts to the central Government grant in the same way that other forces sometimes can.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. It is an important issue that he is right to raise. I want to make two points. First, West Midlands police deserves to be congratulated on the 17% reduction in crime that I understand it has achieved. Secondly, will the hon.

Gentleman say a little more about the extraordinary position in which we find ourselves, whereby the amount of the subvention from central Government is far higher than for any other force, apart from Northumberland, and the precept is very much lower? Most of our fellow citizens in similar cities—if one can say there are similar cities to Birmingham—are paying much more. That is an established fact, but it would be very helpful if the hon. Gentleman could discuss the options for remedying that.

Richard Burden: The right hon. Gentleman is quite right—that is what I touched on earlier. The fact that we start with a lower council tax base means that we are more reliant on the central Government grant, so it is much harder to mitigate or to compensate for the effect of flat-rate cuts. I will come to crime levels, particularly the levels for different kinds of crimes, in a minute.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): The issue is not only the level of income, but the huge additional burdens. For example, after the Metropolitan police, West Midlands police bears far and away the biggest share of the successful campaign against terrorism.

Richard Burden: My right hon. Friend is quite right about that. I will mention some of the specific demands on West Midlands police in a little while, but he is absolutely right to draw attention to counter-terrorism work.

In addition to the issue of council tax, the west midlands is also hit doubly hard by how formula damping works. In brutal terms, such damping prevents the region from receiving the funding allocation that the national formula says we need. This year, West Midlands police will receive £43 million less than the Government's own formula says is required.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): As my hon. Friend says, under the existing system we are being robbed of £43 million that we should receive. In the past, the Minister has recognised that that is wrong. The Minister will not want to comment too much on his future plans today because of the ongoing consultation, but does my hon. Friend agree that at the very least we need an assurance that we will not lose, as has been speculated, a further £20 million under the plans that the Minister is going to put into action?

Richard Burden: My hon. Friend is right on both points. First, the impact of formula damping is a problem. Everyone seems to recognise that, but then nothing is done about it, so I hope that the Minister will reassure us on that. Secondly—I hope that the Minister will say something about this as well—the current consultation is also important, because some of the scenarios could hit the west midlands very hard indeed. I will say something about that in a little while. Suffice it to say that, if the funding was increased by just £10 million to compensate for the formula damping problem, that would still leave West Midlands police hit three times as hard as any other force, but we could recruit 450 additional police officers. Instead, £43 million is given to other forces. I understand the problems when formulae change and the effects have to be smoothed, but the reality is that other forces will get more funding than the Government's formula says they need and West Midlands police will get less.

[Richard Burden]

At this point, I want to note that in the individual force assessments for handling austerity, Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary rated West Midlands police as outstanding. Credit for that is due first, and most importantly, to the officers and staff of West Midlands police. It is also important to mention the contributions of the late Bob Jones, the former police and crime commissioner, and David Jamieson, the current PCC, as well as that of Chief Constable Chris Sims, who will soon be retiring—we should thank him for his work during his time in the west midlands.

It is important that policy makers listen to people such as those I have just mentioned, because they are not crying wolf; they are raising legitimate concerns about the sustainability of the police service in the west midlands. Were the existing formula regime to continue, the force would expect to lose a further £100 million over the coming years. That would mean that a further 2,500 officers, police community support officers and staff would be set to go. At the end of the decade, West Midlands police would be expected to be smaller than when it was established back in 1974. In a moment, I will give more detail about the demands facing the force, which were mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (Mr Spellar), but for now I will simply say that crime is often more complex and sophisticated now than it was in the '70s. Will the Minister tell us what the Government are doing to ensure that West Midlands police gets a fair deal to halt the huge drop in officer numbers that it is facing?

Given the categorical unfairness of the existing regime, I think that many colleagues present, from both the Government and the Opposition, were encouraged when the Government finally announced a review of the current formula. That should have been good news. The problem is that the Home Office has refused to publish any detailed exemplifications or impact assessments using its proposed models. We are already seeing the Government's attempt to have an open discussion, which they say they wanted, starting to unravel. How can anybody offer an informed judgment to the consultation without the full information? As was reported in *The Guardian* at the weekend, even attempts to get figures via a freedom of information request have been rejected.

Thanks to the revelations published by the same newspaper, forces may still have time to review the implications of the new formula just before the consultation closes next Wednesday. Early analysis of the modelling suggests that there are several serious concerns about the Home Office's approach that are likely to disadvantage our region even more. Based on modelling of the new funding formula by the Police and Crime Commissioners Treasurers' Society, West Midlands police could lose more than 25% of its current funding. That is on top of the existing 40% cut, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) alluded. Before the end of the decade, that could leave the force with a budget smaller than the fixed costs for the officers it already has.

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is being most generous in giving way and is making an important speech. May I press him further about the budget and funding? Does he believe that the precept should rise or

does he think that the Government should continue to give more of a subvention because we are providing a smaller precept locally? It is important to address that point, so that we have it clear and in the open.

Richard Burden: I will say two things in response to the right hon. Gentleman. First, tackling the question of the precept and the relative level of the council tax base is a long-term issue. It raises fundamental questions about how much it is legitimate to raise locally, as opposed to being dependent on central Government grants, when funding local government and other local services. That brings with it issues of how to compensate for particular levels of deprivation and so on, but he is right that it is a vital discussion, which goes beyond police funding.

In relation to this debate, however, we are where we are. We have a lower council tax base and are disproportionately dependent on central Government grants. Unless central Government formulae recognise that and respond to it, we will not be able to move forward.

Steve McCabe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way again. It does not really matter whether someone thinks that the precept should rise or not; the reality is that the Government have locked in a system that requires a referendum before it can rise, which is part of their intention to limit the rise. This is surely a spurious argument.

Richard Burden: That is saying perhaps a little more bluntly what I meant when I said that we are where we are. The Government must listen to the implications of their own policies.

My hon. Friend mentioned referendums. Let us say that we in the west midlands decided that, as the Government will not change their mind, despite our low council tax precept and so on, we should have a referendum. Where would that funding come from? It would come from the police budget, and we would lose even more as a consequence.

Mr Mitchell: I am stunned at the suggestion that I might have made a spurious point. It would be perfectly fair for the Minister, in seeking to confront the funding difficulties that we all agree exist, to ask whether senior politicians in Birmingham, such as the hon. Gentleman, believe that the Government should continue to give far more as a proportion because the precept in Birmingham is so low or whether senior local politicians believe that that needs to change and that the Government should not immediately assume that the wider taxpayer will provide an extra amount because the precept is so low. I am only trying to ensure that the hon. Gentleman is making a point of principle and is not simply asking the Minister for more money without expressing a view.

Richard Burden: I hope that it was clear from what I said at the outset that if a region has higher needs and a lower capacity to meet those needs locally, an important part of which is the level of the council tax precept, the Government should not ignore that problem. The formula should take account of that kind of thing, and the support should reflect the region's needs and its lower capacity to raise money, which is partly a result of

deprivation and the historical level of the council tax precept. As I said, if we decided to try to go for a higher council tax precept, the police force would have to pay for the referendum, which is patently unfair.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Bedfordshire decided to hold such a referendum in order to increase the council tax. That vote was lost and it cost Bedfordshire police some £600,000. It would be madness for the West Midlands police to try that even if it was desirable.

Richard Burden: My hon. Friend makes a good point about the costs of referendums.

I am concerned that the Government's proposals fail to take into account the multiple and complex demands on policing in the UK's second largest city and the wider west midlands region. My constituency of Birmingham, Northfield, part of the Birmingham south local police unit, has recently seen a wave of high-profile incidents that have raised safety concerns among local residents. The reality is that those incidents are unrelated and exceptional—it is not a high-crime area—but the fact that they are taking place underlines the cross-cutting demands and sporadic pattern of many of the crimes with which large urban areas must contend. As a result, the question of police providing essential community reassurance is as important as crime detection and crime prevention.

Police community support officers are familiar faces of reassurance in many of our communities, mine being no exception. They play a vital role in deterring crime and building confidence among local people. Yet, despite their prominence and value on our streets, we look set to lose huge numbers of PCSOs. What is the Minister's assessment of his Government's pledge not to undermine front-line policing services such as PCSOs? Traffic police are another key, often overlooked front-line service. Specifically trained traffic officers are vital in deterring dangerous driving. Yet as their numbers have fallen in the past five years, casualties have risen dramatically nationally. What is the Minister doing to ensure that the Central Motorway Policing Group, for example, will maintain adequate staffing? Indeed, when considering job cuts to police officers, traffic officers and PCSOs, what assessment has he made of the required policing capability and capacity of each force area?

Across the west midlands—this goes back to the point of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) about crime levels—recorded incidents of violence against the person have increased by 10%, sexual offences by 18% and public order offences by 13% in the last year alone. West Midlands police is facing increasingly important challenges, such as radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation. Safeguarding the most vulnerable in society and investigating and bringing perpetrators to justice are time and resource-intensive processes. When we consider the increases in many types of recorded crime, many of us will be aware that the real figure is probably much higher.

Critics of official crime statistics are well aware that many crimes, such as rape and sexual assault, regrettably go unreported. Others such as cybercrime and credit card fraud are simply not recorded properly. Crime is changing—not falling—and the Government must recognise that fair and proportionate funding for police forces is important.

In closing, I have two specific questions for the Minister. First, will he publish in full the data that his Department has used to develop the consultation proposals and will he then consider extending the consultation deadline to allow all respondents more time to review that information? Secondly, in the light of the disproportionate cuts in funding for West Midlands police, as found in the recent National Audit Office report, and given the growing local and national security demands in our region, will the Minister commit today to those things being taken into account in the new formula?

On Tuesday, the Select Committee on Home Affairs will take evidence about such matters, not only from the West Midlands police, but from other forces as well. For the Committee's discussions and debates on Tuesday to be as informed as possible, I hope that the Minister will give at least some of that information today. He should be able to answer today the questions about the nature of the consultation, the basis for the figures arrived at and the work of the National Audit Office, without in any way jeopardising the consultation.

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): There is no set time limit, but I intend to call the first of the two Front Benchers at 15.40, which gives us almost 50 minutes. Five people are standing, although I am sure that other people might change their mind later on, so if Members will keep their contributions to less than 10 minutes, including interventions, we will get everyone in.

2.51 pm

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) on securing the debate and on his contribution to it.

Every area of the UK feels a connection with and a debt of gratitude to its police services. They keep us safe day in, day out, in overt and sometimes covert ways. They are part of the glue that holds our society together. In my constituency I know my local police by first name, where their beats are and even some of their hobbies—I have to reveal that a few are fellow cyclists. I am sure that most, if not all hon. Members can echo such sentiments and experiences.

My latest briefing from the local police found that the level of high-impact crimes such as burglary has been cut dramatically. Officially, as of last spring, the previous three-year period had seen a 10% drop in crime in our area. Police are doing more, sometimes with less, but always, it seems, more efficiently and intelligently. This Government are all about good husbandry of resources—we understand that the money is everyone's, not ever the Government's.

We are undergoing a review of the police funding formula. As was the case with schools, we have had to wait a decade or more for a review. The social make-up of our country has changed markedly over that period. However, such reviews always throw up worst-case scenarios, and a lot of stories in the Birmingham media involve the possible direction of the review based on those worst-case scenarios. Understandably, therefore, I have received several letters from constituents concerned about future police funding in the west midlands, and I have held informal discussions with senior local police to gauge their views. The overwhelming response is that

[*Julian Knight*]

we do not want to see the fantastic work done by our police in bringing crime down to be damaged by any misallocation of resources.

We have particular challenges in the west midlands, which should carry extra weight in any funding allocation. We face acute challenges in combating radicalisation, child exploitation and female genital mutilation. On a straight population model, it is easy to see how Ministers might look at West Midlands police funding as a potential area for future efficiencies. However, I am encouraged to read in the Home Office consultation document that basing the funding model on per head of population has in effect been ruled out. In addition, I welcome the part of the document that acknowledges that funding based purely on police activity “may skew the results”.

We are not helped in our cause by the office of the police and crime commissioner, which has overseen the expenditure of some £30 million on its headquarters and holds more than £100 million in reserves according to some estimates. The PCC also employs seven people in a public relations capacity, compared with an average among all the other PCC areas of two. To be fair to the police and crime commissioner, however, he is planning to apportion a substantial slice of those hefty reserves on front-line policing and recruitment in the near future.

The West Midlands force has also been slow in weaning itself off central Government financing. It relies on central Government for some 87% of its financing, and over time the proportion drawn from the precept has not increased by the level that it should have. The socioeconomic challenges that we face, however, should give real pause for thought before any substantial cuts to central Government financing are undertaken; and I am confident that we will be listened to and that no such cuts will be made. Furthermore, West Midlands police should be allowed to show how the force will redress the funding balance between the precept and central Government.

Steve McCabe: I realise that this will be a central part of the debate, but will the hon. Gentleman care to tell us how much he thinks the precept should rise by as part of the weaning process?

Julian Knight: That is a matter for local decision makers—just as it is a matter for them that they have not increased the precept over previous years. The hon. Gentleman used the word “spurious” before, but frankly the only spurious argument put forward so far has been that used by Opposition Members—that the referendum costs would be so prohibitive that one could never actually happen. If the argument is that a precept increase would spark a level of council tax sufficient to require a referendum automatically, I suggest that it would be up to the local decision makers, councillors and politicians to put the strong case for why—which is, in effect, that the West Midlands force is playing catch-up.

Mr Mitchell: I have the greatest respect for the hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe), but I asked whether the Opposition favoured national subvention or a greater contribution from local resources—merely to flush out Labour’s thinking on funding—so for him to put the same question to my hon. Friend and

then look rather askance when he does not answer shows, if I may say so, a bit of brass neck. This is an important point: we are asking those who want to see an increase—we all want to see the West Midlands police properly funded—where they think it should come from and in what proportion. So far we have not had an answer from the Opposition, although I have no doubt at all that my neighbour, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), will give us precisely that answer when he speaks in the debate.

Julian Knight: I concur with my right hon. Friend’s thoughts in that respect. The realities are that when we want to discuss financing and to argue a case with Ministers, we have to show a route map towards future decisions. We have to show a way in which we are ultimately going to wean ourselves off the precept. Shouting about it, saying, “Woe is me!” and making party political points will do no good in achieving what we want, which is—this is the bottom line—the best possible funding deal for West Midlands police. I hope everyone in the Chamber would agree with that.

The west midlands should be allowed to show clearly how it will redress the balance between precept and central Government funding for the police. Let me use the example of the BBC, an institution that I have touched on once or twice in recent debates. That organisation’s model of funding is not fit for purpose, but it has been allowed an opportunity, in the charter renewal, to show how it will correct itself. I am asking for the same consideration to be given to West Midlands police. After all, the police are more important to our way of life than whether BBC4 or the BBC website exists. The long-term objective has to be that local decision makers must show a route map away from the existing levels of precept funding. That has to form part of the negotiations, so that we do not end up with any formula that dramatically cuts funding to the police. We need a gradual process of retrenchment by central Government, with more of the burden being put on the local area.

2.59 pm

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) on initiating this important debate.

In all the time I have served as a west midlands Member—a very long time indeed—the West Midlands police force has never received such a financial blow as it has over the last five years. The force has, at times, been the subject of controversy—perhaps the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) will remember only too well some of the more recent controversies—but the fact of the matter is that the force has been treated properly under successive Governments until, unfortunately, the last few years, and it is due to be hit again. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield referred to a future meeting of the Home Affairs Committee. On 21 July, the very day that the Home Secretary gave evidence to that Committee, the Chancellor called for a further 40% cut from what are known as unprotected Departments. I asked the Home Secretary during that session what effect that would have on the police, and in particular on the West Midlands force, and she gave, more or less as one would expect, a rather ambiguous reply.

As has been pointed out, the West Midlands police force relies far more on a central Government grant allocation than do most other forces in the country. As the Minister will know, that point has been emphasised on so many occasions since 2010—by local authorities in the west midlands and by both the late and the new police and crime commissioners. Indeed, few Members, even Conservative ones, have not made the point that the manner in which finance has been organised over the years—the damping process that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield referred to—has been particularly adverse to the West Midlands police force.

In my earlier intervention I made reference to referendums. To increase the precept by just under 2%, a referendum would be necessary. When a referendum took place in Bedfordshire, the answer was no, and the cost was in the region of £600,000. Bearing in mind incomes in the west midlands, and the way in which so many people, certainly in public services, have had their wage increases frozen at 1%, it would not be right or proper to ask people in the region to pay more.

In comparison, Surrey, which undoubtedly is a far more prosperous area than the west midlands—I do not think there is any controversy about that—gets half its income from council tax. That is very different indeed from in the west midlands, yet Ministers and the Home Secretary have simply refused to recognise the difference between places such as Surrey, which rely far more on council tax, and those that rely more on the grant allocation.

In five years there has been a 17% reduction in the number of police officers in the west midlands. I do not think that the Minister is likely to challenge that figure—if he does, I will be interested to hear what he says. Moreover, there has been a 24% cut in the number of police community support officers. I would also be interested to hear the Minister's comments about the fact that some 590 west midlands officers, each with more than 30 years' service, have been forced to retire under regulation A19. Of those 590 officers, nearly 500 have put in claims regarding pension sums that amount to more than £71 million—a very substantial figure.

Let me add a little about my own constituency. Over the years there have been two police stations, in Bloxwich and Willenhall. In addition, there has been the main station on Green Lane—I will not go into the fact that it was opened by the then Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, in 1966. What is happening now is that Willenhall station is to close and be sold off. The borough's central police station, on Green Lane, is to close next year and the building will be sold off also. Bloxwich will, fortunately, remain—I hope we are not going to be told that it is also to close.

That is the situation locally. No wonder the police and crime commissioner, David Jamieson, has said that "the force will have to look and feel different"

in respect of crime in the future. How different? The chief constable, who is retiring, has said that by 2020 the police force will have to be reduced by almost 45% over 10 years.

In conclusion, law-abiding people in the west midlands must feel a good deal of anxiety, certainly among those who understand what has happened and is likely to happen—people who feel that if they are burgled or

their cars are stolen, there will be difficulties contacting the police, getting the crimes investigated and all the rest. Such anxiety is perfectly justified. Criminals and potential criminals must feel a good deal of satisfaction about what is happening. I believe that the Government, and certainly the Home Secretary, have a duty to understand the concern that is being expressed by so many, including Members on both sides of the House, and to find a formula that is fair for the people of the west midlands. That is what we are asking for today. I hope it is not too much to ask that the Minister bear in mind our concerns and our desire to ensure that there are sufficient police officers and facilities to protect law-abiding people in the region.

3.8 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called to participate in my first Westminster Hall debate under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby. I join my right hon. and hon. Friends in congratulating the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) on securing the debate on this extremely important topic. As the son of a west midlands police officer, who served for nearly 30 years in West Midlands police and before that in the Birmingham force, through the '60s, '70s, '80s and mid-'90s, this issue is important to me personally. The future of West Midlands police is obviously dear to me, as well as vital to my constituents.

I appreciate that time is short, and I will try to keep my remarks brief and avoid repeating things that have already been said better by my right hon. and hon. Friends. As has been said, we have seen crime levels fall by 17% in the west midlands over the last few years. I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield that the crime has changed, but I do not accept his assertion that crime levels have not fallen. The evidence is that, however crime is measured, the trend generally points in the same direction. If anything, the scale of the fall, on other measures, is greater than 17%.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is absolutely not the case with crimes such as domestic and sexual violence?

Mike Wood: Sorry, but whether we take our crime figures from the police or the victims of crime surveys, the general trend in the west midlands and nationally is down. Of course, some sections of crime—the hon. Lady is right to identify domestic violence as an issue—have had a large impact on recent crime figures. Domestic violence is, of course, an important issue, which West Midlands police has to address; and it is, in fact, working hard to do that.

The work being done to reduce crime across the west midlands has come at a time when the Government have had to take extremely difficult decisions, and they will continue to do so. That is despite the scare stories we have had since day one, when we were told that decisions that have now been taken would inevitably lead to apocalyptic outcomes, but that is not what we have seen. Of course, we all want the best funding settlement for West Midlands police, but we should be careful about accepting at face value some of the more apocalyptic predictions.

[Mike Wood]

As I said, West Midlands police has achieved significant reductions with reduced budgets. We are fortunate to have a police force that is innovating and that has shown that it is, where appropriate, prepared to work with the private sector to deliver the police service we need. Its success in that field has been recognised as outstanding by HMIC.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): My hon. Friend makes an important point about the innovative work of West Midlands police, and I can think of one area where that has been somewhat understated. West Midlands police identified a problem with people with mental health conditions being put in inappropriate locations. They are now working in an innovative partnership with the NHS, and there has been a huge reduction in the number of people being put in inappropriate locations under the Mental Health Act 1983.

Mike Wood: I absolutely agree, and I was fortunate enough to join my hon. Friend on a visit to see that initiative. We accompanied the team as it responded to a call, which it dealt with in a way that ensured that the person involved received appropriate medical care, rather than ending up in a police cell, which was clearly the worst place for them. Police forces around the country could learn a lot from the work being pioneered in the west midlands.

The West Midlands police force is clearly being ambitious in its plans, but we have to ensure that taxpayers in Dudley South and across the west midlands get a fair deal. That means making sure not only that the funding settlement is fair to the west midlands, but that the money is spent effectively. The heart of the Conservative approach is that we must fix the roof while the sun shines.

That does not mean that things are perfect or anywhere near perfect. The police funding system does not work as it should—it is complex, opaque and out of date. As the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield said, the damping system seriously disadvantages the west midlands, and it has done so for the past 10 years, since the last Labour Government introduced it. That needs to be addressed as part of the review. That is why it is right that the Government focus on replacing the existing funding formula with a simpler one, but we must make sure that forces such as the West Midlands get the deal they deserve and need. The new funding formula needs to reward forces that innovate and that succeed in bringing down crime. It also needs to recognise the level of underlying crime that remains in the west midlands, as well as the need to tackle it and the resources that are required to do so.

The West Midlands force is the second largest in the country, and there is a need for funding that reflects that. However, too often it also seems that we do not get the full 100p for each pound of police funding, and we have seen questionable uses of that funding. Only last week we heard of a local police officer receiving almost £33,000 in overtime alone. I think there is perhaps rather more to that than appears in the newspapers, but that is clearly not an ideal or efficient way to allocate resources. The overtime bill for 39 forces in England and Wales rose by £6 million last year, and it has totalled more than £1 billion over the last three years.

Julian Knight: My hon. Friend is making some important points. He is spotting many of the inefficiencies that already exist, including in relation to the office of the police and crime commissioner. Will he comment on the fact that the commissioner has reserves of up to £100 million and that £30 million has been spent on Lloyd house?

Mike Wood: My constituents have certainly come to me with concerns about how West Midlands police is using, or intends to use, those reserves to make sure that the best possible service is provided. Yes, people were surprised—

Jess Phillips: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mike Wood: If I could just finish a sentence, I will give way.

People are surprised at the use of £33 million to refurbish Lloyd house. I understand that there were some contractual obligations, but the situation is obviously not sustainable. Tying up so much of the force's resources in a prime property in Birmingham city centre is not delivering the police service we need.

Jess Phillips: I agree, as I am sure everybody here does, that we must spend our resources wisely, so does the hon. Gentleman feel that the £4 million spent as part of a flawed policy on an exceptionally flawed by-election, which was badly managed by the Home Office, was a good use of spending?

Mike Wood: I campaigned in last year's by-election. Obviously I was not happy with it being in August or with the result, but we have to move past both those factors.

The current police allocation formula is clearly outdated and in desperate need of reform. I will respond to the Home Office consultation as soon as I work out what some of the questions refer to.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Is it opaque?

Mike Wood: Some of the model does, as the hon. Lady suggests, lack clarity. The lack of detail about how the five factors involved are to be incorporated and the information they are based on makes it difficult to understand how a new formula would affect the west midlands. That is a serious problem, which I hope the Minister will reflect on. It certainly makes it difficult for me and other Members to understand how a change would affect our constituents.

More broadly, as well as needing a fair funding formula that delivers fair funding for the west midlands, we must accept that it is not sustainable in the long term for 87% of the funding to come from central Government grant. As the former finance spokesman on Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, I am the first to argue for council tax bills to be kept as low as possible. However, I hope the Minister will discuss with DCLG colleagues whether there might be some way to introduce an element of flexibility into the referendum criteria, as happened in previous years, recognising low-precepting authorities and perhaps setting a cash ceiling that would trigger a referendum, rather than a straight percentage increase. West Midlands fire service certainly took advantage

of that three or four years ago. It would help to put West Midlands police on to a more sustainable footing if the balance between centrally and locally funded streams were addressed better.

It is clear that the police reform that is happening locally is working. West Midlands police have been working to identify and respond to crime, and crime has fallen. I want to express my thanks to West Midlands police force, my local police officers and, of course, the West Midlands police leadership, from the chief constable down.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. There are 15 minutes left and three Members standing. If they all keep their speeches below or around six minutes we will get everyone in, as long as someone else does not stand up and spoil my calculations.

3.21 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby, and to follow the hon. Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood). It is interesting that he, a new Member, has already seen the difficulties of the policies brought forward by the previous Government. It is good that he has been creative in that way.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), for obtaining the debate. It is not a question of people ringing around forcing Members to attend. As can be seen, Members from throughout the west Midlands are here, quite rightly, because the debate is about a key issue for our constituents. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick) is here, and I hope that he will report back some of today's comments at the Select Committee sitting that he will attend next week.

The debate is about fiscal fairness, and protecting our constituents and their public services. Lots of Members have already raised the financial issues, and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield, eloquently went into the issue of the damping formula, but I want to add my voice on the concerns about finance and the funding of the West Midlands police. I am not giving a political statistic, but information from the National Audit Office. The West Midlands police have had 23% cuts. By comparison, as many hon. Members have said, Surrey has faced cuts of only 12%. Those are all facts. There have been cuts of £126 million in the past five years. Under the current formula, £43 million should have been given to the West Midlands police, but has not been.

Members touched on the matter of the council tax precept. The creative thinking of the hon. Member for Dudley South is interesting, and I hope that the Minister will look at what he said carefully, but I repeat that the precept for the West Midlands police is the second lowest in the country. People have talked about a referendum; that was the previous Government's policy, and was part of the Localism Act 2011. There has been a squeeze on the West Midlands police nationally, but also locally, and it has resulted in the loss of 1,471 police officers, which is a huge number. I have had conversations with the police, and there has been a

recruitment freeze. In addition to the effects of retirements, it is difficult to get new people into the force to provide the service that my constituents need. The effect of that has been huge.

There have been several criticisms of the police and crime commissioner, who is not here to defend himself, so I hope he will get an opportunity to provide clarification, given some of the misinformation about what he has done about the budget.

I want to thank Chief Superintendent Dave Sturman, who has moved on to another job—yes, it may well be in Lloyd house—and who has been fantastic about responding to concerns that I have raised on behalf of constituents. He has raided houses where there were sex workers and drugs, and he brought to justice the perpetrator of an attack on an elderly gentleman who was on his way to a mosque. In 2011 there was proper consultation with the local authority and Walsall town centre was free from riots. That is what it is about—partnership with local people.

Terry Simmons, the secretary of the Walsall borough neighbourhood watch, whom I have spoken to, has said that there is concern about what is happening. The association has enjoyed a good relationship with the police, but one neighbourhood team has moved back to the town centre. One person spoke of being at the mercy of a local response team, and those will not always deal with the low-priority cases. Pleck, Alumwell and Birchills are distressed at the kind of things that the police, with the minimum of resources, are having to do—they cannot do their job. As to response teams, it is said that they are moving away from the public, given the closure of front offices and falling numbers of patrols. People cannot talk to police officers on the street. The police are retreating into their cars. That is the wrong strategy.

Now more than ever before, we are in a challenging time. We need people to be vigilant, and we need to build up relationships with local people. We need local intelligence to protect our communities. In Walsall there have been two marches—a drain on people's resources—of people who do not consider that a diverse community should be together, and who try to divide it. Those are the kinds of things that we face in Walsall.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield, commented on the funding formula, which is currently opaque. How opaque can it get, when all the information is not provided? I ask the Minister to start the consultation again, because the process is flawed. A decision cannot be made without all the information. I ask for all the information to be published immediately—not on 29 September after the consultation period ends, as has been suggested. If the consultation period is extended, perhaps all the information can be provided. West Midlands police should not have to make a freedom of information request to get basic information that they need. It is simple. When someone buys a house they have all the information—the survey and the price—before making a decision on whether to proceed. We cannot have a situation in which public services are de-funded, things do not work and people get angry, and then the services are handed over to G4S—after which, as happened during the Olympics, the state has to take over again. My constituents want to know the police officers they speak to every day. They want them to know the community, and they want to allow the police the resources to do what they need to do to serve the community.

3.28 pm

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby, and that is particularly true in this important debate secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden). He outlined precisely the effect, and the unfairness, of the cuts that are to be made after the so-called consultation. I hope that the Minister will look at the considerable number of representations made about the adverse effect on the West Midlands police. As my hon. Friend said, if they must stick to the budgets outlined, they will not have sufficient finances to pay for their current staff. That will be a grave situation for all of us.

I will concentrate on my constituency, Birmingham, Perry Barr, where I took over as MP 14 years ago. We have faced significant issues with crimes against the person, gang-related crime, gun crime, knife crime and robbery. There have also been significant issues with regard to supporting people with mental health concerns, and particularly with some of the hostels for them, of which there are a considerable number in my constituency. We have had quite a lot to tackle over the past 15 years. I am proud to say that, by working with precision with the West Midlands police, and with proper funding, we have managed to reduce those crime rates hugely. When it comes to crime levels, we are now probably one of the best constituencies in the country. That is a credit to all the police officers, and all the people who work with the West Midlands police, including elected councillors and lay people who work in the neighbourhood forums. Delivering all that has been a combined effort. However, we have increasing issues to do with how we move forward and deal with our situation. We have lost a considerable number of police community support officers, and we could be about to lose all the ones we have left.

I want to mention a PCSO, Rob Capella, who has been in the force for almost 15 years—he joined the service as I became a Member of Parliament. He has done phenomenal work in the local area of Lozells and East Handsworth. He knows the families and people who live in those streets. People invite him in for a cup of tea and give him the information and intelligence that we need to work on reducing crime and finding out where the issues are and how we can deal with them. Losing a resource such as the one that Rob provides would be hugely detrimental.

In my constituency, we have held neighbourhood forums, which the police have put resources into; officers attend to listen to local people. They have been able to deliver a hugely important service. Residents have been listened to by the police, and the police have delivered services; for example, they have taken huge numbers of email addresses and phone numbers, and have been able to text and email people about the issues arising. That has been quite effective.

We are starting to see some of that work being undone, however, because of the cuts. Considering where we have come from, that is sad to see. A lot of people have put a lot of effort into local areas, and the community has been working together with the police; before I was elected in 2001, it was difficult to imagine that happening in areas such as Lozells, Aston and Handsworth. We have broken down barriers by working with the police, but now we find it extremely difficult for the police to

engage with people in those places who want to protect those communities and be part of the solution, not the problem.

It is important that we can put that work together, but to do what we have to, resources are needed. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield, said, resources are crucial to providing that kind of support to our communities. I do not think any of us wants a return of the era we have come from.

To conclude quickly, I know that the Minister is taking part in a consultation. He is a very fair man, and I am sure that he will have listened to the concerns that all Members have raised today. This issue is important to all of us. As for the outcome of the consultation, I hope he is able to bear in mind the concerns we have all raised. That would go some way to addressing some of the issues.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. I want to call the Front Benchers at 3.40 pm.

3.34 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): This is my first go at contributing to a debate in Westminster Hall, Mr Crausby. I did not know where the Chamber was—luckily one of my colleagues from Coventry was coming here—but I do know an awful lot about policing in the west midlands. There is not a single MP here in whose constituency I have not worked with the police teams. In fact, I welcomed the hon. Member for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (James Morris) into a women's refuge in my area some years ago, and had a cup of tea with him and Francis Maude. I have also—I am sure that the Minister is not aware of this—acted for the past five years as an adviser to the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice on international human trafficking and police resources for domestic and sexual violence.

I know what I am talking about when it comes to police funding, and what should be central or local. There is definitely a need for both to play their part. There is a huge array of different funding models for preventing crime in the west midlands. My experience has largely been that those that are protected, part-funded—for want of a better word—and encouraged by central Government always work best.

I want to give some apocalyptic examples of exceptionally bad husbandry in cases of, I am afraid to say, bad husbandry. The bad husbands that I will talk about are people who abuse their wives. I have worked on every Birmingham MARAC. Not everyone will know that acronym; it stands for multi-agency risk assessment conference. MARACs deal with people at imminent risk of death from domestic violence—the most high-risk victims, who have been put through unimaginable terrors. In Birmingham, we have had four MARACs. For 10 years, they were chaired by serving police officers; then it changed to police personnel chairing the meetings. The administration and co-ordination of all those meetings, at which all the cases were heard and we decided together what to do about them, was managed by police staff. Police people put together the minutes, gave everyone their actions and chased people who were to come back to the meeting once they had taken action; they would

ask, “Probation, what have you done about the offender? Housing, have you got a house for this woman and her children?”

Until about 18 months ago, it was the police who held that together. Then the police did not do it any more. The three MARACs that now exist in Birmingham do not have an administrator or a co-ordinator. We go along to the meetings and talk about stuff, and action points are taken away, but stuff falls through the cracks. That stuff is what you—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, Mr Crausby, not you. That stuff is what the Home Office will receive when it has its domestic homicide reviews. It will say that the system is broken and that we cannot communicate with each other any more, because we had resources—once it was police officers, and then, one step down, police personnel—but now we do not have any.

This might sound apocalyptic, but that situation will mean that people die. It will mean that we fail in our duty to keep people safe. That is what police cuts mean. Yes, we all feel that crime is going down, and that good husbandry and efficiency in management has really helped, but I am seeing that it has not. Members will never see inside the MARAC room. No one from a newspaper will ever say, “Gosh, there’s no MARAC co-ordinator—MARAC co-ordinator scandal!”, but in the real world, where people are working on the frontline in every single one of your constituencies—sorry, Mr Crausby—that is what is happening. It is bad.

There is a difference between crime figures and safety. The public protection unit of West Midlands police is one of the greatest police units. West Midlands police have done an awful lot to clear the decks and try to recognise that child sexual exploitation, human trafficking, sexual violence and rape have to be dealt with. The force has put huge effort, care and love into that, but the report from Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary still says that the response is not good enough for the people in my constituency and across the west midlands. That is not the fault of the police. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr Mahmood) said, if we were where we were 20 years ago, things would look very different; on domestic and sexual violence, on gang violence and on working with our communities, we have come really far, and there is a reason for that: we were able to do the work.

I have seen how a really good multi-agency, multi-partnership community response has gone because of cuts to policing. I can do no more than urge the Minister to hear me when I say that the papers will be coming across the Home Office’s desk, but unfortunately they will be about the deceased.

3.40 pm

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) on his public service in securing this debate.

Last weekend I was in Erdington high street with Louis, a much loved police community support officer who works with the town centre partnership, making the high street a safe place to go. Popular with the local community, he is a grandfather figure to the local children in the high street. Last month I was with Cindy Tierney, out on the beat in Perry Common. She has

been doing the job for 11 and a half years. “I love the job,” she says, and she is much loved—I saw that at first hand. She polices one of the poorest wards in Britain and undertakes exemplary work with local young people. Now both are at risk of losing their jobs as a consequence of budget cuts that will see PCSOs become an endangered species in the west midlands.

West Midlands police is rightly regarded to be one of the best forces in Britain. It is ably led by Chris Sims, and has been ably represented, first by Bob Jones and then by David Jamieson. Centres of excellence are contained there, including award-winning neighbourhood police schemes, such as in my constituency, in Stockland Green. The West Midlands police service has done everything and more that the Government have asked of it. The Police Minister often says that the police should make the best use of resources. West Midlands police has done precisely that and been rated as outstanding by HMIC for doing so. That includes undertaking a groundbreaking partnership with Accenture on the modelling of the police service looking to 2020.

However, West Midlands police is reeling from 23% cuts over the last five years—the biggest cuts to any police service nationwide and in Europe—with £126 million gone from their budget. The west midlands is increasingly feeling the consequences, and I have seen that at first hand all over the west midlands—the progressive hollowing-out of neighbourhood policing, with more and more neighbourhood police officers getting taken back on to response; 27 police stations closing; and a generation of progress in cutting crime now being reversed. The latest figures on police recorded crime is for a 1% increase for the period of March 2014 to March 2015—and by the way, West Midlands police has been praised by HMIC as being the best force in the country for the accuracy of its crime statistics.

Now the West Midlands police service is facing catastrophic cuts, with potentially very serious consequences. Why? Because of the cumulative impact of what has happened thus far, with 1,500 police officers gone, and now, because the comprehensive spending review is looming, with the police not protected and with at least another £100 million and 2,500 more police officers to go. What has made things worse is the grotesque unfairness of the approach adopted by the Government. As hon. Members have said, had the west midlands been treated fairly over the last five years, we would have seen £43 million more in funding. Unfortunately, the west midlands has been treated grotesquely unfairly.

To add insult to injury, a funding formula review is about to make a bad situation worse. A fresh review was necessary and was promised for a year. It was published on the last day on which Parliament sat. The situation is now descending into farce because vital information has been withheld. The review talks about a number of principles, saying that some forces would be significantly affected, yet the Government have withheld which forces and by how much. There must have been an study on the likely impact of the new formula on all forces—on West Midlands police in particular—and there has to be, under law, an equality impact study. Neither has been disclosed.

On 30 July, I wrote to the Police Minister asking for that information to be disclosed, but there was no answer. The West Midlands police service has asked for it to be disclosed, but there was no answer. Therefore, it

[*Jack Dromey*]

had to put in a freedom of information request, but there was no answer; or, now at least: “We may answer. If we do, we’ll do so on 29 September”—14 days after the consultation period closes. You could not make it up.

Now at last we have some clarity, as a consequence of the leaked document. Work has been carried out by the Police and Crime Commissioners Treasurers’ Society, suggesting that the West Midlands police could lose another 25.1% because of the new formula, which does not include the departmental spending cuts to come. It reveals that, under the proposed formula, there will be a shift from urban to rural. The second hardest hit will be the west midlands, with a cut of 25.1%, the third hardest hit will be Merseyside, at 25.5%, and the fourth hardest hit will be Greater Manchester, at 23.3%. That will mean that the West Midlands police service will be near cut in half and will be smaller than when it was founded in 1974.

The Government have perpetrated a myth that somehow massive cuts can be inflicted on the police service and crime can be cut. Well, not only is recorded crime rising after a generation of progress, but crime is changing. Demand is rising. We have seen a massive increase in fraud, online crime and cybercrime—nearly 4 million last year alone—while the biggest concentration of cases of female genital mutilation outside London is in the west midlands. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) said in her excellent contribution, this is not only about the impact on the victims of domestic violence; it is about protecting those who have been subject to child sex exploitation and abuse. What the West Midlands police service has done is rise to the challenge to tackle these obscenities, increasing the numbers in the public protection unit from 300 to 800. However, it is still struggling to cope with rapidly growing demand.

There is also counter-terrorism. At a time like this, it is utterly irresponsible to inflict such cuts that hollow out neighbourhood policing. The former head of counter-terrorism, Peter Clarke, and the current head of counter-terrorism, Mark Rowley, have both said that the patient building of good community relationships through neighbourhood policing is absolutely vital to the apprehension of terrorists and potential terrorists. Seeing neighbourhood policing being increasingly hollowed out will put the people of the west midlands at risk.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield asked some powerful questions. Fundamentally, it comes down to two points. First, will the Police Minister agree to publish in full all the studies that must have been carried out on the impact on our police service, so that this debate can be properly informed? Secondly, will he agree to extend the deadline on the consultative process? Otherwise, the consultative process is utterly meaningless, concealing a serious hidden agenda.

In conclusion, what the Government and the Police Minister must do today is come clean about exactly what they are proposing. Thus far, both the Government and the Police Minister have been in denial, asserting that, as was said earlier this week, numbers of police officers somehow do not matter—but yes, they do. They have been claiming that the front line will be protected, when it has not been—12,000 have gone from the front

line over the last five years and the number is rapidly rising. Sometimes we are accused by the Police Minister, when we are telling the truth about what is happening—as hon. Members have in the powerful contributions that have been made in this debate—of somehow attacking the police. Nonsense. I bow to no one in my admiration for the West Midlands police service and for the good men and women that I see doing an outstanding job, day in, day out. We are not attacking the police; we are standing up for our police service, because that is exactly what our constituents want us to do. We are standing up against a Government that are doing terrible damage to our police service.

The first duty of any Government is the safety and security of their citizens. Cuts on this proposed scale will make it very difficult for the police to do their job, and it will make many communities in the west midlands less safe places to live and work. The Government cannot fail in that fundamental duty to the people of the west midlands, and we urge them to think again.

3.49 pm

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): It is, as always, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby. I congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) on securing the debate. If I was still a Back Bencher—we all start in that position—I would probably have put my name down for a debate here today on this subject as well. As colleagues who are here from both sides of the House know, that is what this place is for, and I have never hidden any of my views on this subject. I stand up again today, as I do every time I stand up as the Police Minister, which it is an honour and a privilege to do, to pay tribute to the police officers not only in the west midlands, but across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland—this great kingdom of ours. They do a simply fantastic job.

The forces around the country have adapted brilliantly to changes in the crime that they deal with daily and to austerity. Opposition Members will not like this point, but we inherited a really difficult financial position, and we went into an austerity process. The country made a decision at the general election. Many of the things that I heard in the speech by the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey), were also put out by him across the country during the general election campaign, but the public believe in what we are trying to do, which is to run a stable ship with the money available and not continue to get ourselves in a difficult financial situation.

I have met representatives of many forces, from chiefs right down to junior constables who have just joined the force. The other day I was at Hendon, where training of new recruits was going on. The one thing that has always been clear to me is that 99.9% of police officers are in the job for the right reason. That is true whether they are at the bottom or the top. I do not think that the press pay enough of a tribute to them; too often, they focus on the bad apples who spoil it for everyone else. It is right that they should be rooted out, and they are.

I pay tribute to the comments made on both sides of the Chamber. In the time allowed, I probably will not be able to answer all the points that were raised, but, as always, I will write to colleagues—and I did write to the

shadow Police Minister in response to his letter to me. If he has not got that response, I do not know where it has gone, but I have responded.

Let us begin right at the start. Every time I went to see different forces, the one thing that the chief and the PCC either said in unison or quietly said individually to me was that the existing formula was fundamentally flawed. We were basically saying to forces, “This is how much money you should have, based on what you’re delivering, and this is what we’re going to take away from you through damping, top-slicing, etc.” All of them said that it was fundamentally flawed, so the principle of what we were looking at was how we could find a fairer system for all 43 forces that I represent.

I fully understand that there have been real, substantial and difficult financial decisions to be made by PCCs and chief constables about where and how they deliver their policing. I pay tribute to the work that has been done. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) said that I might not know what she has done. Trust me: the civil service is quite good and did tell me exactly what she has done in the past. I thank her for the work that she has done for the Department and in her community. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

It is important that we ensure that the people on the front line and not the people—without being rude—in this room decide how policing is delivered in their communities. With that in mind, I have, interestingly enough, a new member of staff joining my private office from the Metropolitan police. They will be seconded from the Metropolitan police for one year, so that I can hear about what is happening on the front line, rather than perhaps just going by other experiences in the room. Actually, that person has volunteered to do it; they have not been seconded.

It is crucial that we ensure that a modern police force can deal with modern, difficult crimes. Some of those crimes are not new to us. FGM has been around since we became—this interesting word—a multicultural society. A lot of people have brought here traditions that we find completely abhorrent. Fortunately, we now have the legislation on the statute book to try to do something about that and people are coming forward.

When I was a young man on the council estate where I was brought up in north London, domestic violence was, I am ashamed to say, almost accepted. Thank God it is not today. People do have the confidence to go to the police and report it—sometimes through a third agency—and those prosecutions are going up.

Some of the figures for crime were alluded to by the shadow Minister. Has it gone up in the west midlands by 1% this year? Yes, it has. People should have a quick look, though, at what the figures tell us about where the reporting of offences is—I am referring to rape, sexual violence, male rape and domestic violence. Those are the areas where we should all be proud that people now have the confidence to come forward. Because of some of the historical sexual abuse cases, there are, rightly, more and more people coming forward. They are telling us things that we perhaps would never have dreamt had taken place in this country.

Crime as a whole is falling. I accept that it has also been falling in other parts of the world, but the police have done a simply fantastic job, with more limited resources, of ensuring that crime is coming down.

Jack Dromey: Will the Minister give way—

Mike Penning: I am very limited for time, so I will not give way.

Jack Dromey: So that we can get an answer to the question about the impact—

Mike Penning: I am going to speak; I am not going to give way.

The key is what is being delivered; that is crucial. I know that the Labour party opposed PCCs, even though it fought a very interesting by-election campaign when Bob Jones sadly died. It was very sad that he went. I respected him enormously; he was a very good PCC and community leader. And he has been replaced by a similarly very good community leader.

Several hon. Members talked about referendums. The provision is there. I understand the argument about the precept. It has been raised with me several times by the local police and the PCC. If there is a need or want to increase the precept, let the people decide. Interestingly, we will have PCC elections in May next year. Perhaps someone will put it in their manifesto that if they put 10% on the precept, they could raise £7 million and put more than 124 officers—if they want to use the money for that purpose—back on the beat. [Interruption.] I will touch on the problem that has been alluded to.

Although I praise what is happening in the west midlands, it is crucial that we ensure that good work that is going on elsewhere in the country is also done in the west midlands. We do not necessarily need huge numbers of buildings with just police inside them. I had the pleasure of going to Winchester. I am an ex-fireman; I went to the fire station there and in the fire station was the police station. I went down the bottom of the drill yard, where the firemen were practising the excellent work that they do, and the armed response unit was also at the bottom of the yard. They were completely unified. It is very important that that is the case. In my own constituency, the police station will soon move into the new civic centre—that is where it needs to be. The interesting thing from my point of view is that when the front desk was closed, I asked my local force how many times people were coming to the front desk on the average day and the answer was three. Is that really the best use of our resources? Can that service not be delivered in a different way?

The aim of the consultation document that we put out was to try to find a fairer way of doing this. Instead of coming from the top and saying, “This is how much you deserve, but we’re going to take this away,” let us start from the bottom and build up from there in terms of what we deliver and what the needs are. That is part of the consultation that is going on.

Jack Dromey: Will the police Minister give way to answer this question?

Mike Penning: I am not going to give way.

What is really wrong is when people scaremonger. There is no calculation, whether there is a leaked document or not. No one really knows until we come to a conclusion about whether the “bottom” principle is actually right, and the reason—[Interruption.] The shadow Minister holds up a document, saying, “This is fact.” It is not

[Mike Penning]

fact, because we do not know yet. Once the consultation is over and we agree on the principle of feeding up from the bottom, we can see what the needs of West Midlands police are—what they are bringing to the market. This relates to counter-terrorism. We will know more about exactly how things will be delivered. Will it be through the ROCUs—regional organised crime units? Will it be through the National Crime Agency? What will actually need to be delivered by West Midlands police? Will it deliver in collaboration with the forces around it? It is a very large force; it has a lot of capacity. Could some of that capacity be used elsewhere? What it brings to the party will decide the fundamental principle of how much money is coming.

That is why we have not released a set of assumptions. We cannot release a set of assumptions until after the consultation is over. That was the advice I took, and that is the advice I continue to work from today. But it is a consultation. One principle is crucial, and those who have been in the House for a while with me will know that when I did the coastguard consultation, which was very controversial, I said this categorically. It is a consultation. I will look very carefully not only at what has been said here today, but at all the other representations. I encourage colleagues to be part of the consultation. They should not assume that what they have said today is everything that needs to be said. They should be part of the consultation. And what we will come out with, I believe, is a fundamentally better formula for the whole of England and Wales—the 43 authorities. Trust me, Mr Crausby: plenty of chief constables and PCCs from other parts of the country are desperate for a change, because they feel that they have been fundamentally underfunded for many years. We therefore need a fairer policy. As soon as we can get the consultation finished and—

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): Order.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Orphaned Open-cast Mines

4 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Orphaned Opencast Mines.

I am grateful for your chairmanship today, Mr Davies. This will be quite a complicated discussion, because I am aware that several colleagues from other areas of the United Kingdom want to take part in the debate. I have said that I will take one intervention from each of them so that they can be engaged, but I feel that it is important that we move forward in tackling this issue.

This is my fourth debate on the subject, in which there is cross-party interest. I am so sorry that I did not look for a 90-minute debate or another Backbench Business debate, because the level of interest would have made that feasible. The Minister is the third Minister I have discussed the problem with. Let us hope that this is the last debate needed and that she is the one who will finally address the problem of open-cast sites, so that communities up and down the country can at last feel that their problems are being addressed and that help is at hand.

Equally, let us hope that the companies that have abandoned sites and not completed their commitments to restoration understand that they cannot ravish the countryside in the name of profit and greed and then simply walk away, leaving their responsibilities for others to take on and finance.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs Moon: I will. This is your one intervention.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies, and I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I agree entirely with her point about land restoration and companies not running away from their responsibilities. Does she agree that we must also ensure that the application process is a broad one, which takes into account public opinion and anticipates future problems?

Mrs Moon: I assume that my hon. Friend is talking about the need to take into account public opinion in the restoration process. That is absolutely critical. My community of Cynffig Hill are very clear that they want the void on the Parc Slip site to be filled in, because they think it is highly dangerous, and any restoration must include that.

The Coal Industry Act 1994, which received Royal Assent under the Major Government, privatised the remains of British Coal and gave the then Department of Trade and Industry powers to ensure full continuity from the coal corporation to private companies. The Department committed to checking carefully the financial status of successor companies as part of the bid process. Too many communities have found those to be empty promises, and the result has been environmental devastation, pollution and failure.

In the case of Parc Slip, the company that eventually became Celtic Energy bought the site with the inclusion of a 10-year restoration bond-free period. For 10 years,

no money was put aside for restoration, the company having paid up front to the Major Government a sum that was, it argues, to include the cost of that 10-year restoration. The Government took the sale money and coal levy payments for 13 years; Celtic took the coal; and the communities of Margam, Cefn Cribwr, Cynffig Hill and Pyle have been left with the consequences.

Parc Slip is mostly in the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) and for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), but most of the residents affected by the site are in Cynffig Hill. Most of them live about 300 metres south of the void. The site is more than a mile and a half long, and half a mile across. It includes the void, which contains foul water that rises and falls with the seasons. At one point this winter, there was huge fear that the void would overspill and water would cascade down into the community in Cynffig Hill.

After further planning applications, an escrow account was belatedly established, which contains £1.5 million. However, the full restoration costs of the site are estimated at £57 million. Roads, footpaths and farming land have been lost, and promises to restore them and sell back the farmland have been reneged on. I do not intend to repeat the horrific story of Celtic selling off its restoration liabilities to Oak Regeneration, which is based in the British Virgin Islands, and the subsequent dispersal of £73 million elsewhere in the company—millions of pounds that could have paid for the restoration went to pay those involved in establishing paper offshore companies.

The Serious Fraud Office and the judiciary have also failed my community. In February 2014, fraud charges against six individuals, including members of Celtic Energy, were dropped. They had been charged with conspiracy to defraud Neath Port Talbot, Bridgend and Powys Councils, as well as the Coal Authority; and with

“deliberately prejudicing their ability effectively to enforce obligations to restore cast mining sites to open countryside and/or agricultural use”.

That relates to the Oak conspiracy.

Mr Justice Hickinbottom said that there had been no economic injury to the local authorities or the Coal Authority. He said that although the transactions may have been dishonest, they were not illegal, and that Celtic was obliged to restore the land to countryside and agricultural use once mining was complete. I cannot begin to tell the Minister—or you, Mr Davies—how that decision is viewed in Cynffig Hill, or indeed in Cefn Cribwr or Margam. It is felt that everyone has turned their back on their responsibilities to this site, and the community is left to live with the most horrific situation.

According to the results of the court case, Neath Port Talbot and Bridgend Councils were not adversely affected, but the reality is that they have been gravely adversely affected, because they have no funds at all to restore the land. Bridgend Council has had a £50 million budget cut. Both planning departments failed to protect the local community over a number of planning applications and conditions applied. One thing is clear, however. Whatever restoration comes out of any discussions between the planning departments and Celtic—however minor the results that £5.5 million can achieve—the void must be made safe.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate, and I thank you, Mr Davies, for your chairmanship. Does my hon. Friend agree that the situation has now become a serious health and safety issue? Whatever the questions around who owns what—is it Celtic? Is it Oak Regeneration? It seems as though we will be constantly bamboozled by those two companies as they sneak away from their responsibilities—it is for the Government to take responsibility for the health and safety of my hon. Friend’s residents and of others in the surrounding areas. The situation is a ticking time bomb. Something needs to be done, beyond economic and small-scale political considerations, because we are talking about the health and safety of human life. We need to see the matter in that context, and urgent action is required by the Government immediately.

Mrs Moon: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I am talking today about the open-cast coal site in Parc Slip, but I am sure that across England, and particularly in Scotland, there are sites that are equally dangerous and hazardous to local communities.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend and neighbour on astutely and carefully laying out the case as it is. Most people have run from any liability or responsibility, and it is not right that this now falls on local taxpayers or the Welsh Government. There needs to be a solution. I constructively suggest that she, the people involved and the Minister consider a proposal such as the one suggested by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and others for some sort of levy to address those sites where no bond can be found, where no money has been put aside and that are sitting there presenting a real danger to the local public, as well as being environmental disasters.

Mrs Moon: Yet again, my hon. Friend, my constituency neighbour, has been sneaking into my office and reading my speech. I accused him of that the last time I secured a debate on this subject, and he has done it again. He cannot be trusted.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I congratulate the hon. Lady on her hard work on this issue, on which she has secured many debates in Parliament. Further to the point raised by the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) and the hon. Lady’s point about health and safety, is it not true that the operators are blasé? The restoration plan for the massive development at East Pit mine, on the border between my constituency in Carmarthenshire and Neath Port Talbot, revolves around building a lake in the hole in the ground following the completion of mining activities. That is clearly not good enough, is it?

Mrs Moon: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is not acceptable. The water, certainly at Parc Slip, is foul. It is rain-fed, and there is no way of cleansing it. There is a huge risk of children seeing the water as somewhere to go, have fun and swim. Depending on the level of the water, they are at grave risk of injuring themselves as they try to gain access, which is a real problem.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I echo the hon. Lady’s comments. Although I am a new Member, I know about her hard work over the past

[Alan Brown]

couple of years. On health and safety, does she agree that the only way of addressing the situation, including the environmental concerns, is through some form of restoration? The only way that can be achieved is through some sort of UK Government measure. Local authorities do not have the money. The restoration of my local authority's sites is estimated to cost up to £200 million, and the authority faces a £35 million budget cut over a five-year period. The devolved Administrations are suffering budget cuts. The UK Government have received the main tax income over the years, and a UK Government-driven scheme could target the appropriate sites across the UK.

Philip Davies (in the Chair): Order. Interventions need to be much briefer.

Alan Brown: I apologise. There needs to be a tax measure or direct funding. A tax measure makes sense.

Mrs Moon: As I have already said: Westminster Governments have taken money from the sale of the sites; Westminster Governments have taken the coal levy, and Westminster Governments have failed to ensure through legislation that companies are restoring the sites. In the case of Parc Slip, the 10-year bond-free period was an unmitigated disaster. The Welsh Assembly Government have lost £1.5 billion in funding. They have had no financial gain from Celtic's bond or the coal energy, and they do not have the powers to place limits on companies or to raise funds in Wales to do any of this work.

When these companies that have abandoned their responsibilities make subsequent planning applications, or take the form of another company, I hope that the Welsh Assembly Government or the Scottish Government will be able to say, "No. If you want to work and do business in our communities, you have to meet your responsibilities. Your reputation is your bond. Never mind any deal that you did elsewhere."

That leaves Her Majesty's Government. Following my first two debates I met the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock), who was then the Minister for Business and Enterprise and the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change. I know him to be an honourable man, and in a meeting literally days before Parliament was dissolved he told me that, over the general election period, civil servants would be putting together a plan to cover all the orphaned coal sites across the UK. He acknowledged that there was a major problem and said that it would be addressed by whatever Government, of whatever form, was formed following the election.

Sadly, the right hon. Gentleman moved, but we had a new Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise, the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry). I met her, and she promised to take an active interest. Sadly, the issue was then moved to the Department of Energy and Climate Change, and it has taken me five months to secure this debate. The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change has also generously agreed to meet me, and hopefully other Members present, after this debate so that together we

can work out a solution for all our communities, which is how we need to move forward—through a joint approach.

There has been one change since March in relation to Celtic. Consent for a further extension to East Pit, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees), was gained under the guise of the "lakes development." The development significantly reduces Celtic's restoration obligations from £115 million to £23 million. The section 106 agreement for the new consent would not otherwise have been agreed—I am sure she will correct me if any of this is incorrect. The freeholds of East Pit, Selar and Nant Helen have been returned to Celtic. It is therefore possible for Oak Regeneration, in the right circumstances, to move responsibility for restoration back to Celtic. Oak Regeneration has not restored the rights to Parc Slip to Celtic, and I hope we will work together to ensure that that happens.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on all her hard work. Although I represent Neath, I was born and brought up in Cynffig Hill, which is close to my heart.

Celtic has made a planning application to restore East Pit, but people do not want it to be restored in the way Celtic has proposed. They do not want a lake or a hotel up there. There is also a balance of jobs. By again setting work out there, jobs are saved. I hope we will have a similar situation with Parc Slip in the future, and I will help in any way I can.

Mrs Moon: I thank my hon. Friend.

We now come to the Government's plan. Where is the plan that we were promised would be in place after the election? How do we move forward? How are Celtic and other companies to be held to account? What role does Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs play in examining the movement of money that would have been used for restoration? What powers does the Minister have to see the return of the freehold of Parc Slip to the ownership of Celtic? Has the Minister considered the establishment of a restoration investment fund financed through a proportion of carbon price support revenue from coal generation? That approach would support restoration jobs and maximise benefits for the community and the environment.

There are also suggestions for a carbon price support exemption for coal extraction at sites with legacy restoration problems. That proposal is opposed by the RSPB, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore and others mentioned, as it poses additional risks. I hope the Minister is willing to work with us all to find a solution. All these communities have given money and coal and have sacrificed their environment to the wellbeing of the UK. It is now time for us to acknowledge what they have done and take up our responsibilities here in Westminster.

4.19 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) on her efforts in getting the debate on this very important subject. She will be aware that I have also met Welsh

Minsters to discuss the topic. I am delighted to be meeting her and some of her constituency colleagues later today.

I fully appreciate the concerns of hon. Members and their local communities about the lack of restoration work at the former open-cast sites. I can understand that they are looking to local and national Government to address the remediation of the sites so that they can become local assets. My office has looked carefully at what was said by the previous Energy Minister, and I can confirm that he agreed that the Treasury and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills would look at potential solutions, including tax exemptions. To clarify the situation, the Exchequer Secretary sent a letter today confirming that a tax exemption would not be possible for future coaling in those open-cast mines.

As the hon. Lady explained, of particular concern in Wales are the sites that transferred at privatisation in 1994 to the Welsh successor company to British Coal. The new company acquired a number of operational sites and also British Coal's land ownership and planning consents at a number of "prospective" sites. Having developed and worked those sites for several years, the company transferred the freehold ownership of the remaining sites to another company, which is registered in the British Virgin Islands. As I understand it, that company has taken the view that they cannot afford to restore some of the sites unless they are awarded planning consent to undertake further surface coaling. That of course places the local authority and the Welsh Government in a very difficult position. On the one hand, there is local resistance to yet more coaling in the area and on the other hand, any attempt to enforce restoration risks precipitating the insolvency of the company involved. Such an insolvency could allow the liquidators to "disclaim" the land assets, rendering them effectively ownerless; the land would be left unrestored unless there were costly public sector intervention.

As set out by the Prime Minister and in the Wales Bill announced in the Queen's Speech, the UK Government are committed to delivering extensive new powers to Wales, building on the Government of Wales Act 2006, though which the National Assembly for Wales took on responsibility for town and country planning. As the hon. Lady knows, part of those responsibilities is the need to meet the liabilities, both future and historical.

Obviously the issues do not affect communities only in Wales; in Scotland and England there are other examples, and we can all learn from each other's experiences. One such experience is that of Northumberland County Council, which in July this year approved an extension to the existing Potland Burn open-cast site, so that UKCSMR Ltd—the not-for-profit company established to deal with a number of UK Coal's mines—could mine an additional 164,000 tonnes of coal and 50,000 tonnes of brickshale, to help meet the financial commitment of restoring the site.

I listened carefully to the hon. Lady. I truly admire her strong support for her constituents. Although I appreciate that hon. Members and their local communities will be disappointed, I find it difficult to see that it would be right for the Government to intervene in Wales while there continues to be a solvent site owner and while discussions with local planning authorities are ongoing. I am looking forward meeting the hon. Lady, along with the hon. Members for Ogmore (Huw

Irranca-Davies) and for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), after the debate to discuss the matter further. That will follow on from the meeting I had with the Welsh Government Minister for Natural Resources recently, at which I offered the support of my officials to look at other private-sector led possibilities to address the funding required.

Mrs Moon: The Minister still has not addressed the fact that a 10-year bond-free period was given to Celtic, with an advance payment made to the Major Government, which would otherwise have been put into an escrow account that would have paid towards the restoration. Some of the money for restoration rightly rests with Westminster because the Government had the money for restoration in advance.

Andrea Leadsom: I would have to take up that specific point separately with the hon. Lady. It is not something that I particularly addressed. Obviously, she is telling me that, and it may indeed be the case, but I would want to look into that carefully with the Department.

My officials will shortly visit Wales to see one of the sites for themselves and have discussions with interested parties. I am sure that the hon. Lady will want to be involved with that.

Jonathan Edwards: Many of the problems our communities experience are a result of the privatisation of coal by the Coal Industry Act 1994 and the fact that the restoration protocols were not watertight. The UK Government have been receiving the revenue for the Treasury from the mining activities, so I find it very difficult to understand why the Minister thinks responsibility falls on the Welsh Government.

Andrea Leadsom: Governments do not allocate specific revenue lines to specific activities. I do not accept the premise of the hon. Gentleman's point.

Importantly, my Department's non-departmental public body, the Coal Authority, now provides to local authorities its expert advice on calculating the level of bonds required for future surface mine operations, to ensure that restoration costs are covered should the mining company in future no longer be in a position to carry out the work. The Welsh Government have recognised that work. The Minister for Natural Resources announced in April 2015 that the authority would continue that work and provide further advice on active surface mine sites in Wales. The authority is also working with the coal industry, national Governments and local authorities to provide the specialist skills needed to manage sustainably the risks presented by the decline of the industry. The Government have done as much as possible to support the coal industry throughout its recent challenges. They have provided financial support to help UK Coal and Hatfield colliery, for example, with their efforts to avoid insolvency and achieve a more orderly closure of their deep mines, and with the impact on those directly affected.

With the closure of Thoresby and Hatfield earlier this year, and impending closure of Kellingley later this year, surface-mined coal is now our major remaining source of indigenous supply. Production of surface-mined coal has been relatively static over the past four to five years, when it overtook deep mine production as the

[Andrea Leadsom]

majority source. The future of the industry is closely linked to that of the power sector. Coal generation has been a critical element of our electricity generation mix for a long time. As hon. Members know, there will be no long-term role for unabated coal as we move to a low-carbon energy environment, and the Prime Minister has publicly pledged to end its use for power generation. As we move to decarbonise the power sector substantially, the role of unabated coal will diminish. Coal supplied 29% of our electricity in 2014, which is down from 40% in 2012. We expect that trend to continue.

Alan Brown: I presume that the Minister is aware that in the current climate most coal burned in the UK is imported from Russia and Colombia. There is therefore still a market for UK domestic coal. Moving towards carbon-free energy provision in the future is not necessarily an argument against further coaling in the UK at the moment.

Andrea Leadsom: I thank the hon. Gentleman; I completely accept his comments and I will address his point.

Any longer-term role for coal will be dependent on the successful deployment of cost-competitive carbon capture and storage. The Government have put in place one of the most comprehensive programmes on CCS in the world; we have committed £1 billion to our CCS competition, plus operational support under contracts for difference. There could still be demand for coal in the UK power generation sector in future, but, unfortunately, continued demand for coal for power generation has not necessarily translated into opportunities for domestic production, as the hon. Gentleman points out. The industry as a whole is in decline, with indigenous production at less than 12 million tonnes in 2014—around 95% lower than the levels some 60 years ago.

That point brings me back to the heart of the matter we are debating today: balancing the challenges facing the industry going forward and addressing the significant legacy it has left behind. There is an important role for those involved in the industry in achieving that balance. I assure the hon. Lady that the Government will continue to provide support and advice wherever we can.

Question put and agreed to.

Dementia Care Services

4.29 pm

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): I beg to move,
That this House has considered dementia care services.

It is a pleasure to lead this debate—the first in my name since my election—under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. It is also a pleasure to debate with a Minister whose commitment to this cause is well known, on a subject of such importance. Indeed, its importance grows daily.

I am particularly pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani) next to me. I hope that she plans to speak in this debate, because her work in her constituency on this subject, and the depth of her knowledge, is well known and will be of great benefit to the House.

Dementia is incredibly cruel; it can take a person away from you even while they are still with you. It is estimated that there are around 850,000 people with dementia in the UK; that 21 million people have a family member or close friend with dementia; and that a third of people over 65 will develop it. The majority of those 850,000 people are over 65, but an estimated 17,000 people below that age have dementia. In my constituency of Charnwood, it is estimated that just over 1,000 people have dementia. All of this—put aside the human consequences for a moment—is estimated to cost around £23 billion per annum, with a huge proportion of that being met by families, either through care that they engage or through the free hours of care that the 670,000 voluntary carers provide. The challenge before us is huge.

Significant progress on dementia has been made in this country in recent years. However, while we as a society have made significant strides in improving our longevity and our ability to fix and patch up our physical selves through the medical profession, our understanding of and care for the mind have fallen behind somewhat. Dementia poses a massive financial challenge to our country, as people live longer—a good thing, but a partial consequence is an increase in the number of dementia cases.

The last Labour Government should be rightly proud of their work in bringing forward the first national dementia strategy, and I pay tribute to them, through the shadow Minister, for that far-sighted step. It is a baton that the current Government, and particularly this Prime Minister, have seized with vigour; there has been the Prime Minister's challenge on dementia 2012, the G8 dementia summit, and the Prime Minister's 2020 challenge. All this is hugely positive, and dementia is an issue on which there is considerable consensus in all parts of the House, and among all the parties represented within it. However, we must not think for one moment that we have done enough, nor lose the momentum built up thus far.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this matter to the House for consideration. A great many of us across my constituency of Strangford and the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland—know people who suffer from dementia. Just last week, I had the opportunity to go to what is referred to as a memory

café, which is organised by the Alzheimer's Association, which is a wonderful organisation. I met some wonderful people, as well as their carers and families. Does he recognise the good work that the Alzheimer's Association does? Does he feel that now is the time to not only raise awareness of Alzheimer's but commend the Alzheimer's Association for its work?

Edward Argar: In addition to the hon. Gentleman's many talents, which are well known in this House, he appears to be a mind-reader, as I was about to come on to that subject, having visited a similar memory café on Monday. He is absolutely right to highlight and pay tribute to the work of such places. On Monday, I went to the Syston community centre, where our local Alzheimer's Society group was holding its regular Poppies memory café session for about 30 carers and people with dementia. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman did on his visit to his local memory café, I met some amazing people and it was a fantastic session. My memories of that session, and the lessons I learned from it, remain with me; I continue to reflect on them. However, across the UK, including in my region—the east Midlands and Leicestershire—the access to and coverage of such vital services remains patchy; that was a message I got loud and clear from the people I spoke to. As I suggested, that session left me in no doubt about the vital role of dedicated and passionate carers, including the amazing people whom the hon. Gentleman and I met, in helping people with dementia.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this debate, and he has made some powerful points. I would like to share with him some things that we are doing in Cheshire, and indeed in Weaver Vale. Dementia awareness is so important. My staff have received dementia awareness training, so that we can identify people with dementia. Also, our local town centres are dementia-friendly, which is significant. It enables people to come out as families and they are made most welcome in town centres, such as that of Northwich. Does my hon. Friend agree that town centres across the country should be dementia-friendly?

Edward Argar: Yet again, it appears that another hon. Member has the facility of reading minds and anticipating speeches, because I was about to say that there remains too little understanding of dementia in our communities, despite the progress made, and dementia-friendly communities and workplaces can play a hugely important role in supporting both those who have dementia and those who care for them.

I encourage the Minister to push all Government Departments to become dementia-friendly workplaces, and to keep talking about dementia and raising awareness of it. I also encourage her to keep the NHS talking about it. I know that other hon. Members—not least the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth, who is chair of the all-party group on dementia and possibly the only dementia champion in this House—will continue to raise these issues, as the shadow Minister has done over many years.

A recent survey showed that 25% of 18 to 25-year-olds are keen to learn and understand more about dementia, as opposed to only 15% of those aged 55-plus; that was a 2012 YouGov survey, so it is relatively recent. While it

is encouraging that young people are keen to understand and learn more about dementia, those figures are still far too low.

Jim Shannon: One thing that I became aware of after visiting the memory café last week and speaking to some of the people there—by the way, the Big Lottery Fund was one of the funders of that café, so it is doing good work—is that the age of those being diagnosed with dementia and Alzheimer's is starting to fall. There are some people in the 40-to-50 bracket who have dementia, which worries me. Does the hon. Gentleman feel that there is anything we can do to raise awareness of that issue?

Edward Argar: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. Just last Saturday, I was at a gala in Anstey, which is a village in my constituency, and a man came up to talk to me about this issue. He said that a lot of emphasis is put on those in their 60s or 70s who develop dementia, but he told me about a lady who had developed it very early in life, which creates a whole new set of challenges around children, paying mortgages and the support that should be in place but is not always there. I will come on to the support that is or is not in place shortly.

The second part of the picture is about diagnosis and care. Diagnosis rates have improved. In 2011-12, only 45% of people with dementia received a formal diagnosis, but Department of Health figures suggest that the figure is now up to 59%, which is real progress. I know that 66% was the target set for the end of this year, but can I encourage the Minister to go that little bit further and press for a 75% target for diagnoses by 2017? That is ambitious but achievable, and if we do not set ambitious targets we will not achieve them.

However, diagnosis is only the start. Too many people tell of being diagnosed and then receiving no information or support, or only very limited information or support. In a recent Age UK survey, 89% of those surveyed said that they did not feel they had enough information about dementia. We need to improve GPs' understanding of dementia care; many GPs are fantastic, but that is not universal. We need to ensure that after a diagnosis, people and their families receive information on "What now?", as well as support. What steps do the Government propose to take to create minimum mandatory standards to ensure that everyone with a diagnosis receives swift signposting and advice from dementia advisers and a proper support package for them and their carers, possibly through the NHS outcomes framework?

We all know—all the research shows this—that once someone is diagnosed with dementia, if they are to continue to lead a full life, it is best for them to be able to live independently at home with their family, but if they are to do that, we must ensure that carers are cared for and supported, and that support plans are in place—as much for the carers as for any individuals with dementia. A recent pilot in Norfolk on the use of Admiral nurses—they are the dementia equivalent of Macmillan nurses, and although they are sadly rather less well known, they do a fantastic job—saved more than £400,000 and provided a strong local support service for carers and people with dementia. What consideration have the Minister and the Department given to how that might be made more widely available? What support can be given to local authorities in that respect?

[Edward Argar]

We are all aware of the funding pressures faced by local authorities—not least my own, Leicestershire. It gets one of the lowest per-head funding settlements in the country, and I hope that that can be reviewed and revisited in this Parliament, with rural councils being given a fairer share. While I would not presume to burden the Minister with responsibility for dealing with the local government finance settlement as well, what progress has been made nationally on developing integrated dementia care pathways, which can go some way to alleviating financial pressures?

While care and support to stay independent at home are key, there are times when people with dementia have cause to be admitted to hospital, and here the picture is by no means universally good. According to a recent survey, 41% of hospitals do not include dementia awareness training in staff inductions, and only 36% have a care pathway in place. Many people with dementia still have real problems when they are admitted to acute care. More research into the quality of personalised care for those with dementia, particularly in hospitals, would be immensely valuable. It is estimated that a quarter of hospital beds are occupied by people with dementia, although they might not necessarily have been admitted for dementia. On average, such people have a 20% longer hospital stay than others.

While some hospitals have made progress in having dementia-friendly wards, it simply is not enough. We should have hospitals that are dementia-friendly in their entirety. We often hear of instances of people with dementia not having that noted on their hospital records, meaning that no allowance has been made for it. We also hear of carers and partners not being allowed to stay with relatives with dementia in hospital, which often leads to acute anxiety and distress among those patients at being in an unfamiliar environment without any familiar faces around them. I hope that Simon Stevens and the NHS can look at that.

The national dementia strategy and the Prime Minister's challenges on dementia for 2015 and 2020 set out an array of targets and objectives. The key to success, however, will be proper implementation to deliver clear and focused outcomes that are measured, monitored and reported. Will the Minister update the House on the implementation plan to achieve the objectives that we all welcome, and to ensure that dementia care gets its share of the very welcome additional funding that the Government have pledged to the NHS as a whole? Specifically, as we look at how to improve care and support, 37 NHS vanguard sites are piloting new care models, but only three make specific mention of dementia. Will she consider adding to that number? The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence is updating the 2006 clinical guidelines on dementia. That work is due to be completed in September 2017. Will she make representations to NICE on updating the dementia quality standard as part of that? It is an important tool in driving up NHS standards in this area.

The third and final part of tackling dementia is research. We have seen some encouraging early signs over the summer that finding a way of slowing down the progress of dementia might be that little bit closer. There is still a long road ahead for that research, but it is a reminder of the importance of a continued focus.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): As a Dementia-Friendly Hampshire ambassador—I am not quite a champion, but an ambassador—I welcome the debate and remind my hon. Friend of the Government's commitment just before the election to creating a dementia research institute somewhere in the UK within the next five years. Does he agree that it would be helpful if the Minister updated us on the funding envelope for that, and the implementation plan for it over the next four and a half years, given that time is running out for its creation? I have to declare a slight interest, as the idea was fermented at City Hall. I may have had a hand in it, and therefore have a stronger motive to see it come to fruition.

Edward Argar: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I am beginning to think that I must be careful about what I think, because yet again a Member has touched on a paragraph I was about to begin. He is absolutely right. The Government's dementia research funding now stands at £66 million. That is double what it was in 2010, but we need to be clear that we must not stop there. I was pleased that earlier this year the Government reaffirmed their commitment to doubling the dementia research spend by 2025. That is vital, and I know that Members on both sides of the House, in the spirit of constructive support, will help to hold the Government to that. Will the Minister commit to collating information on that spend centrally, and to publishing it annually, so that we can track progress? Coming to my hon. Friend's point, I would be grateful if the Minister updated the House on the plans for a dementia research institute to drive forward research in a truly world-leading way. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the work he did in City Hall, and as a Deputy Mayor, in pushing that agenda forward.

Finally and most importantly—I declare an interest as a member of the Alzheimer's Society—I pay tribute to such organisations as the Alzheimer's Society, Alzheimer's Research UK, Age UK and myriad others for the work they and their members do to ensure that we in this House and society never forget this cause, and that we continue to support the tens of thousands of people with dementia—and the voluntary carers, who are the real heroes and heroines. We have a duty to recognise what they do, and to do everything we can as a country to support them. I look forward to the Minister's comments on what we can do to support carers.

I will close by quoting from a moving and powerful article by Alice Thomson about her father's dementia. It was published in *The Times* this summer. She said:

“Old age shouldn't be seen as a humiliation but more as the other bookend to your childhood; a time when you can rely on the help and patience of others to reach the end but can also still be a central part of family and community life”.

I echo those words and ask the Minister, the Government, all of us and society as a whole to continue to rise to the challenge and to make that a reality for all those who have dementia in this country.

Philip Davies (in the Chair): It may be helpful if I point out that for hour-long debates, we need 20 minutes for the Front Benchers: five minutes each for the two Opposition Front Benchers and 10 minutes for the Minister. If the Minister leaves any time at the end, Mr Argar may get a few seconds to wind up. I will be

going to the Front Benchers no later than 5.10 pm. As I understand it, three Members are seeking to catch my eye to make a speech. I will not impose a time limit, but if they think of taking seven minutes each, that would give everyone a fair crack of the whip.

4.48 pm

Ann Coffey (Stockport) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) on securing this important debate and on his commitment to making life better for dementia sufferers and their relatives. I will not take up much time, and my observations are probably from a more personal point of view.

I completely support the Government's objective to be a world leader in fighting dementia, but it is a challenging objective at a time of cuts in social care and given the difficulties in recruiting people to work in jobs that have traditionally been poorly skilled and badly paid. Social care is fundamentally task-orientated. It best supports people with physical disabilities and frailty, but it is not necessarily the best way to help people who have dementia.

In an area in which I have some personal experience, I know that the quality of the relationship between the carer and the dementia sufferer is vital in enabling the dementia sufferer to feel reassured and cope with anxiety, which is a common consequence of the illness. One of the symptoms of dementia is a complete loss of short-term memory, which results in the inability to do simple tasks. For example, a dementia sufferer may see a cup, a tea bag and a kettle, but not the connection among them. Making the cup of tea is, of course, an important task to ensure that the person does not become dehydrated. However, once the tea is made, the elderly person may be reluctant to drink it and may need continuous prompting. If the carer is new and does not know the person, and can spend only 15 minutes with them, the cup of tea may never get drunk.

A person's relationship with their carer and the amount of time they can spend together is vital. It is sometimes forgotten how important relationships, emotional support and encouragement are to people with dementia, and how vital it is not to add to their confusion with multiple carers. Particularly when a person has no near relatives, the carer has to get to know them to understand when something is wrong with them, because a person with dementia cannot tell the carer themselves that their dentures are too tight.

Dementia sufferers need good quality care, and carers must have good antennae to be able to spot, for example, the signs of a urinary tract infection by changes in the person's behaviour or level of confusion. We therefore need to move from a task-centred social care system in which multiple carers make short visits to a system that involves skilled care in which continuity of care and carers' skills are a high priority. Simply integrating the health and social care system does not necessarily do that, as my experience in Scotland shows.

Of course, we cannot produce a vast army of skilled carers now or in the near future, particularly given population changes, so we need to look at how we can better use existing resources, including relatives, who at the moment seem to spend most of their time negotiating the system. The constant rounds of phone calls to

doctors, nurses, occupational therapists and social workers leave relatives exhausted and with less time to spend with family members on social activities. There needs to be more support for relatives, who are important for ensuring the continual wellbeing of their family members.

We also need to be more imaginative about using technology to help people with dementia to free up the time for relatives and carers to build those important, high-quality relationships. We still tend to think of aids in practical terms, such as hand rails, bath mats or clocks with large faces, but I am interested in how we can use new technology to promote emotional wellbeing. For example, carers could help people to communicate with their relatives via Skype or smartphones, or set up digital photo frames that can be programmed to show photographs, which can help spark memories and support conversations. Relatives can link cameras to their smartphones and computers to check whether the person is all right at home, and they can use technology such as personal alarms and health monitoring devices. For example, bed pressure sensors can help reassure from a distance that the person has got out of bed, and a front door sensor can ensure that they have not left the house.

Hopefully, a cure will be found for this devastating illness, but until then we need to use the resources that are currently available better. In particular, we should develop technology, which, if it can free social carers from monitoring and supervision, would be very helpful in freeing up resources. We also need to use the resources of relatives, neighbours and the community. I hope that in the future we will be able to look at what the whole system can provide.

4.54 pm

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Thank you, Mr Davies, for the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) on securing it. He raised many issues that I was going to speak on, so I will keep my speech short. I must declare that I am the chair of the all-party group on ageing and older people, and I previously worked for Age UK. Dementia is an issue particularly close to my heart, and I am delighted that we have the chance to discuss it today.

On 12 September, All Saints church in Crowborough in my constituency is hosting a day conference entitled "Living with Dementia". Hilary Mackelden, a constituent of mine, once feared that she had dementia, and wrote about the condition in my local paper, the *Kent and Sussex Courier*:

"There can be no more terrifying illness. How do you cope in a world you don't recognise, with people who say they love you but who you think are strangers?...How should that world respond to and support you?"

In our ageing society, ever greater pressure is being put on healthcare services and charities, so our response to dementia is a vital humanitarian and social care issue. In my region of east Sussex, one in four of the population is aged 65 and over. It is predicted that one in three people aged 65 and over will develop dementia, which means that as many as one resident in every 12 could suffer from the condition. What is more, it is estimated that there will be an 11.3% increase in the number of people aged 85 and over in east Sussex by 2019. That means not only that more people will develop the condition as they grow older, but that those

[Nusrat Ghani]

who develop it at an early age will require care and support for a longer period as their life expectancy increases, which will inevitably put huge pressure on care providers.

In Wealden, under the leadership of Councillor Bill Bentley, we are already tackling our responsibility for managing the multiple healthcare and social care needs of our elderly. There are concerns that budget restraints will affect the delivery of community-led programmes for dementia sufferers and respite for their carers.

Dementia-friendly communities do much to promote the rights, welfare, independence and livelihoods of people with dementia, and they help to eliminate the stigma that surrounds it. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister championed them as part of the Prime Minister's challenge on dementia. I am proud to represent Rotherfield, a dementia-friendly village. We do not yet have a dementia-friendly town, but I will go home with that ambition. The church of Rotherfield St Martin is a charity that works to ensure that elderly people are supported to live their lives the way they want to. It is run by Jo and Sasha Evans, who should be commended for their work. I was delighted that Rotherfield St Martin was nominated for a "Small Charity, Big Achiever" award at the Third Sector Awards last month. I wish them every success when the winner is announced in a couple of weeks.

We should not underestimate the work of local councils, which support people with dementia by helping to create dementia-friendly communities. The upcoming spending review is an important part of the Government's entirely necessary effort to eliminate the deficit, but I hope it will not compromise local councils' ability to support dementia-friendly communities. What action is the Minister's Department taking to ensure that future funding settlements take account of our ageing population? What pressure does she anticipate that local authorities—particularly those in the south-east—will face in the coming years? Projections tell us that we are likely to have to reduce significantly support for people with dementia and their carers. I urge the Minister to ensure that does not happen.

By 2021, there will be more than 1 million people living with dementia in the UK. One in three people over 65 will die with dementia, and dementia costs the UK £23 billion a year, not to mention the incalculable costs to individuals and families, who give so much time, energy and love to offer care. NHS England has been set a target of diagnosing 66%, and my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood mentioned reaching a target of 75%. Has that target been met, and will we continue to be ambitious by setting even higher targets?

At the heart of the issue is the fact that dementia takes so much away from people: their ability to recognise loved ones, remember special occasions and communicate as they once could. It would be cruelly ironic were we to allow some of the support that dementia sufferers and their carers depend on to be taken away. We owe it to dementia sufferers and their carers to fight for the support they count on and the funding it requires. I hope this debate will throw that obligation into sharp relief.

4.59 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I declare an interest as a proud supporter of the Dementia Friends movement, which has done so much in my constituency. I praise in particular Mrs Christine Parker, whose work in bringing the Dementia Friends message to so many in Tonbridge has echoed across other areas. I draw inspiration from her for my remarks, which I hope I can make on her behalf as well.

The rising demand on the NHS in my community is not unlike that in others. One in three people in my constituency are over 65, so the pressure on dementia services is naturally high. Indeed, 1,600 people in my community have dementia, and in the west Kent NHS region, 322 are under 65 and therefore count as young dementia sufferers. As my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) so eloquently put it, when we think about dementia and old people, we usually think about people for whom it is an end-of-life event, but for too many in our society it is not—it is part of life. It is something with which individuals, families and communities—indeed, our whole society—will have to live as they experience this terrible disease.

It is important that we work together, because this is not something that central Government can solve alone; nor, indeed, can the devolved Administrations or local government. It requires a fully joined up approach. The work by a lot of third-sector organisations to bring together the community at all levels has been essential. I particularly praise the organisations working in my part of Kent: Age UK, Crossroads, the Alzheimer's Society and many care homes.

Jim Shannon: In his speech, the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) mentioned the need for more research and development. There have been massive steps forward in the development of medication that can delay the onset of Alzheimer's and dementia in some cases. Although that is a wonderful step forward, the cure is not yet here. Does the hon. Gentleman feel that, along with all the good work that the Government are doing, there should be more partnerships with the pharmaceutical industry to ensure that we can take more giant steps forward?

Tom Tugendhat: I can confirm that the hon. Gentleman is not reading my mind—I had not thought of those points. He makes a very important point about tying together with the pharmaceutical industry. I would also urge tying together with universities throughout the country, because many of them across the nation have done incredible work on this issue. I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to look hard at what more can be done to partner up.

Many of the issues have already been covered today so eloquently by Members, so I will just highlight one area that I feel is somewhat tragically overlooked. As we increasingly see younger people suffering from this terrible disease, we must recognise that their needs are different. We are talking about not only old people who may also suffer from other weaknesses and might not be going out as much as they once were, but younger people who rightly expect to enjoy some form of independence in their life. Indeed, through medical treatment, older

people are, thank God, much stronger and fitter than they once were and rightly continue to enjoy active lives for longer and longer.

As a society, we should do more to encourage dementia-friendly transport. In my constituency, we have been working towards dementia-friendly communities, whether towns or villages, and we have had some success in different areas. In fact, some places have developed a dementia-friendly high street and various other spaces. Nevertheless, I feel we have not yet got dementia-friendly transport right. Whether we are talking about taxis, buses or trains, the ability to be able to put someone with dementia on a form of transport and know that the people on board will be aware that there might be an issue, allowing people with dementia to maintain some level of independence, is essential if we are ever to achieve the result we wish for: people with dementia living happily and comfortably as part of our society.

Finally, when I learned about dementia, what struck me most was the importance of emotion, which we too often forget when we medicalise and use too much science. When we deal with people in our communities who have dementia, it is important to remember that even if they struggle to understand who we are, the community they are in or the actions they are taking, the one thing that will stay with them, which we must really value, is the emotional response. We must remember that that will live with them for a lot longer than any confusion, and we must make sure that we play our part as individuals—not just as a society—in ensuring that that emotion is positive.

5.5 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I commend the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) for securing this debate on what is probably one of the biggest challenges we will face over the coming decades. There is no easy answer, north or south of the border or on either side of the House. I think we all fear it. Previous generations have feared other illnesses and avoided them. They talked about consumption instead of TB, or about “the big C” instead of cancer. Most of our generation are less afraid of cancer than of Alzheimer’s. We are afraid of disappearing, or of being married to someone who simply is not who they used to be. That is a fear we all live with.

The Scottish National party welcomed the then Government’s introduction of a national dementia strategy in 2009. The Scottish strategy came in 2010. We set out clinical standards the following year and updated our strategy in 2013. We reached the 64% diagnosis target in 2013, when England was diagnosing 48% of those with dementia. I commend the fact that that has now risen to 59%, although there is obviously more work to do. Northern Ireland was diagnosing 63% of sufferers. What happens to someone when they are diagnosed? Think of the fear that we all have, and then imagine the bombshell that diagnosis is.

There is no easy answer, but we have done a few things in Scotland that we feel have worked. All our health boards now have a linked member of staff, like the cancer nurse specialists we have for breast cancer, which was my specialty. Since 2012, we have had the older persons’ acute care plan, which looks at secondary care and modern hospitals. I welcome the talk about

dementia-friendly towns and villages—I will go home and throw down that challenge to my area, because that is not something I have come across.

In the past 18 months, our hospital has been completely redesigned, with colour zones and images of what everything is, instead of just words. Toilets, beds, kitchens—how to find one’s way around is all visual. We also have champions in every single ward. All that has really changed things. We have reduced length of stay from 22 days to eight days; we have reduced falls by half, and we have reduced returns to A&E from 26% to 8%. These relatively cheap, simple changes actually save a lot of money.

We obviously need more research and development, because at the end of the day families want a treatment to make early diagnosis worth while. Otherwise, what is the point? We have to be able to intervene. We can slow things down, but we want a drug that will stop dementia and reverse it. At some point further down the line, we will face the challenge of drug companies coming to us with an expensive drug that will do that. It will be important for the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and other agencies to weigh up the sheer scale of dementia that we face and the money that could be saved by using even quite an expensive drug.

Kit Malthouse: One of the interesting developments over the past couple of years, which was looked at by Dennis Gillings, the international dementia envoy appointed by the G8, has been the question of whether the financial equation around the development of a drug could be changed by negotiating an international exception for its patent life, extending it by, for instance, five or 10 years. That might propel investment into research to find a cure and also make it cheaper when it does emerge, because the time for commercially exploiting it would be extended. Would the hon. Lady support such a proposal?

Dr Whitford: I absolutely would. In my previous life as a breast cancer surgeon, when I was also doing breast cancer immunology research, I watched what became Herceptin go from its development on the bench-top into common use. That took 21 years. This is something we often do not recognise when we moan about big pharmaceutical companies: they are investing in something that may turn out to be a mirage. The more that we can look at supported or shared R and D, the cheaper the drug will be when it finally comes to market. I would commend something like that.

The current problem is that most patients face living with dementia, and we must think about how we help them and their families to do that. We should be challenging ourselves to make dementia-friendly our surroundings and all the agencies that sufferers may interact with, whether through visual aids, through other people recognising them or, as the hon. Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey) said, through technology. The eHealth programme in Scotland is working on that, including devices in patients’ homes that it can interact with and establish whether the person is okay. Much of the care that people receive is the 15 minutes that the hon. Lady mentioned. How can we improve that? How can we ensure that the faces are not different every day? Some patients and families report 100 carers in a year. We should look at how we organise the care and remember who the real carers are: the family.

[Dr Philippa Whitford]

It is predicted that one in three of us will be carers for someone with dementia. We have a vested interest in ensuring that we look after them. The carer's allowance is currently £60 a week, which does not even match jobseeker's allowance, for a job that could be 164 hours a week, so we need to think of how we support carers and the work that they do. In Scotland, things are slightly different as we have free personal care, so the family does not pay for the carer who comes into the home. If that person has to go into a care home or nursing home, they do not pay for the personal care. The system has been expanded and deepened and actually allows us to keep more people at home for longer.

One problem is that care jobs attract lower earners. How can we motivate people and attract high-quality candidates if they are being paid the lowest possible amount?

Ann Coffey: On free personal care, the budget in Scotland is capped. Free personal care is probably welcome, but the problem is that sufferers do not necessarily get the required level of care because demand is managed by stopping the supply. That is the problem with a capped budget. Free personal care is not really a panacea for families seeking the care that their relatives need.

Philip Davies (in the Chair): Order. Before I call Dr Whitford, may I ask that she bring her remarks to a close?

Dr Whitford: Okay. Free personal care is obviously not a panacea, but some families have someone coming in four times a day to offer support and people of different levels are coming in. The request for such care is made through the general practitioner, so a health assessment is made. As I said when I first stood up, Scotland does not have a magic answer, but we are coming at the issue from a different angle. Some of what is being done in Scotland can be shared and clearly the same goes for some of the things being done elsewhere.

Remembering who these people are and helping them to remember is important. The volunteer projects involving music and football to help people find themselves are really important. We must remember that they are still in there. They are still a person, and they require our sympathy and to be able to keep their dignity.

5.13 pm

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Davies. I congratulate the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) on securing this debate, on his excellent speech and on how he approached the debate, engaging and seeking consensus. I look forward to working with him over this Parliament as co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on dementia.

I speak today not only the behalf of the Opposition, but as someone with personal experience of caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease. My mum was 64 when she was diagnosed and I provided her care. I have spoken about it in the past, but it has certainly informed my view and led me to want to champion the Alzheimer's Society and working together on this issue.

I will keep my comments brief because much has already been said about the challenge that our society faces. As has been said, 850,000 people are currently living with dementia in the UK, and the number is set to reach 1 million by the end of this Parliament. It is a distressing disease because of the impact not only on the person living with the condition, but on the carers, as it affects relationships with loved ones. I was lucky that my mum was in good health for much of the time, but the first time she could not recognise me really did have an impact.

As has been mentioned, the previous Labour Government made much progress on dementia. They launched the first ever national dementia strategy, which began the process of establishing memory clinics, providing better training for staff and improving the quality of dementia care for people in hospitals. They appointed the first national clinical director for dementia and commissioned a quality standard for dementia from the then National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. The current Government have built on that work, and I am delighted to support the Prime Minister's challenge. There has also been welcome progress on the number of people with dementia receiving a diagnosis. However, I want to mention three areas where we need to push for more progress.

First is awareness. People are often frightened of dementia because they think nothing can be done, but it is important to remember that, although there is currently no cure, people living with dementia can live well with the right level of support. Like so many who spoke in today's debate, I have been a big supporter of the Dementia Friends programme. Politicians have a responsibility to lead by example in this area, and I was pleased to see that the Minister recently underwent her training.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): A year ago!

Debbie Abrahams: Fantastic. As the first MP to become a Dementia Friends champion, I ran a Dementia Friends session in Parliament to launch the "dementia-friendly parliament" last year.

We have also heard about the importance of involving young people. A lot of work has been done in my constituency, where, for example, the youth council has received training to be Dementia Friends. Making Oldham a dementia-friendly community is a priority of mine and, after starting with just a few hundred, we now have 2,000 Dementia Friends. I am proud that Oldham is one of more than 100 communities across the country that is working towards becoming dementia friendly, but we need to go further. Our ambition should be to ensure that everyone living with dementia feels included in their community and feels that they have control over their lives.

Secondly, we need improvements in the quality of care and support for people with dementia and their carers, which, as we heard today, is just not good enough in some parts of the country. Too often, people with dementia receive no care and their families get no support. Over the last Parliament, cuts of £3.5 billion were made to adult social care services, which have had a real impact on people with dementia and their families. Some 87% of social services departments can provide care only for people with critical or substantial need.

For example, I called on a woman in her late 70s in the middle of the afternoon during one of my regular door knocks. She opened the door, looking dishevelled and confused, and had an empty bubble pack of medication in her hands. Her first words to me were, “I don’t know what I have to do.” I was able to call the pharmacy and to get support for her, but what if I had not been there? She obviously needed support and was not getting it.

Councils are doing their best to save money through changing the way that care is provided and working more closely with the NHS, but the scale of the cuts is forcing many to cut the support that would have helped to keep people out of hospital. As a consequence, more and more people with dementia are ending up in hospital, with some estimates suggesting that one in four hospital beds are occupied by someone with dementia. The NHS has also seen delayed discharges from hospital hit a record high in recent months, costing some £526 million since 2010. Once people are in hospital the support is simply not in place in the community to enable them to return home.

In 2009 the then Health Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), called for national care services to be developed and to be provided on the same basis as for health. He has repeated that call. We will not be able to improve the quality of dementia services until we find a solution to the funding crisis facing social care.

At a meeting with the Saddleworth carers group in my constituency, I listened to predominantly elderly carers describing the hundreds of hours of often back-breaking work that they were providing for their loved ones. They did that because no support or respite was available. How are they meant to cope? Given that the Government have delayed the implementation of the care cap until 2020, or possibly later, and have gone back on their promise to raise the £118,000 assets threshold before someone has to pay for their own care, will the Minister tell us what assessment has been done to estimate the number of families with a family member with dementia who will be affected by that between now and 2020? In addition, is the Minister committed to the Alzheimer’s Society proposal to drive up the quality of residential care for people with dementia? If so, how is that being monitored, for example in the use of anti-psychotics?

My final point is about research. Research for a cure for dementia provides hope for people in the future. In addition, however, we must focus research into the cause and prevention of the different forms of dementia, and into how we can best care for people who are living with dementia today. The Government’s commitment to double dementia research by 2025 is welcome, but we are starting from a low baseline. Other countries have shown much greater ambition.

Last month Alzheimer’s Disease International called for a significant upscale in research support, given the 35% increase in the global cost of dementia since 2010. It estimated that by 2018 the cost will have increased to \$1 trillion, equivalent in size to the 18th largest economy in the world. Will the Minister report on the progress made, as has been asked by other Members?

Philip Davies (in the Chair): Order. I have to ask the shadow Minister to bring her remarks to a close.

Debbie Abrahams: We need to give hope to people who are experiencing dementia and to their families.

5.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): We have had some excellent contributions this afternoon. I will be unable to answer the questions of the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams), because unfortunately she took several minutes of my time, but I will do my best to respond to the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), who brilliantly introduced the debate. He follows a distinguished predecessor in the health field and Charnwood has clearly found another health champion. It was a terrific speech and there were excellent contributions from other Members.

Dementia continues to be an absolute priority of the Government. Several hon. Members have spoken about the devastating impact of the disease, which has touched many families in our country, mine included, and I suspect those of many others in the Chamber and of those listening outside. I will not outline the scale of the challenge, because others have done so eloquently, but it is huge and it is local, national and global. This is the first debate since the launch of the Prime Minister’s challenge on dementia 2020, which builds on the success of the challenge that ran between 2012 and 2015, as others have said. We are well aware that it is only a building block and that we need to carry on and to go further. I welcome the chance to refresh our commitment to going the extra mile, for which Members have called.

We have good news on diagnosis and have made significant progress. More people than ever before are receiving a diagnosis. Without it, they would not receive the support that they need. More than 400,000 people now have the opportunity to gain access to the care and support that they require. Almost 45,000 more people have received a diagnosis of dementia than would have done had earlier trends simply continued, so that is 45,000 more people getting access to support for living well with dementia. The diagnosis rate was increased by 20 percentage points from the baseline in 2010-11 and is now around 60%. We expect to meet our target this year. I will reflect on the challenge to me to achieve ever higher diagnosis rates.

On research, we are committed to tackling dementia through our research efforts at home and abroad. I was delighted to see how many people are volunteering to participate in dementia research. We have had really good news on that recently. Through Members and to those beyond the Chamber, I thank all those people for taking part in such vital programmes.

We are already doubling research spending on dementia. That money supports world-leading major research programmes and significant investment in infrastructure. Globally, the UK is leading the way and working with partners around the world to tackle dementia, boosting investment and accelerating research through the \$100 million dementia discovery fund. We obviously have a spending review coming up, but we look forward to continuing that leadership and looking at how it can be provided—potentially through an international institute on dementia research, about which we will be talking to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

[Jane Ellison]

after the spending review. I hear the call, however, and welcome the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse).

Many Members spoke about the need to raise awareness. The job has begun, but it is by no means complete—it is an ongoing challenge to build awareness of dementia throughout our society through individuals and communities. In the Chamber this afternoon we have heard some fantastic examples of people with local groups and communities who are becoming more dementia-friendly. The first Prime Minister's challenge set a target of 20 communities; I am delighted to say that we are exceeding this with 115 communities. My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani) spoke about one of hers. As she highlighted, there is a great range, from cities to villages and from urban to rural. I congratulate all those who are involved in that public-spirited initiative, but we need to go further. I ask any Member who wants information about how to do that and champion it in their area to please contact me, and we will put them in touch with the Alzheimer's Society, if they are not already. We have always had good support on that.

It was great to hear tribute paid to the emergence of dementia-friendly cafés and initiatives such as Singing for the Brain, both of which I have seen in my local area. It is great to be able to praise the people leading those initiatives. My hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) might be interested to know that one of the groups set up as part of the dementia-friendly communities strand of the Prime Minister's dementia challenge is looking specifically at transport. He made a good point on that. It was also good to hear about the work of the local dementia café in Syston, run by the Alzheimer's Society. I, too, echo the tributes made to the volunteers, who do such work in all our constituencies. We also provided support to the July 2015 launch of a new standard developed by the British Standards Institute, which encourages more communities to recognise what they can do to be dementia-friendly.

The first Prime Minister's challenge included a programme to create 1 million dementia friends by March 2015. I am delighted to say that we achieved that target in February, but we want to build on that, and Members of Parliament have a great role to play in leading such work, as has been said. We are pleased that the Alzheimer's Society has committed to reaching a total of 4 million dementia friends in coming years.

We have invested £50 million to support capital projects in health and care settings, designed to improve the environment of care for people with dementia; nearly

£4 million of that was invested in the east midlands during the previous Parliament. Some great work led by Loughborough University on how we can give guidance on dementia-friendly environments is helping us to assess care environments. Some of that work has been led by patients, and there has been an encouraging start, with nearly three quarters of healthcare sites becoming dementia-friendly, including acute wards and hospices. Again, though, we want to build on that and see all such settings becoming dementia-friendly.

More than 500,000 of our dedicated NHS staff have received dementia awareness training so that patients with dementia can be better cared for. Much has been said about the vital role of social care and the people who work in it, and we recognise that key role—the hon. Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey) brought that point eloquently to life. More than 100,000 social care staff have been trained in better supporting people with dementia. Since April 2015, newly appointed healthcare assistants and social care support workers, including those supporting people with dementia and their carers, have undergone dementia training as part of their care certificate. That is encouraging, but, again, we want to build on it.

Post-diagnosis support is an area to which I give enormous consideration. It is going to be one of the big, important challenges in rising to the Prime Minister's challenge in the next few years. My hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood is right to push us, because these are the practical ways in which we can make a real difference to people's lives. We are committed to working on that and making sure that we provide advice and information. He mentioned Admiral nurses—again, a great example of what can be done.

There is a great deal to say about investment in future integration. On the vanguards, more are addressing the issue than perhaps my hon. Friend thought, given his concerns; perhaps we can discuss that after the debate. I liked his idea of pushing more Departments on the Dementia Friends programme and I am happy to take that up with the Cabinet Secretary to see whether we can do more there. The revised NICE standard is expected during 2017.

The Government's commitment to the challenge is undimmed. I welcome the fact that so many new Members have been at this debate to speak about the issue. Seeing their passion to make further progress is inspiring in itself, and we will make that progress.

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Wednesday 9 September 2015

DEFENCE

Defence Technical Training Change Programme

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): The Defence College of Technical Training (DCTT) delivers training and education to engineers and technicians from all three services, at schools located at Ministry of Defence (MOD) Lyneham, Blandford Garrison, RAF Cosford, HMS Sultan at Gosport and MOD St Athan. The Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) schools are due to move shortly from Bordon and Arborfield to MOD Lyneham, under tranche 1 of the defence technical training change programme (DTTCP).

The DTTCP was established to take forward one of the key outcomes from the defence training review, the need to transform the way technical training is delivered to the armed forces. It is also seeking ways to rationalise the training estate in line with defence objectives; reduce the military manpower involved in the delivery of training; reduce the time taken for personnel to be trained, and maintain training to the standards required by all three services.

Due to the enormity of the task we planned to implement training transformation in a phased manner, split into a series of tranches, the first being the relocation of the REME schools from Bordon and Arborfield to MOD Lyneham. For the subsequent tranches of the programme, the original intent was to consolidate additional elements of the DCTT at MOD Lyneham. However, a recently completed re-evaluation of the programme has determined that the consolidation onto a single site at MOD Lyneham is not the best solution.

The revised DTTCP will result in the Defence School of Marine Engineering and the Royal Naval Air Engineering and Survival Equipment School remaining at HMS Sultan. It will also see No. 1 School of Technical Training, the Aeronautical Engineering and Management Training School and the No. 1 Radio School remaining at RAF Cosford and subject to further work, these schools will be joined at RAF Cosford by No. 4 School of Technical Training from MOD St Athan.

The future location of the Royal School of Signals, currently based at Blandford Garrison, is being assessed as part of the footprint strategy work to establish a more effective use of the defence estate in support of military capability. This will report during 2016.

The school commandants at each site have informed their service personnel, civil servants and contractors of these plans. The trade unions have been briefed.

The resetting of the DTTCP will not affect the rebasing of the REME schools to MOD Lyneham.

[HCWS182]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Reform

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The historic office of constable is at the very heart of the policing of England and Wales.

Police officers across the country carry out a wide range of duties, keeping the public safe and ensuring justice for the most vulnerable members of society. We value the essential role they play, but they cannot do this on their own. Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and other designated police staff have played a key role in policing our communities in recent years and we believe that they should play a greater role in the future.

Volunteers also play a vital role in community safety. Since 1831, special constables have taken many of the same risks as full-time police officers, for no reward other than the satisfaction of playing their part in keeping their communities safe from crime. In recent years, police support volunteers have also played an important part of policing in such roles as manning police enquiry desks or giving crime prevention advice. But there is an anomaly. Volunteers can either have all of the powers of the constable, as a special; or have none of the powers, as a police support volunteer. They cannot take on roles such as community support officers. Enabling volunteers to be designated with powers in the same way as staff would enable them to work more closely with their policing colleagues to support forces in keeping their communities safe.

There is more that both police staff and volunteers can do, bringing new skills and expertise to police forces, freeing up police officers to concentrate on the core policing task that most requires their particular powers and experience. This Government want to encourage those with skills in particular demand, such as those with specialist IT or accountancy skills, to get involved and help the police to investigate cyber or financial crime and, as their experience grows, to enable them to play a greater part in investigations. We want to help the police to make further progress on the use of cyber-specials.

I am today publishing a consultation paper setting out a set of reforms to address these challenges. We will, for the first time, underline the office of constable at the centre of policing in England and Wales by setting out in a single piece of legislation the core list of powers that will only be available to police officers. Beyond these core powers, we will also give police forces a more flexible workforce, enabling police officers to focus on the most important roles; roles that only they can carry out. We will therefore, subject to key safeguards, enable chief officers to designate other police powers to staff. And we will allow volunteers to take on the same range of powers as designated staff.

These reforms will help this Government to finish the job of police reform, taking further the process started in the Police Reform Act 2002, which first introduced the PCSO role and the concept that police staff, as well as police officers, could have enforcement powers. The proposals included in this consultation are summarised below; further details are set out in the consultation document:

enabling chief officers to designate a wider range of powers on police staff and volunteers;

creating a list of "core" police powers that would remain exclusive to police officers;

taking an order-making power to enable Parliament to add to the list of those "core" powers;

enabling volunteers to be designated with powers in the same way as staff; and

abolishing the office of traffic warden under the Road Traffic Acts.

The consultation document is available online at: <http://tinyurl.com/hocons>; the closing date for responses is 31 October 2015.

[HCWS181]

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