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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 4 November 2015

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Onshore Wind Power: Planning

1. **Glyn Davies** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): If he will encourage the Scottish Government to devolve responsibility for onshore wind planning to Scottish local authorities. [901897]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): Before I answer the question, may I begin by commending you, Mr Speaker, not just for your attendance at the Davis cup semi-final in Glasgow, but for the enthusiasm with which you got behind Team GB for that momentous win? I am sure you will join me not only in wishing our Team GB the best in the final in Ghent, but in confirming that Glasgow, as it has once again demonstrated with the world gymnastics championships, is a great sporting city.

The UK Government have given local communities the final say on new onshore wind developments in England. Planning for onshore wind is a matter fully devolved to the Scottish Parliament and sadly the Scottish Government have kept that power to themselves. I would urge them to look closely at this Government's policy of an affordable energy mix that also protects our natural landscapes.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Secretary of State. I shall be there in person, all being well, to support the team.

Glyn Davies: True devolution means that power should rest as closely as possible to the people in Scotland, in Wales and in Northern Ireland. [*Interruption.*] Does the Secretary of State deplore the centralising policies of the current Scottish and Welsh Governments, who seem to think they know better than the people and the communities of Scotland and Wales?

David Mundell: I agree with my hon. Friend. The current Scottish Government are one of the most centralising Governments on record, routinely overruling the wishes of local people and local authorities. The UK Government are delivering devolution to Scotland. As Lord Smith recommended, let us see devolution delivered within Scotland.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): The Secretary of State will be aware of the case of the Binn eco park in my constituency. It has the support of the local community, and the developers worked diligently to secure planning permission from Perth and Kinross Council. Despite that support, the development is threatened by the regressive approach to support for renewable energy that the UK Government have taken, putting local jobs at risk. Will he look again at the case? The development has been penalised because of a responsible approach to community engagement on planning issues.

David Mundell: I am always happy to look at individual cases raised by Members from Scotland. I would be delighted to meet the hon. Lady and hear more about the case she sets out.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the Scottish Parliament could learn a lot from the devolution debate in England? [*Laughter.*] Will he encourage the Scottish Parliament to devolve more responsibilities and powers to local government, which could even include elected mayors for the great cities of Scotland?

David Mundell: I agree with my hon. Friend. The response of Scottish National party MPs says it all—they think they know best and know better than local people. Let us see local decision making. Let us see Lord Smith's individual recommendation on devolution within Scotland honoured by the Scottish Government.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): In addition to this question, question after question on the Order Paper from the Nats queries the powers of the Scottish Parliament, yet the truth is this: they have missed the A&E waiting time in Scotland for six years; more than 6,000 children leave primary school unable to read properly; children from poor families get a particularly bad deal under devolution; and Scotland faces a housing crisis. When I visited Edinburgh a week or so ago, I was stunned at the level of rough sleeping in that city—it is much higher than in comparable cities. Should the Nats not be sorting out the things for which they are responsible instead of demanding all those other powers? They are not just the most centralising but the most useless—

Mr Speaker: Order. I have been generous. We must now hear from the Secretary of State.

David Mundell: The Scotland Bill will make the Scottish Parliament the most powerful devolved Parliament in the world. What we require now is to hear from the SNP and the Scottish Government how they will use these Parliaments. They prefer arguments about process. They do not want to tell us what they will do and they do not follow that through with action.

Mr Speaker: I call Angus Brendan MacNeil

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Me?

Mr Speaker: Yes, it is you, Sir.

Mr MacNeil: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It was difficult to hear over the noise from Labour over there.

As we know of course, the only damage to onshore wind comes from the right hon. Gentleman's Government, and for me the only centralising problem in Scotland is that it is not centralised enough—if only the Scottish Government could take control of inter-island flights. Planning is working well in Scotland. In fact, perhaps the Secretary of State could commend several things in Scotland to Wales, such as the political system, under which 99% of Scottish voters rejected the Tories and 95% of Members sent back here were SNP Members. He could learn a lot from that.

David Mundell: The hon. Gentleman could learn a lot from the leader of the Western Isles Council, who is keen to have confirmation that the Scottish Government will devolve responsibility for the Crown Estate to the Western Isles—a measure that he, as MP for the Western Isles, does not appear to support. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) is the Chair of the Energy and Climate Change Committee, and I urge him to behave in the statesman-like manner expected of such a high office holder. We might learn about onshore wind from Michelle Thomson.

Michelle Thomson (Edinburgh West) (Ind): The provision of an extra runway for either Gatwick or Heathrow is likely to require related infrastructure improvements, to be met from the public purse. Given that the money spent will include a population share of the financial consideration from Scottish taxpayers, will it be taxation without representation or can the Secretary of State guarantee that Scottish MPs will have a vote on an extra runway?

Mr Speaker: Order. I am genuinely trying to be helpful to Members. May I please urge them to look at the terms of the question on the Order Paper? This one is specifically about onshore wind planning. I think we must now move on.

HMRC Offices

2. **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with Her Majesty's Treasury on the future of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs tax offices in Scotland. [901898]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): As part of its ongoing and long-term transformation, HMRC will shortly be making face-to-face announcements in all 170 offices to all staff explaining where its future offices will be.

Stuart C. McDonald: Good-quality jobs at our local HMRC office—the largest employer in Cumbernauld—are in serious danger because of this Government's drastic cuts, debt management privatisation and proposed office mergers. What will the Minister and the Secretary of State do to protect the jobs of hard-working HMRC employees and the local economies of towns such as Cumbernauld?

Mr Gauke: As I said, HMRC will be making an announcement in the next few days about its long-term plan, but it is right that it seeks to find savings on its property costs so that the money can be used to improve customer service and get the taxes in.

Smith Commission

3. **Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): What assessment he has made of progress in meeting the recommendations of the Smith commission; and if he will make a statement. [901899]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): The Scotland Bill delivers the Smith commission agreement in full. I have tabled amendments that strengthen the Bill and look forward to it returning to the House for debate next week. It represents another milestone in making the Scottish Parliament one of the most powerful devolved Parliaments in the world.

Angela Crawley: The Smith commission identified that Scotland's budget should be no larger or smaller simply as a result of the initial transfer of new powers and recommended that the Scottish and UK Governments work together to agree a fiscal and funding framework for Scotland. Will the Secretary of State reassure my constituents that that framework will be in place to accompany the devolution of further powers so that Scotland's funding is not adversely affected?

David Mundell: Yes.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, rather than relying on subsidies from London, the Scottish Government should use their tax-raising powers to pay for the services provided to the people of Scotland?

David Mundell: I do not recognise my hon. Friend's description of the Barnett formula, which of course will remain in place. The Scottish Parliament will now have significant powers over tax and welfare, and it is about time the SNP told us what it will do with them.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): It is interesting that the Secretary of State did not take the opportunity to condemn the views of his Conservative colleagues who believe that Scotland is subsidised.

Only 9% of people in Scotland believe that the vow has been delivered, so unsurprisingly the Government are belatedly having to accept amendments. The financial framework underpinning the Bill is crucial. The Secretary of State could only give a one-word answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley), so will he elaborate and tell us exactly when the UK Government will update this Parliament on the progress made on the fiscal framework?

David Mundell: I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman did not read my written statement on Monday, which updated the House on the progress of the fiscal framework. What I recognise in the right hon. Gentleman's comments are these words from the editorial of the *Daily Record*: "Moan, moan...whinge, whinge. Their response has been as negative as it was predictable. A cynic might argue that the SNP don't actually want those new powers because it makes them...accountable to the people of Scotland."

Angus Robertson: The Secretary of State has now had a second opportunity to condemn the views of his Back Benchers that Scotland is subsidised. I challenge him to come to the Dispatch Box and disassociate himself from the views of his colleagues. His Government are bringing in detrimental measures that will impact on families and individuals—not just in Scotland, but across the length and breadth of the UK. Will he give us some detail on what is going on between the Treasury and the Scottish Government, and give an assurance that there will be no detrimental implications for people in Scotland as part of the fiscal framework?

David Mundell: Not only does the right hon. Gentleman not read written statements; he did not even listen to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman)—perhaps he will read *Hansard*. The reality is that the powers being delivered to the Scottish Parliament will make it the most powerful devolved Parliament in the world. Rather than SNP Members telling us what they will do with those powers, it is grievance and grudge. The Scottish Parliament acknowledges that tax credits can be topped up, so will the SNP top them up—yes or no?

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I take the opportunity this Armistice weekend to pay tribute to our armed forces for their sacrifices to this country.

Scottish and UK Ministers have said repeatedly that the fiscal framework negotiations will be concluded this autumn. Can the Secretary of State explain to the House and the country why they have been delayed until January at the earliest?

David Mundell: As I set out in my written statement, the UK Government are proceedings towards the comprehensive spending review, which I am sure the hon. Gentleman accepts is a major task, and shortly thereafter the Scottish Government will proceed with the Scottish draft Budget. When I met the Deputy First Minister John Swinney last week, he gave me confidence in his wanting to reach a fiscal framework agreement. That is certainly the position of the UK Government, which is why I was able to answer the question from the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) as I did.

Ian Murray: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, but Scotland's First Minister has warned that the SNP Government may reject the Scotland Bill

“if the accompanying fiscal framework”

is not

“fair to Scotland”.

It is clear that they are looking for any excuse for the fiscal framework to delay further powers for Scotland. Will the Secretary of State assure us that the fiscal framework will be agreed before the Scottish Parliament is dissolved in March, and can he explain why both he and the SNP are conspiring to make this agreement the tartan TTIP—the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership—delivered behind closed doors with no public transparency? That raises the question of what they are trying to hide.

David Mundell: As the hon. Gentleman well knows, a statement has been published after each meeting of the Joint Exchequer Committee. I take John Swinney and

the Scottish Government at face value—that they want to reach a fair agreement for Scotland. The United Kingdom Government want to reach a fair agreement for Scotland. That is in all our interests and I am confident that that will be achieved.

Scotland Bill

4. **Owen Thompson** (Midlothian) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with Ministers of the Scottish Government on changes to the Scotland Bill. [901900]

11. **Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with Ministers of the Scottish Government on changes to the Scotland Bill. [901907]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): I have regular discussions with the Deputy First Minister, John Swinney, and our officials are in close contact on provisions in the Scotland Bill. I have now tabled changes to strengthen the Bill in delivering the Smith commission agreement in full.

Owen Thompson: Having twice failed to acknowledge the question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), will the Secretary of State disassociate himself from the financially illiterate comments of his hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) who suggested that Scotland is subsidised? The fiscal framework will allow the Scottish Government the flexibility to pursue separate fiscal policies to those damaging policies progressed by the UK Government, thereby ensuring the highest levels of transparency. Will the Secretary of State provide the House with a timetable for the publication of a draft fiscal framework?

David Mundell: Monday's written statement set out that the fiscal framework agreement is likely to come after the comprehensive spending review and once the draft Scottish Budget has been completed.

Neil Gray: This is the fourth opportunity for the Secretary of State to disassociate himself from the comments about people in Scotland being subsidy junkies—will he do so? Will he also confirm that negotiations on the fiscal framework are taking place between the Treasury and the Scottish Government, and that he is relying on a Scottish Lord to advise those negotiations?

David Mundell: It is clear that Scottish National party Members do not listen to answers, and if they read *Hansard* they will see the response that I gave to my hon. Friend. The fiscal framework is an agreement. Who is negotiating on behalf of the Scottish Government? It is John Swinney, the Deputy First Minister. The comments of SNP Members suggest that they do not have much confidence in his ability to reach a fair deal for Scotland.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): At the weekend the leader of the Scottish Labour party announced that a future Scottish Labour Government would use powers in the Scotland Bill to compensate people for the money that they will lose because of Tory cuts to tax credits. I am sure that the Secretary of State would not like that

to happen, but will he confirm that new powers in the Scotland Bill will give the Scottish Parliament the ability to top up tax credits?

David Mundell: I do not agree with Kezia Dugdale, but at least she has the guts to stand up and say that she will put up taxes and put up tax credits. The SNP has said precisely nothing. It wants an argument about process, instead of telling us what it will do with these important new powers.

English Votes for English Laws

5. **George Kerevan** (East Lothian) (SNP): What discussions he has had with his Cabinet colleagues on reforming the estimates process to take account of the changes made to the Standing Orders of the House to implement English votes for English laws. [901901]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): Ministers have had discussions with the Leader of the House on English votes for English laws and their implementation. These sensible and pragmatic steps do nothing to limit Scottish MPs' rights to represent their constituents.

George Kerevan: Is the Secretary of State as concerned as I am that Barnett consequentials that affect all three devolved nations are not clearly spelled out and safeguarded in the new arrangements for English votes for English laws? Will he take his fifth opportunity to explain what is happening with the fiscal compact?

Mr Gauke: The changes to Standing Orders do not make any difference to the estimates process. When my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House challenged hon. Members to provide examples of where there would be difficulties, no examples could be provided.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): As the Procedure Committee is planning to hold an inquiry into the manner in which the House deals with estimates, may I urge the Minister to defer holding discussions with his Cabinet colleagues until that report is to hand?

Mr Gauke: The Government will look carefully at what the Procedure Committee has to say about reforms to the estimates process, which is ultimately a matter for the House.

Health Spending

6. **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to facilitate the sharing of best practice with the Scottish Government on public spending on health. [901902]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): Health spending is a devolved matter and the Scottish Government are responsible for the NHS in Scotland. It is up to the Scottish Government to decide how best to use their funding and deliver health services in Scotland. The UK Government are happy to share good practice with the Scottish Government to help ensure that people living in Scotland receive high-quality healthcare. Discussions between UK Health Ministers take place where necessary.

Andrew Bridgen: Has the Minister seen the recent Audit Scotland report which shows that the Scottish Government have completely failed to pass on health spending increases instigated by the United Kingdom Government, and that that has resulted in a 0.7% real-terms reduction in health spending in Scotland between 2008-09 and 2014-15?

Mr Gauke: I have seen that report, and my hon. Friend is right to bring it to the House's attention. The fact is that a Conservative Government have shown more commitment to public spending on the NHS—*[Interruption]*—in England than an SNP-led Government have shown in Scotland.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): We now have "English votes for English laws" on issues such as health spending in England. Does the Minister not think that it is time for "Scottish Members for Scottish business" and "Scottish questions for Scottish Members", and for Scottish Ministers to answer Scottish questions in this House?

Mr Gauke: I note that the hon. Gentleman has raised the issue of English votes for English laws, and that he gets very worked up about it. Let me remind him and the House that, just a year ago, he said that English votes for English laws was

"an issue that the Scottish people could not care less about". That does not seem to be his approach any more.

Anti-Semitism

7. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the level of anti-Semitism in Scotland. [901903]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): Recorded incidents of anti-Semitism in Scotland are thankfully low, but I am not complacent. I echo the Prime Minister's view that tackling anti-Semitism goes right to the heart of what we stand for as a country. Whatever our politics and whatever our faith, we must seek to defeat it.

John Mann: Last week, 15 Scottish MPs attended a briefing by the all-party parliamentary group against antisemitism. Given the good will that clearly exists, will the Secretary of State talk to the Scottish Government about how the system of state-funded security in Jewish schools in England could be emulated in Glasgow?

David Mundell: I certainly will, and I am very happy to do so. I should also say to the hon. Gentleman that, despite the many robust exchanges that we have in the Chamber, all MPs from Scotland are united in the view that we cannot tolerate anti-Semitism.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): The Secretary of State will know that, in my constituency, I represent Scotland's largest Jewish community. At the briefing that was mentioned by the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), I was pleased to hear about the very good inter-community relations and positive support from Police Scotland that exist in my area. Will the Secretary of State join me in applauding our Scottish Jewish

communities for their great contributions to our country, and in deploring anti-Semitism and discrimination wherever they occur?

David Mundell: Absolutely, and I commend the hon. Lady for the extent to which, during her short time as a Member of Parliament, she has already engaged with that important Jewish community in Scotland. I also commend the work of the Scottish Government in that regard. As I said earlier, this is a matter on which we are all united, supporting Jewish communities and not accepting anti-Semitism.

Devolution

8. **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What steps he is taking to ensure that the new devolution arrangement which would result from the provisions of the Scotland Bill is financially neutral. [901904]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr David Gauke): The UK Government are delivering the cross-party Smith agreement in full, giving the Scottish Government substantial new powers over tax and spending. The Smith agreement stated that the devolution of powers “should be accompanied by an updated fiscal framework”. The UK and Scottish Governments are discussing that.

Deidre Brock: Let me offer the Secretary of State a sixth opportunity to disassociate himself from the subsidy claims that have been made by his own party in the Chamber. Will he do so now? Does he agree that the Treasury’s statements of funding policy over the devolution years have been a creaking and unstable mess, creating unnecessary friction, and will he recommit himself to a more open and transparent process—as he refused to do previously—for the calculation of the block grant to underpin the new fiscal framework?

Mr Gauke: There is a process, and it involves UK Treasury Ministers in negotiations with the Scottish Government. We are continuing to work on that process, and we will update the House when there is further news.

Abortion Legislation

9. **Jo Cox** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): What discussions he has had with women’s organisations on devolving competence for abortion legislation to the Scottish Parliament. [901905]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): The Smith commission recommended that abortion law be devolved to the Scottish Parliament, but recognised that the issue needed to be handled sensitively by the UK and Scottish Governments. Following ministerial discussion between Scotland’s two Governments, I confirmed that abortion would be devolved in the Scotland Bill, and wrote to interested parties. As I have already confirmed, there will be ongoing engagement with women’s groups as the matter is taken forward.

Jo Cox: We believe that the woman’s right to choose should be universal. Does the Secretary of State envisage any change in abortion law in Scotland?

David Mundell: I think it would be helpful if I confirmed that because abortion law is being devolved, that does not mean that there will be any change. The existing arrangements will continue to apply in Scotland until they are changed by the Scottish Parliament. I am very pleased to note that the First Minister of Scotland has confirmed that she has no plans at all to change the existing abortion law in Scotland.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): May I urge the Minister to think again about the devolution of abortion to Scotland? To have smaller jurisdictions making such sensitive decisions on healthcare is deeply unwise and would allow those who want to lobby against the interests of healthcare to undermine the interests of women both in Scotland and in England. I urge him to consult far more widely before making this very big step.

David Mundell: I recognise, of course, the concerns the right hon. Lady raises, but the Scottish Parliament already has responsibility for criminal justice and health issues, and it has dealt with some very sensitive issues extremely well in my view. I have spoken to women’s groups in Scotland such as Engender, Abortion Rights Scotland and Scottish Women’s Aid. They believe that the devolution can take place but want to be consulted about that, and they will be.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I have not forgotten the hon. Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies); I never do.

Access to University

10. **Mark Menzies** (Fylde) (Con): If the Government will make an assessment of access to university education for people from the lowest income families in (a) England and (b) Scotland. [901906]

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): I am very pleased to report that the most recent UCAS statistics show a record year for university entry for disadvantaged students domiciled in England: 18.2% in 2014 compared with 13.6% in 2009. Unfortunately, the situation in Scotland is not as good; only 10% of the poorest 20% of Scots attend university, which is very concerning.

Mark Menzies: My right hon. Friend the Minister anticipated my supplementary question. As someone who came from a working-class background from the west coast of Scotland and who went to university in Scotland, I am deeply concerned about how Scotland is now lagging behind England and how working-class poor people are losing out.

Anna Soubry: It may sound strange: an English Tory elected to a Scottish university, but as a former honorary president of Stirling university—an outstanding university—I share my hon. Friend’s concerns, and indeed the Scottish Government could learn a great deal from the experience of the English universities.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [901982] **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 4 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): At the last Prime Minister's questions before Armistice day I know the whole House will join me in paying tribute to all those who have fallen serving our country. They gave their lives so we could live ours in freedom, and it is also right to pause and reflect every year on Armistice day on the contribution of all those who serve our country.

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.

Craig Tracey: I would like to associate myself with the Prime Minister's comments and I look forward to joining the Armistice day parade in Bedworth in my constituency which has been in existence since 1921 and has grown to be the largest in Britain.

On the military, from speaking to constituents in North Warwickshire I know that the Government commitment to spend 2% of GDP on defence was very welcome. Does the Prime Minister agree that, given the volatile state of many parts of the world, it is more important than ever that we maintain that commitment and give our brave troops all the support, resources and equipment available?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We do live in a very dangerous and uncertain world, and we have made key commitments—the 2% on defence spending throughout this Parliament, the 0.7% on aid spending, which helps our security as well as making sure we are a generous and moral nation, and, crucially, having the ultimate insurance policy of a replacement for our Trident submarines.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I concur with the Prime Minister's remarks concerning Remembrance Sunday and Remembrance weekend. We mourn all those who have died in all wars, and surely we also resolve to try and build a peaceful future where the next generation does not suffer from the wars of past generations.

Last week I asked the Prime Minister the same question six times and he could not answer. He has now had a week to think about it. I want to ask him one more time: can he guarantee that next April nobody will be worse off as a result of cuts to working tax credits?

The Prime Minister: Let me be absolutely clear. What I can guarantee next April is that there will be an £11,000 personal allowance, so you can earn £11,000 before paying tax. What I can guarantee is that there will be a national living wage of £7.20, giving the lowest paid in our country a £20 a week pay rise next year, compared with the situation at the election. On the issue of tax credits, we suffered the defeat in the House of Lords so we have taken the proposals away. We are looking at them and we will come forward with new proposals in the autumn statement. At that point, in

exactly three weeks' time, I will be able to answer the hon. Gentleman's question. If he wants to spend the next five questions asking me that all over again, I am sure he will find it very entertaining and interesting, but how it fits with the new politics I am not quite sure. Over to you!

Jeremy Corbyn: This is not about entertainment—*[Interruption.]* This is not funny for the people who are desperately worried about what is going to happen next April. If the Prime Minister will not listen to the questions I put, and will not listen to the questions that are put by the public, perhaps he will listen to a question that was raised by his hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) on tax credits last week. He said, "The changes cannot go ahead next April" and that "any mitigation should be full mitigation." What is the Prime Minister's answer to his Friend?

The Prime Minister: It is very much the same answer that I gave to the hon. Gentleman. In three weeks' time, we will announce our proposals and he will be able to see what we will do to deliver the high-pay, low-tax, lower-welfare economy that we want to see. That is what we need in our country. We are cutting people's taxes and increasing people's pay, but we also believe it is right to reform welfare. So he will have his answer in three weeks' time. But in the meantime, he has to think about this: if we do not reform welfare, how are we going to fund the police service that we are talking about today? How are we going to fund the health service that we could be talking about today? How are we going to pay for the defence forces that we are talking about today? The hon. Gentleman has been completely consistent: he has opposed every single reform to welfare that has ever come forward. If we listened to him, we would still have families in London getting £100,000 a year in housing benefit. So the answer to the question is: you will find out in three weeks' time. Carry on!

Jeremy Corbyn: The reality is that the Prime Minister makes choices, and he has made a choice concerning working tax credits that has not worked very well so far. I shall give him an example. A serving soldier, a private in the Army with two children and a partner, would lose over £2,000 next April. I ask the question—*[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The questions will be heard and the answers will be heard. It is as simple as that.

Jeremy Corbyn: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Surely it is the whole point of our Parliament that we are able to put questions to those in authority.

I have a question from Kieran, a veteran of the first Gulf war. His family are set to lose out, and he writes:

"It's a worry to the family... There's fear and trepidation about whether we're going to be able to get by",

and he asks:

"Is that how this government treats veterans of the Armed Forces?"

The Prime Minister: Let me take the case of the serving soldier. Many soldiers—indeed, I think all soldiers—will benefit from the £11,000 personal allowance that comes in next year. That means they will be able to earn more money before they even start paying taxes. Serving soldiers that have children will benefit from the

30 hours of childcare, and of course serving soldiers and others will be able to see our proposals on tax credits in exactly three weeks' time. What I would say to the serving soldier is that he is now dealing with an Opposition party whose leader said he could not see any use for UK forces anywhere in the world at any time. That serving soldier would not have a job if the hon. Gentleman ever got anywhere near power.

Jeremy Corbyn: May I invite the Prime Minister to cast his mind to another area of public service that is causing acute concern at the present time? I note he is trying to dig himself out of a hole with the junior doctors' offer this morning, which we await the detail of, but there is a question that I want to put to him. I quote Dr Cliff Mann, the president of the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, who said that

"this winter will be worse than last winter, and last winter was the worst winter we've ever had"

in the NHS. Can the Prime Minister guarantee there will be no winter crisis in the NHS this year?

The Prime Minister: First, when it comes to the Royal College of Emergency Medicine, it actually supports what we are saying about a seven-day NHS and the junior doctors' contract. The hon. Gentleman says, "Wait for the detail." I would urge everyone in the House and I would urge all junior doctors who are watching to go on to the Department of Health website and look at the pay calculator, because they will be able to see that no one working legal hours will lose out in any way at all. This is an 11% basic pay rise, and what it will deliver is a stronger and safer NHS.

As for the state of our NHS more generally, it is benefiting from the £10 billion that we are putting in—money that the Labour party at the last election said it did not support. I believe the NHS has the resources that it needs, and that is why we are seeing it treating more patients, with more treatments, more drugs being delivered and more tests being carried out. It is a much stronger NHS, and the reason is simple: because we have a strong economy supporting our strong NHS.

Jeremy Corbyn: I note that the Prime Minister has not offered any comment whatsoever about the winter crisis of last year or about what will happen this year. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition is entitled to ask questions without a barrage of noise, and the Prime Minister is entitled to answer questions without a barrage of noise. That is what the public are entitled to expect.

Jeremy Corbyn: If the Prime Minister will not answer questions that I put, then I quote to him the renowned King's Fund, which has enormous expertise in NHS funding and NHS administration. It said that the national health service

"cannot continue to maintain standards of care and balance the books...a rapid and serious decline in patient care is inevitable"

unless something is done. May I ask the Prime Minister which is rising faster—NHS waiting lists or NHS deficits?

The Prime Minister: Let me deal directly with the King's Fund. What we have done on this side of the House is appoint a new chief executive to the NHS, Mr Simon Stevens, who worked under the last Labour Government and did a very good job for them. He produced the Stevens plan, which he said required at least £8 billion of Government funding. We are putting in £10 billion behind that plan. That is the plan that we are producing, and we can see the results: 1.3 million more operations, 7.8 million more out-patient appointments and 4.7 million more diagnostic tests. What is going up in the NHS is the number of treatments—the number of successful outcomes.

If the hon. Gentleman wants to know who is heading for a winter crisis, I would predict that it is the Labour party. We have seen it in a lot of his appointments: his media adviser is a Stalinist, his new policy adviser is a Trotskyist and his economic adviser is a communist. If he is trying to move the Labour party to the left, I would give him "full Marx".

Jeremy Corbyn: The issue I raised with the Prime Minister was the national health service—in case he had forgotten. I would just like to remind him that since he took office in 2010 the English waiting list is up by a third. There are now 3.5 million people waiting for treatment in the NHS. If his party cannot match its actions by its words, I put this to him: will he just get real? The NHS is in a problem: it is in a problem of deficits in many hospitals; it is in a problem of waiting lists; and it is in a problem of the financial crisis that it faces, with so many others. Can he now address that issue and ensure that everyone in this country can rely on the NHS, which is surely the jewel in all of our crowns?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman talks about the health service since I became Prime Minister, so let me tell him what has happened in the NHS since I became Prime Minister: the number of doctors is up by 10,500; the number of nurses is up by 5,800; fewer patients are waiting more than 52 weeks to start treatment than was the case under Labour; we have introduced the cancer drugs fund; we have seen mixed-sex wards virtually abolished; and we have seen rates of MRSA and hospital-acquired infection come plummeting down. And it has happened for a reason: because we have had a strong economy, because we have some of the strongest growth anywhere in the world, because we have got unemployment coming down and because we have got inflation on the floor, we are able to fund an NHS, whereas the countries he admires all over the world, with their crazy socialist plans, cut their health service and hurt the people who need the help the most.

Q3. [901984] **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): The UK's internet economy is by far the largest of the G20 nations, at 12.4% of our GDP. But as consumers move online, so do criminals. Does the Prime Minister therefore agree that the investigatory powers Bill must give our security services the powers they need to keep us safe, while ensuring that proper controls exist on how we use those powers?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this, and it is one of the most important Bills this House will discuss. Obviously, it is going

through pre-legislative scrutiny first. The Home Secretary will today, at this Dispatch Box, set out very clearly what this Bill is about and why it is necessary. Let me just make one simple point: communications data—the who called whom and when of telecommunications—have been absolutely vital in catching rapists and child abductors and in solving other crimes. The question before us is: do we need those data when people are using social media to commit those crimes rather than just a fixed or mobile phone? My answer is: yes, we must help the police and our security and intelligence services to keep us safe.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): At this week's Remembrance events, we remember all the sacrifices from past and present conflicts. We also show our respects to veterans and to service families. Does the Prime Minister agree that everything must be done to deliver on the military covenant—both the spirit and the letter?

The Prime Minister: I certainly agree with both parts of the right hon. Gentleman's question. These Remembrance services are very important, right up and down our country, and the military covenant is one of the most important things that we have. We make a promise to our military that because of the sacrifices they make on our behalf they should not have less good treatment than other people in our country and indeed that, where we can, we should provide extra support. We are the first Government to put the military covenant properly into law and to deliver almost every year big improvements in the military covenant—hospital treatment, free transport, council tax discount and so many other things—and we report on it every year.

Angus Robertson: However, is the Prime Minister aware that many, many service widows continue to be deprived of their forces pensions if there is a change in their personal circumstances? Does he agree that that is a clear breach of the spirit of the military covenant, and what will he do to rectify that wrong?

The Prime Minister: I think that it was last year that we made a big change at around the time of Armistice day to ensure that many people who had remarried were able to get their pensions. That was a very big step forward, which was welcomed by the British Legion. If there are further steps that we need to take, I am very happy to look at them and see what can be done. I also remember that, in the last Budget, we looked at the case of police widows, and we tried to put right their situation as well.

Q5. [901986] **Dr James Davies** (Vale of Clwyd) (Con): Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating the town of Prestatyn in my constituency, which is a finalist in the Department for Communities and Local Government's great British high street awards? Will he confirm whether the UK Government will be holding discussions with the Welsh Assembly Government about the devolution of business rates to councils in Wales so that other town centres in my constituency, such as Rhyl, have a better opportunity to regenerate?

The Prime Minister: I certainly join my hon. Friend in congratulating Prestatyn. I do not know whether Prestatyn is in the same category for this prize as my

home town of Chipping Norton, which has also been nominated, so I might have some conflicts of interest. Obviously, in Wales, business rates are a devolved issue, but it is open to the Welsh Government, should they choose, to take the approach that we are taking of devolving that business rate income directly to local councils, so that local councils have a better connection between the money that they raise and the decisions that they take to attract business, investment and industry to their area.

Q2. [901983] **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): I went to Cheltenham Ladies' College and the Prime Minister went to Eton. Both schools invest heavily in excellent teaching and facilities for music, dance, arts and drama, and yet while he has been Prime Minister, the schools that educate 93% of our pupils have cut the number of teachers in those subjects. Will his legacy be that Britain stops being a world leader in creative and cultural industries and becomes an also-ran?

The Prime Minister: I do not accept that. If Members look at what has happened with school funding, they will find that it has been protected under this Government, and we want to continue protecting school funding. What I make no apology for is the very clear focus that we have on getting the basics right in our schools. It is essential that we get more children learning the basic subjects and getting the basic qualifications. It is then more possible to put in place the arts, the dance and the drama that I want my children to enjoy when they go to their schools.

Q6. [901987] **Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): The channel tunnel and the port of Dover are major pieces of national infrastructure, but when there are big disruptions to services it causes chaos on Kent's roads. As the Government complete their final work on the spending review, will the Prime Minister give special consideration to the need for an urgent and long-term solution to Operation Stack?

The Prime Minister: I absolutely recognise the serious problems that are caused to Kent residents and businesses when it becomes necessary to put in place Operation Stack. We have already implemented short-term measures to reduce the impact, including using the temporary availability of Manston airfield as a contingency measure. I know that my hon. Friend and other Kent MPs met the Chancellor this morning. We are happy to build on that work. I understand the pressures, and we will do everything we can to relieve them.

Q4. [901985] **Mr David Anderson** (Blaydon) (Lab): May I associate myself with the Prime Minister's comments about what will happen this weekend and also with the comments made by the leader of the Scottish National party, the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson)? Thousands of people who served our nation in the Royal Navy before 1987 are not entitled to full compensation. That means that people who have been exposed to asbestosis and have contracted the cancer disease mesothelioma stand to lose out massively when compared with people in civilian life. Someone who has been exposed to asbestosis in industry could get £150,000 in compensation, while it is probable that a service person will get only £31,000.

Will the Prime Minister look into that and report back to this House, as it is clearly a moral outrage as well as a clear breach of the military covenant?

The Prime Minister: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. I understand that the Defence Secretary is looking at the matter. As I have said, since putting the military covenant into law, we have tried every year to make progress, whether it is on the issue of widows or of other groups that have been disadvantaged in some way. I am happy to go away and look at the point that he makes.

Q9. [901992] **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): The Royal Society has identified a need for 1 million scientists, engineers and tech professionals by 2020. One way to bridge the skills gap is through an increase in high-quality apprenticeships, such as those delivered by PROCAT, the Prospects College of Advanced Technology, in Basildon. However, for every one place available, 20 people apply. Will my right hon. Friend redouble his efforts to meet our commitment to 3 million new apprenticeships?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right that the 3 million target is essential, and I believe that we can achieve it. To go back to the question asked by the right hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), one way we can achieve that is by making sure that more of our young people have the qualifications necessary to apply for an apprenticeship. Many firms find that lots of people apply, but when we knock out the people who do not have a qualification in English or maths the number comes right down. I am delighted to announce today that my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) will take the place of my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Richard Harrington), who has moved on to other things, as my adviser on apprenticeships to help me ensure that businesses deliver on this agenda.

Q7. [901988] **Mr Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool South) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister realise that my constituents in Blackpool face a double whammy on police cuts from his spending review and from the Home Office formula, which chops 14%, or £25 million, off Lancashire's police? With letters from a cross-party group of Lancashire MPs, from my neighbourhood watch group, from our police and crime commissioner and six others, mostly Tories, and from our chief constable all saying that the process is flawed, how many blue lights does he need before we hit meltdown?

The Prime Minister: The reforms to the police funding formula are in consultation and no decisions have been taken. Through the hon. Gentleman, may I congratulate Lancashire police, as crime is down in Blackpool by 5% over this Parliament? Funding for Lancashire police is £180 million, the same in cash terms as in 2003, and Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary

"found that Lancashire Constabulary is exceptionally well prepared to face its future financial requirements."

That is the view of HMIC in a country where crime, however we measure it, has fallen significantly since the Government took office.

Q12. [901995] **Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): My constituent, Dr Sarah Pape, one of the UK's leading burns specialist, went out on Monday to Bucharest to help the Romanian medical teams dealing with the nightclub fire disaster. I understand that some 150 patients are in need of critical burns care and that there are only 25 burns beds in Bucharest. Sarah Pape has asked whether the Prime Minister will consider offering practical humanitarian medical assistance to these burns victims by allowing the use of UK burns facilities for their treatment.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the tragic events that took place in Bucharest last Friday. All our thoughts are with the victims and their families. I am pleased to hear about Dr Pape's visit and her selfless work to help. It is a good suggestion to consider whether we can offer specialist help and support and I will take that away and see what can be done.

Q8. [901991] **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): The Prime Minister will understand the heartbreak of the death of a child, but for parents then not to know what has happened to the ashes of that child, as is the case for Mike and Tina Trowhill in Hull and other families up and down the country, is simply very cruel. Will the Prime Minister agreed to meet Mike and Tina to discuss why we need national and local inquiries into what happened to baby ashes in such cases?

The Prime Minister: I completely understand how the hon. Lady's constituents feel. This must have been an absolutely tragic event, only made worse by not knowing what had happened to the child. I am happy to arrange that meeting. I am not aware of the case and had not heard of it before, but let me look into it very carefully and see what I can do.

Q13. [901996] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I was delighted that the Chancellor chose our county city of York to launch the new National Infrastructure Commission. Will the Prime Minister confirm that this is the start of a new era in which important investment decisions on issues such as roads and railways between the great cities of the north will help to bring growth and prosperity to our region?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to raise this issue. People in Yorkshire have long felt that there has not been a fair enough deal for transport funding for roads and rail. People can now see that £13 billion is being spent on transport in the north as part of our plan to rebalance Britain's economy. We have committed more than £4.8 billion of major road improvements and are continuing to invest in improving the A64, which is vital for the people of York. We will go on looking at what more we can do to ensure that this vital part of our economy has the transport links it needs.

Q10. [901993] **John Nicolson** (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): On 9 September the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport told the Culture, Media and Sport Committee that

"there are no plans to sell Channel 4".

Can the Prime Minister confirm that that remains the Government's position, and that no discussions are under way to privatise, and thus imperil, this much-loved and important public institution?

The Prime Minister: First, let me say that I am a huge fan of Channel 4, which was a great Conservative innovation; I think that it was a combination of Willie Whitelaw and Margaret Thatcher who helped bring it to our screens. I want to ensure that Channel 4 has a strong and secure future, and I think that it is right to look at all the options, including seeing whether private investment could help safeguard the channel for the future. Let us have a look at all the options and not close our minds, like some on the Opposition Front Bench who think that private is bad and public is good. Let us have a proper look at how we can ensure that that great channel goes on being great for many years to come.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Everybody who has had any contact with the adoption process will be familiar with the frustration that unnecessary delays cause prospective parents. Will the Prime Minister take action to speed up the adoption process so that more children can be placed with the right families much more quickly?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this matter. We have seen a 72% increase in the number of children being adopted, and the average waiting time has come down by something like five months, but it is still far too long. If we look across the 150 different councils responsible for adoption, we see that around 68 of them have no mechanism for what we call early placement, where fostering and adoption are run alongside each other. If we can introduce that, not least through the regional adoption agencies that we will be establishing, we will see many more children get the warm and loving home we want them to have.

Q11. [901994] **Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister spare a thought on Armistice Day for the 633 of our bravest and best who died as a result of two political mistakes: 179 in pursuit of non-existent weapons of mass destruction in Iraq; and 454 in the Helmand incursion that promised that no shot would be fired? Will he rethink his own plan to order more of our brave soldiers to put their lives on the line in the chaos and confusion of a four-sided civil war in Syria?

The Prime Minister: I have great respect for the hon. Gentleman, but I suggest, with respect, that on Armistice Day we should put aside political questions about conflicts and decisions that were made and simply remember the men and women who put on a uniform, go and serve and risk their lives on our behalf. Let us make Armistice Day about that, not about other questions.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): The past week has been a very good one for Cornwall airport in Newquay, with the announcement of the scrapping of the airport development fee, which was an additional tax on passengers and a barrier to growth, the announcement of new air links that will link Cornwall directly to mainland Europe, and the upgrading of the Gatwick link, with the support of the public service obligation. Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating the team at Cornwall airport in Newquay on their excellent work supporting the Cornish economy?

The Prime Minister: I am a huge fan and frequent user of Newquay airport. The Government made a series of promises about helping the airport to ensure there is that vital connectivity between Cornwall and the rest of the country, and indeed continental Europe, and I am delighted that it is doing so well.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I thank the Prime Minister for his welcome—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to hear this question.

Norman Lamb: I thank the Prime Minister for welcoming the campaign launched this week whereby 200 leaders from across society will join the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), Alastair Campbell and me in calling for equality for those who suffer from mental ill health. The truth is that those who suffer from mental ill health do not have the same right to access treatment as others enjoy in our NHS. The moral and economic case for ending this historical injustice is overwhelming. Will the Prime Minister do what it takes to ensure that this spending review delivers the extra investment in mental health needed to deliver genuine equality?

The Prime Minister: Let me say to the right hon. Gentleman, who did a lot of work on this in the previous Parliament, that I very much welcome the campaign that has been launched and what it aims to achieve. We set out in the NHS constitution parity between mental and physical health and we have taken steps towards that by, for instance, introducing for the first time waiting times and proper targets for talking therapies. There are now twice as many people undergoing those talking therapies as there were five years ago. But I completely accept that there is more to do in healing the divide between mental and physical health, and this Government are committed to doing that.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): Further to the question from the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), I thank the Prime Minister for his support and emphasise that this is indeed an all-party campaign. Does he agree that there is an opportunity now to build on the work of the coalition over the past five years and, with widespread support across all parts of society, end an historical injustice and inequality in the treatment of mental ill-health and physical illness?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is right. Let me tell him what we are doing. We are investing more in mental health than ever before—we will be spending £11.4 billion this financial year. Crucially, we have asked every clinical commissioning group to ensure real-terms increases in its investment in mental health services so that it cannot be treated as the Cinderella service, as has sometimes been the case in the past. If we do that and deal with some of the other issues, such as mental health patients being held in police cells inappropriately, we will have a far better system for dealing with mental health in our country.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): With the announcement yesterday of the loss of 860 manufacturing jobs at the Michelin plant in Ballymena, one of the factors being high energy costs, will the Prime Minister undertake to work with the Northern Ireland Executive

to address both the short-term and the medium-term issues as a matter of urgency? People who are currently in work in Northern Ireland are extremely worried about the impact of cuts to working tax credits. Given that the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Government are in listening mode and are showing a surprising degree of flexibility across a range of issues, will the Prime Minister reverse the thrust of that policy and remove the burden and threat against working families in Northern Ireland and across the country?

The Prime Minister: First, on the issue of industries, if a company qualifies as part of the energy-intensive industries, it will see a reduction in its bill because of the action that I announced from this Dispatch Box last week. Secondly and specific to Northern Ireland, we

have passed in this House historic legislation to allow Northern Ireland to set its own rate of corporation tax. The sooner we can put together all the elements of the Stormont House agreement, the sooner Northern Ireland will be able to take action to try and build a stronger private sector in Northern Ireland, which is exactly what I want to see.

On the issue of tax credits, I give the right hon. Gentleman the same answer: he will know in three weeks' time. He also knows that people who work in that business or in other businesses will be able to earn £11,000 before they start paying taxes, get more help with their childcare and have a higher wage to start with. Let us build an economy where people earn more and pay less taxes, and where we keep welfare costs under control so that we can build great public services.

Draft Investigatory Powers Bill

12.39 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the draft Investigatory Powers Bill and our commitment to providing a new law consolidating and updating our investigatory powers, strengthening the safeguards, and establishing a world-leading oversight regime.

We live in a digital age. Technology is having a profound effect on society. Computers are central to our everyday lives. Big data is reshaping the way we live and work. The internet has brought us tremendous opportunities to prosper and interact with others. But a digital society also presents us with challenges. The same benefits enjoyed by us all are being exploited by serious and organised criminals, online fraudsters, and terrorists. The threat is clear. In the past 12 months alone, six significant terrorist plots have been disrupted here in the UK, as well as a number of further plots overseas. The frequency and cost of cyber-attacks is increasing, with 90% of large organisations suffering an information security breach last year. The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre estimates that there are 50,000 people in this country downloading indecent images of children.

The task of law enforcement and the security and intelligence agencies has become vastly more demanding in this digital age. It is right, therefore, that those who are charged with protecting us should have the powers they need to do so, but it is the role of Government and Parliament to ensure that there are limits to those powers. Let me be clear: the draft Bill we are publishing today is not a return to the draft communications data Bill of 2012. It will not include powers to force UK companies to capture and retain third party internet traffic from companies based overseas; it will not compel overseas communications service providers to meet our domestic retention obligations for communications data; and it will not ban encryption or do anything to undermine the security of people's data. The substance of all of the recommendations by the Joint Scrutiny Committee which examined that draft Bill have been accepted.

So today's Bill represents a significant departure from the proposals of the past. Today we are setting out a modern legal framework that brings together current powers in a clear and comprehensible way, with a new Bill that provides some of the strongest protections and safeguards anywhere in the democratic world, and an approach that sets new standards for openness, transparency and oversight. This new legislation will underpin the work of law enforcement and the security and intelligence agencies for years to come. It is their licence to operate, with the democratic approval of Parliament, to protect our national security and the public's safety.

This Bill responds to three independent reviews published earlier this year: the first from the Intelligence and Security Committee; the second from David Anderson QC, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation; and the third from the independent surveillance review convened by the Royal United Services Institute. All three reviews made it clear that the use of investigatory powers is vital to protecting the public. They all endorsed the current powers available to the police and law

enforcement agencies as both necessary and proportionate, and they all agreed that the legal framework governing those powers needed updating. While considering those reviews, we have engaged with technical experts, academics, civil liberties groups and communications service providers in the UK and overseas. I also met charities supporting people affected by the crimes that these powers are used to investigate.

Copies of the draft Bill will be available in the Vote Office. Our proposals will now be subject to further consultation and pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee of Parliament. A revised Bill will then be introduced to Parliament in the spring, when it will receive careful parliamentary scrutiny. As the House knows, the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014 contains a sunset clause which means that legislation will cease to have effect from 31 December 2016. It is our intention to pass a new law before that date.

This Bill will govern all the powers available to law enforcement, the security and intelligence agencies and the armed forces to acquire the content of communications or communications data. These include the ability to retain and acquire communications data to be used as evidence in court and to advance investigations; the ability to intercept the contents of communications in order to acquire sensitive intelligence to tackle terrorist plots and serious and organised crimes; the use of equipment interference powers to obtain data covertly from computers; and the use of these powers by the security and intelligence agencies in bulk to identify the most serious threats to the UK from overseas and to rapidly establish links between suspects in the UK.

It cannot be right that today the police could find an abducted child if the suspects were using mobile phones to co-ordinate their crime, but if they were using social media or communications apps they would be out of reach. Such an approach defies all logic and ignores the realities of today's digital age, so this Bill will also allow the police to identify which communications services a person or device has connected to—so-called internet connection records.

Some have characterised that power as law enforcement having access to people's full web browsing histories. Let me be clear—that is simply wrong. An internet connection record is a record of the communications service that a person has used, not a record of every web page they have accessed. If someone has visited a social media website, an internet connection record will only show that they accessed that site, not the particular pages they looked at, who they communicated with, or what they said. It is simply the modern equivalent of an itemised phone bill.

Law enforcement agencies would not be able to make a request for the purpose of determining, for example, whether someone had visited a mental health website, a medical website or even a news website. They would only be able to make a request for the purpose of determining whether someone had accessed a communications website or an illegal website, or to resolve an internet protocol address where it is necessary and proportionate to do so in the course of a specific investigation. Strict limits will apply to when and how those data can be accessed—over and above those

safeguards that apply to other forms of communications data—and we will ban local authorities from accessing such data.

I have announced today our intention to ensure that the powers available to law enforcement and the agencies are clear for everyone to understand. The transparency report I am publishing today will help, and copies of that report will be available in the Vote Office. There remain, however, some powers that successive Governments have considered too sensitive to disclose, for fear of revealing capabilities to those who mean us harm. I am clear that we must now reconcile that with our ambition to deliver greater openness and transparency.

The Bill will make explicit provision for all of the powers available to the security and intelligence agencies to acquire data in bulk. That will include not only bulk interception provided under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and which is vital to the work of GCHQ, but the acquisition of bulk communications data, both relating to the UK and overseas.

That is not a new power. It will replace the power under Section 94 of the Telecommunications Act 1984, under which successive Governments have approved the security and intelligence agencies' access to such communications data from communication service providers.

That has allowed them to thwart a number of attacks here in the UK. In 2010, when a group of terrorists were plotting attacks in the UK, including on the London stock exchange, the use of bulk communications data played a key role in MI5's investigation. It allowed investigators to uncover the terrorist network and to understand their plans. That led to the disruption of their activities and successful convictions against all of the group's members.

I have also published the agencies' handling arrangements relating to that power, which set out the existing robust safeguards and independent oversight. These make it clear that the data do not include the content of communications or internet connection records. The Bill will put that power on a more explicit footing and it will be subject to the same robust safeguards that apply to other bulk powers.

The House will know that the powers I have described today are currently overseen by the interception of communications commissioner, the intelligence services commissioner and the chief surveillance commissioner, all of whom are serving or former senior judges.

That regime worked in the past, but I am clear that we need a significantly strengthened regime to govern how these powers are authorised and overseen, so we will replace the existing oversight with a powerful and independent investigatory powers commissioner. This will be a senior judge, supported by a team of expert inspectors with the authority and resources to effectively, and visibly, hold the intelligence agencies and law enforcement to account. These will be world-leading oversight arrangements.

Finally, I want to turn to authorisation. Authorising warrants is one of the most important means by which I and other Secretaries of State hold the security and intelligence agencies to account for their actions. In turn, we are accountable to this House and, through its elected representatives, to the public. As the House

knows, the first duty of Government is the protection of the public, and that is a responsibility this Government take extremely seriously.

Although there was a good deal of agreement in the three independent reviews I have referenced, all three reached different conclusions on the question of who should authorise interception warrants. The Intelligence and Security Committee supported authorisation by a Secretary of State; David Anderson said judges should carry out the authorisation; and RUSI said that the authorisation of warrants should have a judicial element, but also recognised the important role of the Secretary of State. I have considered the very good arguments that were put forward by the three reviews. My response is one that I hope the House agrees will provide the reassurance of both democratic accountability and judicial accountability.

As now, the Secretary of State will need to be satisfied that an activity is necessary and proportionate before a warrant can be issued. However, in future, the warrant will not come into force until it has been formally approved by a judge. That will place a double lock on the authorisation of our most intrusive investigatory powers. There will be democratic accountability, through the Secretary of State, to ensure that our intelligence agencies operate in the interests of the citizens of this country, and the public reassurance of independent, judicial authorisation. This will be one of the strongest authorisation regimes anywhere in the world.

For parliamentarians, we will go even further. The Bill will, for the first time, put into law the Prime Minister's commitment that in any case where it is proposed to intercept the communications of a parliamentarian, including Members of this House, Members of the House of Lords, UK MEPs and Members of the devolved legislatures, the Prime Minister will also be consulted.

The legislation that we are proposing today is unprecedented. It will provide unparalleled openness and transparency about our investigatory powers; it will provide the strongest safeguards and world-leading oversight arrangements; and it will give the men and women of our security and intelligence agencies and our law enforcement agencies, who do so much to keep us safe and secure, the powers they need to protect our country. I commend this statement to the House.

12.51 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary's comprehensive and detailed statement, and the advance notice that she provided.

Huge changes in technology have clearly left our laws outdated and made the job of the police and security services harder. In a world where the threats we face, internationally and domestically, are growing, Parliament cannot sit on its hands and leave blind spots where the authorities cannot see. This debate will be seen through the prism of extremism and terrorism, but, as the Home Secretary said, it is about much more. It is about child sexual exploitation, serious online fraud and other important functions, such as the location of missing people.

We support the Government in their attempt to update the law in this important and sensitive area. We share the Government's goal of creating a world-class framework.

[*Andy Burnham*]

The Opposition's position is clear: strong powers must be balanced by strong safeguards for the public to protect privacy and long-held liberties. From what the Home Secretary has said today, it is clear to me that she and the Government have listened carefully to the concerns that were expressed about the draft Bill that was presented in the last Parliament. She has brought forward much stronger safeguards, particularly in the crucial area of judicial authorisation. It would help the future conduct of this important public debate if the House sent out the unified message today that this is neither a snooper's charter, nor a plan for mass surveillance. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

On behalf of the Opposition, I echo the Home Secretary's thanks to the Intelligence and Security Committee, RUSI and, in particular, David Anderson, QC, who has done the House and the country a huge service by setting out the basis for a new consensus on these important matters. Will the Home Secretary tell us whether David Anderson has expressed a view on her draft Bill, whether he supports the measures within it and whether he is satisfied with the checks and balances on powers and safeguards?

The House will want reassurance that the Bill carries forward the safeguards from previous legislation, particularly the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, such as the threshold for the use of the most intrusive powers. Will the Home Secretary assure the House that the far-reaching powers of content interception will be used for only the most serious crimes, as was the case under the original legislation?

We welcome what the Home Secretary said about internet connection records and local authorities, but the House will have been listening carefully to what she said about data retention and bulk storage. Will she say more about what kind of data will be stored by the authorities, for how long it will be stored and whether the information will be held in anonymised form? That is important because public concern will have risen following the attack on data held by TalkTalk. People will have heard her say at the beginning of her statement that 90% of commercial organisations have experienced a data breach. What lessons has she drawn from the TalkTalk attack? Does she believe that there is a need to enhance the security of bulk storage arrangements in both public and private bodies?

On encryption, the Prime Minister spoke some months ago about the possibility of introducing a ban. Clearly, that is not the policy that the Home Secretary has just outlined. Will she explain the reason for the change in approach? Alongside the proposals on encryption, it is clear that the Bill will place a range of new legal duties on communications providers. Will she tell the House whether all the major providers support her proposals, including those who are based overseas? I listened carefully to what she said on that point. She implied that the measures in the Bill would not apply to organisations that are based overseas. That suggests that there is a large hole that the legislation will not cover. Will she say more about that and reassure us on whether there will be voluntary arrangements in that area?

Will the Home Secretary say whether the measures will apply to individuals? There is rapid change in the development of online applications, so we need to know whether individuals might be liable.

The whole House will welcome what the Home Secretary had to say about the Wilson doctrine, but she did not mention journalistic sources. Will she say whether the legislation will provide protection in such cases?

My predecessor made a key demand in the crucial area of authorisation, which I have reiterated. We are pleased that the Home Secretary has listened. The two-stage process that she advocates seems to have the merits of both arguments: it will provide public and political accountability, and the independence that is needed to build trust in the system. There may be a worry that it will build in delays. Will she say more about how the two-stage process will work in practice and how delays will be avoided? Will judges sign off warrants in all cases? If the Secretary of State and the judge come to different conclusions, who will have the final say?

Finally, as well as looking at the specific proposals in the Bill, it is important to look at the wider context in which they are being introduced. The Home Secretary will know that there are fears in some communities, particularly the Muslim community, that the powers will be used against them disproportionately. We have seen in the past how police powers have been wrongly used against trade unionists.

David Anderson rightly laid great emphasis on the need to build trust in the new framework. It does not help to create the right context when the Prime Minister suggests that the entire Muslim community quietly condones extremism, nor does it build confidence in the new Bill when, at the same time, the Government are legislating in the Trade Union Bill to impose new requirements on trade unionists in respect of the use of social media and on the monitoring of it by the police. As the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) said, "This isn't Franco's Britain". Can the Home Secretary see that to continue to build on the trust she has created and the good start that she has made today, the Government should drop some of its more divisive rhetoric and measures, starting with the measures in the Trade Union Bill?

In conclusion, the issues the proposed legislation seeks to tackle go way beyond party politics. Any Government will face a difficult task in balancing the security of the nation with the privacy and liberties of individual citizens. As someone who was in the Home Office on 7/7, I know that that challenge has got harder in recent years. We will examine carefully the detail of the draft Bill and seek to improve the safeguards to build trust. Having listened carefully to what the Home Secretary has said today, I believe that she has responded to legitimate concerns and broadly got that difficult balance right.

Mrs May: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the tone that he adopted for most of his response to my statement. I thank him for his willingness to understand and accept the importance of this legislation and for his clear comment that this is not mass surveillance. As he says, the message should go out very clearly from this House today that these are important powers that are necessary to keep us safe and secure, but that we must have the right safeguards.

The right hon. Gentleman asked a lot of questions. I will attempt to answer as many of them as possible, but if I miss any particular points I will respond to them in writing.

Before I come to the specific questions, I want to address the reference that he made to the Prime Minister at the end of his speech. I have to say to him that it was not justified by the tone that he adopted for the rest of his speech. What the Prime Minister has said, and what we are saying in our counter-extremism strategy—the strategy deals with extremism of all sorts, including Islamist extremism and neo-Nazi extremism—is that we want to work with people in communities and encourage mainstream voices. We want to work to ensure that, when people are in isolated communities, we identify the barriers that cause that isolation. That is why Louise Casey is doing the very important work she is doing. The characterisation of the Prime Minister that the right hon. Gentleman puts to the House is not one that I recognise.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about David Anderson's view. I have had a private meeting with him on the matter and discussed it with him. We have taken virtually everything that he requested on board, but I do not think it is appropriate for me to say what his view is. That is for him to say separately. It was a private meeting and I just do not think it is appropriate for me to use it in that way.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to serious crimes. Yes, the measure will cover only the most serious crimes, as currently defined in RIPA. That definition will be brought into the legislation.

On the retention of communications data, it will be possible to require the intercept communications records to be retained for up to 12 months. That refers only to the front page of the website. As I have said, it is not exactly which pages within a website that people have been looking at, but just the fact of access to a website or communications device.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about recent cyber-attacks. The message we take from those is very simple: as criminals are moving into more online crime, we need to ensure that our law enforcement agencies have the power to deal with that cybercrime and work in that online space, which is precisely what today is about.

On encryption, the current requirement, which is in secondary legislation, that those companies issued with a warrant should take reasonable steps to respond to it in unencrypted form, is being put on the face of the legislation, but we are not banning encryption. We recognise that encryption plays an important part in keeping people's details secure.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about providers. There may be a slight misunderstanding about requirements on overseas providers. There are some elements that we are not now requiring of overseas providers, but we retain the extra-territorial jurisdiction of our warrant. It is still our view that we should be able to exercise against an overseas provider a warrant issued here in the UK. The work of Nigel Sheinwald, of which hon. Members will be aware, suggested that there was scope for a greater form of international agreement in this area. The Government will continue to look at that.

On journalistic sources, I did not mention it, but we will include in the legislation what we included in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 code earlier this year: access to communications data to identify a journalist's source will require judicial authorisation.

The point of the double lock is that both parties have to authorise the warrant for it to go ahead. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the time delays. There will be an urgent process, so it will be possible for a Secretary of State to sign an urgent warrant that will come immediately into effect. There will then be a period of time within which the judge will have to review it and make a decision on whether it should continue. We will look to ensure that, in that urgent process, the time delay is as little as possible between those two parts of the process. As I have said, the purpose of a double lock is that, in most circumstances, we will have that double authorisation.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): In view of the size of the Bill, I will confine myself solely to the judicial authorisation aspects of it. Will the Secretary of State tell the House whether the measure will replace all 66 statutory approval mechanisms for intercept and use of communications data? Will the judiciary involved in the authorisation procedures be appointed by the Judicial Appointments Commission or by the Prime Minister? Will Members of Parliament get the same protections on communications data, to which she referred, that are being extended to journalists? My understanding is that that is not the case.

Mrs May: In relation to the warrantry that will be subject to the double lock and the process of interception, where the process currently requires a warrant signed just by the Secretary of State, it will in future have the double lock. Additional processes will be introduced in relation to some of the bulk capabilities to which I referred. Obviously, we have to appoint the investigatory powers commissioner. There will then be a process to determine who should be under the commissioner and the areas of expertise they should have. I have said to the Justice Secretary in Scotland and the Minister of Justice in Northern Ireland that we would expect to ensure that Scottish and Northern Ireland expertise is available to the commissioner.

Mr Nick Clegg (Sheffield, Hallam) (LD): I thank the Home Secretary for her statement. Her last Bill on this fraught but important subject hit the buffers. The current Bill is a much improved model, although I have the feeling that, under the bonnet, it retains some of the flaws of its predecessor. The Home Office has clearly put in a lot of work, which I welcome, as I do the dropping of some of the key provisions on third-party data and encryption. I am a little confused by the advance briefings on the Bill: some suggest that it is a radical departure from its predecessor, and others suggest that much of it is the same. It cannot be both, and the devil will be in the detail.

On judicial authorisation, the Home Secretary has set out a somewhat complex double lock compromise that may incur stop-start delays. I heard what she said earlier, but I wonder whether it would not be simpler and faster to provide for direct judicial authorisation. I should like to understand from her why she has not decided to do that.

On web browsing, I strongly welcome what looks at first like a significantly more proportionate and targeted approach, but will the Home Secretary explain why it is still necessary to hold such large amounts of data retrospectively for a considerable period of time?

[Mr Nick Clegg]

Finally, will the Home Secretary tell the House why she has not acted on the commitment she made in the last Parliament to establish a proper US-style privacy and civil liberties board to provide reasoned scrutiny on such Bills in future?

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman says that there was some confused briefing. Different reports appeared in newspapers, but that is not necessarily the result of briefing. The situation on the Bill is what I have set out today in my statement—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) says that I went on TV. I said on TV exactly what I am about to say to the House in relation to the difference between the Bill and the draft Communications Data Bill, which is that some of the more contentious elements are not in the current Bill. For example, the requirement for UK communications service providers to retain and access third-party data from overseas providers is not in the Bill, nor is the web browsing provision, to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, and nor is the provision that would have placed on US and overseas providers the same data retention requirements and obligations that apply to UK service providers.

On judicial authorisation, the double lock provides both judicial independence, but also, crucially, public accountability. That is what we get through membership of the House.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned retrospective data. I put to him the case of the abducted child. We want to see who that child or young person was in contact with before they were abducted. We can do that through telephone records, but we cannot do it if they were using a social media app. That is what the intercept communications records enable us to do.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement. The Intelligence and Security Committee will, working in co-operation with the Joint Committee, provide scrutiny for the proposed legislation. In that context, my right hon. Friend referred to the earlier report of the ISC in March, in which there were 54 specific recommendations. While I appreciate that, in part, the draft Bill may be seen as a response to those recommendations, there is a duty on the Government to provide a specific response to the ISC report. May I urge her that, in the course of the next few weeks and while the debate takes place, the Government should provide such a response—it can be in a quite short form—to those 54 recommendations, because that will enable the House and the public to identify those areas that need to be looked at in the course of the debate, and to identify what has been taken on board and what, perfectly properly, has been rejected by the Government? I seek an assurance from her today that that will happen.

Mrs May: Of course, the ISC report went wider than investigatory powers, but I can reassure my right hon. and learned Friend that, in relation to those aspects that dealt with such powers, in a sense the new Bill is a response to the report. As he knows, we have been considering very carefully the full set of recommendations from the previous ISC and will respond to him and his Committee in a timely fashion.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I thank the Home Secretary for her statement, its tone and the care taken to address many of the concerns raised. I also thank her for the conversations I have had with her and her Ministers in advance of the publication of the draft Bill and for having confirmed to me that a Member of the Scottish National party will serve on the Joint Committee that will scrutinise it. I would be grateful if she could confirm that she will continue her open-door policy.

We have our political differences, and I am sure there will be some over the content of the draft Bill—as the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) said, the devil is in the detail, so we will have to scrutinise it carefully—but I think we all agree that we have a responsibility to protect the rights of our fellow citizens while being realistic about the threats we face. We live in dangerous times, with threats of asymmetric conflict and an accelerating pace of technological change that unfortunately is often first embraced by those who mean us harm. It is only right when we discuss these issues that we put on the record our appreciation of those charged with keeping us safe—the police and the intelligence services—but we should also thank campaigning groups such as Liberty, Justice and Amnesty that remind us daily why it is important to protect our civil liberties, which were won and protected at the cost of the lives of the many people we will be remembering this Remembrance Sunday.

As David Anderson said in his report, the law in this area needs a thorough overhaul. We need a modern and comprehensive law that can cope with the challenges of modern technology while taking account of human rights and civil liberties, particularly the right to privacy. Only time and careful scrutiny will tell whether the draft Bill fulfils the aims he underlined, but I would be interested to hear if the Home Secretary thinks that the Bill meets his key recommendations.

Other countries are watching what we do, and it is important we get it right. SNP Members believe that access to private communications must always be necessary, targeted and proportionate, and I would be grateful if the Home Secretary could confirm that she agrees with us. Safeguards are crucial, and there is a debate about the oversight of access to communications, particularly about who authorises warrants. In common with many Members on both sides of the House, we hold that judicial oversight and authorisation might largely be the answer to the concerns, but we are concerned that a hybrid system—involving both political and judicial authorisation—might add an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy and lead to error and delay in urgent situations. Can she give us any comfort in that regard?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Joanna Cherry: I am nearly finished.

I welcome the Home Secretary's indication that protection of all parliamentarians' communications will be put on a statutory footing, but will that protection extend to people communicating with parliamentarians, such as our constituents, whistleblowers and campaigners, and will there be not just oversight by the Prime Minister, but judicial oversight?

Finally, and briefly but importantly, the Bill concerns not only issues of national security but the investigation of serious crime, and accordingly it will impinge on

areas devolved to the Scottish Parliament. Will the Home Secretary confirm that she is aware of this and that a legislative consent motion will be required in due course, and that she has engaged, and will continue to engage, with the Scottish Government?

Mrs May: On the hon. and learned Lady's point about an open door, I have already spoke to Michael Matheson about the Bill, and my officials have been, and will continue to be, in touch with Scottish Government officials. I am well aware that it impinges on matters devolved to the Scottish Government—the operation of Police Scotland and the signature of warranting relating to law enforcement powers—and we will work with them. There is a question about whether a legislative consent motion is necessary, but officials are working through that and considering whether it would be appropriate.

I recognise that the Scottish Government have raised the timing of warranting. We have every confidence that the process will not add greater bureaucracy, but will add the necessary independent judicial authorisation. In emergency warrant cases, the Secretary of State will be able to authorise a warrant immediately, but that will be followed by a speedy review by the judge to ensure there is still authorisation.

The hon. and learned Lady asked if David Anderson's recommendations, particularly about the Bill's being comprehensive, had been met. I genuinely believe that this is a clearer and more comprehensible and comprehensive Bill, although given its length, some Members might wonder how I can say that. It is an important Bill that will set out much more clearly the different powers available to the authorities. She asked about necessity and proportionality. Of course, warrants will still be judged on whether they are necessary and proportionate—that will still be the test applied by the Secretary of State to any warrants signed. On the issue of liberty versus security, some people think it is a zero-sum game—that if we increase one, we reduce the other—but I am clear that we cannot enjoy our liberty until we have our security.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): Our success in preventing numerous attacks on the public, to which the Home Secretary rightly paid tribute, is down not just to the professionalism and skill of our security services, but to the rapid decision-making process for warrants. As she and I know acutely, this is a very serious responsibility, but I strongly believe that these decisions should be made by an elected Member of the House, accountable to the House and Committees such as the ISC. I am concerned that involving a decision maker from the judiciary, who might not have particular skills in this area, will bring delay and complication. As Secretary of State, I was often approached at short notice and at difficult times of the day—early morning, for example—for a decision, and in making such decisions, I was fully aware that I would be held to account later. Will she explain further how this system will work? How many hours after an early-morning decision by a Secretary of State will there be scrutiny by the judge? Will the Secretary of State be able to discuss the areas of concern, and will the intelligence services, which prepare the material—I always found it to be punctilious, correct and professionally drafted—have an opportunity to return with a further application with further detail, if the Secretary of State has understood the judge's grounds for throwing out an application?

Mrs May: As he said, in his former role as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my right hon. Friend did indeed witness the process of warrant approval. I am conscious of the need to ensure that warrants can be put in place within a reasonable timeframe. There are already agreements between the Home Office and the Security Service about the time needed for a Secretary of State to deal with a warrant and for officials to process the warranting, and we would expect to come to similar agreements with the judicial commissioners in order to make clear the time in which a warrant needs to be considered.

The judicial commissioners, in considering the warrants under the powers they will be given, will apply the same principle as applied by a court on an application for judicial review, but in an emergency a Secretary of State will be able to authorise a warrant immediately. In normal circumstances, the double lock will be required for a warrant to be exercised, but in an emergency it will be possible to exercise it purely on the Secretary of State's authorisation. The Bill makes it clear that the judicial commissioners should review that decision within five days and decide whether the warrant can continue or should be stopped, and if it is stopped, whether the material gained from it should be kept in certain circumstances or destroyed.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): Today the Home Secretary has ripped up RIPA—a piece of legislation that has been unfit for purpose. I particularly welcome the ban on local authorities accessing information about their own citizens. Although I welcome the additional judicial scrutiny, I have some concerns. Who will train the judges to deal with this very complex area? We shall need a panel of judges and a lot of expertise. Will she continue working with the internet providers to ensure that we track people of interest? I know that the Home Secretary said that the information is equivalent to an itemised bill, but there is a lot of information in an itemised bill. If I were to look at her itemised telephone bill and she were to look at mine, we might be surprised at who we were telephoning. [*Interruption.*]

Mrs May: I think that in their sedentary suggestion my hon. Friends made the right response to that particular point: "Speak for yourself!" There is an issue with the judicial panel, and a number of judges will need to be brought together. It is not the first time that changes have been made in matters relating to national security, where judges have to deal with them in different circumstances from which they have dealt with them previously. Judges are used to making independent decisions on a judicial review basis and on the basis of the law as they know it. Of course, a Secretary of State who, like me, has been in the position for some time will have seen a history of national security operations, for example, that provides a level of experience that would not be there the first time a judge looked at this. Ensuring that the judges are aware of that national security background will, I am sure, be part of the process. I have more faith in the judiciary and its ability to work independently than the right hon. Gentleman perhaps does.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): I agree with the Home Secretary about the importance of putting faith in the ability of the judiciary. What consultation will she have with the Lord Chief Justice on the selection

[Robert Neill]

of members of the panel that will be appropriately security vetted? Can she ensure, for example, that an appropriate senior judge is available to be on call on a 24-hour basis, as is perfectly common in other types of judicial review proceedings so that delay is minimised? Will she also provide more detail on how the appointment of the judicial commissioners will take place and who will be responsible for it? Finally, will she give an undertaking that the ambition to introduce the Bill by the spring will in no way truncate the pre-legislative scrutiny of the Joint Committee?

Mrs May: On the last point, we will be talking to the Chairman of the Joint Scrutiny Committee, when appointed, about the appropriate timetable. Although we have the deadline of December 2016, we want to ensure that the process of scrutiny by the Joint Committee is a proper one, and the timetable will reflect that. On the judicial commissioners and the investigatory powers commissioner, we have already had some discussions at official level with the judiciary, as my hon. Friend might imagine. We would not be putting these provisions into legislation unless we had spoken to the judiciary about the requirements. Discussions about the precise elements that my hon. Friend and others have raised about the choice and number of judicial commissioners will be ongoing.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The police and the agencies will agree with what the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary have said about the need both for powers to deal with serious threats and for safeguards that are needed in a democracy. I welcome the Home Secretary's agreement to judicial authorisation and her significant points about transparency, both of which issues reflect the David Anderson report.

I want to ask particularly about the investigatory powers commissioner. It sounds like something we have called for, but will that commissioner be accountable to the Executive and to the Prime Minister, which has limited the operation of some of the existing commissioners, or will he be accountable instead to Parliament or to the ISC? How will this interact with the existing counter-terror reviewer? I think David Anderson has done an extremely good job in that role.

Mrs May: On the right hon. Lady's last point, there is no intention to change the role of the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation. As she will know, we have made some adaptations to that role in respect of what it covers and the reporting requirements, but there is no intention to change that role. Indeed, we are having discussions with David Anderson, ensuring that he has extra support for the role he is required to carry out.

I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) and others who have raised this issue. The appointment of the investigatory powers commission will be a prime ministerial one, and the Prime Minister will appoint such members of other judicial commissioners as are considered necessary. The Bill will set out the relevant qualifications that judicial commissioners will need to have to undertake their role.

As the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) will know, the existing commissioners report annually on the work they undertake. It is a great pity that that part of our process of oversight has never really been seen by the public, precisely because the reports usually show that the agencies are doing a very good job, so do not hit the headlines in the way that different sorts of reports would. We expect the independent investigatory powers commissioner to ensure that recommendations are made and to make public any views on the processes that emerge.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. More than three dozen hon. and right hon. Members are still seeking to catch my eye. If I am to have any realistic chance of accommodating them without intruding excessively on subsequent business, brevity is now required.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Constituents of mine who work at GCHQ are some of the most talented and dedicated public servants anywhere in our country, but they are also conscientious and scrupulous about acting within the law. Does the Secretary of State agree that these measures contain a clear authorisation and oversight framework, including a welcome judicial element, which can command public confidence and, crucially, allow GCHQ employees to do their vital work with professionalism and pride?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend does well in speaking for his constituents who work at GCHQ, and indeed for all who work at GCHQ. Obviously, I have met and dealt with a number of them, and with our other security agencies such as the Secret Intelligence Service and MI5. I can confirm what my hon. Friend says—these people act with extreme professionalism in the work they do, and take extreme care with the powers they exercise. They are very conscious of the powers they hold and they are very careful in the exercise of them. As my hon. Friend says, the Bill provides the important strong oversight arrangements that will enable the people at GCHQ and our other agencies to get on with the job they do so well, day in and day out.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): However much we all agree that action is necessary to combat terrorism and other forms of criminality, I remain concerned, even if I am one of only a few who do, about the excessive powers that will be given to the security authorities in addition to what they already have, although judicial involvement is better than no judicial involvement. I hope the Home Secretary will bear in mind the fact that there is a good deal of concern outside this House. I certainly believe that if this measure were to be passed without substantial amendment, it would be unfortunate and a bitter blow for civil liberties.

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman says that he thinks there are substantial new powers in the Bill, but I have to tell him that there are not. What the Bill primarily does is to bring together the powers that are spread across a number of pieces of legislation—mainly RIPA, but others too—into one single piece of legislation in a much clearer and more comprehensible form than has

previously been the case. There is a new power in respect of the retention of the internet connection—with limited access to internet connection records—but the other powers in the Bill already exist. What it will do is strengthen safeguards and strengthen authorisation systems.

Mrs Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary's careful and thoughtful approach to this sensitive area, which is so important for all our safety, and I particularly welcome the new provisions on judicial oversight. If my right hon. Friend anticipates that additional specialist training will be required by members of the judiciary to fulfil the widened remit she has outlined today, will it be possible to ensure that there is no delay in putting the necessary training in place? Will she be able to carry it out in advance and in anticipation of the legislation passing through the House?

Mrs May: I thank my right hon. Friend, who is absolutely right. We shall take every step to ensure that as soon as the legislation is in place, the new processes and structures will be brought into operation. That means ensuring that those appointed as the investigatory powers commissioner and additional commissioners have the necessary training to enable them to undertake the role we are giving them.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): The Secretary of State will be aware that when in the past she has sought support from the DUP on national security issues, it has always been willingly given. Sometimes, however, we find it hard to take when the Government do not tackle serious and organised crime on the ground in Northern Ireland. Ministers could take immediate measures with statutory instruments to address serious and organised fuel crime, and they should do that urgently. More directly, does the Secretary of State recognise that some of the major godfathers of serious and organised crime will be in direct communication with some political representatives in Northern Ireland? To avoid the debacle that we had over the National Crime Agency, she should avoid a legislative consent motion for Northern Ireland.

Mrs May: I, and others in the House, worked hard to ensure that the National Crime Agency was able to operate in Northern Ireland, and it is now tackling serious and organised crime there just as in the rest of the United Kingdom. I am not aware that a legislative consent motion would be necessary in Northern Ireland, but we will be talking to the Northern Ireland Executive about such matters, just as we will be talking to the Scottish Government.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for coming to the House today and setting out such a comprehensive approach to these issues. She is right to do so because they affect fundamentally the civil liberties and rights of every citizen in the country. Parliament will need to look precisely at the words in the Bill, not least because—she alluded to this—there has been a certain amount of spin in the papers recently and we must be clear about what is suggested. On warranting, from time to time I deputised for the Home Secretary and for my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), and I am inclined to agree that the dual key is the right way to proceed. Does she accept that the judges appointed

must not be those who work too closely with the police and security services—for example the Special Immigration Appeals Commission—because their independence will not be trusted or accepted by the general public if they are given such a role?

Mrs May: I thank my right hon. Friend for his work—as he said, he sometimes signed warrants on my behalf and that of other Secretaries of State. Those appointed as judicial commissioners must have held high judicial office—we are setting a high threshold for those appointed to this role. Because such extra, strengthened oversight is an important part of the Bill, those who are appointed must be seen by members of the public to have the independence that is required to give extra confidence in the whole process of warranting.

Mr Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry North West) (Lab): The Home Secretary must be aware that there is wide acceptance of her statement in the House, and Members will consider the details of the legislation in due course. One question from Members of this House and the other UK legislatures is whether she is happy that the combination of the triple lock, as she described it, is the best way to ensure that extra safeguarding is provided?

Mrs May: Yes I am, and I apologise because I think one or two Members have already raised that issue. It is important to introduce the extra element—the third element—of consultation with the Prime Minister, so that everybody in the House will be clear about requests to intercept the communications of a Member of this House, the House of Lords, or the other legislatures. We will discuss with the Scottish Government the process that will be introduced for warrants that are currently signed by Scottish Ministers. That third lock is the right way to go, and I hope that will give people confidence in the process.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her statement, and the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) on his remarks about the snoopers charter misnomer. The difficulty we often face is when the use and abuse of intelligence leads to poor policy decisions—I am thinking particularly of the September 2002 dodgy dossier from which I am afraid the reputation of the intelligence services has yet to fully recover. What can be done further to improve public understanding of the work that the intelligence services do on their behalf? I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for her remarks about the double lock and the investigatory powers commissioner, and for the fact that her statement draws on the three reports to which she referred. That is a good first step although I am sure she feels that more could be done. What more can we do as the Bill passes through the House?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend raises an important point about highlighting to members of the public the nature of the work being done by the agencies and the way they do it. A number of steps have already been taken, and I am sure we will build on them to ensure that the public have that confidence. Recently, the agencies have been more willing to come forward and explain what they do to members of the public—the director general of MI5 gave a live interview on the “Today” programme,

[Mrs May]

and that is the first time any of our agency heads have given such an interview. Anybody who has read *The Times* over the past couple of weeks will have seen a considerable amount of reporting on the operations of GCHQ. Such things are important because they help the public to understand what our agencies are doing.

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): A large number of constituents have contacted me about this matter. Does the Secretary of State accept that concerns about her proposals go well beyond what is sometimes wrongly dismissed as the civil liberties lobby?

Mrs May: It is important that Members of the House make clear to people exactly what the Government are proposing, and the strength and safeguards in the Bill. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the review by David Anderson on these matters, in which he cited polling that showed that the majority of members of the public wanted the authorities and agencies to have the powers they need to keep us safe.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): We often hear about the rights of criminals not to have their privacy intruded on. Will the Home Secretary inform the House about the perspective she has heard from the victims of crime?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I met representatives from groups who support and campaign for victims of crime, including child sexual abuse, rape and stalking. They made it very clear that the Government must ensure that the police and others are able to use the powers necessary to bring the perpetrators of these terrible crimes to justice.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): A few weeks ago at the Investigatory Powers Tribunal, the Government's QC, Mr James Eadie, seemed to argue—on the Home Secretary's behalf and at public expense—that modern technology had rendered the Wilson doctrine impractical, and that it was not up to much anyway. Now that the doctrine has been reborn in the Home Secretary's statement, will she say what has happened to modern technology over the past few weeks that has now made practical what was impractical? How will that protection extend to journalists, campaigners and whistleblowers who may be contacting their MP or MSP?

Mrs May: I am not sure that I recognise the right hon. Gentleman's description of references to modern technology. I was clear in the statement that I gave to the House less than two weeks ago that the Wilson doctrine still exists. We are putting the third lock of consultation with the Prime Minister in the legislation. Over time a mythology has grown up around what the Wilson doctrine meant. Many Members of the House felt that it meant that no communication by MPs would ever be intercepted, but that is not what the doctrine said.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): If the first duty of the Government is the protection of the realm, their second duty is to ensure that those protections are fit for purpose—my right hon. Friend the Secretary and the Minister for Security have passed that test with flying colours and are to be congratulated. The Home Secretary mentioned in passing the benefits that her

proposals will bring when clamping down on paedophiles and child sexual exploitation, and as a father of three young children I welcome that, as do all my constituents. Will she flesh out a little further what benefits she sees for the services that are involved in clamping down on such pernicious activity? What benefits will her proposals actually deliver?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend has raised an important issue. Let me give him just one example. Following a recent survey of more than 6,000 cases, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre determined that more than 860 paedophiles could not be identified precisely because it did not have the internet connection records power that we are introducing in the Bill. With that power, it would have been able to identify them.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Under Operation Notaris, more than 30,000 individuals were identified as engaging in online child abuse, but, if I recall correctly, only 1,000 of those cases were followed up. Will the new powers be matched by resources to ensure that prosecutions and safeguarding interventions can take place as well?

Mrs May: As I said a moment ago to my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), the increased power relating to internet connection records will increase the ability of CEOP—and, indeed, others—to identify the paedophiles who are committing these horrific crimes. The National Crime Agency has made very clear that it continues to investigate those who are looking at online images of child abuse, and continues to take action against them.

Oliver Dowden (Hertsmere) (Con): I welcome the fact that the proposed powers update the existing investigatory powers to reflect the existence of new technologies such as Facebook Messenger, which were not even thought of a decade ago, but what reassurance can the Home Secretary give the House that the Bill will be future-proofed so that we do not have to return to the issue very rapidly?

Mrs May: I have every confidence, because we have taken every care to draft the legislation in such a way that it will last for a good many years and will take account of the fact that new technologies develop. The draft Communications Data Bill was drawn so widely that there was great concern about what the authorities might have been able to do as a result, so we have had to balance the requirements very carefully, but we are obviously very conscious of the need to ensure that the Bill enables us to move forward as technology develops.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): I welcome the statement, but it appears that every application to the Secretary of State and the judge will involve limited provision for investigative accessibility. Will applicants have to go back to the Secretary of State and the judge to make a secondary, or further, application every time something is found during an investigative process?

Mrs May: The requirement for a double lock relates to the most intrusive powers, mainly those relating to the interception of communications. Access to

communications data will continue to take place according to the current process, which does not involve warrantry from the Secretary of State. Not everything in the Bill involves the warrantry; it is involved only in those most intrusive powers.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated particularly on the introduction of independent judicial oversight, which, as she will know, many Members in all parts of the House regard as an essential step towards ensuring that she can promote both the security of the people and their civil liberties. As she says, security and civil liberties are not a zero-sum game; they go together.

In relation to the double lock, has my right hon. Friend considered any kind of reconciliation mechanism to enable the judge and the Home Secretary to resolve the position—presumably over some time—if they reach different decisions, or will the intelligence services be able to come back again so that warrants are not simply lost?

Mrs May: That is an important point. I think that it was touched on in a previous question, and I apologise for not responding to it then.

Under the current system, if the Secretary of State expresses the view that a warrant should not be issued, it is open to the agency concerned to go away, reconsider, and then come back with more information about necessity and proportionality, or to abandon the warrant, or to consider applying for a different warrant. That process will continue to be possible under the new system.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): As the Home Secretary has acknowledged, David Anderson called for prior judicial authorisation. He also said that the new law should comply with international human rights standards. Given the uncertainty over the future of the Human Rights Act, will the Home Secretary confirm that the Bill will comply with that Act, and with the European convention on human rights?

Mrs May: As the hon. Gentleman will know, Ministers have to take account of the human rights issue in relation to any legislation that they present to the House. That has indeed happened, and I have every confidence that this legislation will comply with human rights requirements.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary's balanced approach. Is it not important for us to continue to reassure the public that this is not a proposal for mass surveillance, and to restate the essential need for the Bill? There is a new form of technology that is effectively shielded from the law enforcement and intelligence agencies simply because the law has not kept up with technological development, and it is therefore necessary to update the law with essential safeguards in order to ensure that the public are safe.

Mrs May: My right hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. Technology has moved on, but the law has not. We need to update the law so that our law enforcement and security agencies have the powers that they need to continue to keep us safe.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): May we have some idea of any benchmarks that may have informed the Home Secretary's declaration that these will be world-leading oversight arrangements?

Mrs May: As I think was mentioned by the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry), other countries look to this legislation precisely because they feel that we are forging a path ahead. They will be looking very closely at what we do in the Bill, and, indeed, may wish to adopt some elements of it in their own legislation.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Will the Home Secretary comment on what was said recently by Lord Carlile, the former independent reviewer of terrorism legislation? He said:

“Judges are, of course, very good quality men and women”,
but

“if judges are going to authenticate these issues, they have to learn about national security”.

We have heard about three reports that had influenced the Government's thinking. Will the Home Secretary tell us who else they consulted when they were drafting the Bill? I am thinking particularly of communications companies and internet providers.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend has quoted Lord Carlile, who, as she said, is a former independent reviewer of terrorism legislation. It will, of course, be necessary for any judicial commissioners who undertake the warrantry to be aware of the context in which they make decisions in relation to national security in particular. There have been a great many meetings with internet service providers from both the United Kingdom and overseas. The Security Minister and I have held round tables with United States internet service providers, and I met some when I was in the United States in September. We have also held round tables with United Kingdom providers, civil liberties groups, and charities representing victims of these serious crimes.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I welcome the tone and nature of the statement, but may I ask the Home Secretary what in particular led her to decide that 12 months was the right maximum period for the police and security agencies to benefit from data retention?

Mrs May: It is the period that is currently in legislation that we reinforced in the Data Retention and Investigatory Powers Act 2014. We looked at it again following the Digital Rights Ireland decision by the European Court of Justice. It had previously been possible to hold data for up to 24 months, but we felt that, given the need for a balance between not holding data for too long and holding data for a sufficient period to do the job required by the authorities, up to 12 months was the right and appropriate time frame.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I, too, welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. When we talk about nefarious online activity, we should bear in mind that cyber-bullying is a very worrying activity which often involves young, vulnerable people and, in the most serious cases, has led to suicides. In those most serious cases, could the new powers be used to put the perpetrators behind bars?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue of cyber-bullying, which affects the lives of too many young people—sometimes, as he said, with tragic consequences. The Bill will include a definition of serious crime, which is one of the areas in which it is possible for the agencies to apply for the most intrusive powers, such as interception warrants. I would expect cyber-bullying, at the most serious end, to come within the definition, but I will check that point and write to my hon. Friend.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): Does the Bill deal with the process of applying to go through browsing history—the directory to which the Home Secretary referred? If there are no such regulatory procedures in the Bill at the moment, might the Home Secretary think about a system whereby somebody at the rank of chief superintendent, for example, would give initial permission under RIPA criteria?

Mrs May: It will not be possible for law enforcement agencies to access browsing history; they will just be able to access the first device or social media site that the individual device accessed, for the limited purposes I have set out—IP resolution, to see whether somebody is looking at an illegal website or to find out the communications services accessed. The arrangements for authorisation are those in existence for communications data in telephony, which were looked at by the Joint Committee on the draft Communications Data Bill. It felt that that was the right process to lead to serious and proper consideration of access—albeit not the browsing history—and that the right measures were already being taken in that authorisation process.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not wish to embarrass any individual hon. Member, but may I just gently point out that a Member who was not here at the start of the statement or who has gone in and out of the Chamber during the course of it should not be standing and expecting to be called? We have a very long-established practice that a Member must be present at the start of a statement and remain present throughout the exchanges, and I think on the whole the House will think that is a very proper courtesy.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I welcome the statement, which will help make the country safer and prevent local authorities from accessing communications data. The Home Secretary rightly condemned the extraordinary claim by the shadow Home Secretary in an otherwise positive response that the Prime Minister had said that the entire Muslim population condoned extremism. Will she confirm that in his speech on 7 October the Prime Minister specifically recognised the value of religious teaching across all religions, but said that the teaching of intolerance or separatism was not acceptable? Does the Home Secretary also agree that many of us know good examples of Islamic teaching in our constituencies and the message today is very clear: we should unite against extremism using all modern tools appropriately, and if there is nothing to hide, there is nothing to fear?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In the speech to which he refers, the Prime Minister welcomed and recognised the important role that faith teaching

plays in our society. We all wish to see an end to intolerance, separatism and division among those who would seek to divide our communities. That is why our counter-extremism strategy is so important.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): As the home affairs spokesman for my party, I commend the Secretary of State for the reassurances given in her statement and her statements over the weekend about what is in the Bill, and perhaps more importantly, about what is not in it. We are grateful for those indications. There was an exchange earlier about the composition of the Joint Committee. May I encourage the Home Secretary to consider making sure that its composition reflects this House and more importantly the regions of this United Kingdom—that Northern Ireland's voice can be present in those discussions to ensure that the legislation is drafted in full cognisance of the effects and impacts in Northern Ireland?

Mrs May: As the hon. Gentleman may recognise, decisions about the composition of Committees are taken by the business managers in the House, but I can assure him that it is my intention, as I indicated to David Ford when I spoke to him yesterday, that my officials will continue to work with Northern Ireland officials. Ministers will be available to speak to Ministers in Northern Ireland about these matters to ensure that we take into account the considerations in relation to Northern Ireland as this Bill goes through its scrutiny and through this House.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's comments that local authorities will be banned from accessing these sort of data. Can she give a little more information about the extension of the life of a warrant for any period and about data-sharing among those who are able to access those warrants—or will each authority have to access their own separate warrant?

Mrs May: Any agency that wishes to intercept and use these intrusive powers would need to have a warrant to do so. The current position, which it is intended will be replicated in the Bill, is that a warrant applied for by the security and intelligence agencies is normally in place for six months, and a warrant applied for by law enforcement is normally in place for three months. There is a much shorter period of time when an emergency warrant is signed; it normally must be reconsidered within five days.

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I, too, welcome the Home Secretary's statement. Does she agree that it is important that the public feel reassured by these proposals and that, therefore, while it is clear that the police and security services need the very important powers set out today, where they are most intrusive it is right that they are authorised by Secretaries of State, who are, after all, accountable to the public?

Mrs May: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. That is why the double-lock is important. Many people have called for the involvement of the independence of the judiciary, but I think it is important not to abandon the public accountability of Secretaries of State. It is the Secretary of State who can stand in this House and who is accountable for the actions of the agencies, and that is why it is important that they continue to sign.

Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary for her statement. She will know that the debate about the use of investigatory powers often focuses on prevention of terrorism. Does she agree that the proposed powers are also important in keeping the public safe from financial cyber-criminals and organised crime?

Mrs May: Yes. My hon. Friend is absolutely right and is right to mention financial cyber-crime. It is one of those new forms of crime; as crime becomes more online it is important that our law enforcement and agencies have the online powers to be able to deal with it.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. Does she agree that the double lock will mean judicial oversight to ensure that the measures are legal and proportionate, and that the Secretary of State can ensure that the public interest test is satisfied by any warrant being issued?

Mrs May: Yes I do agree; it is important that we retain that double lock in these matters. It will give the public extra confidence in the process undertaken, ensuring that these very intrusive powers for the authorities are used only when it is necessary and proportionate.

Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, which again shows why she is held in such high regard by those who operate in these teams. Does she agree that one of our great privileges in this country is the relative safety and security that we enjoy in a desperately unstable world, and that sometimes these privileges require a price, which in my experience the vast majority in this country are willing to pay so long as they are safe?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend, who of course has put himself on the line to maintain our security and defend this country, makes a very important point. Most members of the public want to know that the authorities have the powers they need to keep them safe, but they also want to ensure that those powers are exercised properly, and that is where the safeguards that we have put in this Bill are so important.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): I, too, welcome the statement. I have also been alarmed by the terming of the so-called snoopers charter and, unsurprisingly, have had correspondence from concerned constituents, but as a forward-looking Government, doing nothing is not an option. We should listen to the police chiefs and give them those essential tools. Does the Home Secretary agree?

Mrs May: Yes, that is important. The police have been very clear that they need these tools if they are going to be able to continue to do the job we want them to do in relation to serious and organised criminals and particularly in relation to paedophiles. On the first point my hon. Friend made, that is why I particularly welcome the comment made by the right hon. Member

for Leigh (Andy Burnham): across this House we can send out a message today that this Bill is not about mass surveillance.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): I congratulate the Home Secretary and her team on introducing into what has been an incomprehensible regime much-needed transparency and coherence, informed deeply by three independent reports and, importantly, enabling our intelligence, security and law enforcement agencies to have the powers they need to deal with the unprecedented scale and character of the threat this country faces. On warranting, does my right hon. Friend agree that the judiciary are well placed to deal with their new involvement? As a barrister, I made urgent applications on the phone late at night on an emergency basis to senior judges, so they are experienced in these matters. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the double lock strikes the right balance of public accountability and appropriate checks and balances?

Mrs May: I thank my hon. Friend, particularly for her reference to her own experience. Sometimes people have a vision of judges taking a very long time to do all this, but as she says, there are many occasions on which they have to react very quickly to requests, and they have to be available to do so. I expect that they will do that in these circumstances as well. I believe that this Bill will strike the right balance between public accountability and the independence of the judiciary, which will give the public that extra confidence.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): The House has generally welcomed the Home Secretary's balanced approach, as do I, but may I urge her to be much more aggressive in one regard? In her statement, she referred to equipment interference powers. May I encourage her to frame those powers in such a way that they could be used to disrupt or even destroy servers distributing child abuse images or other criminal material?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend raises an interesting point. We do everything we can to take action against those who distribute child abuse material, and a lot of work is being done with the industry in relation to taking down such material in order to protect children online.

Byron Davies (Gower) (Con): Lord Carlile, the former terrorism laws watchdog, has said that there has been a lot of demonisation of the police and security services over their intentions regarding this information. He also said:

"I think it's absurd to suggest that the police and the security services have a kind of casual desire to intrude on the privacy of the innocent."

Does my right hon. Friend support that view?

Mrs May: Absolutely. The heads of agencies have also made it clear that they have no intention of intruding on everybody's lives. That is why the message that this is not about mass surveillance is so important. This is about targeting those who are seeking to do us harm and ensuring that any action that is taken is always necessary and proportionate.

Points of Order

2.2 pm

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You may recall that, last Thursday, there was considerable disquiet across the House about the seven-year delay in the publication of the Chilcot inquiry and the fact that the Government chose not to make a statement on that. You invited those on the Government Front Bench to consider that position, but I now understand that the Prime Minister has declined to make a statement. This involves matters that are clearly the Government's responsibility, including claims that the Cabinet Secretary delayed the release of documents, and matters that relate to the national security timetable, which has been built into the release of Chilcot. Given the need to avoid such a disgraceful situation occurring again, in the light of the seven-year delay, can you confirm that it would have been in order for the Government to make such a statement without prejudicing the independence of the inquiry? Do you also agree that the decision not to do so—given the considerable offence caused to the 179 service families waiting for answers from the inquiry—is a matter for the Prime Minister alone?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I am happy to confirm that it would have been entirely orderly for a statement by a Government Minister to be made on this matter. The right hon. Gentleman is an extremely experienced parliamentarian, and he knows that that is an entitlement of a Minister but that it is not an obligation that the Chair can impose upon a Minister. In the absence of an offer of a Government statement, he will also be well aware that there is a range of options open to hon. and right hon. Members who seek to elicit from the Government a statement of their current thinking on the matter in question. He does not need me to provide him with the toolkit, but I am happy to confirm its existence.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP) *rose*—

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I am keeping the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) warm. We will come to him in a moment. I call Ian Paisley.

Ian Paisley: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Twenty-seven hours ago, the single largest announcement of job losses in Northern Ireland was made, involving the loss of the jobs of 860 people directly employed by Michelin in my constituency. There has not been so much as a squeak from the Government Front Bench: not a statement, not a press release—quite frankly, naff all. It bothers me that a convention appears to be arising in this House that Northern Ireland has once again become a place apart, and that Ministers think that because we have a devolved Administration they do not have a responsibility to get to the Dispatch Box as a matter of urgency to issue statements on important matters that affect us, including, in this case, those 860 people in Northern Ireland. Mr Speaker, can you assure us that no such convention will be allowed to arise under your stewardship of that important Chair, and that a Minister will be urged to come to the Dispatch Box tomorrow?

Mr Speaker: I am very sensitive to the important point that the hon. Gentleman has made, and I very much hope that no such convention has arisen. Suffice it to say, without going into matters that should not be raised on the Floor of the House, there is sometimes competition for time in the House—a point to which I know that he will be sensitive, not least in relation to today, when we had an important statement from the Home Secretary, which I rightly anticipated would be heavily subscribed. However, there are other days and other opportunities of a variety of kinds, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will seek to take those opportunities. I can assure him, eyeball to eyeball and in front of all Members present in the House, that the Chair will be no obstacle to the pursuit by him and others of such opportunities.

Brendan O'Hara *rose*—

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: I will save the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute till last. I call Paul Flynn.

Paul Flynn: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Yesterday, you ruled that you would seek consultation on the Prime Minister's decision to take three long-serving, active and effective Conservative members off our delegation to the Council of Europe. Those members have now been removed—against their will, as I understand it—from the delegation. You said that you would consult on this and on their suggestion that Members of this House should consider the membership of the delegation. I have examined the proposed new membership of the delegation, and I am surprised to see that among the nominations is a Member of the other House who has twice appeared before its Standards Committee and been asked to make an apology to that House because of his links with lobbyists. Many of us would like to question the membership of the delegation on that basis. This could be a further reason why this should not simply be a matter for prime ministerial diktat. These people are representing Britain in Europe, and the membership of the delegation should be a matter that we can bring to this House so that MPs can debate it and vote on it.

Mr Speaker: I did indeed say yesterday, in response to a point of order on this matter, that I would reflect upon it. I have reflected upon it and I continue to do so. I also said to the House that it was my responsibility to be assured of the propriety of the process involved, but that it was not for the Chair to assess the merits or demerits of the individual prospective candidates for membership of the delegation. There may well be an opportunity for this matter to be considered by the House relatively shortly. I do not know that that will be the case, but it could be. In the meantime, I am happy to inform the hon. Gentleman that I have not sent the list of new proposed members of the delegation to the secretariat and that, pending possible consideration of the matter by the House, it seems prudent at this stage for me not to do so. I hope that that is helpful to the hon. Gentleman and to the House.

Brendan O'Hara: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Last week, I tabled eight detailed and specific questions relating to the proposed extension of the limit of restoration

of electrical shore supply to nuclear submarines at Her Majesty's naval base Clyde from 20 minutes to a maximum of three hours. I have been approached by my constituents and asked to raise this matter on their behalf. However, rather than answering my eight specific questions individually, the Ministry of Defence grouped them together and gave me one answer, in which it hid behind national security issues even though my questions related to health and safety. I firmly believe that nuclear safety at Faslane is not just a matter for the MOD and for Babcock, and that it is a matter of serious concern for my constituents. Their concerns should not be dismissed in this way. I would be obliged, Mr Speaker, if you could advise me of what, if any, recourse I have in these circumstances.

Mr Speaker: Let me first say to the hon. Gentleman that I feel his pain. He has tabled a series of serious questions, and he is dissatisfied by what he regards as a grouped and minimalist response. I remember as a Back Bencher once tabling several dozen questions to a particular Department and being more than a little aggrieved to receive a grouped and extremely minimalist response.

I am genuinely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice yesterday of his point of order. He has set out his concerns very clearly, and no doubt those concerns have been heard by those on the Treasury Bench, who will relay them to the Ministry of Defence. I must make it clear that the content of answers to questions is a matter for Ministers, rather than for the Chair. It is quite frequently the case, under Governments of different colours, that Members do not find the answers entirely satisfactory. While it is reasonable that the Government are unwilling to put into the public domain information that would damage national security or the effectiveness of the armed forces, there has long been a debate about whether the balance between security and transparency is appropriately struck.

The hon. Gentleman asked what recourse he can seek. If he wishes, he may refer the matter to the Procedure Committee, under the chairmanship of the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), as that Committee monitors the answering of questions on behalf of the House. Alternatively, he may use his ingenuity to pursue the matter through other avenues. The Table Office is always ready to advise hon. Members on the options open to them. I feel sure that the hon. Gentleman will be making the short journey to the Table Office ere long.

BILL PRESENTED

MARRIAGE AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIP REGISTRATION (MOTHERS' NAMES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Christina Rees, Huw Irranca-Davies, Dr Rupa Huq, Frank Field, Clive Lewis, Paula Sherriff, Cat Smith, Gerald Jones, Carolyn Harris, Jenny Chapman, Nick Smith and David T. C. Davies presented a Bill to make provision about the recording of the names of the mother of each party to a marriage or civil partnership for registration purposes; to make provision for requiring such information to be displayed on marriage certificates and civil partnership certificates; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 December, and to be printed (Bill 90).

House of Commons (Administration)

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

2.11 pm

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to consolidate and amend provisions about the House of Commons Members' Fund; and to make provision about the House of Commons resources estimates.

This is not a Government Bill or a Government hand-out Bill; it is a minor House of Commons management Bill. The Bill is not new: there were at least two similar private Members' Bills in the last Parliament, which fell due to lack of time.

I suspect few Members will be aware of the fund, apart from through the note of a small monthly deduction to be seen on their monthly Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority pay slip. The fund was established before the second world war, when there was no parliamentary pension to help former Members who had fallen into financial difficulties. It has been used to top up pensions for widows of Members who left the House when widows received a lower entitlement, and for a few isolated cases of hardship of former Members.

As the House will recognise from that description, as time has passed the demand has dropped. In the last financial year, payments worked out at £137,000, but the fund has grown to a considerable £7 million. At present, the fund is drawn from compulsory contributions from Members, earnings from its investments and an annual contribution from the Treasury of £215,000. That compares with Members' contributions of £15,000 per year.

The Bill will remove the requirement under existing primary legislation for Members to make monthly contributions of £2. In effect, the trustees will be empowered to cease deducting contributions. Given the figures I have just stated, they intend to do so immediately, since the fund has, to put it simply, a considerable surplus. However, the Bill enables the trustees to recommend resumption of contributions, if needed, up to a maximum of 0.2% of pay. The trustees can, if they agree, return any surplus funds to the Treasury. The trustees have requested this particular discretion.

The Bill will extend the class of beneficiaries to assist all dependants of former Members who experience severe hardships. It will also remove the requirement for trustees to be current MPs. I am sure the House would agree that it seems sensible for the trustees to ask, for example, the Association of Former Members of Parliament to nominate one trustee. In addition, that will enable the trustees to get over the problem that arises when, at a general election, a number of Members who are trustees lose their seats. The Bill will allow such former MPs to remain as trustees temporarily, until they are formally replaced.

For efficiency reasons, the Bill will amalgamate various Acts governing the fund to create a comprehensive set of governing legislation. That will remove unnecessary or outdated costs, procedures and restrictions, and provide a streamlined service with reduced costs.

Finally, clause 10 will amend the description of the House of Commons administration estimates set out in the House of Commons (Administration) Act 1978.

[*Sir Paul Beresford*]

This amendment will enable the House to merge the administration and Members estimates into one at some future date, if that is deemed desirable. That decision would be taken by the House of Commons Commission, subject to discussions with the Treasury. There is cross-party and trustee support for this small tidying-up Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered.

That Sir Paul Beresford, Mr Nicholas Brown, Mr Peter Lilley, Mr Clive Betts and David Mowat present the Bill.

Sir Paul Beresford accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 December, and to be printed (Bill 91).

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): We now come to the Opposition day motion—I am purposely speaking rather slowly, but I cannot go much more slowly than this—in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The House is obviously anticipating an important debate. What procedures are in place if a Minister or shadow Minister does not turn up?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent and most immediate point, but I have to say—very slowly—[*Interruption.*] I am very pleased to be able to answer the hon. Gentleman that whereas I was looking for a solution to this point, the appearance of a certain Member through the door means that I no longer have to consider such a solution. I call Mr Andy Burnham.

Opposition Day

[9TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Policing

2.18 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes with concern the loss of 17,000 police officers in the last five years; further notes the most recent Police Recorded Crime statistics, which show sharp rises in some of the more serious crimes including knife crime and sexual assault and that, alongside evidence that some crime is rising, there is evidence that crime is changing and moving away from traditional forms such as burglary and car theft and is being increasingly replaced by cybercrime; is concerned by reports that the police budget could face between 25 and 40 per cent spending reductions in the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review; notes warnings from senior police figures that this could result in over 20,000 further reductions in frontline staff, the effective end of neighbourhood policing and much of the public being exposed to much greater risk; accepts that further efficiencies can be made in the police budget for England and Wales but believes that budget reductions over 10 per cent would be dangerous; further notes the ongoing concern surrounding the Scottish Government's oversight of Police Scotland and the findings of the recent staff survey which found only 30 per cent of staff thought they had the resources necessary to do their job properly; and calls on the Government to secure a funding settlement for the police that maintains frontline services and does not compromise public safety.

I rise to speak to the motion in my name and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends. At the start, I should thank the hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford), who is about to leave the Chamber. Old alliances forged over the cause of water fluoridation do, in the end, stand one in good stead. I am grateful to him.

We have just been discussing the powers that the police and security services need to keep us safe in the 21st century. I would be the first to argue that the House has a duty to provide those powers, alongside strong safeguards, but that is of course only half the story. Alongside the powers, we need the people to put them into practice. That bit was missing from the Home Secretary's statement. In the 19th and 20th centuries, Britain led the world in policing, because our policing by consent model was based on investment in good people with a strong sense of public vocation. In the 21st century, crime is changing—it is moving online and becoming more complex—but what will never change is the simple principle that the foundation stone of good policing is that presence in every community and the building of those strong relationships at local level.

It therefore feels right to pay tribute at the start of this debate to police officers and police civilian staff. What unites this House is a deep sense of gratitude to the men and women who work every day to keep our constituents safe and put themselves in harm's way to do it.

Ms Karen Buck (Westminster North) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that among the police whom the public are most supportive of are our safer neighbourhood teams? They have been so severely undermined by spending cuts in the past few years. In Westminster, we saw a 30% fall in police between 2011 and this spring, and many constituents are saying to me that they no longer

see any evidence of safer neighbourhood teams on the beat. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is a cause of great sadness?

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend anticipates me, because that is going to be at the heart of what I say today. I am sure that she, like me, feels great pride in what the last Labour Government did to invest in neighbourhood and community policing. Those changes have been noticed by the public and have built confidence locally in policing, and that is now at risk.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): Let me make a point that I made during last week's business questions. In Enfield, 152 uniformed officers have been lost from our streets since 2010, yet there has been a 22% increase in violent crime in the past year alone. There has been an increase in all categories of violent crime, and I think there is a connection between those two things. I wonder what my right hon. Friend thinks, because the reply I received from the Leader of the House was less than satisfactory.

Andy Burnham: My right hon. Friend rightly says that there is evidence that violent crime—knife crime and sexual assault—is on the increase and that the Metropolitan police have seen some reductions, particularly in her community. The big worry is that if the Government proceed with the spending plans they set out at the Budget, thousands of police officers could be taken off the streets of this country, particularly in London, where the change would be most keenly felt. That should concern Members on both sides of the House.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con) *rose—*

Andy Burnham: I will make a little more progress and give way later on.

Last week, the shadow Policing Minister and I joined the Home Secretary and the Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice at the police bravery awards. As I am sure we would all agree, it was a humbling evening. It was particularly poignant this year, with PC David Phillips in the minds of many. We think of David's family today, and we hope that they take some comfort from the huge public response and outpouring of feeling that we have seen.

As I said when I started this job, when the Home Secretary gets it right, she will have my support—I have just offered that to her on the investigatory powers Bill—but where she and the Government get it wrong, I am not going to hold back from saying so, particularly where public and community safety is at risk. That brings me to my central point: this Government are about to cause serious damage to our police service and if they do not change course, they are about to put public safety at risk.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that all one needs to know about the Government's policy is that four Conservative police and crime commissioners and the Mayor of London are preparing a judicial review, in the Met's case because, in addition to a 43% cut in its budget—achieved and proposed—the Government are proposing another £184 million-worth of cuts as a result of the resourcing budget changes?

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend tempts me on to important ground: we are considering today not only the overall size of the cake for the police—how much money the police budget gets from the spending review—but how that cake is then divvied up. This week, PCCs of all political colours, have come together to say that the rushed changes to the police funding formula could seriously destabilise our police services. I would be interested to know what response the Government will make to the letter they have received.

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): I spoke to my local PCC yesterday and he confirmed to me that

“we are in a strong position to face future financial challenges” while maintaining front-line services. Does the right hon. Gentleman therefore agree that many factors influence performance, of which finance is just one?

Andy Burnham: That may well be the case—I do not know, as I have not seen the details. May I gently point out to the hon. and learned Lady, however, that that is not the position everywhere? I refer her to the comments the chief constable of Lancashire made yesterday before the Home Affairs Committee. He said that if these cuts go through,

“people in Lancashire will not be as safe as they are now”.

The chief constable of Cumbria has said that that force may not be viable, and we face the closure of police stations across the country. Complacency will not serve Conservative Members well in this debate.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): South Wales police force has had a reduction of 600 police officers in the past three years. I have had the privilege of working closely with community teams in my constituency in crucial areas such as counter-terrorism and dealing with extremism. Mark Rowley has made it very clear that uniformed officers on the beat also play a crucial role in that work. Does my right hon. Friend agree that such work is put at risk when cuts are made in police forces across the country?

Andy Burnham: That is the point: we are already hearing that police services in England and Wales are overstretched and struggling to cover all their functions. That is because in the past five years 12,000 full-time officers have been lost—the total was about 17,000 police staff overall. Three weeks from now, the Chancellor of the Exchequer will be standing at that Dispatch Box announcing his spending review. If he follows through on what he said at the Budget, the country will soon have a very different police force, providing a much-reduced service than the one that has just been described. As it stands, the Home Office, like other unprotected Departments, is in line for a cut over the next five years of between 25% and 40%. If we assume that the Government are working to keep it to the lower end of that spectrum, it still represents a massive hit on resources. It will mean 22,000 fewer police officers than we have today. That is a massive number and the Government need to provide justification for cuts on that scale.

Dr Murrison: If things are as dire as he is suggesting, why is it that crime across the country is falling? In addition, why is a 10% cut in police funding, which he said was doable at his party conference, apparently now “dangerous”, as his motion puts it?

Andy Burnham: I will come on to deal with that, explaining clearly what we think could be done and what takes us into the realms of dangerous cuts. The hon. Gentleman glibly says that crime is coming down, but he just heard what my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) had to say a moment ago. We know that crime has moved online and that the crime figures have not yet been updated to include those cybercrime figures—5 million crimes. I do not believe it will serve the Government well if they continue to exhibit complacency on these matters. There is good evidence to show that crime is not falling, but is in fact rising.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): As a member of the Home Affairs Committee, I had the opportunity to question the chief constables that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned. Is it not true that efficiency has to be part of the settlement and that some forces spend over £75 more per capita than others? That surely is where savings can be made.

Andy Burnham: The hon. Gentleman makes a very valid point, and I will come back to it later. I am not standing here today saying, “No cuts. Things have to stay exactly as they are. There is no room for efficiency in the police service.” Of course there is room for efficiency. My right hon. Friend the Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) commissioned a report from the former Met commissioner Sir John Stevens in the last Parliament. He identified scope for savings of the kind that the hon. Gentleman just described. I am not saying that there is no room for cuts. The core of my argument is this: yes, make those efficiencies, but there comes a point beyond which the Government will be beginning to unpick the fabric of our police service and to put local communities at risk, and I am not prepared to see that.

Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab): Lancashire has one of the best performing police authorities in the country, but due to a flawed formula, about which a cross-party representation was made to the Minister, Lancashire is set to lose £25 million. People talk about crime reduction, but does anyone recognise that early intervention by the police in Lancashire working with communities and residents—

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): There is no such thing as prevention any more.

Kate Hollern: Absolutely. It is an absolute nonsense that Lancashire should be penalised because of a flawed formula.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I have a word of advice for the hon. Lady. Interventions must be short, because there are a great many people wishing to speak this afternoon. For future reference, during an intervention it is not acceptable to take another intervention from someone from a sedentary position however amusing it might be to the House. I am sure that the hon. Lady will now conclude her intervention and hand back to the shadow Secretary of State.

Andy Burnham: I am glad that my hon. Friend made that intervention, because it was a really important one and those on the Government Front Bench needed to

hear it. They all shook their heads when she gave that figure of £25 million. Lancashire is not making that up. People are not speaking out for the sake of it. Doubtless the Government will want to accuse them of scaremongering, but this is nothing of the sort. Senior police are speaking out about what is happening. They can see that the proposed budget cuts, combined with the new funding formula, could seriously destabilise community and neighbourhood policing.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Andy Burnham: I will give way in a moment.

That brings me to my first question for the Home Secretary today. I have just described how we saw cuts to frontline services in the previous Parliament. I have also said that we are looking at cuts of possibly up to 25%. What evidence can she point the House to today that says that the Government can safely shrink the police by a quarter from its current overstretched position and not put public safety at risk? In fact, what evidence is there that she can safely cut the police by 20%, 15% or even 10%? We would love to see it, but I do not think that we will. I do not think that that evidence even exists. This is what is happening: we are being asked to accept major changes to the police without the evidence to justify it.

Sadiq Khan (Tooting) (Lab): I commend my right hon. Friend on his excellent speech. He will be aware that the commissioner of the Metropolitan police has warned that he is concerned about the safety of London if the scale of planned cuts and changes to the police funding formula go ahead. In an interview, he said:

“We think we can expect to lose somewhere between 5,000 to 8,000 police officers.”

He said that responding to a “marauding terrorist attack” or 2011 riot scenario would be harder. How much weight does he think that the Home Secretary and Chancellor should pay to the most senior police officer in the country?

Andy Burnham: The Home Secretary should give those comments her full attention. The figure that my right hon. Friend has just quoted is backed up by independent research that I have commissioned. It suggests that if the cuts go ahead—cuts of around 25%—London could see 5,000 or 6,000 police officers lost from the frontline. I know that he will do what he can to oppose those cuts and the funding formula in the coming months. I look forward to seeing others on the Government Benches doing the same, and standing up for the people of London as I know that he will.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): May I take my right hon. Friend from London and bring him closer to home? He might be from Leigh, but he knows Merseyside like the back of his hand. Does he agree that the level of cuts that are about to be imposed on Merseyside do more than just take away a service? They risk undermining the foundation of trust between us and our police.

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend puts it very well. Let us look at what Merseyside has said about what the proposed cuts would do. It has said that they would mean scaling down teams dealing with sexual assault

and hate crime. Those are very serious implications. Where is the evidence to justify cutting the police on that scale? I have not seen it. I hope we hear it today, because this House cannot give permission to the Government to proceed with these cuts until they have made the case for what they are trying to do.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend as surprised as me to hear that there are Members who do not understand that, in certain parts of the country, crime is rising, not falling. Crime in Greater Manchester rose by 14% in the 12 months up to June 2015 compared with the previous 12 months. Recorded violent crime rose by 39% over the same period. Members must take account of the fact that some parts of the country are different. We have guns and gang violence in Salford, and it is a very serious issue.

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend puts her case very well. Crime may indeed be changing, and moving away from volume crime, such as car crime and burglary, but that is not to say that crime is falling. As I have said before, online crime is not adequately reflected in the crime figures. She rightly says that there are worrying increases in the most serious crimes in a number of areas, including in our part of the world, in Greater Manchester.

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

Andy Burnham: I will make a little progress if I may, and take some further interventions later.

I was just saying that I do not see the evidence to shrink our police force back to the levels of the 1970s, leaving us with fewer police officers per head of population than other comparable countries. That brings me to my second question, which is not for the Home Secretary, but for the whole House. If there is no authoritative evidence that cuts on this scale will not put our constituents at risk, how on earth can we allow them through? We have called this debate today for the following reasons: to challenge the Government on what we feel is a reckless gamble with public safety; to give voice to the deep disquiet felt by thousands of police officers across all 43 forces in England and Wales about the future of policing and community safety; to initiate a proper debate about the future of policing and the needs of our communities, in advance of the spending review; and to alert the public to the enormity of what is at stake by launching a national campaign today to protect our police. Just as with tax credits, I cannot remember the public being told about these plans to decimate neighbourhood policing before they went to vote.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): What a lot of people outside this place will try to square is the right hon. Gentleman's speech to the Labour party conference in which he said that he would cut these budgets by 5% to 10%. Rather than a thoughtful critique of what the Government are actually doing, what we have today is a cut out and paste standard attack on the Conservative Government for acting in a fiscally responsible way, which he suggested that they should do just a few weeks ago.

Andy Burnham: If the hon. Gentleman is going to intervene in the debate, he should at least listen to it. A moment ago, I said that we put forward plans for

efficiencies before the election, so it would not be a sustainable position for me to say, "No cuts at all", and I am not saying that today. What our motion says is that cutting the police by more than 10% would put public safety at risk. If he thinks that it is fiscally prudent to do that and damage public safety, then I beg to differ with him. I would love to see how he can justify cuts of more than 10% in his community.

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there has been a 23% reduction in the force establishment in Merseyside since 2010? By 2019, that will have gone up to 41% of the workforce. Does he think that those on the Government Benches have any idea about the impact that that will have on the community, safe policing and the safety of police officers?

Andy Burnham: I do not think that they do. Cuts on the scale proposed would mean the effective end of neighbourhood policing as we have seen it in recent years, particularly in rural areas and areas of lower risk. We would see thousands of bobbies taken off the beat. It would take us back to the bad old days of reactive and remote policing, with officers retreating to cars and to the station. They will not be out on the streets or visible in their communities.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): The safer neighbourhood teams were started in Stonebridge in my constituency of Brent. They helped to build trust in the police and to lower crimes. We have had a 62% cut in our neighbourhood teams. Again, that is a false economy by the Government. There will be more crimes and fewer police to deal with them.

Andy Burnham: False economy is absolutely the point, is it not? The Government do not seem to equate the reduction in crime we had in the last decade, which began under our Government, with the investment in those community safety teams. That brings me to the role of police community support officers, one of the innovations of the Labour Government of which I, for one, am very proud indeed. Under the Government's plans, they will become an endangered species. We know that they do not enjoy the same employment protection as warranted officers, so no doubt they are worried that they will be the first to go.

One of the gains brought about by PCSOs was that they substituted for warranted officers on lower level duties, such as managing the Remembrance Sunday parades we will see in our constituencies this weekend. Around the country, some of those parades are beginning to be scaled back and even cancelled because there is not sufficient police cover. Is it not a sure sign to the Conservatives that if the police can no longer cover events of such importance to our local communities their cuts have already gone too far?

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Aintree ratepayers' association and neighbourhood watch is a non-party political organisation and wrote to me to say:

"It is, in our view, 'criminal' that such significant deep-rooted budget reductions are being considered, it demonstrates what value the Government places upon community safety and cohesion and totally sends out the 'wrong message' to those who do not want to abide by the mores of civilised society."

I could not have put it better myself.

Andy Burnham: Civilised society; that is what matters here. If people want a glimpse of what the future might look like, they should have a look at Tiptree in Essex, where residents already have to club together to fund their own private security guards. Is that the kind of society we want, with private security guards roaming the streets in areas where the police have withdrawn? The Government deny it, but that is what is happening on the ground.

This is not just about the loss of capability in community and neighbourhood policing. Forces are talking about disbanding mounted sections and dog sections. The cuts could have serious implications for the police estate, with police station closures all over the country and the police becoming a blue-light only service, responding to emergencies and not dealing with crime at a local level.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): Today's motion refers to Scotland, where we have 1,027 more serving police officers on the street than we had in 2007. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree, however, that it is iniquitous and unfair that Police Scotland should be the only force in the United Kingdom to be required to pay VAT on its operations, taking £23 million out of operational expenditure?

Andy Burnham: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that that should be considered, but I am afraid that I am not going to be to let him or the Scottish National party off the hook. The survey referred to in our motion says that only 30% of officers in Scotland feel that they have sufficient resources to do the job. I accept that that might partly be the responsibility of the Westminster Government, but I am not sure that the changes to the police in Scotland and the move to Police Scotland have resulted in the improvements that we were told would happen.

As I said only a moment ago, the police have spoken about becoming a blue-light only service in places. In their briefing for this debate, Lancashire police state:

"We will attend fewer crimes."

That prompts the question of which crimes. Where is the national public guidance on the crimes that can now safely be de-prioritised? Again, there is none, because the Government would rather pass the cuts and pass the buck down to a local level, leaving the public facing a confusing postcode lottery in policing.

If anyone believes that referring to a postcode lottery is an exaggeration, may I refer the House to the pilot scheme in Leicestershire, where the police attended burglaries only at houses with even numbers, a scheme that the Government claimed worked and that could now be expanded? At what point have we as a society or this Parliament accepted the principle that the police will no longer attend someone's home if they have been burgled? At what point have we accepted the principle that some victims of crime can be abandoned in this random fashion? We have not, and I do not believe that this House should concede that principle. Policing practice should not be changed in such a way until the Government have provided sound justification for the change.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that cuts to the neighbourhood policing budget will undermine the follow-up work after serious

crime, such as the gun crime that happened recently in Wood Green, in all our inner-city areas? Does he agree that for criminals this proposal is Christmas day 365 days a year?

Andy Burnham: I can do no better than refer my hon. Friend to the words of Peter Clarke, former deputy assistant commissioner of the Met's specialist operations directorate, whom the House will know. Talking about what is in the offing, he said:

"We risk breaking the 'golden thread' that runs through the police effort all the way from local communities to the farthest part of the world where, in an era of global terrorism, defence of the UK begins".

That is the point: that pyramid of policing that begins at a very local level and feeds intelligence into the system is not an either/or idea. We cannot just say that we will have officers dealing with online crime and withdraw people from the streets. We have to maintain a police presence in every community, which is a point that the Government seem not to understand.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con) *rose—*

Andy Burnham: However, I believe that the former Policing Minister does understand that.

Nick Herbert: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, and he has been very generous. As I understand it, he is saying that cuts of up to 10% could safely be made now because, as he accepts in the motion, further efficiencies could be made in the police budget. Therefore, by definition, he has accepted that the efficiencies that have been made so far have not damaged policing. He shakes his head, but it is fairly obvious that if further cuts of up to 10% could be made safely he accepts that the reductions that have been made to date have not damaged policing. Is it therefore not extraordinary that Labour Members opposed those reductions in spending and said that policing would be damaged? Why should we believe them now?

Andy Burnham: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman intervened, because I am not saying anything of the kind. I am not saying that the cuts that the Government have managed to date have been without consequence. I have just described how functions as important as managing Remembrance Sunday parades have been cancelled. I have also pointed out that crime is rising and I, for one, do not say that there is no link between police numbers and rising crime. We looked at a plan to protect the frontline by merging police forces. I note that the Government have turned their face against that. It is all about how they do it. The frontline can be protected if the Government are prepared to manage the cuts in a way that takes resource out of the back office. They are not prepared to do that, either, so consequently we are seeing unacceptable cuts in police forces up and down the country.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): I am very interested in the point that the right hon. Gentleman is making about the frontline. Perhaps he would like to add in to his speech the fact that the proportion of officers on the frontline has increased over the past five years.

Andy Burnham: “Proportion”—people will hear how the Home Secretary is trying to spin it. Let us deal in people, shall we, rather than proportions. Between 12,000 and 13,000 officers lost, police community support officers lost, and all at a time when crime is beginning to go up. She wants to take away 22,000 more. I say in all sincerity to the Home Secretary that with crime on the rise this is no time to cut the police.

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab): May I bring to the attention of my right hon. Friend another example of Tory promises? Croydon was hit very hard by the riots in 2011 and the Prime Minister came down days afterwards and promised to keep the area safe. Since then, the Government have allowed every single police station in Croydon North to close down and as of today we still have fewer police on the streets than in 2010, when these people came into government. Is that not yet more Tory broken promises?

Andy Burnham: Everybody will remember very well the terrible fire and the consequences of the riots on the streets of Croydon. People would expect promises like that to be kept, would they not? But with this Prime Minister and this Government, they are rapidly learning that such things are said in the moment to look good but are not followed through. Sadly, that is the hallmark of this Government.

The Government are sending the police on a dangerous journey without a route map. Where is the White Paper that sets out the case for these drastic changes to the police and the vision for the police service of the future? Where is the expert analysis of the changing nature of crime and society and therefore of the resource needs of the police? In the absence of all that, the only justification put forward by the Government, as we have heard today, is that despite reductions crime has continued to fall. I have dealt with that, Madam Deputy Speaker. I believe that in the last decade the reduction we saw was linked to the investment in neighbourhood policing and we are now beginning to see signs that crime is on the rise again.

The truth is that this whole process is not being driven by our future needs as a society, or by the changing nature of crime; it is a crude, Treasury-driven process that owes more to an ideological drive to shrink the state than to the good governance of the police and our public services. What we will soon be left with is the police service of the Treasury’s dreams but the public’s worst nightmares.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Does the shadow Home Secretary recognise the concern expressed by Sara Thornton, head of the National Police Chiefs Council, when she recently appeared before the Home Affairs Committee? She adopted the words of the chief constable of Merseyside police, who said that there is a political obsession with police visibility, irrespective of actual neighbourhood demand. Is not the shadow Home Secretary guilty, along with the shadow Ministers quoted in *The Times* today, of that political obsession, and of seeking to weaponise police numbers?

Andy Burnham: I think that the hon. Gentleman will regret those remarks. Listen to what senior police officers are saying. Is he accusing them of scaremongering? Is he saying that Peter Clarke, whom I quoted a moment

ago, is wrong? Has he talked to his own constituents recently and heard their views about visible neighbourhood policing? I suggest that he speaks to them, because this is not about what politicians want. His constituents want to see a strong uniformed presence on their streets, keeping them safe.

As I have said, it is not just about the overall size of the cuts, because the Home Office, in characteristic fashion, is taking a bad situation and making it worse. The changes to the police funding formula—[*Interruption.*] The Policing Minister should not dismiss this, because the letter he received this week was a pretty difficult and sobering one for him. It talked about a process that is “unfair, unjustified and deeply flawed”.

That is how his own Conservative colleagues describe it. It is highly critical of Ministers’ handling of the whole process, which they say was “entirely avoidable and wholly unacceptable”.

They are now looking at a judicial review. Those are strong words, and is not the fact that it is Conservative voices saying them a clear indication that the Government are no longer carrying their own side, and that they are losing the confidence of the police as a whole?

Where do we go from here? A good start would be to put implementation of the formula on hold. Let me get to the heart of what we are calling for today. As our motion makes clear, we have not turned our face away from the idea of savings in the police budget, because there are changes to back-office structures and procurement that could protect the frontline. If one speaks to senior police officers, one realises that most accept that further savings of up to 5% are difficult but doable. Cutting between 5% and 10% gets more dangerous, and the cuts would be harder to make, but neighbourhood policing would have a chance in that scenario. My message to the Government is that if they cut the police by 10% or more, they will put the public at risk.

I hope that I can take it as read that the Home Secretary is fighting for the best deal she can get from the Treasury. Will she share with the House this afternoon what figures she thinks are acceptable without compromising public safety? If she can set out those figures, can she tell us where she thinks those savings can be made from within the police without compromising public safety? That is important, because her vision for the police needs to fit with the Government’s other plans for public services; they cannot be seen in isolation from the rest of the spending review.

Policing is the last safety net, and it will be forced to deal with the consequences of failure in other services. For instance, if the Government fail to tackle the crisis in mental health services in the spending review, that will only add to the pressure on the police and on police cells. If they force councils to close youth clubs, leisure centres and playing fields, the chances are that antisocial behaviour will be on the rise again. If they fail to invest in social care, they will leave our hospitals in crisis, ambulances trapped in queues outside and police cars having to fill the gaps. If they fail to sort out the mess in probation, caused by underfunding and part-privatisation, there will be a direct impact on re-offending and, ultimately, public safety.

Ultimately, that is the problem. What we are facing in this spending review is a drive to shrink back the state and then privatise it. In the response to this debate, we expect to hear plenty of talk about the deficit. Yes, the

[*Andy Burnham*]

deficit is important, but there is not just one way to close it, and it is not more important than the safety of the public and of the country.

This is a milestone moment for the police service in Britain. The decisions that the Government make on funding over the next few months will determine the mission and the manner of policing and community safety in this country for a generation. That was the warning given by the Conservative police and crime commissioners in their letter to the Government this week. This is an issue that they now have to explain and answer. It is simply not safe to cut the police in the drastic way they plan, and they have failed to set out a case that it is.

Our motion makes a reasonable demand: put simply, it is to secure a funding settlement for the police that maintains front-line services and does not compromise public safety. Is there any Conservative Member who cannot vote for such a demand, or are they saying that they are ready to sacrifice public safety in the name of deficit reduction? It is not acceptable, and it will not be acceptable to their constituents, as it is not to ours.

Opposition Members understand the value of public service and public services. We have shown in the past that we can fight for our NHS, so we give notice to the Government today that we are ready to do the same for our police and for the safety of our communities. I call on Members on both sides of the House to think about what cuts on this scale will mean for their constituencies, put public safety before party politics and support the motion before the House tonight.

2.55 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): I commend the right hon. Member for Leigh (*Andy Burnham*) for securing his first Opposition day debate since becoming shadow Home Secretary. I agree with his comments about the bravery of our police officers and the excellent job they do for us day in, day out. We were tragically reminded by the funeral of PC David Phillips earlier this week of the dangers that our police officers face when they put on that uniform and go out on shift, because they never know what they will face or what difficulties they will encounter. Sadly, in PC David Phillips's case, a family was left bereaved. Our thoughts are with his family and with his colleagues in the Merseyside police.

However, I cannot commend the motion that the right hon. Gentleman has put before the House today. Not only is it simply wrong on almost every point of fact, but it shows that Her Majesty's Opposition have comprehensively failed to learn the lessons of the past five years. I will happily turn to each of their points in turn, but before doing so I want to say this: when I became Home Secretary in 2010 and set out the need for reform of policing, the response from the Opposition Benches was to deny the need for change. The Labour party was united with chief constables and the Police Federation in saying that funding reductions would lead to a "perfect storm" of rising crime, falling public confidence and a depleted and damaged frontline. Five years on, and not a single one of those irresponsible claims has come true.

Crime, according to the independent crime survey for England and Wales—one of the most authoritative indicators of crime in any country in the world—is down by more than a quarter. Public confidence in the police has remained strong. Far from the frontline being damaged, police officers are now more likely to be deployed in front-line roles, like patrol or neighbourhood officers, than at any time in modern policing history. This is the uncomfortable truth for the right hon. Gentleman and the Labour party: communities in England and Wales are safer now than they have ever been. Their homes are less likely to be burgled, their cars are less likely to be stolen, and their friends and families are less likely to be confronted with violence on Britain's streets.

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): We had a meeting earlier this week at which we heard police officers say that 1% of fraud was being investigated. We heard concerns that cases of human trafficking were not being investigated. We know for a fact that the number of hate crimes against disabled people has increased by 25%. How can the Home Secretary be so complacent?

Mrs May: We are concerned about the investigation of fraud, which is exactly why we set up the economic crime command in the National Crime Agency, to improve the police's ability to deal with fraud. With regard to human trafficking, it is the Conservative party that introduced the Modern Slavery Act 2015, ably taken through the House by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (*Karen Bradley*). It gives the police extra powers to deal with exactly that point. Police reform is working and crime is falling.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): What message does the Home Secretary think she is sending to my constituents when only 16% of knife crimes in 2013-14 have been resolved? Is she suggesting that my local police force is incompetent or that tragedies such as the murder of Mohamed Duru-Ray, who was a 16-year-old stabbed to death, should go unsolved?

Mrs May: We want the police to investigate crimes and a tragic death of that sort. I am very sorry to hear of the case that the hon. Gentleman raises. I shall go on to refer to violent crime later in my speech.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend congratulate Hampshire constabulary, which has 96% of police out on the beat rather than stuck in back offices, because of efficiencies and reorganisation which have led to an 11% reduction in crime?

Mrs May: I absolutely do congratulate Hampshire police. I have visited Hampshire police. It is one of the police forces that has been at the forefront of using technology to help it investigate crime—through the body-worn video cameras, for example, and the tough tablets that they have taken out with them. They are also working very closely with the fire service and doing everything to ensure that they have been making savings and improving the service to the public.

Graham Stuart: On the new funding formula for the police, there is concern among many that it favours the urban over the rural. Will my right hon. Friend meet me and other colleagues from across the House who represent rural constituencies to discuss the formula and ensure that we get something that is fair to all?

Mrs May: I am happy to do so. I know that my right hon. Friend the Policing Minister has been conducting a number of meetings with colleagues to hear their views on the proposed police funding formula. I am happy to set up the sort of meeting that my hon. Friend suggests. The consultation on the police funding formula is still open and no decisions have been taken in relation to it.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): The funding formula as it stands is out for consultation, but the proposals would lead to a 5.1% cut for Sussex police and a 5.2% increase for Surrey police next door—urban to rural. Would the Home Secretary say that that is fair, and that a city such as Brighton and Hove, which has very specific challenges, could cope with another 5.1% cut, on top of all the others?

Mrs May: The point I made is very simple. The police funding formula has been out for consultation for a while. We are listening to the representations and then decisions will be taken. He refers to the specific needs of certain parts of the Sussex police force area, Brighton and Hove being one of those. I take this opportunity to commend the work that Police and Crime Commissioner Katy Bourne has been doing in relation to certain communities in Sussex and the very real attention that she has given to the sort of issues that the hon. Gentleman refers to.

Joan Ryan: Enfield communities value their police community support officers, particularly given the rise in violent crime and the need for uniformed officers on the streets to reassure people. The right hon. Lady will know that having had a £600 million cut in budget, the Met police are now expecting another £800 million cut in the spending review and are considering making the decision in December to axe all PCSOs. Does the Home Secretary place any value on police community support officers?

Mrs May: Earlier the right hon. Lady intervened on her right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh and referred to the issues around knife crime. May I take this opportunity to commend her predecessor in her constituency, Nick de Bois, who did a great deal in relation to knife crime and ensured that further legislation was passed in this House in that regard? On the issue of police community support officers, of course we value them, but the decision is an operational one for chief constables as to how they balance their budgets and ensure the differentiation. The sort of comments that we are hearing now about PCSOs have been heard before. For example, in 2010 the chief constable of Lancashire, Chief Constable Finnigan, said that with huge regret he had told all 427 PCSOs in the force that they might lose their jobs as a result of budget cuts. Did they? No, they did not.

Police reform is working, and crime is falling. This Government have achieved something that no other Government have achieved: we have proved that it is possible to improve services, and maintain public trust

and confidence, while saving money for the taxpayer. We must not forget why those savings are necessary. The right hon. Member for Leigh mentioned the deficit and yes, we did inherit a structural deficit, high taxes, record debt and unreformed public services. I hope I do not have to remind the right hon. Gentleman, who was Chief Secretary to the Treasury when the 2007 spending review was decided—a document that continued this country's course down that fateful path of profligacy.

Andy Burnham: If I may correct the Home Secretary, I conducted the 2007 spending review as Chief Secretary and a decision was taken to grow public spending at a lower rate than overall growth in the economy—a decision that the current Prime Minister and the current Chancellor described at the time as tough. The right hon. Lady she needs to correct the record.

I want to ask the Home Secretary a direct question, and she cannot leave the debate today before she answers it. If she is saying that everything is fine, she now needs to tell the House at what level she thinks it is safe to cut the police before public safety is compromised. What is the percentage cut that she is prepared to make without compromising the safety of our constituents?

Mrs May: It sounded as though the right hon. Gentleman was about to get his handcuffs out and stop me. [*Interruption.*] Perhaps I won't go there.

The right hon. Gentleman knows full well that the discussions around the spending review are currently taking place. The spending review will be reported to this House by the Chancellor on 25 November. We are still consulting on the police funding formula, and in due course, after the spending review has been announced, the funding formula will be announced.

Since 2010, we have cut the budget deficit by more than half, we have lowered the tax burden for people up and down the country, and we have set about reforming public services to better serve citizens and communities. It is therefore with some dismay that I see the Opposition making exactly the same mistakes they made in 2010—misusing statistics, worrying decent members of the public, and wilfully ignoring the experience of the past five years. The similarities are uncanny.

The weekend before last, the right hon. Member for Leigh told the *Sunday Express* that “the Home Secretary is gambling with public safety”, just as five years ago his predecessor told *The Daily Telegraph* that police savings were “an irresponsible gamble with crime and public safety”.

Indeed, in 2011 the right hon. Member for Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) even called an Opposition day debate on police funding, with a motion that bore more than a striking resemblance to the one we are discussing today.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I admire the Home Secretary's approach to the good use of statistics. I am surprised to hear her say that crime has fallen, when in Redcar and Cleveland in the past year we have seen an increase in crime of 21%. That includes a 77% increase in violence against the person. This does not accord with what she says about crime falling. Under the Labour Government crime fell by 43%. I am very proud of our record so it is disappointing to see that.

Mrs May: I think I am right in saying that the figures the hon. Lady quotes for crime falling under the Labour Government have exactly the basis as the figures that I have quoted for crime falling over the past five years—the independent crime survey of England and Wales. There is an issue about police recorded crime which I will refer to later in my speech.

The tactics and the language of the Opposition have not changed, but I thought the shadow Home Secretary's mind had. As a number of my colleagues have pointed out, and as was very ably pointed out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert), the shadow Home Secretary told the Labour party conference:

“Of course, savings can be found.”

Savings are mentioned in the motion today. The Opposition say that further savings can be found. They therefore assume that the savings that have been made so far have not damaged policing. This was a point that the right hon. Member for Leigh completely failed to address when my right hon. Friend challenged him on it.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): On savings, according to the chief constable of Sussex, the last savings term delivered not only efficiency but reductions in crime—for example, by merging arrest units with detection units. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is a question not just of how much money is spent, but of how well it is spent?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right: it is about how the money is spent, not about the absolute amount of money. That is a crucial difference between ourselves and the Labour party. Labour thinks the answer to everything is more money; we recognise that it is how the money is spent. It is not just about police officer numbers, but about how those officers are deployed.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): Another problem that Labour seems to be repeating from its past, according to the shadow Home Secretary's comments, is the plan to force mergers on to police forces. Will my right hon. Friend commend the way in which the West Mercia police force has worked in a bottom-up alliance with Warwickshire police? Only today, they have announced plans for a joint operational control centre with Hereford and Worcester fire service.

Mrs May: I do indeed commend West Mercia for the steps it has taken. The work that it has done with the Warwickshire force is an example of how forces can retain an individual identity while getting the benefits of working together and collaboration. It is a very important example.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mrs May: I would like to make a little more progress, because I am conscious that a lot of Members wish to speak, and I want to turn to each of the points in the motion in turn.

First, the motion

“notes with concern the loss of 17,000 police officers in the last five years”

and the possibility of “further reductions” in numbers during this Parliament. Of course, that is not Government policy. Decisions on the size and make-up of each

police force are not a matter for the Home Office but a matter for chief constables to decide on locally in conjunction with their police and crime commissioners. Indeed, and Labour Members might be interested in some of these facts, a large number of the police officer reductions since 2010—8,153 officers, or 48% of the total fall—were lost in the 13 areas controlled by Labour police and crime commissioners. Nowhere is this more the case than in neighbourhood policing. Between 2012 and 2014, Conservative PCCs increased the number of neighbourhood officers by 5,813, yet over the same period, Labour PCCs cut them by 701. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) asks where these statistics come from. They should be familiar to Opposition Members, because they were released in response to a parliamentary question from the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) earlier this year. As Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary has said repeatedly over the past five years, what matters in policing and in the safety of communities is not how many officers there are in total, but how they are deployed. Since 2010, the proportion of officers deployed to the frontline has increased from 89% of officers to 92%—the highest level on record.

Andy Slaughter: I am sure that the Home Secretary will therefore join me in congratulating Hammersmith and Fulham Council, which is now funding 44 police constables on the beat in Hammersmith. At the same time, though, the Mayor of London has destroyed neighbourhood teams, is about to get rid of all PCSOs, and is closing two out of the three operational police stations in the borough. How can neighbourhood policing survive in that climate?

Mrs May: It is interesting to look at the Met, because it has been recruiting more officers, as is the Lancashire force, which I mentioned earlier. It is wrong to assume that the service that is offered by police officers is best judged by the number of police stations. Many forces up and down the country have sold off their police stations but have given the public better access to the police—as I saw when I visited my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Caroline Ansell) prior to the election—by siting them in council offices.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that more can be done on collaboration between the police and the fire and ambulance services so that efficiencies can be made?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are very good examples of where that is taking place. I referred to Hampshire. Northamptonshire is also doing this, and there are other examples of where there are real opportunities for savings to be made and for a better service to be given to the public as a result.

Secondly, the motion suggests that there is evidence that crime is rising, including increases, in the most recent police recorded crime statistics, in very serious crimes such as knife crime and sexual assault.

Mr Steve Reed *rose*—

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mrs May: I am going to make progress.

The right hon. Member for Leigh and others are right when they say that those crimes are serious, and it is absolutely right that the police are recording more incidents of each, but it is wrong to suggest that an increase in police recording necessarily means more crime in communities. As the independent Office for National Statistics said last month:

“as well as improvements in recording, this is also thought to reflect a greater willingness of victims to come forward to report such crimes.”

Victims of crime—often very vulnerable people who have endured horrendous suffering and torment—are coming forward to tell their stories to the police and to put the perpetrators of their abuse behind bars. Members across this House should welcome that and not seek to manipulate or use it for their own ends. As I said earlier, according to the independent crime survey, crime is down by more than a quarter since 2010.

Thirdly, the right hon. Gentleman says that crime is changing and traditional crimes such as burglary and car theft are being replaced by modern criminality like cybercrime. Crime is indeed changing, but the level of some digital crimes in no way compares with the dramatic falls in conventional volume crimes over the past five to 10 years. Crime survey data also show that the proportion of plastic card users who were victims of fraud is currently around 25% lower than its peak in 2009-10.

This Government have not failed to recognise the changing nature of crime; we have faced up to it. In 2012, we set up the National Crime Agency to lead the fight against serious and organised criminality. In 2014, we brought Action Fraud into the City of London police to better co-ordinate the response to fraud and financial crime. Our national cyber-security programme has invested nearly £900 million in protecting British people, businesses and state assets against cyber-attack. For the first time ever, the Office for National Statistics now publishes an estimate of the number of cybercrimes and frauds experienced by members of the public, making us the first major western country to capture the changing nature of crime.

Mr Steve Reed *rose*—

Mrs May: I want to make progress because I am conscious of those who wish to speak.

However, it is the crux of the motion that I find most troubling—that is, the concern among Opposition Front Benchers that the police may endure spending reductions in the forthcoming comprehensive spending review. As I have said, in the previous Parliament we successfully halved the deficit. In a few weeks' time, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will set out how we will finish that job in the comprehensive spending review. In doing so, he will show that this Government recognise the value of balancing the books, spending within our means, and lowering taxes for hard-working people, because the deficit is still too high, and it is right that police forces share in that effort, as they have done in the past five years. To echo the shadow Home Secretary's speech to the Labour party conference, savings are still there to be made. The limit of those savings is not the arbitrary 10% that he sets out in his motion. Let us remember that usable financial reserves for police forces in England and Wales stand at just over £2.1 billion

right now—built up, in part, to help soften the impact of future spending cuts. These reserves increased by nearly £100 million last year—up in 26 forces across England and Wales. Capital reserves are approximately £240 million in 2014-15—roughly the same as the previous year.

Nor can we forget the extraordinary savings and operational benefits that can be made, as several hon. Friends have said, from better collaboration between forces and effective joint working with other local services. Only last week, Cleveland, Durham and North Yorkshire constabularies announced a £5 million saving by bringing together their dogs units, while still maintaining a 24-hour service across the three forces. There are efficiencies afforded by better technology. Cambridgeshire police have saved an estimated 240,000 officer hours a year and over £7 million by rolling out tablet and mobile devices to officers to allow them to work better on the road and away from the police station.

Graham Stuart: I add to my right hon. Friend's list the police and crime commissioner for Humberside, Matthew Grove, who is working hard with the fire service to have a joint service centre for vehicles across the two services, saving millions of pounds in capital and revenue terms over the years. We have not heard much today about Labour's U-turn in recognising that greater democratic oversight of local policing has been a significant contribution to better policing and improvements in crime figures across the country.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I commend Matthew Grove for the work that he is doing in Humberside, particularly in collaboration with the fire service. My hon. Friend reminds me that Labour Members have done a complete U-turn on directly elected police and crime commissioners. They were implacably opposed to them, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs, the former Policing Minister, will know from the time when he took the legislation on police and crime commissioners through the House, and now they have suddenly decided that they are a good thing and they should carry on.

Catherine West: The Home Secretary is painting rather a rosy picture of everything. What does she say to the orphans of Erdogan Guzel, who was tragically shot in Wood Green in the summer? The culprits still have not been brought to book because the police locally do not have the resources, despite the fact that the local authority, which is under immense strain, has pitched in and given them extra resources. Those orphans want an explanation as to what happened to their father and why that crime remains undetected because the follow-up work has not been done.

Mrs May: Obviously, I am very sorry to hear of that particular incident and the effect it has had on that family. Nobody wants to see anybody deprived of one of their parents through an attack of the sort described by the hon. Lady. I am very clear that I want the police to investigate such crimes and to be able to do so. That is partly why I stood here earlier to make a statement on a draft Bill that will ensure that our police have the powers they need to access certain data that they currently use to investigate crimes, but that, as modern technology develops, they are unable to access.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mrs May: I apologise to the hon. Lady, but I did say that I would make progress and I am conscious that time is getting on.

I have just quoted a few examples of how collaboration can benefit forces and represent savings. They collectively represent opportunities worth billions of pounds in savings for policing, without the loss of operational capability and without cutting corners on the service the public expect. Policing has risen admirably to the challenge of lower budgets and a changing landscape in the past five years, and I have no doubt it will continue to do so in the next five.

Before I finish, I want to address the final point in the motion. Police Scotland has previously been held up—including by shadow Front Benchers—as a better alternative to the model of police reform this Government have pursued in England and Wales. If on nothing else in today's debate, I agree with what it says about Police Scotland, because I firmly believe that the amalgamation of eight local forces into a single body was mistaken.

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): I refer the right hon. Lady to her party's 2011 manifesto, which said that it would agree to the creation of a single police force. If it was good enough in 2011, why is it not good enough now?

Mrs May: Top-down restructures of police forces do not deliver the benefits they supposedly promise. We as a party here have said that if forces wish to come to us and say that they have a business case and local support for a merger, we will look at it. On top-down restructuring, however, the economies of scale invariably do not appear. The complexity of bringing together distinct organisations can distract from the day-to-day business of fighting crime, and the most precious element of policing by consent—local accountability—can be lost. We must go further to drive deeper collaboration, better sharing of back-office services and a more intelligent approach to where police capabilities sit, to generate savings without the loss of local accountability and identity.

Andy Burnham: I am grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way one last time. We agree that savings can be made, but what we disagree on is the extent to which they can be made safely. My hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Catherine West) said that the Home Secretary is painting a rosy picture, and I think that police officers watching this debate will conclude that she is not living in the same world as them. This is not about what we on the Labour Benches are saying; chief constables from London to Lancashire are saying that the safety of their public will be compromised if the cuts go ahead. Does the Home Secretary think that those chief constables are scaremongering?

Mrs May: I will repeat the point that I have already made: if the right hon. Gentleman would care to look back to 2010, he will see that chief constables were making very similar points then and they have dealt with the savings. As he himself accepts in the motion, policing has not been damaged by the budget savings made over the past five years. Otherwise, he would not be able to stand up and say that further savings could be made.

Over the past five years, officers and staff have worked day in and day out to cut crime. Chief constables and police and crime commissioners have demonstrated true innovation and creativity in meeting the challenge of lower budgets, and in doing so they have shown that that greater efficiency, improved effectiveness and strengthened legitimacy are possible, all at the same time.

For the Government, the job is not yet done. We are currently consulting on a new funding formula so that the police grant is allocated fairly and in a transparent way between police forces. We have made proposals to allow much deeper collaboration with fire and rescue services and ambulance services—to save money and improve the operational response—and later in this Session, the Police and Criminal Justice Bill will give police officers much greater professional discretion to allow them to make savings, cut crime and improve services for the public.

Police reform has worked. That is the lesson that the Labour party has not yet learned, but in this Parliament—under this Government—police reform will continue.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Before I call the spokesman for the Scottish national party, it might be helpful for the House to know that after Mr Arkless has spoken there will be a time limit on Back-Bench speeches of six minutes.

3.25 pm

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): I am grateful that I have avoided the cull on speaking time and that I will be heard in full, but I do not propose to take up as much time as the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) and the Home Secretary.

I am delighted to be called to speak in this debate on policing. I am sure that everybody in the House would agree that the police in the UK are one of the best examples of civil law enforcement in the world. I have always been particularly proud of that. Police play a huge and invaluable role in all UK communities. They are a cornerstone of civilised society and the enforcers of what many of us understand to be the rule of law.

I offer personal thanks to all police officers and all civil staff in all police forces across the United Kingdom. I also pay my condolences to the family of the courageous David Phillips. My thoughts and prayers are with them.

I pay tribute to all the civilian and police staff at Police Scotland, and thank them for their sterling and diligent work in admittedly challenging times over the past few years. When users were asked whether they felt confident that Police Scotland would deal with their inquiry efficiently, 79.1% gave a “very high” or “high” response.

My constituency of Dumfries and Galloway has faced challenging times with regard to policing. As the Home Secretary has said, the single police force was created in 2013, but not without concern locally. The local control room in Dumfries has been closed and I share the local concern about that. I am delighted to report, however, that last month the Scottish Government reacted by placing £1.4 million in an extra fund to train

70 to 75 call-handling staff. I am confident, therefore, that the Scottish Government are reacting to local concerns.

I have been clear that policing in Scotland has not been without challenges. In 2013, we created the single police force—a move supported by both the Conservative and Labour manifestos in the 2011 Scottish Parliament elections. That resulted in the amalgamation of eight police forces into one. I think it is right that a country of 5 million has one single police force. The crux of the move is to stop duplication, have a more joined-up approach towards policing and unlock potential savings over the next generation. The Scottish Government can confirm that they are on target to save £1.1 billion over 15 years. In fact, they have saved £120 million from Police Scotland's budget since it was formed in 2013.

Good policing is not only about our fantastic police officers; it is about the wider criminal justice system. The causes of crime need to be addressed. Reoffending is down in Scotland, as is alcohol and drug abuse. The Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, which is passing through the Scottish Parliament, will reform court procedures to make them less rigorous, so that evidence can be agreed in advance and there is less need for officers to attend court hearings. There are increased obligations to provide procurators fiscal, the equivalent of the Crown Prosecution Service, with better and more thorough information. The rehabilitation consultation in Scotland is considering extending the presumption against short sentences of under three months. The attacks on legal aid that have happened in England and Wales have not occurred to the same extent in Scotland. We are trying to maintain good levels of access to justice. I am proud to say that we have no criminal courts charge in Scotland.

At the crux of this debate is cuts, but if we scratch below that issue, it is the manner of the cuts and the areas that are cut that cause most concern, particularly to Opposition Members. In Scotland, we have decided to protect frontline policing. I am proud to report that since the Scottish National party came to power in the Scottish Parliament in 2007, we have created an extra 1,000 police posts—there are now an extra 1,000 police on our streets. That can be compared with what we heard before I rose to speak: almost 12,000 police officers have been cut in England and Wales. Worryingly, that figure could rise to 20,000 over the next five years.

Melanie Onn: If things are going so well, why in a survey that was published last month did 33% of respondents from Police Scotland say that they saw themselves leaving the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland in the near future?

Richard Arkless: The hon. Lady is correct that an independent survey of police officers in Scotland came up with that figure, and that is concerning. If we look beyond that figure, the survey said that 50% of those who expressed an opinion blamed that desire on the pension changes enforced by the Treasury at Westminster. It has compelled our police officers to put 14.25% of their income towards their pension. The decrease in morale is blamed predominantly on that decision by the Treasury. Of course, that finding is concerning and the Scottish Government are doing everything possible to work with the Scottish police force and the SPA to address it.

Melanie Onn: It is very neat to blame Westminster for all the ills, but the survey also found that

“47% of all respondents stated that they did not receive recognition for any good work that they do and 37% stated they were not motivated to do the job to the best of their ability.”

Surely you cannot lay the blame for that at the hands of Westminster.

Richard Arkless: It is not me who is laying the blame. I am using the words of the police officers in Scotland, who have told us that the reason their morale is dropping is the pension changes made by the UK Government. I am merely the conduit.

It is interesting to note that there has been no similar sampling of police officers in England and Wales. Given the dramatic cut of more than 15,000 officers—the reverse of what is happening in Scotland—I suggest that any such exercise would produce similarly concerning results.

I am very proud of our approach in Scotland. My constituents and police officers tell me, as does every indicator I see, that people feel more confident when there are more visible police on the streets. That is the decision that we have made.

Members on both sides of the House have alluded to the letter that seven police and crime commissioners sent to the UK Government this week. The content of that letter is worrying in the extreme. As the right hon. Member for Leigh said, it states that the cut of 14% or £25 million next year in Lancashire will result in

“the loss of almost all of its proactive crime fighting and crime prevention capacity by 2020.”

It gives me no great pleasure to say that. The seven commissioners have informed the Government that they are

“taking legal advice with a view to initiating a judicial review”.

That sounds like a crisis. That is not happening with the single police force in Scotland.

Joan Ryan: Is it not the case that Police Scotland has had a year of chaos, with control centres closing, harming public safety? I understand that staff cuts have meant that some of the police who are working in the call centres are not trained in that work, which is leading to serious problems. Will the hon. Gentleman comment on that?

Richard Arkless: I have just said that my constituency has been unfortunate to lose one control room, but that the Scottish Government have responded positively by providing an extra £1.4 million to train 70 to 75 call centre staff.

I must point out that in the week when the first Bill has been certified as an English-only Bill, this House has put forward a motion on a devolved matter that specifically criticises the Scottish Government. Scotland is watching and its people will be the final judges of what goes on in this House.

Police Scotland have done an incredible job recently on crime reduction. As I have said, the real test for the public is police numbers and crime levels. I am delighted to report that crime is down in Scotland. It is now safer to live in Scotland than it has been for 40 years.

Byron Davies (Gower) (Con): If everybody is doing such a good job, why is the chief constable leaving after such a short time?

Richard Arkless: As I understand it, the issues for the chief constable were not operational. We are trying to find a successor quickly. It will be his job to deal with many of the concerns arising from the continued review of the police service.

Crime is down: violent crime is down by 52%; handling offensive weapons is down by 62%; homicide is down by 48%; and fire raising and vandalism are down since 2007 by 58%. In 2014, there were 270,000 recorded crimes in Scotland, which is down by 148,000 from 2007. Statistically, it is clear that Police Scotland, despite the pressures forced upon it, is doing an incredible job.

The reasons for the reduction in crime in Scotland are complex, but I believe that enormous credit must go to our exceptional officers within Police Scotland. Thereafter, there are other reasons. Perhaps it is due in part to our growing sense of community and our optimism about our country's future. The devolved Parliament in Scotland engages directly with the community wherever possible. Our Government are made up from ordinary people from ordinary Scottish communities. Our sense of community extends to the Government—they are accessible and fully accountable to the Scottish people. We have been working and taking measures towards building a fairer and more equal society, so that people feel less ignored and more included.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) alluded to a survey carried out in Scotland by an independent provider. It sought views on a range of subjects, including management, training, development, wellbeing, equality and communication. Twelve thousand officers took part. It found that there is a very positive team spirit within Police Scotland: 73% felt that their team works well to improve services; 83% said that they are treated with the upmost respect by their colleagues; and 78% expressed trust and respect for their line managers and said that they have strong relationships with their colleagues. The survey also highlighted the cohesion within Police Scotland.

Melanie Onn: It seems incredibly convenient that you are cherry-picking some of the—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. The hon. Lady should speak through the Chair.

Melanie Onn: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman is cherry-picking the statistics, but nearly half of respondents felt overloaded with information that they did not need to know. Only 22% felt that they had appropriate information on what Police Scotland wanted to achieve, and only 12% felt that they had appropriate information on what the Scottish Police Authority wanted to achieve. Is the evidence he is presenting an inaccurate reflection of the survey?

Richard Arkless: Absolutely not. I freely admit that there are concerns, but when any organisation goes through the fundamental change that Police Scotland has gone through in the last generation, concerns will arise.

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is somewhat ironic that the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn) criticises him for cherry-picking from a survey when that is exactly what the motion on the Order Paper does? It picks one line from any number of different points in the survey. In fact, if we cherry-pick in such a way, we can make surveys say anything we want. We might even be able to find one that says that the Labour party is a credible political force.

Richard Arkless: I agree with my hon. Friend. The reality is that over 1,000 more police officers are on the streets in Scotland. That is what the public want and that is what they have received. There is a 79% satisfaction rate that, if people complain to Police Scotland, it will be dealt with in an efficient and responsible manner. To me, those two indicators are key. Our police perform well and the people in Scotland live in a country that is safer than it has been in my lifetime. I am very proud of that statistic.

The survey was the first ever of that nature carried out by Police Scotland. Officers embraced the opportunity to participate and there was a high response rate. There is a huge amount of interest in the results. It is important that they are used in a constructive and positive way to help to build a better police force in Scotland both for staff and civilians. Indeed, the chairman of the Scottish Police Federation, Brian Docherty, recently said that Police Scotland was an excellent service and should be recognised as such.

Interestingly, there is no comparable survey of police forces in the UK. Perhaps one should be undertaken with haste so that we can have a clearer picture of the police service throughout the UK. These reports should be read by everybody in the Government and the Opposition, particularly those who voted for continued austerity cuts. Sadly, most of the stresses endured by our police are the result of the continued UK austerity measures. Unison, which agrees, has said:

“It is clear from UNISON’s 2014 police staff stress survey that our members are suffering adverse effects from the impact of the UK government’s austerity cuts to policing.”

In conclusion, the creation of Police Scotland has allowed the Scottish Government to defend front-line services from Westminster austerity. I am proud that we have more police officers on the streets of Scotland. I am proud of the selflessness and dedication shown by Police Scotland members during these challenging times, and I am proud that Scotland has never in my lifetime been a safer place to live.

3.40 pm

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): As we have heard from the Front Benches today, this is a sad and sobering week to be debating policing. The funeral of Dave Phillips sets the context that we should always remember: police officers do a job that is always difficult and often dangerous—sometimes tragically so. Front-line officers police a society that is largely peaceful and law-abiding and in which crime has been falling for years, but they still put themselves in harm’s way every time they go out on patrol, and we should not forget that.

Within that sombre context, there is a legitimate debate to be had about how to run this essential public service. I hope that in the less partisan moments of this

debate, everyone will acknowledge that the coalition Government's police reform agenda was largely a success. The introduction of police and crime commissioners has led to much greater democracy and transparency in the oversight of police forces, so I welcome Labour's U-turn in agreeing to their continuation, and there is a much greater commitment to professionalism based on evidence and the spread of best practice, through the College of Policing—an institution that receives much less attention than it deserves, but which was an important reform.

Furthermore, the newly introduced National Crime Agency is transforming the policing of serious and organised crime, and there is a much more positive attitude towards the introduction of new technology, which has the capacity to transform policing at the sharp end. The police innovation fund has played a significant role in encouraging forces to make better use of digital technology—body-worn cameras are perhaps the most visible example, but it does not end there. The use of digital devices, along the lines of smartphones, can revolutionise the way the police access intelligence, respond to calls and write reports. There is no need now to go back to the station after every incident.

The Government can be proud of their record, but the reform agenda never ends, and further changes are needed. I will make a few suggestions in a minute that I hope Ministers will consider, but we should first consider the central issue of finance, which the motion addresses. The shadow Home Secretary is in a difficult position, because he comes in a long line of shadow Home Secretaries who have stood at the Dispatch Box and predicted that cuts in spending will lead to soaring crime rates. They have all been proved wrong, and it is a tribute to police forces around the country that they have coped with tough spending settlements and re-organised themselves to become better at crime prevention and catching criminals.

Labour's motions raises two essential points. The first is that we still need restraint on public spending. We are still spending £70 billion a year more than we raise and so increasing our debts. We have to stop behaving like this as a country, and the central task of Governments throughout this decade is to put our public finances back in order.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): It was an honour to work as my right hon. Friend's Parliamentary Private Secretary while he was Policing Minister. He did an excellent job then, and he makes an excellent point now. Cheshire police have not only cut crime and shown innovation, but achieved an outstanding score for efficiency from Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary. Is this not the balance—between crime reduction and fiscal responsibility—that we need to take forward?

Damian Green: My hon. Friend makes a very good point from his own position as someone with expertise in this area. He is right that the forces best at spending their money effectively are also often the forces best at fighting crime, which is what we want them to do. The overall issue of public spending is important.

The second point that needs to be considered is that the formula by which money is allocated to individual forces is out of date and needs to be changed. This has been a long process, and it is inevitable that when a

formula such as this one is changed, there will be winners and losers—and the losers will shout very loudly and the winners will keep quiet. That is the phase we are in at the moment.

The point for today's debate is that neither the overall amount of money available to the police, nor the distribution between the individual forces has yet been decided. Indeed, I think I am right that the consultation period on the funding formula is still going on. We all know that tweaks, as well as transitional periods and damping and many other arcane tricks of the Whitehall trade, can be applied to any formula. I am sure they will all come into play over the coming months.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with me that the formula for policing is grossly unfair—to the west midlands, for example? If comparisons are made with other police authorities, it is clear that about 2,000 to 3,000 policemen have been lost in this region over the last three or four years.

Damian Green: I am interested to hear what the hon. Gentleman has to say. We can all make eloquent pitches about how any formula is unfair to our own areas. I would happily talk to him about education funding in Kent, but perhaps not in this debate. As I say, all debates of this kind come down to losers always caring more than winners.

Whatever the final results of both the spending review and the funding formula distribution, there are serious underlying issues for police leaders and Ministers to address about the long-term viability of the way we do policing in this country. Assuming we do not return to irresponsible levels of public spending, settlements will continue to be tight, so if we want a serious debate, we need to address those underlying issues.

Let me make a few suggestions. First, we have only scratched the surface of the benefits of new technology—for making policing more effective and for making it more cost-effective. I have mentioned body-worn cameras and the information available on smartphones. Both can save time and therefore money. There are huge savings in police time to be made in better use of technology throughout the criminal justice system, especially with regard to police attendance at court.

The days when a police officer wasted a day at a court waiting to give routine evidence for five minutes should already be over. Evidence can be given by video link, or recorded on video at the time of arrest and charge. Faxes and photocopying should be things of the past in a digital age. The piece of paper in a bundle of evidence that goes missing or has not been sent to the defence, causing trials to be postponed and further days wasted, should be playing no part in a modern criminal justice system.

Andy Burnham: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Damian Green: It will come off my time now, so I am afraid I cannot. I can count as well.

The next main point is that we have reaped nothing like the full benefits of collaboration between forces, about which we have heard some examples. Economic necessity has forced some useful collaboration between

[Damian Green]

neighbouring forces, providing more effective policing at less cost. Specialist units such as firearms, mounted police or dog handlers can well be shared. We need more of that, but we also need a radical change in procurement policies—perhaps with national contracts for repairing police cars, and indeed buying them. Clearly, too, computer systems should be able to talk to each other in a way that they cannot now. There is great scope for better and more collaboration between the different “blue light” services. This will be a huge area of useful co-operation in the future.

My final suggestion is that some force mergers are inevitable, and should be made easier. I completely agree with the Home Secretary that a top-down blueprint of the type that previous Home Secretaries have proposed, which failed, is not the way to go. Many sensible people will argue, however, that in the case of some individual forces, there is a logic that says they should merge with their neighbours. I have heard that argument advanced by police and crime commissioners.

Policing is always difficult, and so is making policy for the police. I think the Home Secretary has a record that she can be proud of in this area, and I hope that she will build on this with further radical reform in the future, because the police need it.

3.49 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): The wisdom and strength of the Opposition resolution was proved by a novel decision by Leicestershire police, which recently decided to experiment by investigating only those burglaries that took place in houses with odd numbers. If the house had an even number, the burglary was not investigated. The news was welcomed with gratitude by the Leicestershire branch of the burglars and footpads trade union, but it was less popular with residents of Leicester who live in houses with even numbers.

I pay tribute to the late Michael Winner—it is rare that one has the opportunity to do that—and the matter of recalling and commemorating the deaths of policemen. Mr Winner, who was not admirable in every way, set up a charity to establish memorials on the sites where policemen had died in the cause of duty. We do not use such anniversaries to achieve political benefit for ourselves; we wear poppies because we want—genuinely—to mourn the deaths of those who have given their lives in warfare, and learn lessons accordingly. It is disappointing when a Prime Minister accuses us of using the Armistice ceremony for political purposes, when he started Prime Minister’s questions today by using the Armistice service to score a futile point against the leader of the Labour party.

My point is about Mr Daniel Morgan, and it is an issue of enormous importance that is endemic to the police force. Daniel Morgan lived in Llanfrechfa on the edge of my constituency. He was a 37-year-old private investigator who was working in London on a job to investigate police corruption. He was found dead 27 years ago in a pub car park in south London. His brother Alastair, who I spoke to yesterday, has carried out a campaign over all those years to expose what happened and discover the reason for the murder. He is still unhappy, and rightly so.

I am one of the few Back Benchers who have had the opportunity to read an amazing document called “Operation Tiberius”—I recommend that anyone who has the opportunity to read it should do so. Two members of the Home Affairs Committee were allowed to read it under strict conditions, with a policeman standing next to us making sure that we did not take notes. Our cameras and mobile phones were also taken away so that we could not copy it. People are not allowed to know what is in “Operation Tiberius”, and I am bound by the secrecy vow that I made at the time not to reveal what I read. I can, however, reveal what the *Independent* newspaper has said about “Operation Tiberius”, and it is terrifying. The document reveals that corruption in the Metropolitan police force is endemic and has been for many years. The scale is staggering.

Andy Burnham: I am listening carefully to my hon. Friend, because I recently had the privilege of meeting Daniel Morgan’s brother, who has campaigned with unbelievable courage over the years. My hon. Friend should be in no doubt that although I am calling today to protect our police and for more resources, that does not mean that we should not learn the lessons of what happened at Hillsborough, Orgreave, Shrewsbury and in the case of Daniel Morgan. We must hold that mirror up to the past if we are to build a police service that is ready for the 21st century.

Paul Flynn: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, and I am far from being grateful to anti-police. I have known every police chief constable in my area since 1972—43 years—and they were all men and women of integrity who achieved great things in that police force. It is a fine force, and has been all that time. I was brought up to believe that all policemen were like “Dixon of Dock Green”, and that is why the contents of “Operation Tiberius” are so deeply shocking. It tells the story of crimes planned by little units of serving police officers of various ranks, and criminals. They met not in clubs or pubs where they would be observed, but in the branches of a secret fraternity. Jack Straw tried to persuade all police forces in the country to require a declaration of membership of that fraternity, but he was frustrated in that effort, because several of them refused to co-operate.

I believe that we must look at the “Operation Tiberius” report. I see no reason why it cannot be published with the names redacted. The names are all there—names of serving policemen and names of criminals—and the crimes are horrendous: they were plotting crimes, organising crimes, carrying out crimes, covering up crimes, and using people who were corrupted in all branches of Government. The report exists, and it is deeply serious.

I have already talked about Alastair Morgan. Another worrying example relates to the murder of Stephen Lawrence, and the way in which the police—certainly—tried to protect the perpetrators of that dreadful murder. We should recognise that a great problem existed then, and we should ask whether it still exists. When I raised it with Bernard Hogan-Howe in the Home Affairs Committee, he generously admitted that the issue was one of great seriousness, and that many people believed that the problem still existed.

The report, which was leaked to *The Independent* all those years ago, is also significant because, although it covers many parts of London, it does not cover south

London, where Daniel Morgan was murdered. The suggestion is that there was some corruption in that leaking. I ask the Home Secretary and Ministers to examine the report and find out whether it is true that the contemporary situation in the Met is one in which endemic corruption still flourishes.

3.56 pm

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I am very proud to be the second Kent Member to speak in this important debate, because we in Kent are very proud of our extremely effective police force. It has faced some of the greatest challenges with which our nation has struggled—a few months ago the chief constable, Alan Pughsley, said that some 900 migrants were coming into the country each month—and it has to deal with the immediacy that being a front-line county in our great kingdom involves.

I am extremely proud of Alan Pughsley's work. He has done something remarkable: he has managed to increase the proportion of warranted officers on the front line to 92%, which is the highest percentage for six years. That is a phenomenal achievement. Kent has some 3,000 warranted officers and 352 police community support officers, and they do a fantastic job. When I hear Opposition Mems bad-mouthing them or accusing them of failing in their duties, I feel offended for them, because they are performing their duties amazingly.

The officers in my constituency have done fantastically well too. The West Kent divisional commander is Chief Superintendent Julia Chapman, whose team has done fantastic work in West Malling, Tonbridge and Edenbridge. She is ably supported by two district commanders, Chief Inspectors Gill Ellis and Roscoe Walford. Sadly, Chief Inspector Ellis is moving on. I send her every good wish for her future career, but I am very sorry that she is not staying in Tonbridge, where she has done such fantastic work.

One of the PCSOs has done fantastically well in West Malling. Phillip Harrison has been the PCSO on duty on Remembrance Sunday for at least three years—probably more—and he will be there again this Sunday. Very quietly, like so many PCSOs, he will be carrying out his duties armed only with his strength of character and his personality, and he will do that phenomenally well.

Anna Turley: I am delighted to hear the hon. Gentleman pay tribute to PCSOs, because I genuinely think that creating them was one of the best things that we did as a Labour Government. I am sure he shares my despair and horror at the fact that so many of their jobs have been cut, because they do very important work and often free up regular officers to carry out much more serious and heavy duties. I appreciate his support for a Labour Government policy.

Tom Tugendhat: I am happy to welcome Labour policies when they work, and PCSOs do work. They are a brilliant innovation. I particularly welcome the efforts of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice in supporting them, and the amount of work that he has personally done in ensuring that they have every opportunity not only to serve in their current roles but to be promoted to warrant service if they wish—and, indeed, many do.

I am very grateful that PCSO Harrison will be there. These individuals across Kent—this whole team—have in the last year seen a reduction in crime of 6%. I know that that is not down to them alone; it is down to a network, and that network starts in Kent and spreads to the whole of the United Kingdom. That co-operation, which is led very much by the chief constable, has done an amazing amount to ensure the people of Kent are safe. Chief Constable Pughsley has ensured that we have been innovative in introducing new technologies, and I am grateful that my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green) has mentioned some of them. I would just like to raise one of them. In January, Kent Police introduced TrackMyCrime which I hope many other police forces will be introducing soon. It has seen the time taken for a crime report fall dramatically. It has also increased the satisfaction of those reporting crime. It is fantastic to say—or, rather, it is a mixed blessing—that 3,000 have been victims of crime and have used it; it is sad that there have been that many victims, but it is great that that many have used it, and the satisfaction levels have been very good.

The presence of police is not just about individuals, nor just about bricks and mortar, although I do know we all take very seriously the important decisions that will be taken over the location of police stations over coming years. The police station in Tonbridge and that in West Malling are extremely important. I welcome the work done in outreach—many policemen are now operating in our communities from council offices and, indeed, from supermarkets and mobile police stations, but it is not just about that; it is also about the work done across our whole nation.

That is why I am going to take a few moments to welcome the Bill introduced to this House earlier today. The draft Investigatory Powers Bill is absolutely essential. It is essential for ensuring that the intelligence the police need to do their job is available to them. It is essential to ensure that our intelligence services can co-operate effectively with the police so that we have the kind of integrated defence network we need to ensure that our communities are safe, not only from terrorism, violent crime and indeed child pornography and paedophilia, but also from more run-of-the-mill crimes that sadly blight the lives of so many of our constituents. I am delighted that the Bill is now before the House and will soon, I hope, become an Act.

Finally, I very much welcome the democratisation of police forces that we have seen under this Government. I know I am probably the only one in Kent who says this, but I welcome the new police and crime commissioner. That is not a universal statement in Kent—there are divergent opinions—but at least we know in Kent now who is taking the decisions.

Damian Green: Indeed, we do know who is making the decisions and we can hold the PCC to account. That is particularly important in that before the current PCC became the PCC she chaired the police authority so she was doing roughly the same job only with no public accountability. There cannot be a better example of the democratic improvement of having PCCs.

Tom Tugendhat: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right and speaks for me, because that is exactly what I was going to say.

[Tom Tugendhat]

Knowing now who actually takes the decisions on police priorities, the location of police stations, the use of resources and the priority of innovation, it is essential that when we get to the PCC elections—in 2016 in my area—we focus on who we want. These decisions are no longer for anonymous apparatchiks who hold secret sway over our policing; they are for people who are empowered with a huge burden of responsibility, and I greatly welcome the quality of candidates who are stepping forward on the Conservative side. I hope very much there will be excellent candidates from the other sides as well, because we need the best candidates for this job—not party political, but the best candidates. I am delighted to say that we have put forward some of those.

The growth in interest in technology should continue. It is not a process that is going to stop; in fact, it will accelerate as the criminals exploit ever-greater technological innovation, whether through secret messaging on WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger, through exploiting online banking to commit greater fraud or through phishing—in the internet sense—for greater riches. It is therefore absolutely right that our police step into that world and that our security services help them. I welcome the work being done in this area by the Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice and, in particular, by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary.

4.5 pm

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): I declare from the outset that I grew up in a policing household. My dad is a retired police sergeant and one of West Yorkshire police's finest. I am incredibly proud of all that he achieved in the police, but he would be the first to say that he does not recognise today's force. I am certainly not here to argue that that is an entirely bad thing, however. As crime has changed, so has policing. As new evils manifest themselves, legislators and law enforcers have had to adapt in order to stay ahead and to protect those they serve.

My speech today is not like the others I have written. Since becoming the MP for Halifax, I have been keen to bang the drum for my town, to speak about the potential for jobs and growth, and to speak with pride about what we have got right and what we have to offer in order to bring in the investment and the tourists we need if we are to prosper. However, I would not be a credible MP if I spoke only about the positives at the expense of those issues that are difficult, that are a challenge and that pose a danger to the wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable in my constituency.

In May this year, on one of my first weekends in this job, members of the English Defence League marched through Halifax. They were there to protest about child grooming gangs, and the march highlighted to me, very early on, the value of local, informed and familiar neighbourhood policing teams. In Calderdale, we have had one of the highest numbers of arrests in the country in connection with child sexual exploitation. Crime may be changing, with a decline in certain types of criminal activity, but colleagues who have made the hard yards on raising awareness of CSE prior to my election—my hon. Friends the Members for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) and for Rochdale (Simon Danczuk) among others—will know just how complex CSE is to tackle.

According to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, all four countries in the UK have seen the number of recorded sexual offences against children increase over the past year, and the type of policing required to identify, disrupt and prosecute those seeking to exploit children and young people is intensive: it takes care, persistence and time. There are now 957 fewer police officers in West Yorkshire. The thin blue line is thinner than ever. My conversations with the local police have revealed their worry that policing will become much more reactive—the blue light service that we heard about earlier. Reactive policing is of limited use when we are striving to secure prosecutions and deliver a zero-tolerance approach to child sexual exploitation.

Further to this, Calderdale has also been deemed to be vulnerable to radicalisation and extremism, and in that context I cannot stress enough the importance of trusted local neighbourhood policing teams. Again, we cannot afford to take a reactive approach to radicalisation. Over the past three years, the number of terrorism-related arrests has gone up by 56%. Britain's counter-terrorism chief, Mark Rowley, has said that regular officers on the beat make an "essential" contribution to developing relationships with communities. He went on to say:

"Counter-terrorism is not simply delivered by the counter-terrorism network",

and

"mainstream policing makes a big contribution".

On the day the EDL came to Halifax, it was thanks to local officers that the march went ahead with limited trouble. They knew exactly where any geographical flash points would be, and they knew where to look on social media to take the temperature of the situation. They also knew who to keep an eye on, and where they were likely to be. I want to thank the officers who were on duty that day for the work they did, and for the work they do every day.

West Yorkshire police has weathered the cuts so far, but hon. Members will appreciate my anxiety about another round of cuts as high as 25% to 40%, which would be devastating. Neighbourhood police and police community support officers are at the forefront of identifying vulnerabilities, frustrations and other causes for concern within communities and among individuals before radicalisation starts, almost irreversibly, to manifest itself. We will lose the ability to do this proactively if there are further cuts to West Yorkshire police—or to any force, for that matter.

I have mentioned CSPOs and their role. We heard a little more about that from the hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat). In 2013, the Home Office said:

"Since their introduction in 2002...PCSOs...have proved to be an invaluable link between the police and the communities they serve... They bring key skills, values and diversity to policing."

PCSOs have proved to be an incredibly effective way of building trust within communities, bridging the gap between policing priorities and the concerns of local people and gathering information in a way that officers may otherwise not be able to do.

West Yorkshire police has lost 137 PCSOs since 2010, a reduction of 18%. The Home Office has acknowledged what it describes as the "invaluable link" between police and communities delivered by PCSOs, so it must recognise

that further cuts will start to diminish that link. Given the changes in crime—not only the complexities of tackling radicalisation and child sexual exploitation, but the urgency with which we must carry out that work—I urge the Government to think very carefully about how they reconcile the proposed cuts to services with their responsibility to keep people safe.

4.10 pm

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I am very pleased to contribute to this debate on policing. I am a criminal barrister by training, as I should probably declare at the outset. I have prosecuted hundreds of offences—from youth robberies in the magistrates court to murders and terrorism offences in the Old Bailey—and I know as well as anyone that our criminal justice system owes an enormous debt of gratitude to our police officers, particularly officers who carry out their duties with a tenacity that is always tempered by fairness. I believe our best police officers, particularly the ones I worked with in counter-terrorism and homicide cases, embody the finest traditions of British policing, with a determination to pursue lines of inquiry wherever they may lead and to get to the truth, however inconvenient that may be. The officers I worked with in serious cases were, without doubt, among the finest to be found anywhere in the world.

The background to this debate is the difficult funding climate that the police, and indeed other public services, have faced. We cannot get away from that, or forget that despite having the fastest growing economy in the developed world—generating more jobs in Yorkshire alone, the county of the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch), than in the entirety of France, and creating more employment for young people in the United Kingdom than in the rest of the EU put together—we are still running a very significant deficit. If we do not get the deficit under control, it will be a real and present danger to our financial stability. It is also right to say that if we do not get it under control, the deficit will do nothing to keep crime levels as low as we want them to be. Indeed, if we do not get it under control, we will not be able to continue to plough more money into our NHS and into protecting our schools.

How have the police responded to this funding climate? They have risen to the challenge magnificently. Crime has fallen since 2010: there have been 2.9 million fewer crimes, 189,000 fewer burglaries and 465,000 fewer violent offences. The independent crime survey for England and Wales shows a fall of 8% in the year to the end of June 2015. In my own county of Gloucestershire, crime is down by 18%. That is a tribute to the police officers who have shown such resourcefulness and dedication in serving the people of Gloucestershire, and my constituency of Cheltenham in particular. It is worth noting that those stunning falls have been achieved in the context of a much improved reporting culture, with people feeling better able to report crime, particular sexual offences.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman, with his considerable experience, asserts that crime is falling. May I quote City of London Police Commissioner Adrian Leppard, who is the national fraud co-ordinator? He said in a circular to all police and crime commissioners and chief constables that the crime survey for England and Wales will shortly include at least

“an extra 3 million fraud and cyber incidents”.

That reflects for the first time the changing and true nature of crime and, in his words, is “an increase of up to 40%.”

Alex Chalk: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that crime is changing. That is of course correct, and I will come on to that in a moment. However, the truth—the inconvenient truth for Labour Members, some might say—is that the figures cited are the very figures on which they relied, being those of the independent crime survey for England and Wales. It is no good saying, “Yes, we relied on those in the past but we are not going to rely on them now because they are inconvenient.” There has to be consistency across the piece. There is that consistency of reporting and the figures are unanswerable: crime has come down.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): Has my hon. Friend thought about some of the reasons why crime is falling? Does he agree that it may be linked to our having a stronger economy, with more employment? On the link between crime and deprivation, does he agree that it may be linked to the fact that we have the lowest number of workless households on record?

Alex Chalk: My hon. friend makes an important point, one that I was trying to make at the outset. We have to live within our means, not least because if we do not and the implications of economic instability befall our country, one thing that will rise, just as the sun rises in the morning, is crime. That is another reason why we have to live within our means.

How have the police managed to achieve this fall in crime? They have been innovative and forward-thinking. Savings have been made through improved procurement, which has delivered more than £200 million; the police have become less top heavy, rebalancing their forces in favour of rank and file officers; and they have redeployed their assets, putting a higher proportion of police officers on the frontline. As for the Government, it is right to say that the key priorities have been maintained and properly funded. I am particularly interested in counter-terrorism, and £564 million has been put towards supporting counter-terrorism policing in 2015-16. The Independent Police Complaints Commission has received additional funding, as has the police innovation fund. The College of Policing direct entry schemes have also been properly supported. Let us just look at what the police innovation fund has done. It is a multimillion pound fund that will consider proof of concept bids, as well as implementation-ready bids, to support innovation and breakthrough ideas.

Jack Dromey: The hon. Gentleman has asserted that counter-terrorism is fully funded. There is unanimity across this House in our determination to tackle the generational threat of terrorism, and there is effective funding of the national and regional strategies accordingly. But what does he have to say to Peter Clarke, the former head of counter-terrorism, who has said that what the Government are missing is neighbourhood policing? He said that if we hollow out neighbourhood policing, we

“risk breaking the ‘golden thread’”—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. That is a very long intervention and the hon. Gentleman’s time is running out.

Alex Chalk: I am very grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Of course there needs to be front-line policing, too—that is simply unarguable—but I was going to discuss how resourceful and innovative police forces, doing more with less, have been able to deliver that. I wish to talk about what is happening in my county of Gloucestershire, but first let me address the change in crime, about which the hon. Gentleman made a point. He rightly said that crime is changing, but steps have been taken to address that. As we know, the National Crime Agency has been established to take the fight to organised crime, but Opposition Members made no mention of the £860 million invested in the national cyber-security programme to improve cyber-security. I respectfully invite them to mention it, because it is an important innovation. We have also had campaigns such as Cyber Streetwise to help members of the public.

In Gloucestershire, local officers have responded superbly. They have a commendable can-do attitude, they have rolled up their sleeves and they have got on with it. When National Police Chiefs Council officer Sara Thornton said that members of the public should no longer expect police officers to turn up at their door, officers in Gloucestershire said, “No, we will attend.” That is the right approach to take, because burglary is a horrible crime that robs people of their security and it requires a police response—and a police response will continue in Gloucestershire. It shows that Cheltenham and Gloucestershire’s officers are doing an excellent job—

Jim Dowd *rose*—

Alex Chalk: I am sorry, but I am not going to give way. Gloucestershire’s officers are doing an excellent job of making important reforms while continuing to deliver on the public’s priorities. The truth is that further savings can be made, be it through collaboration—emergency services collaboration, where appropriate—procurement or reallocation to the frontline. Measures can be taken by which we face the financial reality but keep our people safe, too. We should back our police officers. They have done it in the past and they will do it again.

4.19 pm

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this debate and to support the motion. My constituency of Burnley is policed by Lancashire constabulary, which is renowned as a top-performing police force. It has already been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Kate Hollern).

Her Majesty’s inspectorate of constabulary has rated Lancashire constabulary as outstanding. Yet, since 2010, Lancashire has lost 20% of its officers and 23% of its community support officers. In 2010, Lancashire had six police divisions; it now has three.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): Given what the hon. Lady has told us—[*Interruption.*]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. The hon. Lady must resume her seat while the hon. Gentleman is standing.

Kit Malthouse: Given that the hon. Lady has said that Lancashire has seen a reduction in the number of police officers but is still rated as excellent, will she accept that there is no connection between performance and bare police numbers?

Julie Cooper: As I my speech progresses, the hon. Gentleman will see that I do not accept what he says.

There is no doubt that these reductions are impacting on crime levels and on the public perception of crime. Now, worryingly, crime is on the increase in some areas of Lancashire. Sexual offences, burglary and violent crime are all showing significant increases. In addition to that, and very importantly, the nature of crime is changing, and we ignore that at our peril. Cybercrime is growing at a phenomenal rate. A person is now more likely to be mugged online than in the street. Added to that, an ever-increasing amount of police time is spent countering terrorism and tackling child exploitation. Such crimes are more complex to investigate and place a massive demand on police resources. Bearing that in mind, I am hugely concerned by the further proposed cut to Lancashire’s policing budget. Under the new funding formula, the cut to Lancashire would be an additional £24.5 million.

I understand that savings must be made, but a reduction of that magnitude is particularly hard to stomach when the same formula proposes significant increases in funding for several other police authorities.

Victoria Atkins (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Yesterday, in the Home Affairs Committee we had the privilege of meeting, among others, the chief constable of Lancashire police. I asked him why he has a reserve of £65.3 million. Would that money not be better spent on front-line policing to cover the situation described by the hon. Lady?

Julie Cooper: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for raising that matter. The reserve is a result of prudent policing and developing new tactics to adapt to changing crime. It is about responsible policing.

There is no doubt that less delivers less, and Lancashire’s police constable has put his concerns on record. He talked about what would happen if the cuts went ahead. He said:

“Lancashire Constabulary will no longer be able to keep the public safe.”

Surely, when the police constable believes that cuts at the proposed level will mean that he cannot guarantee to keep the public safe, it is time to take notice. This is about not politics, but the safety of the people of Lancashire.

Last year, Lancashire police responded to more than 90,000 crimes.

Kit Malthouse *rose*—

Julie Cooper: No, I will not give way.

Lancashire police has been praised as an outstanding force, and yet it is to have cuts that go way beyond those of most other forces. There is no rhyme or reason for it, and, yet again from this Government, no fairness. What will the cuts mean operationally? The chief constable and the police and crime commissioner tell me that if

these cuts go ahead at this level, the consequences will be this: no mounted police; no police dog units; the loss of the vast majority of our dedicated roads policing officers; the closure of every single public inquiry desk in the county; and dramatic cuts to our serious organised crime unit and the teams that deal with serious and complex crime—these officers deal with those criminals who pose the greatest harm to our communities. Added to that, police community support officers will become a thing of the past.

I know how much the people of Burnley and Padiham value their PCSOs. I have seen first hand the positive impact that our PCSOs have on antisocial behaviour, but it goes further than that. PCSOs are key to delivering dedicated, accessible and visible neighbourhood policing. It has long been acknowledged that the mobilisation of local knowledge is fundamental in effective policing, and there is no doubt that PCSOs play a massive role in the prevention of minor crime and that the on-street intelligence that they access by virtue of their trusted role in the community often provides enormous assistance to major crime investigations. In addition, the presence of these uniformed officers on the street is a source of reassurance to the public. They make the public feel safe.

In all policing, safety is paramount. In Lancashire, we fully accept our need to take a share of the cuts, but I believe that we should never gamble with public safety. I urge the Government to listen to the professionals, including Lancashire's chief constable, and to revisit the funding formula to ensure that cuts are shared fairly and that public safety is not compromised.

4.25 pm

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I pay tribute to the work of the West Midlands police and the men and women who protect communities across the west midlands. As HMIC has pointed out, police forces across the country have been facing significant challenges, but West Midlands police were singled out for praise for how they have responded to those challenges. Since 2010, crime has fallen by 17% across the west midlands. Certain categories of crime have shown recent increases, but that is due to the success of getting people to come forward more readily to report those crimes. West Midlands police have had to do more with less, and as a metropolitan police force has faced funding challenges.

Jack Dromey: HMIC has certified that the west midlands crime statistics are 99% accurate and they now show an increase of up to 5% in recorded crime. Would the hon. Gentleman therefore like to reconsider the comments he has just made?

James Morris: The hon. Gentleman knows that since 2010 crime has fallen across the west midlands by 17%. As I have just said, there have been some increases in crime such as domestic violence, which I think is a tribute to West Midlands police in encouraging people to report such crimes.

I welcome the Government's plans to revise the funding formula. West Midlands police are a low council tax precept force and are dependent on Government grant to a large extent. One of the key criteria for the new funding formula is to take that challenge into account,

so I look forward to seeing how the new formula will help West Midlands police with their funding settlement. There are big challenges for West Midlands police and I know that through the work they have done with Accenture they have carried out a comprehensive review of the future of policing in the west midlands and have mapped out some strategic priorities through a transformation plan. I support that work.

The West Midlands police and crime commissioner has made some decisions that have been characterised by short termism. They have been driven by a desire to generate political opposition rather than being taken in the long-term interest of West Midlands police. I would put the police station closure programme being considered by the police and crime commissioner, which includes the police station in Halesowen, in that category. It cannot be right that West Midlands police are spending £33 million on refurbishing their central base in Birmingham while proposing to embark on a closure programme across the west midlands and the black country that will probably deliver savings in the region of £3.5 million to £4 million. It is vital across the west midlands and the black country area, part of which I represent, that the police are not seen to be losing their footprint in local communities. The Halesowen chamber of trade has expressed concern, which I share, about the lack of police visibility in the town centre.

Mr Jim Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman talks about the closure of police stations and desks, but that has been going on in the west midlands for the past five years, as we have experienced in Coventry.

James Morris: My view is that the police and crime commissioner is making some short-term decisions on the basis—[*Interruption.*]

Andy Burnham *rose*—

James Morris: I will not give way, because I have done so twice already, and I have not even finished responding to the last intervention.

The West Midlands police and crime commissioner is making some short-term decisions in order to generate lurid, populist headlines about Government cuts, rather than taking the right decisions for the people of the west midlands and the broader black country.

Peter Dowd *rose*—

James Morris: I have already given way twice.

Would it not be better for the police and crime commissioner to have a more strategic response by exploring how local police stations could be used more readily as community hubs, bringing together different services and allowing police visibility, but also allowing the involvement of other partner agencies, because modern policing does not happen in isolation; it happens with partners, whether mental health services or local authorities? Can we not be more strategic about this? I have met the police and crime commissioner in order to try to persuade him of the need for a more strategic approach. We need a decentralised model of policing in the west midlands that does not centralise everybody in an expensive headquarters. The West Midlands police and crime commissioner should avoid the temptation to make these short-termist decisions, grab lurid headlines and consistently campaign in a politically motivated way, as

[James Morris]

he has done, in opposition to everything the Government are doing. That is not in anyone's interests, including the public, who the police are meant to serve.

As other Members have pointed out, there are opportunities for other cost savings to be made by West Midlands police and other police forces across the country. As HMIC pointed out in its recent report, there are too many antiquated IT systems, and there are huge opportunities for efficiency savings in procurement. One example of a very successful collaboration in the west midlands has been the street triage system for mental health services. That pioneering collaboration between West Midlands police and the health service has led to a massive reduction in the number of people being taken to police cells after being sectioned under section 135 of the Mental Health Act 1983. It is an example of strategic thinking leading to cost savings and it is bringing a massive benefit to front-line policing. It is therefore in nobody's interests to take a non-strategic view of what is happening. We need more innovation and creative thinking, especially at a time of fiscal challenges.

I will fight to save Halesowen police station from the decision taken by the West Midlands police and crime commissioner because I think that is the right thing to do in the long term to protect the visibility of policing in the west midlands. However, if he insists on his decision, I will continue to campaign for a successful high street presence in Halesowen. A successful example of that was when the local police took a shopfront and used it as a community hub. Why can we not make the right decisions?

I recognise that the challenges of modern policing are complicated and that crime is falling in the west midlands, but let us not take short-term, politically motivated decisions that undermine public confidence in the police. Let us do the right thing for the communities of the west midlands and the black country.

4.34 pm

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): Opposition Members recognise that the Tories have an ideological ambition to shrink the state. Attacks on the public sector have meant cuts in the workforce in almost all the areas where we try to serve our constituents, but I would never have thought that this Government's ideological cuts would threaten to deliver the end of neighbourhood policing as we know it. That is potentially what we face if the Government go ahead with their plans for budget cuts.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) pointed out earlier, we have already seen a 25% reduction in real-terms funding since 2010 and 17,000 police officers have been lost since 2010, 12,000 of them from the frontline. I shall comment briefly on the potential cuts in Manchester as an example of the problem we face. Just as the Government have hit the poorest areas hardest with local government cuts, so it is with police funding. Generally, the more deprived areas, such as mine in Manchester, which rely on a greater proportion of central Government funding, will be hit hardest by Government cuts in police budgets.

Some 80% of Greater Manchester police funding comes from central Government. The disproportionate

impact of the proposed cuts will mean that we would be among the hardest hit communities in the country. Greater Manchester has already lost £134 million from its budget—a quarter of the budget—since 2011. The majority of a police force budget is spent on staff, so these cuts directly hit the number of officers serving our communities. We have had the second biggest reduction in officers outside the Met. In 2010 Greater Manchester police had 8,200 officers. That is now down to around 6,500.

Richard Arkless: Given the tone of the hon. Gentleman's contribution, does he agree that if cuts are to fall on police services across the UK, front-line officers should be protected from those cuts?

Jeff Smith: Absolutely. We would all want to see front-line officers protected. They are the boots on the ground and the voices that connect with our communities.

Richard Arkless: Does the hon. Gentleman therefore agree that the Scottish Government's response has been correct, in that we have protected front-line services and increased police numbers by 1,000 since 2007?

Jeff Smith: If the hon. Gentleman does not mind, I am more interested in Greater Manchester and my own constituency, though I have nothing against Scotland.

The Home Office is asking for modelling of cuts at 25% and 40%. I asked the Greater Manchester police and crime commissioner what that would mean for Greater Manchester police. A 25% cut would take police officer numbers below 5,000. A 40% cut would be catastrophic. We might be down to fewer than 3,000 officers. From over 8,000 officers in 2010 to under 3,000 on the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary's watch—do they really want that as their legacy? That is not sustainable.

The model of neighbourhood policing that works so well in my area and many others would be under threat. Bobbies on the beat is not some kind of romantic "Dixon of Dock Green" vision of how police forces should work. It is emblematic of the successful model of policing that we currently have—police officers and PCSOs connected to their communities and adding to community cohesion.

What the Government are proposing is a huge change. In the words of Lord Condon, who knows quite a lot about policing, these

"profound changes to the bedrock of British policing should be taking place only by design and after widespread debate . . . not by stealth as a consequence of budgetary change."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 20 October 2015; Vol. 765, c. 564.]

There are, of course, new challenges facing our police forces—terrorism, cybercrime, child sexual exploitation, human slavery and human trafficking, as well as changes in organised crime—and we need a proper debate about how the police deal with those challenges. We also need to consider how community policing helps to tackle those problems, because I believe, as do many police officers, that they are exactly the areas where local intelligence makes a vital difference, where good community relations are important, and where our police officers and PCSOs are the bedrock of those good community relations.

When I meet my local team—Ben and the other PCSOs—on the streets in Withington, I can chat to them and we can share our experiences of what is going

on in the local area. That is useful for me and, I hope, useful for them. The conversations that we have add to their knowledge of the local area—their community—and to the intelligence that they can pick up on sensitive issues.

Another former very senior police officer, Lord Paddick, has said of the changing nature of terrorism and lone-wolf attacks:

“In many cases, community intelligence about the individuals involved may be the only way that we can prevent terrorist outrages.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 20 October 2015; Vol. 765, c. 565.]

The conversations that take place with neighbourhood policing add to the safety of our communities. Cuts in the number of officers and PCSOs are a direct threat to the safety of our communities. The Government are making a huge mistake in assuming that just because some types of crime have fallen we can cut back our police to unsustainable levels. Nobody is saying that the police should not make savings, but cuts on this level will be a massive blow to our communities. I urge the Government to think again.

4.40 pm

Byron Davies (Gower) (Con): I am delighted to be able to speak on this subject of such great importance, and to declare an interest in it. I had 32 very happy years in the Metropolitan police service as a detective serving in the counter-terrorist command and the national crime squad.

Not surprisingly, this motion has some fundamental flaws in the way that Labour frames its arguments about policing. It is far too simplistic to make a point about policing numbers when we are having a really serious debate about what sort of police service this country needs and wants. This is not, and should not be reduced to, simply a numbers game. If the Opposition were serious about discussing it, they would be asking questions about how they want the police services of this country to look, what their priorities are, and how they face the challenges of policing in the 21st century.

The system of policing in this country has had to evolve. We cannot think or accept that a system that was created and honed in the 1820s for a different time will be completely fit for purpose today. While many aspects of police work are excellent, we need to adapt, and the Government are doing just that. Technology has advanced at an incredible pace, and that has left previous models of policing in need of reform to meet today's challenges. The Government continue to promote innovation and improved efficiency by allocating £70 million to the police innovation fund this year. That is key to my point about police numbers.

This is about efficiency, and about management effectively deploying the resources at their disposal. I have had numerous discussions with my former colleagues in the police about this issue, and I have found their views illuminating. It has made senior police officers think about how they manage and deploy their resources. It has required higher quality management, and, through that, the police service has reformed itself by having to prioritise what is important and re-evaluate how a modern police force needs to operate. That has rarely been done before, as Governments have never challenged how the police service works on a deep enough level. Under the previous Labour Government, there was too

much bureaucracy and obsession with target-driven performance, as I well remember. While targets are vitally important, the Government have challenged the long-standing model of policing. Through that, police services have managed their priorities and resources more effectively, and policing has thereby become much more capable of meeting the challenges that it currently faces.

I commend the work of the Home Secretary and the Policing Minister in doing this. During such major reforms of such a vitally important part of British public life, I also commend the Government for providing the stability needed in the Home Office. We have had the same Home Secretary for over five years, and three Policing Ministers, including the current one. They have done an excellent job in providing the continuity and strong leadership required during this period. That is in stark contrast to the Labour Government, who, if I am correct, had six Home Secretaries and seven Policing Ministers. I well remember the days at Scotland Yard when most senior officers did not know who would be Home Secretary on any given day. The constant change of direction and personality in such a crucial role is not conducive to providing the confidence that the police need if they have to undertake major reforms.

The current situation has required courage and innovative thinking on the part of police forces. Given the many trials faced by policing, I am glad that the Government continue to invest heavily in the College of Policing, to ensure that the most talented individuals will lead our police forces in the future.

The Labour motion also mentions sharp rises in knife crime. Policing is complex and nuanced. It requires preventative and outreach work in communities, to try to change deep-rooted cultures that have built up over time. We must concentrate on how police tackle any rises in knife crime. I have read that some say that it is the fault of cuts in funding to police budgets, but that is a deeply misleading and dangerous statement to make about policing. The causes of knife crime are countless and diverse. Many are down to multifaceted and nuanced social reasons that have grown and transformed over decades. Crucial reasons for the recent rise in knife crime include the dark web being used to purchase weapons, a cultural change among young people, and improved recording of knife crime statistics.

Andy Burnham: I think the hon. Gentleman is saying—the right hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) and other hon. Members have also said this—that there is no connection at all between police numbers and levels of crime. Is that seriously the argument that Conservative Members are putting to the House?

Byron Davies: It is about how people are managed and deployed, and managers have to be trained to do that properly. That is the argument. The police are making serious efforts to tackle knife crime and they are making some important changes. The police are there to investigate, prosecute and tackle knife crime.

That brings me on to something that is missing from the Labour motion. It states that traditional forms of crime are being replaced by cybercrime. That is no doubt true, but my point about the dark web being used to purchase weapons is important. We must examine and tackle the link between cyber and more traditional crime.

[Byron Davies]

Finally, I simply do not agree with the notion that this is the end of bobbies on the beat. I am sure that the Government would never compromise public safety. In fact, the proportion of front-line police officers has risen in the past five years. I implore the Police Federation to debate, discuss and engage in positive dialogue with the Government on reform, rather than continue to adopt its militant stance.

We must be serious about how we progress with policing. This is no time for political grandstanding. We must move on from the political obsession with police numbers. The public deserve a far more serious and forensic approach to policing services, and I am glad that the Home Secretary, the Policing Minister and the Government are undertaking the serious work required to do that, rather than engaging in political point scoring.

As a former police officer, I offer my full support to the Home Secretary on her and her team's excellent work on falling crime figures and on ensuring that policing is able to meet the serious and perpetually changing challenges of the 21st century.

4.47 pm

Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in this important debate. I grew up with a huge amount of respect for the police service and the job it does in keeping our communities safe. When I was young, my dad served as a special constable with South Wales Police for a number of years, reinforcing my belief in the important job that our police officers, civilian staff and special constables do.

My constituency of Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney is made up of a number of small villages and communities, each with different needs and priorities. The need for support from the police service is significant in many of the communities I represent, but that support is under threat from the Government's proposed cuts.

Prior to being elected to this place in May, I spent 20 years as a county councillor. During that time I and my colleagues worked closely with the police service—specifically the neighbourhood policing team—to resolve a multitude of community concerns. As councillors we held monthly advice surgeries with the local policing team, delivering a joined-up service to local residents. That approach worked well and served to resolve most concerns that invariably required a two-pronged approach.

Neighbourhood policing has had a hugely positive effect on communities, with constables and community support officers being able to build a rapport with the communities they serve. That in turn creates a greater sense of public safety and enables the police service to quickly target those who cause most problems. Neighbourhood policing also has benefits in reducing indirect costs for the public purse resulting from antisocial behaviour and low-level crime. By working at the grassroots in our communities, the police have been able to tackle the root causes of issues before they become major problems.

Unfortunately, due to the significant cuts over the past few years, neighbourhood policing teams are disappearing. Before they came to power, the Tories promised to protect front-line policing, but over the

past five years they have cut about 17,000 police staff. In Wales, we have been fortunate that, despite the significant cuts to their budget, the Welsh Labour Government have funded the employment of 500 police community support officers.

The significant cuts to which police services have been subjected will put communities at greater risk. I know that in some large organisations, having fewer resources helps to create efficiency initially. I am sure that that is true of the police service, but the sustained cuts that we have seen and the further significant cuts that we face will serve only to weaken the service and impact on morale. There are many examples of how low the morale in the police service has become. I have heard at first hand of the most conscientious of officers leaving the service in the prime of their careers. That does not bode well.

We have all heard a variety of statistics, but stats have a habit of being interpreted in all sorts of ways. I prefer to listen to the people who know best—the people living in our communities and working at the grassroots of the service. Those people are saying that things are not getting better, but worse. This is hardly the time to cut investment. As we have heard, crime is not falling, but changing.

The Government's proposals will take policing backwards in this country. My constituency is covered by two forces, Gwent and South Wales. With a 25% cut, we will see a 22% reduction in officer numbers in Gwent and an 18% reduction in South Wales. That can be compared with violent crime rates, which are up by 22% in Gwent and 28% in South Wales.

Community safety and law and order are too important to put at risk. The Government's cuts will put our communities and residents in danger. I urge the Government to think carefully about the further cuts they are planning and the impact that those cuts will have on the lives of people in our towns and villages. Those cuts are not sensible. Most people do not live on gated estates; they live in ordinary communities and they need adequate protection from the police service. The proposed cuts will not allow the police service to give them that protection. I urge hon. Members to support the motion.

4.52 pm

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): I welcome today's debate on this important matter.

The headquarters of Lancashire constabulary are in my constituency of South Ribble. Indeed, I can see the building from my bedroom window. I have many neighbours and friends who are members of the police force. Lancashire constabulary was rated an outstanding force as recently as last month. I commend the work of Chief Constable Finnigan and Chief Superintendent Lee, and all those in the Lancashire police family who put their lives on the line every day to protect our communities.

I welcome the fact that police reform is working. Crime is down in South Ribble and down in Lancashire by over a quarter since 2010. Lancashire constabulary has made significant changes in the last five years. There is a centralised control room and there have been innovations using mobile technology. I know that the chief constable talked about that when he addressed the Home Affairs Committee yesterday. Such innovations,

including those that my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green) spoke about, free up time for other police work. I know that there is more to do. The chief constable has told me that there is more to do in terms of real estate, particularly in respect of the large site at Hutton that the constabulary owns.

Lancashire has been mentioned many times in this debate, including by the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) and the hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper), who is not in her place. Some of the figures that have been bandied about are speculative and slightly unhelpful.

Jack Dromey: The chief constable of Lancashire, Steve Finnigan, is one of the most outstanding chief constables in Britain. When he says that the proposed cuts will make Lancashire a less safe place to live, is he right?

Seema Kennedy: The word is “proposed”, but the problem is that a lot of what the police and crime commissioner says is based on figures that we know nothing about. There is a lot of speculation about what will come out in the autumn statement in three weeks’ time.

Andy Burnham: Osborne says 25%.

Seema Kennedy: I do not know whether I am allowed to respond when somebody speaks to me from a sedentary position and names a Member.

The Lancashire constabulary has made changes and will carry on making changes. Some of the talk about the changes has been speculative and unhelpful.

Andy Burnham: The hon. Lady claims that the talk is speculative, but did she not read the Budget documents published after the election? The Home Office is unprotected, and unprotected Departments are looking at cuts of 25%. That is why my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) and her chief constable say that her constituents will be less safe if that goes ahead. Is she happy to nod that through?

Seema Kennedy: First, I am not nodding it through. That is why I am speaking. The right hon. Gentleman mentions the figure of 25%, but the police and crime commissioner has spoken of a figure of 40%. They are both speculation about something else.

I would like to speak about the funding formula. We are talking about cuts and safety, but we can have a safe country only if we provide a strong economy so that, in future, our children are safe. It is all very well saying, “Safer now,” but if we destroy the economy in the longer term, it will not be safer now or later.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I am struck by the similarities between the actions of the police and crime commissioner in my hon. Friend’s constituency and those of the commissioner in my area of the west midlands. In her constituency area, the police have £65 million in reserves and yet are closing police services. In my area, we have £100 million of reserves. Will she reflect on that fact?

Seema Kennedy: I will reflect on it and address it later.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Byron Davies) referred to deployment. It is not just all about the money, but about how well it is spent, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) said.

The consultation period on the funding formula is ongoing. I was glad that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice met all Lancashire MPs. Anyone who knows Lancashire—many Members do—will know that it is a unique county. It is mixed urban and rural—small towns with villages next to them. Lancashire MPs believe, on a cross-party basis, that the technical changes to the modelling have disproportionately disadvantaged Lancashire.

John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con): In Cumbria, we have a large geographical area, a small population, a mountain range and poor infrastructure. Does my hon. Friend agree that, when we consider the weighting formula and funding, rurality and the circumstances of each county must be taken into consideration?

Seema Kennedy: Yes, but I do not want to strain the patience of the House on the technical detail of the funding formula. It is a very complicated formula—the right hon. Member for Leigh referred to that.

In conclusion, I applaud the innovation in policing country-wide, and I applaud the work of my constituents and all members of Lancashire constabulary. There is more to do in terms of innovation and responding to 21st century crime.

4.58 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome today’s debate. Policing is a major concern in my constituency and across Merseyside. The motion moved by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) sets out the key areas. It mentions the loss of 17,000 police officers since 2010—in Merseyside alone, we have lost 1,000. It also mentions the sharp rise in serious crime and the move away from traditional forms of crime.

Several hon. Members have talked about how crime is changing. In my constituency, the rate of firearm discharges has been a major issue, so I welcome the 23% fall in that rate over the last year. In Merseyside as a whole, however, the last year has seen big increases in the levels of serious crime, such as hate crime, violence with injury, violence without injury, rape and other sexual crimes. Conservative Members are right that this is partly because more people are coming forward, but when they do their complaints have to be dealt with—the capacity has to be there—and we are concerned that as a result of the cuts we might not have the capacity to deal with those larger numbers.

Since 2010, Merseyside has faced a budget cut of more than £60 million, which represents a 17% reduction in spending, and lost 800 police officers, more than 400 other police staff and more than 100 PCSOs—overall, a cut of almost 20% in staffing levels. Assuming a cut in the CSR not of 20% but of 25%, Merseyside would need to make further savings during this Parliament of £66 million. That would mean a cumulative cut across the decade of this Government of 35%, which would be one of the highest in the country—and in an area of

[Stephen Twigg]

social and economic need facing very big challenges. By the end of 2019, we would have lost 900, or one in four, police officers, 1,300 other staff, which, at 59%, would be the majority, and 78% of PCSOs.

My hon. Friends the Members for Halifax (Holly Lynch) and for Burnley (Julie Cooper) spoke powerfully about the impact of PCSOs. I have seen that in my own constituency. Jane Kennedy, the police and crime commissioner for Merseyside, has said we might have no PCSOs at all in Merseyside by the end of the Parliament. That is a very serious threat.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): We face a similar situation in London, where the future of PCSOs is under threat. Were they to go, which is entirely possible—likely, indeed—the loss of intelligence and visible police presence on our streets would drive a coach and horses through traditional community-based policing. I am sorry to hear that that is the case in Merseyside. I am worried it will be the case in London too.

Stephen Twigg: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Our right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary was right to remind the House that PCSOs were a major reform under the noble Lord Blunkett, the former Home Secretary, of the nature of policing in this country, and it is a great shame to see its reversal as a consequence of these cuts.

The motion rightly focuses on the cuts in the CSR, but I want to comment on the police funding formula. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) spoke about the impact of cuts to the central police grant on Greater Manchester police. It is similar in Merseyside. We receive 85% of our funding from central Government—the third highest of any police force in the country—whereas 51% of Surrey's funding comes from central Government. That means that the impact of a reduction in funding from central Government is much greater in Merseyside than in Surrey, which is protected by the council tax base. I do not think the Government have shown sufficient regard to that as they have made their cuts.

Peter Kyle: I have sympathy with my hon. Friend's argument, but does he realise that down in Sussex it is even more absurd? Sussex police are being cut by 5.1%, as the review stands now, while neighbouring Surrey is getting an additional 5%.

Stephen Twigg: My hon. Friend has made that excellent point already, and it is made even more emphatically by his repeating it. He is absolutely right.

The consequence is striking. Over the last five years, Merseyside has lost one in five of its police officers, whereas Surrey has lost just 1%, and this contrast has a direct impact. The proposed changes to the funding formula will also have an impact. As others have said, there will always be gainers and loser when we change the funding formula, but under the current proposal, which I accept is still out for consultation, Merseyside will see a further cut of more than £5 million in our police budget. So, we have the cuts I have mentioned, the impact of our being much more reliant than average on central Government support,

and a new formula that, if not changed—I very much hope it will be—will take another £5 million out of our budget.

I pay tribute to the entire police team in my constituency and across Merseyside for the fantastic work they do, and to the leadership of Jane Kennedy and our chief constable, Sir John Murphy. He has said:

“We will not deliver as good a service as we have done before. In some instances, it will take us longer to get there. In some instances, we won't turn up. That's an inevitable consequence of having less people to do more work.”

It is as straightforward as that.

I want to say three things in conclusion. First, the scale of these cuts, as the shadow Home Secretary said so clearly at the beginning of the debate, is unacceptable—and that is what the motion says. Secondly, the proposed formula change for areas such as Merseyside, Lancashire, Cumbria and indeed London will result in a loss that will exacerbate the impact of the cuts. Finally, we need a recognition that many areas of the country, particularly those with the greatest levels of deprivation and social and economic need, including Merseyside, are more reliant on support from central Government. When that support is cut, therefore, we are hit the hardest. It is the same with the local government cuts. The Government should recognise that as they go into the comprehensive spending review.

I appeal to Conservative Members, who represent a party that used to be known as the party of law and order, to think again about the scale of these cuts. No longer can they be seen as belonging to the party of law and order or the party for police and communities. In all parts of the country, but particularly in areas like mine that have suffered from serious incidents of crime and antisocial behaviour, it is vital that we have a visible, effective local police service. I know that Jane Kennedy and John Murphy will do their utmost with whatever resources they are given, but let us give them the resources so that they can do the job properly.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I am going to have to lower the speaking limit to five minutes with immediate effect. I remind hon. Members, especially those hoping to catch my eye later on, that if they make a lot of interventions, they are eating into their own time. I hope that interventions will be kept to a minimum.

5.7 pm

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): I hope to be able to speak within five minutes. I would like to echo the thanks of everyone else to the police, and particularly to those in Hampshire, where our constabulary has been leading the way in channelling resources to the front line. The force faces some particular challenges, to which I will return, but it does a fine job and I want to pay tribute to Chief Constable Andy Marsh and all his staff.

There has been a fall in crime of 11% over the last five years, and 96% of police are on the frontline. I hope that when the final funding formula is drawn up, it will recognise that Hampshire has already made the transition to becoming an efficient and responsive force. Hampshire

should not be penalised when other forces, as we have heard, still need to catch up. It is very welcome that the Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice accepted this point in a speech to the House at the end of the last Parliament.

Across the country as well as in Portsmouth, we have seen a fall in crime since 2010, and I am sure that it will continue as society grows stronger under our long-term economic plan. This has coincided with a period of budgetary pressure on police forces across the country; as we have heard, some forces have responded better than others. I welcome the initiative to put senior officers in closer touch with local authorities by sharing facilities. In Portsmouth, we now have our chief inspector and her team in our civic offices—much closer to the city council team, including community wardens, that play such an important part in helping the police.

It makes equal sense to pool facilities and resources across the emergency services wherever this is possible, and both Hampshire fire and rescue service and Hampshire constabulary are leaders in that development. Hampshire has set up H3, which merges all the back-office staff and functions along with the county council. Sharing these resources makes sense, as more money can be spent on front-line services rather than replicating back-office functions. This has meant £4 million going back into front-line services. I know that some authorities are doing the same, but not all. I urge them to follow the example of this scheme. I know the Policing Minister has visited Hampshire and that as a former firefighter he was most impressed to see this. The early implementation of body-worn cameras by Hampshire police has had a dramatic effect in reducing violence towards officers, and on confrontational behaviour generally when officers attend an incident.

Like the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy), Hampshire faces unique policing challenges. Some 85% of the area is rural, yet Portsmouth has the highest population density outside London. As a Member who represents an urban constituency, I was saddened to learn that rural crime is a huge problem. The farming industry in Hampshire is intensive and advanced, and there is a worryingly good trade in stealing equipment and shipping it out of the country through Southampton. That is a particular challenge for Hampshire, as it is for a handful of other forces that cover ports that have a rural hinterland.

I am especially keen to work with the police, local authorities and public health bodies on drug harm reduction and crime prevention, and I welcome the sustained fall in drug crime in Hampshire's crime statistics. This year's figures up to September show an almost 14% fall in reported drug crime. The police force has been running an excellent campaign against psychoactive substances in recent weeks—an issue that I campaigned on before my election to this House. Criminality from the drug trade is fought by street-level police intelligence. I welcome the shift towards getting rid of those drugs, something that the Government have promoted through the Psychoactive Substances Bill.

The Prevent strategy is working well. Six men went to Syria three years ago, but none has gone since. The police team have spent a lot of time with the families affected, and the Prevent team works closely with the Bengali community. I welcome the continued commitment of funding for counter-terrorism policing, which I am sure has stopped further young people travelling to join

terrorist organisations. We now have more officers on the beat in Portsmouth as a result of the reforms, and I look forward to working with the police at all levels, from chief constable to police officers, as well as our valuable police community support officers, whose contribution is much valued.

5.11 pm

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): The British police force is one of, if not the, most professional and efficient in the world. The Home Secretary said in her statement:

“As the House knows, the first duty of Government is the protection of the public, and that is a responsibility this Government take extremely seriously.”

If we look at the Government's proposals, however, we see that that statement is a joke, and it does not square with her actions in capitulating to the Chancellor's demands for more and more cuts. That is a disgrace.

The Home Secretary suggested earlier that the police should be given the tools to do the job, but that is the opposite of what is happening. She has been congratulated on the proposals in the draft Investigatory Powers Bill, but I am not prepared to congratulate a Home Secretary or a Government who are throwing caution to the wind by making cuts to everyday community policing.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), I represent a constituency covered by Merseyside police, and I have regular contact with the police—on a professional level, I might add; the shoplifting claim was just an isolated incident! The police are feeling under siege, not from criminals but from the Government—the very people they look to for support and resource. My hon. Friend said that the Conservative party was once the party of law and order; it is now the party of law and order on the cheap.

What is the picture nationally? There are 17,000 fewer police officers compared with 2010, and 4,500 fewer PCSOs—the proposed cuts take the figure to 22,300. What about a fall in crime? Violent crime is up by 16% and knife crime by 9%, and all in the context of a £2.3 billion cut in funding since 2010, which is 25%. Twenty out of 27 forces say that their response times are going up—there is an average 17% increase in response time, rising to a 57% increase in response time in the worst hit areas. The number of rapes has gone up, not down, to 31,621, and numbers of other sexual offences have risen to 63,800. Violent crime is up by 25%, and levels of hate crime and cybercrime have risen. As my hon. Friend noted, the chief constable of Merseyside police has said that we cannot carry on doing more for less.

All this must be set in the context of major cuts to local government, probation services, other social services and partner agencies, including the voluntary sector. The issue of reserves is one of the fallacies and myths that the Tories persistently use about local government. The figures suggest that 88% of the reserves are earmarked for the next four to five years. The idea that they are being wasted—that they are lying around in some bank account or someone's cocoa tin—is complete nonsense. Moreover, my local force does collaborate: the Merseyside fire service and the police have a combined command and control centre.

My area is to lose 20 PCSOs, who are familiar faces in the community. The concept of neighbourhood policing is going west. There has previously been consultation

[Peter Dowd]

about whether three police stations in my area should be closed; we thought that we had put that one to bed, but it is to be revisited. The 7,350 police staff whom we had in 2010 are to be reduced to 5,773.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): My hon. Friend and I share the Merseyside region. He is in the heart of Liverpool, while I am on the periphery of the region, in St Helens. Does he agree that the cuts mean that our police force will not be able to respond to the diverse challenges of policing in Merseyside?

Peter Dowd: My hon. Friend is spot on. Our two areas are affected by a wide range of issues, from gun crime to organised crime, from day-to-day crime to fraud. A diverse community needs a diverse response.

By 2019, the workforce will be down by 40%. Specialist support teams dealing with such matters as sexual violence, hate crime, gun crime and organised crime will go, and that will have a significant effect on community reassurance. The police service is not just there to react. It is a bit like an insurance service: people like it to be there. All the partnership working is under a huge amount of stress.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): My constituency is also in the Merseyside area. Does my hon. Friend agree that the threatened cut in the provision of PCSOs will have a devastating impact not only on community reassurance, but on the intelligence-gathering that is so crucial to police work?

Peter Dowd: My hon. Friend is absolutely spot on. I have talked about that issue recently, and, indeed, have given a presentation on it. PCSOs are the feet on the ground. They come into contact with members of the community day in, day out: in the shops, for instance. People approach those officers for information and intelligence. Losing them will have a deleterious, detrimental and significant effect on intelligence and the ability of the police to deal, on the ground, with issues such as gun crime, drug crime and organised crime. Whether the Conservatives accept it or not, that will happen as a direct result of the cuts. Indeed, it is already happening, and has been happening for a considerable time. The country, and my constituency, needs a Home Secretary who will stand up for safer communities and not put them at risk.

5.18 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I am delighted to have been called to speak in this important debate. Let me begin by associating myself with what has been said by Members on both sides of the House about PC Dave Phillips.

Members have rightly spoken about the way in which our policemen and policewomen do their duty on the frontline, but we must remember that we, as a Government, have duties as well. Yes, we have a duty to maintain law and order and to deliver safe communities, but we also have a duty to balance the books and to deliver sound fiscal policy and sound public finances. I am proud that

the Suffolk constabulary has excelled in delivering more for less, as we have asked it to do: it has delivered lower crime with lower funding.

I pay particular tribute to the excellent leadership of our police and crime commissioner, Tim Passmore. He is a Suffolk farmer, and he has used his Suffolk farmer's common sense to take effective, practical measures that have delivered savings while continuing to carry out excellent policing. That has been achieved through, for example, collaboration with Norfolk and the wider eastern region, and the use of technology such as Toughbooks, which means that police officers can key in more data away from the police station and therefore spend more time on the frontline instead of behind their desk, and I commend them on that.

As a new MP I find having PCCs very useful as they are a direct line to what is going on when there is a live crime wave, as we have had in Suffolk. Since the end of August no fewer than 14 churches have been subjected to lead theft, including four churches in my constituency: Groton, Hawkedon, Stratford St Mary and the very ancient and historic church of Lavenham. I recently visited Lavenham church and walked on the roof. It is shocking to see the extent of the associated damage. It is not just the fact that the lead has been stripped. The criminals smashed crenellations and damaged the edge of the roof, which caved in, when they threw the lead down to a wheelie-bin on the ground, which they then went off with.

In the case of Hundon church, which is just outside Clare and in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock), falling lead damaged a grave, so this has become a matter of desecration. I have to say—I hope I am not going too far—that the United Nations has labelled the destruction at Palmyra as a war crime, and while I would not say for one moment that the damage to our churches is on that level, it is nevertheless a crime against our own Christian cultural heritage.

Fortunately, when one considers the huge costs our churches face—Stratford St Mary estimates it will cost £54,000 to make good the damage to its roof—our churches have an angel: the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), the heritage Minister. Following representations from myself and my fellow Suffolk MPs, on Friday she wrote to me to confirm that the Chancellor's listed places of worship roof repairs scheme would be extended to include churches that have recently been the victims of lead theft, thereby hopefully providing the resources to ensure that they can repair the damage to their ancient architecture.

The other point I want to raise in relation to this recent crime wave in Suffolk is the issue of alarms. Unfortunately, the perpetrators of these crimes are still at large, although I know our rural crime unit is working hard to catch them. However, our churches have a duty to try to prevent this crime, as indeed do communities, because this sort of rural crime is almost impossible for the police to deal with. Many of our churches are scattered across the county in sparsely populated areas. We need the community to be alert, but we also need the installation of effective alarm systems. I want to make the point on the record that the Ecclesiastical Insurance company, which supports our churches, has a list of just three providers of alarms for churches in the whole

country, including just one in the eastern region, meaning that alarms are incredibly expensive. I have received representations from firms that want to go on that list and I will be getting involved to make sure that they do.

At a time of tough budgets and necessary savings, which we have to make to deliver sound public finances, we need innovation and collaboration. We also need our community working in partnership with the police. In that way, we can continue to cut crime efficiently.

5.23 pm

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I am sure that this House would like to congratulate the many policemen and women who attended the police bravery awards last week—the Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice was there—and also PC Winston Mugarura of the Met and PCs Adam Koch and Jean Stevens of the West Midlands on their exceptional bravery.

Policing has borne a significant burden of cuts since this Government became obsessed with slashing budgets and impoverishing the public good. Since 2010, overall central Government funding for the police, including grants and council tax freeze grants, has been cut by 22% in real terms. We are yet to find out how the police will be affected by the Chancellor's forthcoming spending review, but we know that Departments have been told to plan for the same reductions requested ahead of the 2010 spending review; that is, of course, to model two scenarios of 25% and 40% savings within their own budgets by 2019-20 in real terms.

My local force, North Wales police, was staffed by 1,675 officers in 2005. It has lost 188 officers—11% of the total—in the past 10 years. Mark Polin, the chief constable, has announced that 57 further police community support officers are to go in the next three years. That police force serves a population of 676,000 people across an enormous 2,400 square miles.

I was fortunate enough to accompany the police during their Saturday night work over the August bank holiday. They were already tightly stretched, running between the busy towns of Abersoch and Pwllheli. Because the police responsible for that area of Dwyfor were concentrating on those towns, the rest of the towns in Dwyfor were effectively being ignored, and if anything had happened elsewhere, it would have been very difficult for them to cope with it.

There are already 17,000 fewer police officers in Wales and England now than there were in 2010. That means 17,000 fewer people to look after our communities, help the vulnerable, enable justice and provide security—and this at a time when child protection and digital crime are immense challenges.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): The hon. Lady is making a powerful case in relation to the impact of the cuts across Wales. We are facing a tremendous problem. Does she agree that the police in Wales play a vital role in the social fabric of communities, particularly in relation to dealing with the mental health crisis that Wales is experiencing?

Liz Saville Roberts: I agree with the hon. Lady. The police have talked to me about the difficult role that they play on the frontline when dealing with people with mental health issues.

The Government often brag about their commitment to national security. They brag about protecting the defence budget and spending upwards of £150 billion on a weapon of mass destruction that we will never use, but they are all too happy to use the old excuse of balancing the books as a matter of urgent necessity when it comes to vital community services.

The Welsh police forces are unique within the UK. They are non-devolved bodies operating within a largely devolved public services landscape. They are thus required to follow the diverging agendas of two Governments. It is essential that the people of Wales should be given a democratic choice, through their directly elected Government, as to how the police are to be governed and held accountable, just as the people of Scotland are. I was dismayed at Labour's cheap dig at the Scottish Government. It was a divisive elbow-jab, given the immensity of the challenges facing police forces in England and Wales.

Transferring responsibility for policing to the Welsh Government would not be the tectonic shift that many Unionists claim it would be. Relationships between the Welsh forces and UK services such as the police national computer and the Serious Organised Crime Agency would continue as at present, as is the case in Scotland. Cross-border arrangements could also continue. Why then should the people of Wales not be given the same democratic freedom as that enjoyed by the people of Scotland and that proposed for certain English cities? Devolving policing powers would lead to greater clarity and efficiency by uniting devolved responsibilities such as community services, drugs prevention and safety partnerships with those currently held by the UK Government.

The Tories have been justifying many of their policies of late by claiming that the people voted for them, regardless of whether those policies were included in their manifesto or not. Perhaps that is a democratic oversight. The people of Wales did not vote for the Tories' policies. They did not vote for this Government. The people of Wales voted in 2011 for a Parliament: their own democratic institution to make decisions on matters that relate to Wales and to her interests.

The Silk commission—a commission comprising all four main political parties in Wales—spent two years consulting not only the public but civil society, academia and industry experts. It received written evidence, heard oral evidence and visited every corner of Wales, and its report recommended the devolution of policing. That is what the people of Wales have asked for, and that is what the people of Wales deserve. Wales's police forces cannot cope with continuing cuts, and they should not have to.

5.28 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in this important debate on policing. Prior to my election to this place, I served as a district councillor for eight years and interacted regularly with Sussex police in that role. Back in 2010, when Sussex police announced plans to make efficiency savings of £50 million over the following four years, many in my community felt nervous that crime rates would increase. As it turned out, crime has fallen in my area of Sussex. Indeed, we

[*Huw Merriman*]

have seen crime rates fall nationally by a quarter. I recall the chief constable for Sussex addressing my council chamber in 2014 and explaining that the cutbacks in funding had, in certain instances, actually helped to decrease crime. He gave the example of the merging of certain operations, which resulted in enhanced communication between units and led to better detection and arrest figures.

I recognise that additional reductions in funding for the next term will cause a further challenge to our police forces. That is particularly so in Sussex, which, having found savings of 16% during the last term, has one of the lowest cost bases from which to deliver further savings. I believe it is essential not to send out a message from this place that the police are not properly resourced and not able to do their jobs. To do so would be contrary to the facts, bad for police morale and bad for public confidence. Since I was elected, I have made it my business to meet police representatives in my constituency. My conclusion is that they recognise the challenges ahead, but believe in their ability to meet them head on, without detriment to public safety. I find that stoic attitude refreshing and admirable.

Having referred to the fact that the key to better policing it is not just the amount of money spent, but how it is spent, I want to mention police numbers. In this debate, the reduction in police numbers has frequently been used to highlight the idea that matters are in decline. In years gone by, crime detection required police manpower alone to solve cases. In our modern world, where technology provides surveillance, evidence-gathering and deterrence, there is no need to man as much of the front-to-back police operation as there was previously. Accordingly, it is too crude to use a reduction in police numbers to argue that policing must be in difficulty.

Finally, I would like to touch on the demands that this place and public campaigns put on our police. Since 1997, over 3,000 new criminal laws have been passed that our forces are ultimately required to resource and police. Most, if not all, of those laws are laudable, but each one passed is unlikely to lead to the decriminalisation of an existing law. The additional laws therefore stretch our police forces further, which may have a questionable impact not only on their own resource requirements, but on our civil liberties. One such example is the recent law prohibiting smoking in cars where children are present. Such a prohibition could be judged as sensible, but it has led one chief constable to state publicly that his force would not dedicate resources to cover it. I might add that that is not the best way to deter it. Does it not make more sense to consult the police about such occurrences before passing laws, and to consider whether public education, rather than criminal prohibition, is a better way to reduce such behaviour?

A further suggestion is to look at what we require the police to enforce. In my constituency, the police are required to ticket cars for overstaying in free on-street parking bays, even though around the corner it is the local authority that charges and tickets for car parks. The police have now made the call that they cannot continue to do that, but as parking is not decriminalised in my local authority, it has turned into a free-for-all.

Like every other Conservative MP, I was elected on a mandate that promised to make reductions in public spending in order to deliver a budget surplus. Paying down the annual interest bill on our national debt is essential. The interest bill alone is much greater than the national policing budget. That will be a challenge for many of our leaders in public service. I believe that the police, as they have previously demonstrated, will continue to deliver for my constituents and keep them safe and protected. I look forward to working with my police force in Sussex to that end.

5.33 pm

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I come to this debate with a slightly different perspective, as someone who worked for nearly a decade in the police service, supporting victims and witnesses of crime. I am increasingly concerned about the impact this Government's cuts will have on the people I worked for and alongside. Victims of crime have often had one of the most traumatic experiences of their life; yet a recent survey of detectives showed that only 39% of them felt that they were able most or all of the time to provide the services that victims needed. That is a terrifying statistic, but it will only get worse if the proposed cuts go ahead.

As a consequence of 25% cuts in funding, a number of police forces will no longer offer to visit victims of burglary, which is an event that can have a devastating impact on individuals and families. It has been widely reported that one police force is now piloting a scheme whereby those who report a crime are dealt with via Skype. That may suit some circumstances, but surely it should be offered as an option, not as the standard service we can now expect.

Although falling levels of crime have been welcomed, there is evidence to suggest that rates of certain crimes are on the increase, particularly violent crime. It is entirely appropriate that significant police resources are being channelled into specialist areas, including the investigation of child sexual exploitation, cybercrime and fraud, but as a direct result of cuts to police numbers, far fewer police officers are available. Many believe that the day of the bobby on the beat will soon become a thing of the past, as the police service regresses to the provision of a reactive response-only service.

Jo Cox (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that underpinning these cuts is a fundamental misunderstanding by the Government of the daily reality that many police officers face? As she will well know, in West Yorkshire many police officers spend 80% of their day dealing with safeguarding and vulnerable cases. These are cases that are often not reported but which place a heavy work burden on officers.

Paula Sherriff: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment. What she says is true. Although some crime levels have decreased in recent years, we are seeing a significant increase in much more complex investigations. A police officer recently told me that cuts were already hitting so hard that the scene of a serious sexual assault in a major city had to be preserved overnight as no detectives were available to attend until the following morning—that was just down to cuts in police numbers.

In common with many Members of this House, I have witnessed the benefits of neighbourhood policing at first hand. Many officers who serve in Dewsbury, Mirfield, Denby Dale and Kirkburton have nurtured and developed relationships with the communities they patrol, and take immense pride in seeing crime rates fall, cohesion blossom and trust build. While out door-knocking in streets across my constituency, it is refreshing to hear residents talk of their dedicated officer by their first name as an integral part of the neighbourhood. Officers working in and among local communities are an essential tool for intelligence gathering—this strength of eyes and ears should never be underestimated. Yet we see no sign that this Government are committed to preserving neighbourhood policing for the future. Prevention work is also being hit hard. I know of a local PCSO who runs football training twice a week for boys and girls. Within weeks of the project starting, anti-social behaviour in a previously blighted area had become practically non-existent.

The West Yorkshire police force, which serves my constituency, has seen a reduction of 1,100 police officers since 2010, and we fear that even more will be lost in the next round of cuts. An officer told me recently:

“we are just managing to keep our heads above water, any further cuts will see us drown. I fear a major incident happening around here.”

A survey of more than 32,000 police officers revealed that more than 70% felt that morale was low in their force, with only 10% saying that they would recommend joining the service. Officers talk of being stretched to capacity yet doing their utmost to deliver a comprehensive and professional service.

Of course, we know that the police service needs to evolve. Crime is changing and, like all public services, the police will need to find new ways to meet new challenges. But real reform needs modernisation not privatisation, investment not cuts, and partnership not confrontation. Unfortunately, we see the same attitude from Ministers to everyone in the public sector. As with teachers and doctors, this Government now treat police officers as public enemies, not public servants. Frankly, people in my constituency want police on their streets and a Government who are on their side. That is why they elected me to this House, and that is why I will be voting for the motion today.

5.38 pm

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): I am pleased to see in my constituency that police reform is working. Not only in my constituency, but across the country, crime is down by more than 30%, as a result of the police becoming ever more efficient. For example, strategic alliances between the Hampshire and Thames Valley forces have resulted in the sharing of many specialist units. My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) also mentioned the sharing of back-office services with the county council. Those are all ways in which the police can become more efficient and protect the front line. They are also doing that through procurement. Some £200 million has already been saved on procurement, and many sources suggest that there is about £300 million more to go. This is a strong direction of travel, ensuring that we protect the front line, as has happened in Hampshire

and as is happening elsewhere; it is protecting the roles that people want to see, while ensuring that the taxpayer saves money.

I am pleased that the funding formula is being reviewed because it is currently unfair. The fact is that a new simplified model, which is based on that review, will replace the current, complex, opaque and out-of-date model. The data on which the current model is based is from 2003-04. Indeed, the model even includes some information from the 2001 census. It is chronically out of date, and it is time for a change.

Yesterday, at the Home Affairs Committee, chief constables and police commissioners told us of the disparity that exists between the different police forces. One point that came through very strongly was the need to reflect the cost of rural policing. It is important that the Home Office considers that as part of the consultation. Further, and this point has been made by Members from both sides of the House, there is a lack of parity between different forces in the amounts that they get from council tax and from the central Government grant. That is why the funding formula changes will be felt more greatly in some parts of the country, but it is important that that is taken in the context of the efficiency savings that could be made.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): My hon. Friend mentioned rural policing. I very much hope that he will continue his excellent work on the Select Committee to probe the Government on the funding mechanism, because some policing matters do cost more in rural areas such as Shropshire. I very much agree with his sentiment on that.

Mr Jayawardena: My hon. Friend is right that the cost of rural policing is important, but so too is the way that rural policing is administered. We need to ensure that communities feel safe. The concept of feeling safe is as important to many people as the level of crime.

On the consultation, I believe that we are moving in the right direction. The consultation is trying to create a fairer formula for the country as a whole. However, I urge the Government to consider the point of damping. Damping affects Hampshire to the tune of £10 million, which is a significant burden, whereas Surrey gains £6 million from it. It is important that, as part of this new funding formula, we reflect the actual need of particular areas.

Let me turn now to population distribution, which is where some of the rural issues come in. This is about not only the sparsity of the population and the difficulties in addressing any crime that might exist, but the fact that the police authority boundaries are arbitrary—they are the result of historical boundaries in counties and elsewhere that have existed for many hundreds of years. There is no reflection of the fact that crime can cross county boundaries. We must remember that any funding arrangement should reflect not simply the population within a police authority area, but the neighbouring areas, as crime will cross boundaries. Crime from Surrey or the Thames Valley can very easily reach my constituency of North East Hampshire, so it is important that police forces work closely together. Therefore, I suggest that population distribution should not be looked at in isolation.

[Mr Jayawardena]

I come back now to the point of efficiency. Hampshire is a low-cost force. It gets £38 million less than the average force, which means that it has had to drive those efficiencies faster than other forces. Indeed, between 2005-06 and 2010-11, it made savings when other police forces were spending more per capita. It then had to be even more frugal and it made further savings in 2010-11 through to 2015-16. We must ensure that those forces that have already made the savings are not penalised for having become more effective sooner than other forces, because that would be a perverse outcome, and I am sure that that is not what the Government intend.

That leads me on to the way that the police funding formula is taken forward, and needs to be seen to be taken forward. It is important that we do not scaremonger. The funding formula is designed to provide a long-term stable, simple to understand method of funding for police forces across the country, but there are then the local police commissioners, who are the best way to ensure local accountability and that funding for the future is determined by local people.

5.44 pm

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): When my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless) made his speech, there were a number of calls from Labour asking why we would not be supporting the motion and why we were not turning our focus on the Government rather than on Labour, so let me start with the motion.

The motion starts by expressing concern at the loss of 17,000 police officers, and that is very concerning, yet in Scotland police officer numbers have been maintained, with an extra 1,000 since the Scottish Government took over in 2007. The motion claims that there is some evidence that crime is rising, but in Scotland crime is at a more than 40-year low because of the actions of the Scottish Government. The motion states that the police budget could be cut by between 25% and 40%, but in Scotland the Scottish Government, operating within a fixed budget, have had to make difficult decisions but have not made cuts to anything like that extent. If it was not for the fact that we have to pay VAT for police services in Scotland, which is not the case across the rest of the United Kingdom, there could perhaps even be extra money that could be invested.

When we can agree on all those points, why on earth does the motion have to include a line about the Scottish Government? It is bizarre that in a week where we have seen the first piece of legislation classified as England and Wales-only we have a motion from the Labour party that talks about a matter that is devolved to Scotland.

Anna Turley: Surely one of the most tragic and distressing incidents we have heard about in the past few months was the terrible incident on the M9, in which two people died after being left at the side of the road for three days. HMIC conducted a review into the call handling on the back of that and produced a report that found significant issues with poor performance. Does that not show that there are significant issues with performance in Scotland and that it is absolutely right that we should raise them in this Chamber?

Owen Thompson: Any force can have issues at any time. That was a tragic incident and I know there has been consideration of exactly how that happened, but such things happen regardless of where they are. Why include these references in the motion? It talks of the Scottish Government's oversight, but if we listened to Labour Members of the Scottish Parliament, we would often be forgiven for thinking that they were asking for direct political intervention in the management of the police rather than any kind of oversight. That is not what anybody in this Chamber would want.

I want to pick up on the point about oversight, as I have a particular situation locally. Immediately before I was elected to this Chamber, I was the leader of Midlothian Council, and I have been a councillor there for 10 years. I saw how the council interacted with the police services pre-Police Scotland and post-Police Scotland. Pre-Police Scotland, Midlothian Council had two representatives to scrutinise police activity locally. They tended to be from the administration and, up until 2012, that was always the Labour party, so I, as a local elected member, had no oversight of the police in my local area. When Police Scotland took over, a local safer communities board was established in Midlothian that allowed members of the council across the political board to have direct interaction with the police and a direct say in the local policing plan. It is deeply unfortunate that today's Labour motion criticises the Scottish Government's oversight when the Labour party in Midlothian is the only Labour party in the whole of Scotland not to participate in the safer communities board to oversee local police operations. From my point of view, it is hypocritical for Labour to be saying anything about oversight of the police when a local Labour party will have nothing to do with the oversight of police and fire services.

Let me move on. The cuts to police services are tragic and, because of the Barnett consequentials, they filter through to Scotland. We need to ensure that we do everything we possibly can to maximise investment in policing so that we can continue to maintain the lowest crime levels we have seen in more than 40 years and to make the improvements we have seen across the country. If the Government would take just one more look at VAT, that would enable us in Scotland to make some of the changes we need to continue the progress we have made.

When I look at this motion, I cannot help thinking that somebody on the Labour Benches looked at a previously drafted motion and said, "Hang on a minute. We haven't mentioned Scotland, so we need to do so." It has ended up looking like a typical example of the Labour party saying, "#SNP bad." The section about Scotland makes no sense at all in the context of the rest of motion. Had it not been included, I can see myself supporting the motion. Why has Labour included it? Was it simply to make SNP Members vote against it? It is utterly bizarre. This is a strange situation to find ourselves in, and it is really sad that it has come to this on such an important issue.

5.50 pm

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): As possibly the only person in the Chamber who has actually handled a police budget, I must say that over the past few hours I have had an overwhelming sense of déjà vu. In my first week as deputy Mayor for policing

in London I was told by various senior police officers that if I even thought about touching the budget, it would be the end of life as we know it. The first thing they would wave in front of me was safer neighbourhood teams. In every one of the four budgets I handled during my period at the Met, safer neighbourhood teams were the first saving to be rolled out. Of course, that was designed to frighten me and put me off making the much-needed savings and efficiencies in the force. Despite the fact that during my time I took something like 12% out of the overall Met budget, crime fell very significantly.

I also got used to armchair chief constables giving their views. Opposition Front Benchers have today made much of Peter Clarke. Lovely man though he is, Peter Clarke retired over 10 years ago, so he has not seen a budget for over a decade. Opposition Members would do much better to rely on more up-to-date expertise.

Jack Dromey: The concerns expressed by Peter Clarke about the impact on counter-terrorism of the hollowing out of neighbourhood policing have been echoed publicly in the past three months by the current head of counter-terrorism, Mark Rowley. Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that good neighbourhood policing—forming relationships, gathering intelligence and being the eyes and ears—is key to counter-terrorism?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We need interventions to be short, because I am worried that the hon. Gentleman will not have enough time to respond to the debate in his own speech.

Kit Malthouse: I do accept the “golden thread” argument, but what I am trying to illustrate is that in February and March of every single year of my tenure that argument was waved in front of me, and it never came true.

I have some observations to offer on some of the arguments we have heard today. First, on the connection between police numbers and crime, I can say from experience that there is absolutely no direct connection between the two. The best illustration of that I can give is the apprehension of Delroy Grant, a night stalker in south-east London. That man terrorised and raped elderly people over a period of 17 years. The operation to catch him was the largest and most complex the Met ever mounted and it cost millions and millions of pounds. They did not catch him for 17 years because they were trying to catch a rapist. They appointed a new investigating officer who realised that they were trying to catch a burglar, and then they caught him within two weeks. Millions of pounds was spent on the wrong investigative method. If they had adopted the right method earlier, they might have prevented a lot more crime. Homicide in London fell from 211 in 2005 to 101 in 2012—happily at the end of my tenure. Is anyone saying that we should have the same number of police officers investigating murder as we had back in 2005? Of course not. There is no direct connection between the two.

Those Members who are complaining about a rise in crime types in their constituencies would do better to ask serious questions of their police forces about performance, technology, targeting and skill. Let us look at two similar police forces, Warwickshire and Cleveland. Cleveland currently attracts a lot more funding than Warwickshire, despite the fact that they have similar

populations. Warwickshire’s performance, however, is excellent. Cleveland has just been criticised for not handling antisocial behaviour correctly. Performance—skill, leadership and focus—has much more of an impact on crime types in any particular area than money does. I recommend that Members go and ask some of those testing questions. Most of the time, police officers know where, when and by whom crimes will be committed, and using intelligence better will be much more effective.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): My hon. Friend is making his point in a typically powerful way. Does he agree—this might be a cynical point—that there are some who will say that we should not be playing ball as we have been doing in trying to reduce our budgets, in order to make political capital? That might make good political press releases; it does not make good policing.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. When I say I want short interventions, I do not mean, “Then carry on and make long interventions.” [*Interruption.*] No, I decide whether it is short. I am sure, Mr Hoare, you can find something else to do rather than challenging the Chair. I am sure that is not your intention. I want to get everybody else in, and the only way I am going to do that is to have fewer interventions. I want to allow the right amount of time for the closing speeches.

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend is right. I sat in the chamber at city hall for year after year while Labour members waved the shroud for the public and tried to engender a sense of alarm, and of course crime dropped year after year, particularly very serious crime.

There is more to come out of police budgets—cars, buildings, reoffending rates, possibly a merger with the probation service. There is a huge amount that can be done. Many police forces still have not got a handle on procurement in the way that local authorities have, and many of them are saddled with scalping PFI deals that were brought in under the Labour Government. All of us bear the scars of that.

Much has been made of the supposed rise in crime as a result of online crime and cybercrime, but the truth is that no single force can tackle this. The idea that giving Lancashire more to deal with cybercrime will do anything for us is ridiculous. Often the perpetrator is not within the force area and may well be overseas. We would be much better off having a focused, efficient, combined central force to deal with cybercrime, which is exactly what is proposed.

Finally, I want to say something about the police formula. For many years it has been an unspoken secret—something that senior police officers sniggered about behind their hands—that the formula that was put in place 10 years ago was so manifestly unfair, but nevertheless politically sensitive, that politicians would never have the courage to meddle with it. During the four years that I was deputy Mayor for policing, there were constant complaints about the police formula and nobody really had the *cojones*, if that is parliamentary language, to get a grip on it. So I congratulate the Minister on finally dealing with it.

As my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena) mentioned, the biggest injustice in the formula has been damping. Most of the Opposition Members who have been

[Kit Malthouse]

complaining about cuts have forces that were beneficiaries of damping. Merseyside and Sussex did well out of damping. Hampshire has been significantly penalised over the past 10 years by damping, and its removal will be welcomed not only by those forces that have been penalised thus far and which will therefore benefit, but by anybody who is interested in fair play in police finance.

Some of the forces that have benefited from damping thus far, such as Lancashire, were wise and knew that they were living on borrowed time, so they took action and built up their reserves. Lancashire, as we have heard already in the debate, has £65 million in reserve. Much of that is money that has been accumulated by taking money away from Hampshire. Now that we are getting to a fairer formula and a level playing field for all counties, it is time for Lancashire to use Hampshire's money to plug the gap that it may now experience.

5.58 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): I want to talk about the serious gang-related violence and crime happening in my constituency and in Salford, and the strain that the incidents are placing on an already-overstretched police force in Greater Manchester and on our community.

Over the past 18 months in Salford we have witnessed a frightening escalation of gang-related gun crime, with 21 shootings. Hundreds of "threat to life" warnings have been issued to people in Salford in the past nine months. These "Osman" warnings are given to people, including children, whom the police believe are at risk of being killed or seriously injured. Recently, in the Winton area of my constituency, a seven-year-old boy and his mother were shot at close range on the doorstep of their home. Both were seriously injured, and the seven-year-old boy suffered life-changing injuries. This was a sickening attack which shook the whole community locally in Eccles and in Salford, and I was shocked by it. The escalating violence in my constituency and across Salford has been linked to feuding among armed gangs which are seeking to settle disputes. The use of weapons in Salford is now becoming a regular threat. Constituents have contacted me to tell me about their fears and how they feel about living in an area where shootings happen so frequently. After the seven-year-old boy was shot, people were very fearful about the safety of their own children and grandchildren.

Despite many of the comments by Conservative Members, crime is rising in Greater Manchester. From November 2014 to October 2015, recorded crime rose by 12%, and violent crime rose by 34%. Given this rise in violent crime and the shootings on our streets, I join our police and crime commissioner, Tony Lloyd, in saying that it is time for the Home Secretary to listen to him, to stop the policing cuts, and to invest in keeping our communities safe. As he says:

"Local people are rightly concerned about the cuts to GMP and, while police officers and staff remain committed to keeping people safe, it is getting... more difficult to put the public's mind at ease. The reality is that we are heading towards 1970s police numbers where police were used simply as an emergency response".

In Greater Manchester, we have already lost £175 million from our police budgets, meaning a loss of more than

1,500 officers. Now, any further cuts could be very damaging. We used to have a force of 8,000 officers, with former chief constable Mike Todd saying that that needed to increase to 11,000. It is obvious to me that the Government's cuts to police numbers are leaving Greater Manchester police overstretched, and without the extra help that is needed to deal with the gang violence I have described. I am deeply concerned about the impact that any further reduction in police numbers could have on my constituents.

Recent comparisons have been made between the current situation in Salford and the gang-related violence that happened in the past in Moss Side. Our new chief constable, Ian Hopkins, has gone on record as saying that the gang violence would not be sorted out inside a decade. Our former chief constable had said previously:

"Certain families have been ruling the roost for many many years. That's the sort of thing that needs to be tackled and it's going to take...10 years to do that."

So we are facing 10 years more than 10 years. High visibility policing and proactive community work have helped to tackle the gang violence in Moss Side. Our chief constable has said that

"the key...is gaining the confidence of the community...in south Manchester...the community said 'enough is enough' and worked alongside us, and we've seen a remarkable turnaround."

Further cuts to our policing budgets could mean that our police force just becomes reactive, only able to deal with emergency calls. As we saw in areas of Moss Side in the past, proactive strategies are needed where police work with the local community, and we need a good visual police presence.

I hope that the Home Secretary will think again before forcing any more cuts on to Greater Manchester police, because we need not less, but more help to protect ourselves from the gun crime and violence on the streets of Salford.

6.2 pm

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in this debate. It is a great privilege to follow the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley).

I want to put on record my thanks to the Policing Minister for his readiness to meet Lancashire MPs—including you, Mr Deputy Speaker—with officials to hear our concerns about the funding formula. The Minister was very generous with his time in listening to our concerns, and I have every faith that they will be taken on board. We may not get all the solutions we want, but he is definitely prepared to listen, engage, and see what progress can be made.

For me, the key thing is to maintain some of the real positives in policing in Lancashire, mostly in community policing. Community policing is important in Lancashire, where we have very mixed, diverse communities, whether in east Lancashire, with some of the challenging issues we face there, through to the rural communities or to Blackpool, with its very challenging night-time economy. Lancashire also has great challenges with regard to counter-terrorism. Community policemen and women are often the people who are there on the ground, speaking to residents, allaying their fears, and ensuring that their voices are heard. Whenever the funding formula is changed, I urge the Minister to ensure that everything

that can be done is done to ensure that community policing is not adversely affected.

Lancashire has great variations in its seasonal economy, and that can often involve a policing challenge. My neighbouring constituency of Blackpool will see huge fluctuations in visitor numbers depending on the time of year, with hen nights, stag nights and so on. Having been out with the Lancashire constabulary late on a Saturday night, I know that they are stretched.

Let us not lose sight, however, of the fact that budget savings have to be found. Lancashire has a reserve and the onus is on the constabulary to make sure that the budget is spent wisely. As my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) has said, the reserve is not a rainy day fund but should be used to provide policing. We also have to make sure that resources are being properly managed.

May I take this opportunity to thank the police in Lancashire for all they do to keep my constituents—and indeed yours, Mr Deputy Speaker—safe? That goes without saying. When the review gets underway, I urge the Minister to look at the funding formula, to see whether there are any anomalies and to make sure that the people of Lancashire can be very proud of what this Government continue to do to support the police.

6.5 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in the same debate as so many Lancashire colleagues and to follow my parliamentary neighbour, the hon. Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies).

Lancashire has featured prominently in the debate, including the fact that the Lancashire constabulary has reserves. Under the funding formula, the Policing Minister's local force in Hertfordshire has greater reserves than Lancashire. It has gained £6.6 million, while we have lost £24.5 million. Indeed, Lancashire faces a reduction in funding of between £134 million and £164 million between 2010 and 2020. The funding cuts are going to result in a fundamental change to policing in Lancashire. My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) has mentioned the huge decrease in police numbers. They have fallen from 3,611 in 2011, and we fear that by 2020 there will be only 1,699, if the cuts go ahead in full.

Statistics have been used liberally during this debate, but I want to share a very personal experience of community policing. When I finished work on 24 July 2013, I got the last train home from Preston to Lancaster, which arrives at about 11.30 at night, and then walked the short, 10-minute journey home. When I left the train station, a huge crowd of people travelled away from it with me. People slowly filtered off in different directions until I became very conscious that there was just one person behind me, following me suspiciously closely. An instinct kicked in and I decided to cross the road. This man crossed the road after me. I thought maybe I was making it up—maybe it was all in my head. I crossed back to the original side and he crossed back with me. That moment when you realise that you are not making it up—that you, at 11.30 at night in your home city, are being followed home by a strange man—is a terrifying one that can happen to any one of us.

I was very fortunate that I managed to come across PC Bruce Irvine, who was attending an incident while on the beat. At 11.30 on a Wednesday night, I could go

to him and explain that a man was following me. He was able to put me in the back of his police car to make me feel safer and make sure that I got home safely. He spoke to the man who had been following me, who admitted that he had been following me and that he had intended to follow me all the way home to find out where I lived because he “liked the way” I looked.

The police cuts and the loss of community policing will have a real impact on real people's lives. When my chief constable in Lancashire, Steve Finnigan, says that the cuts could result in Lancashire becoming a blue-light-only service, that terrifies me as a woman. When some councils talk about switching off street lights at night because of the cuts, that makes me question whether I, as a woman, can walk home safely from work in the evening. I am not the only woman in that position. Police cuts are having a huge impact on our communities and a particularly huge impact on certain groups that may be more vulnerable than others.

At a time when the national crime recording standard in England and Wales is showing an increase in the number of rapes and sexual offences being reported, I urge the Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice to take this matter seriously and to reconsider the proposals for Lancashire and other forces that have been adversely affected, including the neighbouring Cumbria force, because they will impact on women's lives and make them scared to go out at night. Please consider that.

6.10 pm

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The police do not usually do politics. The Representation of the People Act 1983 prevents them from influencing any person's decision to vote by word or deed and the police's code of ethics states that the police “must not take any active part in politics.”

That did not stop an open letter being issued on 21 April from 1,000 past and present police staff, including 600 serving officers, 423 police constables and even four chief superintendents, warning of the grave consequences of a Conservative victory at the general election. It said that in power the Tories would “endanger public safety” and leave the force “perilously close to collapse”. We all know the result of the election and it was community safety, not just the Labour party, that was the loser.

The letter said that the public were in “blissful ignorance”, but people are becoming aware of the situation. I have received email after email from people in Hanger Hill ward—the least Labour-friendly territory in my constituency—who are disgusted that their PCSOs are going. And all this from the one-time party of law and order. Since May 2010, the Met has seen £600 million slashed from its budget, resulting in 190 fewer police officers and PCSOs in Ealing. We will find out in the spending review how many will be lost in the next round of cuts. People fear that, with the Tories unfettered by coalition government, things will get worse. *The Guardian* reckons that 22,000 officers will be lost. Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary said last week:

“The reductions in forces' workforces are likely to lead to a further erosion in neighbourhood policing.”

Hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber have recounted the figures for the Met police. The number of officers has fallen from 33,367 in March 2010 to 31,877.

[Dr Rupa Huq]

Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, said last week in an interview with the *Evening Standard* that the combination of the comprehensive spending review and the recalculation of the formula would lead to £800 million of cuts, which amounts to between 5,000 and 8,000 officers. He stated:

“For the past four years we have taken cuts...and we have just got on with it.”

He continued:

“I genuinely worry about the safety of London.”

Sir Bernard spoke at a public meeting in Ealing town hall the other week that was organised by our Assembly member, Dr Onkar Sahota. He was asked how the cuts would affect Ealing. The answer was that if they were shared equally across all the Met’s frontline teams, including firearms and sexual offences specialists, Ealing borough would lose about 25% of its officers, which is 170 police officers. If they were sliced another way, with the specialist units being protected and the 8,000 officers being lost from all the London boroughs, Ealing would lose 299 police officers, which is equivalent to 44% of the current force.

I have been to Ealing and Acton police stations in recent weeks, where I have spoken to our chief superintendent and officers at every level. People are seriously worried. They talk about devastation and a lack of morale. Just like the iconic Scotland Yard, both those police stations will go and the officers will be relocated to Brent. Everyone was saying, “God forbid if anything like the August 2011 riots were to hit Ealing again.”

Mrs Moon: We police by consent in this country, but we also police by local knowledge. Every police officer lost is local knowledge lost. Is not that what the Conservative party fails to understand?

Dr Huq: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. The contact that means officers know the names of people on the streets is what we value about our police force, and it is endangered by the Government’s actions. The police in those police stations told me that the thin blue line is getting ever thinner and that precious human resources are being stretched to breaking point.

In the 2011 riots, our borough—my constituency—had one fatality. It was not just “happy shopping” or whatever people called it.

Among a long list of people, Sir Hugh Orde, the former Association of Chief Police Officers president, has said:

“The notion you can take money out of policing and numbers out of policing without increasing the risk exponentially is flawed.”

Hon. Members might have seen a story about Epping—the other side of town to my constituency—on BBC “London News” yesterday. A Remembrance Day parade that has been held every year since 1919 is not happening this year because there are not the police to marshal and cordon off the areas for it.

In New York, the population is decreasing but police numbers are being increased. It is odd that the opposite is happening in London—it does not make sense. We are in the nation’s capital. Hon. Members see on the annunciator screens in our offices that the threat level is

severe. How will slashing our police force to ribbons help? Many hon. Members have said that the nature and scope of policing have changed and that we have new crimes. We should listen to the unprecedented intervention of 1,000 past and present police officers. The letter says that we

“cannot stand by watching the destruction of the UK police service.”

The people of Ealing, Acton and Chiswick deserve better.

6.16 pm

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): Mr Deputy Speaker, it is a pleasure to be called to speak by you. Most often when I have spoken in the Chamber it is you who have called me, so I am always relieved to see you walk through the doors. [Interruption.] I shall say something nice about the Minister in a second as well, so he should prepare himself.

It is interesting to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith). We have heard from hon. Members who have been affected by crime and there are many different perspectives on crime and policing both sides of the House. I welcome those and enjoyed listening to them because it is important to get different perspectives. I have seen the impact and importance of policing from many different perspectives and angles. I have been a victim of crime—a victim of serious crime—and saw at first hand during that experience the humanity, professionalism and determination of good policing. When I hear from Conservatives who have had experience of policing, from the Minister to the hon. Member for Gower (Byron Davies), I never fail to have respect for their profession and the dedication they showed when they were serving, even though I disagree with the conclusions they draw. Similarly, my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) spoke about her work with victims of crime, which she did for 10 years. I saw that work at first hand too, and have absolute admiration for it.

I have spent time work shadowing with Sussex police. I recommend that all hon. Members do that if they have the opportunity. I spent time with the antisocial and hate crime unit in Brighton and Hove police—it is one of the very few police forces to have a dedicated unit for antisocial behaviour and hate crime. I learned an extraordinary amount about the complex work they do, and about the interdepartmental work they do on the ground, working with councils, social services and so forth to make policing integrated and to make it work for the long term.

As an MP, I see things from another angle, particularly representing Brighton and Hove. It is a complex place to police. We have 8 million visitors to our city every year and two universities, which bring with them specific opportunities and challenges. We have the highest number of pubs and clubs outside London. Being a party town is great fun, but it brings with it a price to police. We have very diverse communities. Some of the most privileged communities in our country are in the city of Brighton and Hove, but we also have communities in the bottom 3% for deprivation in the whole country. We also have Pride, which brings in 200,000 people.

I understand that good policing underpins our economy, something that has not been mentioned enough in the

debate. Our economy in Brighton and Hove is dominated by retail, small and micro-businesses, small traders and the self-employed. Our economy is not hidden away in tall buildings with private security on the front door. Our economy happens on community high streets and people's neighbourhoods. That requires good, solid community policing. Our economy needs a safe space to thrive.

Sussex police have already implemented a 20% cut, as a result of which 500 front-line staff have gone. This is where I extend an olive branch across the House. I have had many frank conversations about this matter. The hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) was slightly patronising earlier when he suggested that we needed to get out and speak to police. We do, and they have told us about their innovation and what they did to survive the first round of 20% cuts. In many cases, these are examples of best practice, doing more for less and learning from experience. There has been innovation, but the CPR will mean a further cut of between 25% and 40%. To put that in context, of its current budget of £250 million, my police force could lose up to £96 million. I do not believe Conservative Members who say that this will not have a direct impact on the frontline. Add to that a funding formula that could take another 5.1% away from our police force, and it is impossible to see how this is anything other than a Government waging a war against policing in cities such as Brighton and Hove.

6.20 pm

Kate Osamor (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): I stand here in solidarity with the police and crime commissioners and policing staff across the UK who are facing cuts, and I join them in urging the policing Minister to halt the proposed changes to the police funding formula, which are, to quote the PCCs' open letter, "unfair, unjustified and deeply flawed".

I am strongly opposed to the proposed policing cuts, under which London will lose 11.3% of its central grant, which equates to £184 million in annual funding for its police service—equivalent to many forces' entire budget or the loss of 3,000 police officers. In the middle of October, the capital's most senior police officer told a meeting of Enfield residents that he feared for the safety of London as a result of the proposed cuts, and I agree with him.

The situation for my constituency is critical. Recent figures show violent crime has soared in London over the past 12 months, especially in the borough of Enfield, in which there are 18 offences every day. The level of youth violence has increased by 19% over the last 12 months, compared with the London average of 13%. In the same period, while London saw a 3% fall in the number of homicides, Enfield saw a rise of more than 250%. It is now 7%, which is the joint highest in the capital. Enfield cannot afford any more cuts. The region has been historically underfunded through the distribution of grants to London boroughs. In the last five years, two of its police stations have closed and more than 100 police officers and PCSOs have been lost.

I ask the policing Minister to think about the open letter. The attempt to appease PCCs for threatening judicial review has not helped. Given the extent of the opposition, I ask that the Government go further than

merely refining the proposals, and radically rethink them. These cuts are unsafe and unjust.

6.23 pm

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Despite the best efforts of Southwark police, my constituents are concerned about the cuts to the borough force and the loss of 200 officers since 2010. These cuts were made despite a concerted campaign by Councillor Michael Situ, cabinet member for communities and safety on Southwark Council, and my constituents are nervous at the prospect of a further cut of 25% or 40% to the borough's resources.

Four particular groups of crime have been raised with me. The first is drugs and the antisocial behaviour relating to their use and sale. In parts of my constituency, there has been a rise in the visible use and sale of class A drugs. This is in central London. In particular, residents of Tissington court, in Rotherhithe, feel that the police were unable, or lacked the resources, to tackle the regular sale and use of heroin within the block. Families felt unable to send their children up and down the stairwell because of the use of heroin and its impact in that stairwell, including the voiding of bowels there during the day. To get that issue resolved, it took an incredible amount of time, and a concerted effort on my part with the Rotherhithe councillors, who took it to the police along with the local tenants association.

There has been a lack of focus in the debate on business crime, although my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) raised the issue far more eloquently than I probably will. There are concerns that relate to businesses in my constituency. The rise in shoplifting has been raised with me by Tesco managers. Particular businesses have been targeted—for example, pub users have had their mobile phones stolen. We have seen a dramatic increase in commercial squatting across the constituency, which I raised with the Met commissioner. The Albion in Rotherhithe and The Elephant and Castle—unsurprisingly, located in Elephant and Castle—have been targeted. Even the Metropolitan police's own building, the former forensic lab in Walworth, was squatted by about 80 people until it was emptied for sale.

My constituency has also seen a rise in commercial burglaries, particularly around Borough and Bermondsey, Long lane and Tower Bridge road. Cold Mountain Kit, next to my constituency office, was burgled on the day it opened. Businesses are losing profits and confidence when targeted in this way, as well as losing their stock and facing higher insurance costs. They also live in fear of repeat incidents in the face of cuts to our policing.

We have seen a drastic rise in street robbery, too. The *South London Press* covered it just last week. A 46-year-old mum was mugged when picking her son up from school; a 70-year-old woman on Olney road had gold jewellery stolen off her body; and an 85-year-old woman was targeted for gold theft by muggers on Andrews Walk in a recent spate of incidents.

As other Members have mentioned, we have seen a dramatic rise in murders and knife crime in particular. It gives me no pride to say that Southwark has one of the highest murder rates in the capital. Knife crime has risen by 13% in England and Wales; and in 2013-14 only 16% of the knife crimes in Southwark led to charges being brought. I see that the hon. Member for Gower

[Neil Coyle]

(Byron Davies) back in his place, and he suggested that the police have the resources to deal with that. I think that is offensive to my local police force. With the track record of 16% of charges brought in cases of knife crime, the police clearly do not have the capacity to tackle that problem. Most recently, close to where I live in the constituency, 16-year-old Mohammed Dura Ray was murdered in a brutal knife crime on 14 September. His mum is desperate for answers and desperate for that terrible track record of solving knife crimes to be confronted.

Byron Davies: I did not say that the police had the resources; I said that they needed to use their resources properly—they need to be properly managed.

Neil Coyle: So the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that Southwark police are not using their resources properly. Brilliant! I thank him for that contribution.

I have met Mariama Kamara, the mother of Mohammed Dura Ray, and I am organising a knife amnesty in the constituency. The Prime Minister said he was unable to meet Mariama to discuss her concerns about policing locally. I hope that the Home Secretary or another Home Office would be willing to meet her.

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): I am naturally prepared to meet any constituents, so the hon. Gentleman could take that up with my private office, which is listening.

Neil Coyle: Fantastic. I am pleased to hear that news, and thank the Minister for jumping to his feet to make that assertion so quickly.

Residents tell me that visibility and trust are the key to local policing, as well as the key to both public and business confidence. That confidence is lacking. We have seen the closure of Rotherhithe police station and the change from safer neighbourhood teams to the cluster of five wards of PCSOs. That has taken officers off the streets, which has contributed to the rise in crime in particular areas. Trust is essential to effective policing, and PCSOs are some of the most trusted officers we have right on the frontline in our local communities. They are the most reflective and representative part of the Met police, and they are the ones most likely to face the cuts proposed in the comprehensive spending review.

In the face of rising crime and the prospect of what lies ahead, I ask Ministers to think what message they are sending to my constituents and local businesses if they continue along the course of cutting police officers. In particular, I ask them what message they are sending to my constituent, Mariama Kamara, after the loss of her son. If the track record of local policing is not improved, her son's death may never be solved.

6.29 pm

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I feel privileged to speak in this debate because policing is one of the most important issues facing my constituents, many of whom feel besieged in their estates by low-level crime—well, I call it low-level, but it makes people's lives a misery. Anti-social behaviour and crime is devastating some of our communities. I was shocked to hear from the Home

Secretary about the Government's fantastic record, because for me and my constituents that record is one of broken promises.

Before coming to power, the Prime Minister promised to protect front-line policing, but he has cut 17,000 police officers. Even now, Conservative Members like to talk about the inheritance that they received in 2010, so I will take a few moments to speak about what they inherited. The Government inherited a record number of police—up by 17,000 from when we took office in 1997. They inherited a level of crime that was down by 43%, and the creation of police community support offers—I welcome the supportive comments from Members on both sides of the House about the great job done by PCSOs. Every single community had a neighbourhood policing team that was committed to spending 80% of its time on the beat, and to respond to non-emergency issues within 24 hours. They inherited a record of domestic violence that had fallen by more than 50%, and the reporting of rape had doubled. They inherited the first ever powers on antisocial behaviour and a guaranteed response within 24 hours, as well as the first ever national victims service. I am incredibly proud of the legacy that we left the Government, and disappointed to see them destroying it. Constituents such as mine are suffering.

Where are we now? In the last year, Redcar and Cleveland has seen a 77% increase in violence against the person, and a 25% increase in domestic burglary. There has been an 18% increase in criminal damage, and a 77% increase in sexual offences—a total overall increase in crime of 22%. That does not accord with the good news and rose-tinted spectacles on the Conservative Benches—[*Interruption.*] And the SNP Benches.

Since 2010, Cleveland has had an 18% cut to its policing budget, which means that it lost a quarter of its full-time officers and a third of its community support officers. Police officers in my constituency have not been replaced after being on long-term sick leave. People in my community are fed up with antisocial behaviour, and with people on bikes and horses running riot across their estates. They are fed up with arson on the Eston hills, and with cars being smashed in Roseberry square. They are fed up with open drug deals and estates that are no-go areas. All that crime is a direct consequence of the lack of deterrent and visible policing on our streets, and that in turn is a direct consequence of the reduction in front-line officers and the disproportionate cuts that Cleveland police has received. That is deeply unjust because police officers in my area are committed, dedicated and brave, and we owe them a huge debt of gratitude. The very least we can do is ensure that they have the capacity and resource to do what we ask.

In the time I have left, let me raise two brief issues that I hope the Home Secretary and her team will consider. First, the continued short-term funding position that the police find themselves in is unsustainable. Being allocated funding in December each year for a financial year that starts only three months later is a poor way to run such a pivotal public service, and it inevitably leads to short-term thinking, reactive decision-making, and therefore not to the best outcomes. The police need a multi-year settlement that incorporates the best estimates, and takes into account comprehensive spending reviews, funding formulas and transitional arrangements.

My second point is about the disproportionate impact of the cuts. Although police areas receive the same cuts in percentage terms, that does not equate to equal pain for all areas in either percentage or cash terms when it comes to overall funding. There is disproportionate demand in areas of high unemployment such as my constituency, and in areas of high vulnerability and disadvantage. I ask the Government to go away and think again, and in the meantime I am delighted to support the motion.

6.33 pm

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Last night in Alum Rock in Birmingham, the shadow Home Secretary and I saw British neighbourhood policing at its best, and a community transformed from a troubled past to a safe place to live with a thriving economy. Why? Because of 10 years of the patient building of good community relationships, as well as outstanding neighbourhood police officers such as Inspector Chris Smith and Sergeant Ifti Ali, who both said, “We love the job”. Local residents and retailers were waxing lyrical about their relationship with their neighbourhood police officers—my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Peter Kyle) was right about the importance of good neighbourhood policing to strong local economies.

My hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) is right to say that one of the great legacies of the last Labour Government was neighbourhood policing. The Labour Government provided 17,000 more police officers and 16,000 PCSOs. They introduced local policing with local roots, giving people a local say and creating strong partnerships with the community and other key stakeholders. We were given evidence of that by my hon. Friends the Members for Bootle (Peter Dowd) and for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff), both of whom made excellent speeches.

The Home Secretary has described the police as crime-fighters, but we have a wider vision than that. Policing is about preventing crime and diverting people from crime. That model is celebrated worldwide and is often celebrated in the House, but now, tragically, a generation of progress in the reduction of crime is being reversed.

The first duty of any Government is to maintain the safety and security of their citizens, but in the last five years this Government have made swingeing cuts. A total of 17,000 police officers have gone, which broke a promise given by the Home Secretary, and 4,500 PCSOs have gone as well. We have seen the progressive hollowing out of neighbourhood policing. Communities complain increasingly that there is no longer any visible presence of police officers, and they are right. There are profoundly worrying signs that the Government are ignoring repeated warnings, and that—in the words of a past president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, Sir Hugh Orde—the “tipping point” is now being reached. I shall say more about that later.

It seems that the Government are determined to blunder on regardless, oblivious to the consequences of their actions. As for the Chancellor, who gives hubris a bad name, he appears to be impervious to criticism as he presses forward with his ideological agenda to shrink the state. The cuts of between 25% and 40% that are currently being discussed will result in catastrophic

consequences for our police service in the next five years; indeed, forces have warned that they could reduce the service to its lowest level since the 1970s.

These cuts are not just huge but unfair, as is clear from the fiasco of the funding formula. Only this Government could acknowledge that the current formula was opaque and unfair, and then, having made a complete mess of the consultative process, replace it with a formula that was opaque and unfair. That process has been described by Conservative police and crime commissioners as unjustified, deeply flawed and shambolic. It now faces a legal challenge, and the hon. Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy) admitted that it gave rise to concern.

I pay tribute to the way in which the police service has coped with immense difficulties in ever more difficult circumstances, but we are now talking about the cumulative impact of the last five years and what is proposed over the next five years. What will that mean? As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith), it will mean the end of neighbourhood policing as we have known it. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), PCSOs are becoming an endangered species. And as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), we are seeing a return to a reactive and discredited model of policing, with Robocops touring estates in cars rather than engaging with the community.

The thin blue line is being stretched ever thinner. The police are ever more removed from the communities whom they serve, and fewer and fewer of them are struggling to do ever more. As cuts in public agencies bite ever harder, the demands on the police, as the force of last resort, are becoming ever greater. We have already seen some of the consequences. Chief constables talk increasingly of becoming a blue light service. In some forces, response times have gone up by 57%, and in a number of forces, police are no longer turning out to deal with reported crimes such as burglary.

The Government cannot say that they have not been warned. In recent weeks, we have heard a chorus of voices from London to Lancashire. Police officers have spoken out, and powerful contributions have been made to today’s debate by my hon. Friends the Members for Burnley (Julie Cooper), for Halifax (Holly Lynch), for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq), and for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith). The message is clear: the growing impact is serious, and will become ever more serious during the next stages of this process.

Thus far, the Government have sought to hide behind a false alibi. They say, “Yes, we cut police, but we cut crime as well.” It is true that, as is the case in the western world, volume crime is falling. We have also seen the benefits of a generation of good neighbourhood policing in reducing some crimes, but the statistics do not give a full picture. The latest ONS statistics show a 5% increase in police recorded crime, and increasingly as police recorded crime is cleaned up with more effective recording, we are seeing a 9% increase in knife crime, sexual crime up 12% and hate crime up 18%, but it is the crime survey of England and Wales that the Government repeatedly depend upon. The only problem is it does not reflect the full extent of rapidly growing fraud and cybercrime. It is now being said by the police—by the national co-ordinator for fraud—that

[Jack Dromey]

as 5.1 million crimes are included from the first quarter of next year, the crime survey will show an increase of 40%.

This is the worst possible time to cut the police service, not just because fraud and cybercrime are rapidly growing—RBS has said by 40% a year—but also because of twin challenges. First, there is the generational threat of terrorism. Powerfully evidenced by Peter Clarke, former head of counter-terrorism, and Mark Rowley, the current head is the fact that neighbourhood policing is the eyes and ears of the police service engaging with local communities. I have seen the success of that in the west midlands, which I am proud to represent. Secondly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) said—she is from a police family—there are the immense challenges of child sexual exploitation and abuse. There is a great national will that we act, and the police are doing so, but in the west midlands alone the size of the public protection unit has gone up from 300 officers to 800 and they are struggling to cope. So it is the worst possible time to cut the police service.

The evidence is clear: the Government are putting public safety and the vulnerable at risk. I have searched high and low in the manifestos of Conservative Members and I cannot find one of them saying to his or her community, “Vote for me and I will support the cutting of 22,000 police officers.”

The time has come for the Government to listen to the growing chorus of concern, including from within their own ranks. The Home Secretary’s own PCC, the delightful old Macmillanite, Anthony Stansfeld, says he just cannot get home to the Home Secretary or the Prime Minister, who also lives in the Thames valley area, just how serious the mounting consequences are of what their Government are doing.

The Government may be impervious to the mounting concerns and oblivious to the consequences of their actions, but Labour is not. Of course, as the shadow Home Secretary has said, sensible savings can be made. We identified that ourselves in terms of a national procurement strategy, which was rejected by the Government. Of course we need a sensible reform agenda. We need to raise standards, hold the police to the highest standards and root out wrongdoing. We also need greater diversity. The Home Secretary was right to challenge the police to rise to the challenge of greater diversity, but it is wrong then to make it nigh-on impossible for the police to do that because, effectively, most police forces cannot recruit to achieve it.

The Government have to stop blaming the police for things that the Government are responsible for. All over the country I meet police officers who say to me, time and again, “They never have a kind word to say about us.” That remorselessly negative tone, combined with the growing pressures, is seeing morale plummeting and sickness and stress leave soaring. The Policing Minister says on many occasions that somehow Labour are criticising the police; on the contrary, we are standing up for a police service that is under immense and growing pressures from his Government.

We are rooted in the communities we serve and we listen to the voices of the police and the public because, ultimately, this is about the kind of country we want to live in and the kind of police service we want. We want

policing by consent, in the great tradition of Robert Peel. The British model of policing is the expression of British values. Tonight, all Members have the opportunity to search their conscience and decide whether to stand up for the British police service. We will vote to do precisely that. Our position is clear: Labour is the party of public safety, and the Tories are putting public safety and security at risk.

6.45 pm

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): We have had a really good debate, up until the last five minutes. I always stand up and say in public that I am proud to be the Minister responsible for the best police force in the world, so how the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) can say that we never stand up for the police, I do not know. That was a strange thing to say. Colleagues who read *Hansard* tomorrow will see that Members on one side of the House have been supporting the police this afternoon and that those on the other side have been scaremongering yet again.

Thirty-four colleagues have made speeches this afternoon, and many of them have talked about the size of the police force. What I am interested in, as the Policing Minister, is how many police are on the frontline doing policing jobs. I am sure that other colleagues are interested in that, too. We are interested in how many warranted officers are out there. Her Majesty’s inspector of constabulary has said more than once that the size of the workforce gives no indication whatsoever of the quality of the service, and that it is the quality of the policing that matters.

We are still in the consultation, which, with the Home Secretary’s permission, we have extended so that more colleagues, police and crime commissioners and chief constables can have a say in the funding formula changes. The chief finance officer for Lancashire has said:

“We welcome the Government’s decision to fully review the police funding formula”.

Tony Lloyd, the police and crime commissioner for Greater Manchester, has said:

“I therefore urge you”—

presumably he means me and the Home Secretary—
“to commence the review as soon as possible.”

Several of my predecessors have spoken in the debate today, and in earlier debates, saying that chief constables and PCCs from the 43 police authorities for which we are responsible banged on their doors and said that the funding formula policy was opaque and not fit for purpose. That is why we have come forward with a new funding formula. I have said from the outset that there will be winners and losers, and that is true. We are still very much in listening mode, however. I am still in listening mode, and I would not do anything else, because if you have a consultation, that is exactly what you should do.

We have also heard extensively, particularly from Opposition Members, that crime is rising and that fraud has suddenly appeared in the statistics. Well, fraud has been out there for some time, but only one Government have had the courage to put cybercrime and fraud into the statistics—this one. We are leading the world by saying that crime is changing and that those crimes should appear in the statistics.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington said that crimes such as sexual offences, fraud and domestic abuse were rising. As the Policing Minister, I am absolutely chuffed that people have the courage to come forward and report those crimes. The Office for National Statistics has said that the overall increase is likely to be due to the increased reporting of certain offences, such as fraud, sexual offences and domestic abuse. The ONS is not issuing a puff on behalf of the Government; it is saying what it thinks the rationale behind the figures is.

Any crime in any community is really difficult, but crime has fallen while we have reduced the funding for the police. That truly must be one of the most important things that we can look at. It is not so much about how much money you throw at the police. The previous Administration threw money at the police force over 13 years, but what did we get from that? Did we actually get warranted officers? We are now looking carefully at the funding formula. We will also make sure that we look very carefully at capabilities.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab) *rose*—

Mike Penning: I apologise to the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, but I have limited time. If I find time towards the end of my speech, I will give way, but I will not do so at the moment. *[Interruption.]* We would have had a lot more time if the shadow Minister had not kept on interrupting Back Benchers all the way through the debate, and Back Benchers would also have had more time to speak. I will just use my time, if I may.

One of the eminently important things to do is to make sure that the money we give to forces is spent correctly and that forces spend it. Our 43 authorities have £2.1 billion in reserves. I will not name and shame each individual force, but—at the end of the day, we are talking about money being tight, and there are real issues about forces wanting more money—hon. Members should take a close look at the forces that have £2.1 billion of taxpayers' money sitting in reserves. They should take a look at how their local forces do procurement. They should go on to the Home Office website and look at how much their local force spends on body armour. For instance, why does one force spend nearly £300 more on body armour? All body armour has to be type-approved and it cannot be done on the cheap, so why is that the case? Why does one force have 100 warranted police officers not on operational duty because they are not fit? Some 10% of its operation force is not in. If they are not fit for duty, sadly—as when I was a fireman and was not fit for duty—they have to leave, because we need people on the frontline to do those jobs.

As was said by my colleagues on the Government Benches, when we look around the country, we can see forces that are doing exceptionally well in working with other blue-light organisations, particularly the fire service. We can look at Hampshire, which has been very well represented on the Government Benches during the debate. Hampshire has been enormously forward-thinking in what it has done. I have been to Winchester, where the brand-new fire station happens to be in the police station. If one goes across the yard where the police and the fire service jointly train, one finds the police firearms unit at the bottom of the yard. That was a joint procurement, and it is a joint way of working. We need to see more of that, and we will.

Mrs Drummond: Will the Minister give way?

Mike Penning: I will not give way at the moment.

Like Hampshire, other forces have real skills. I know the marine service in Hampshire does excellent work, and we need to look carefully at how it is funded in this difficult funding situation. Other forces around the country are starting to work with other blue-light services. In Northamptonshire, the very forward-thinking PCC is not only bringing the fire service alongside the police, but is talking very closely to other blue-light services, particularly the ambulance service.

In Hertfordshire, which is my own force, I have one of the best chief fire officers in the country. He must be, because just under 10 years ago he helped to put out Buncefield. He was the chief fire officer at Buncefield, which blew up half of my constituency. He is the chief executive of the PCC's office, so he and the PCC can work closely together, keeping costs down and making sure that that approach is the way forward. We can see not only where that is starting to work, but how other forces can learn from the work being done in places such as Hampshire and Northamptonshire.

During the course of the debate, I did not want to interfere in Scottish National party Members' little personal disagreements with Labour Members, but I thought that I might just help them a bit now. In an intervention earlier on, I think the lead spokesman for the SNP mentioned the effect that VAT is having. *[Interruption.]* Well, whichever SNP Member it was because, to be fair, one of them did. There was a bit of whingeing—that is what it is called in my part of the world—about VAT.

During the debate, I decided to take a look at why the Scottish nationalists are so worried about the fact that they cannot get their VAT refund. As they put their business plan together for combining the fire and police services in Scotland, including the savings they thought they would make, they took into consideration the fact that they would not be able to claim VAT back and would not get VAT refunds. I therefore find it strange that having done their business plan in 2012 and brought it in, they come to the House today to complain about the Chancellor not giving them their VAT refunds.

We heard a contribution from the Welsh nationalists earlier, with a lot of talk about the Silk commission and its recommendations as to whether or not policing should have been devolved. There was no agreement on the Silk commission by the political parties in Wales in respect of whether policing should be devolved. That is the situation. When they are trying to agree on what was going on, it is important that we get the facts absolutely correct.

As Members on both sides of the House have said, in the 21st century we need to make sure that the money of the taxpayers who send us here is spent correctly. We need to make sure that we continue to have the best police force in the world. We need to make sure that the public have trust in the police force in this country. It is imperative that the people elected to this House to represent their communities do not scare them with estimates of how many police they will lose, whether they will be attacked on the way home and whether there are different situations going on. Nobody knows exactly what the funding will be. Some Members have

[Mike Penning]

conflated the spending review, the funding formula, the chiefs looking at where co-operation can take place and whether some forces would like to amalgamate formally—I do not know whether that is the case, as no business plans are on my desk—or informally, as West Mercia and Warwickshire have done, very successfully. A lot more work could be done across the country, but we should not, as politicians, stand in Parliament and scare our constituents by saying that the police force in this country is going to collapse or that crime is dramatically rising, because it is not.

It is fundamentally wrong for an Opposition party to campaign against cuts and then for Opposition Members to come to this House to tell us that they would have a 10% cut—if people were stupid enough to elect them. That is seriously dangerous. As with their policy on PCCs, they have no policies. Vera Baird and Paddy Tipping clearly won the argument in the Labour party, saying that it should reverse its policy and there has been another huge U-turn on PCCs. Now the Opposition have said, with all their colleagues behind them, “The cuts the Tories have made over the last five years are terrible. They are massively affecting policing in our community. Oh, by the way, we will cut it by another 10%.” It is an absolutely ludicrous position. Anybody with any sense will not be going through the Lobby with the Labour party. The Scots Nats are not going to go through with the Labour party, and that tells me something.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 214, Noes 343.

Division No. 109]

[6.58 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Champion, Sarah
Abrahams, Debbie	Chapman, Jenny
Alexander, Heidi	Clwyd, rh Ann
Ali, Rushanara	Coaker, Vernon
Allen, Mr Graham	Coffey, Ann
Anderson, Mr David	Cooper, Julie
Ashworth, Jonathan	Cooper, rh Yvette
Austin, Ian	Corbyn, Jeremy
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Cox, Jo
Barron, rh Kevin	Coyle, Neil
Beckett, rh Margaret	Crausby, Mr David
Benn, rh Hilary	Creagh, Mary
Berger, Luciana	Creasy, Stella
Betts, Mr Clive	Cruddas, Jon
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Cryer, John
Blenkinsop, Tom	Cummins, Judith
Blomfield, Paul	Cunningham, Alex
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Brake, rh Tom	Dakin, Nic
Brennan, Kevin	Danczuk, Simon
Brown, Lyn	David, Wayne
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Davies, Geraint
Bryant, Chris	Davies, Philip
Buck, Ms Karen	De Piero, Gloria
Burden, Richard	Doughty, Stephen
Burgon, Richard	Dowd, Jim
Burnham, rh Andy	Dowd, Peter
Butler, Dawn	Dromey, Jack
Byrne, rh Liam	Durkan, Mark
Cadbury, Ruth	Eagle, Ms Angela
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Eagle, Maria
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Efford, Clive
Carswell, Mr Douglas	Elliott, Tom

Ellman, Mrs Louise	McDonnell, John
Esterson, Bill	McGovern, Alison
Evans, Chris	McInnes, Liz
Farrelly, Paul	McKinnell, Catherine
Farron, Tim	Meale, Sir Alan
Field, rh Frank	Mearns, Ian
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Miliband, rh Edward
Flelo, Robert	Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Fletcher, Colleen	Morden, Jessica
Flint, rh Caroline	Morris, Grahame M.
Flynn, Paul	Mulholland, Greg
Fovargue, Yvonne	Murray, Ian
Gapes, Mike	Nandy, Lisa
Glass, Pat	Onn, Melanie
Glindon, Mary	Onwurah, Chi
Godsiff, Mr Roger	Osamor, Kate
Goodman, Helen	Owen, Albert
Green, Kate	Pearce, Teresa
Greenwood, Lilian	Pennycook, Matthew
Greenwood, Margaret	Perkins, Toby
Griffith, Nia	Phillips, Jess
Haigh, Louise	Phillipson, Bridget
Hamilton, Fabian	Pound, Stephen
Harman, rh Ms Harriet	Pugh, John
Harris, Carolyn	Qureshi, Yasmin
Hayes, Helen	Rayner, Angela
Hayman, Sue	Reed, Mr Steve
Healey, rh John	Rees, Christina
Hendrick, Mr Mark	Reynolds, Jonathan
Hepburn, Mr Stephen	Rimmer, Marie
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret	Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Hoey, Kate	Rotheram, Steve
Hollern, Kate	Ryan, rh Joan
Hopkins, Kelvin	Shah, Naz
Hunt, Tristram	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Huq, Dr Rupa	Sheerman, Mr Barry
Irranca-Davies, Huw	Sherriff, Paula
Johnson, rh Alan	Siddiq, Tulip
Johnson, Diana	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Jones, Gerald	Slaughter, Andy
Jones, Graham	Smeeth, Ruth
Jones, Helen	Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Jones, Mr Kevan	Smith, Angela
Jones, Susan Elan	Smith, Cat
Kane, Mike	Smith, Jeff
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald	Smith, Nick
Keeley, Barbara	Smith, Owen
Kendall, Liz	Smyth, Karin
Kinahan, Danny	Spellar, rh Mr John
Kinnock, Stephen	Starmer, Keir
Kyle, Peter	Stevens, Jo
Lammy, rh Mr David	Streeting, Wes
Lavery, Ian	Stringer, Graham
Leslie, Chris	Tami, Mark
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Thomas, Mr Gareth
Lewis, Clive	Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Lewis, Mr Ivan	Thornberry, Emily
Long Bailey, Rebecca	Timms, rh Stephen
Lucas, Caroline	Trickett, Jon
Lynch, Holly	Turley, Anna
Madders, Justin	Turner, Karl
Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Twigg, Derek
Mahmood, Shabana	Twigg, Stephen
Malhotra, Seema	Umunna, Mr Chuka
Mann, John	Vaz, rh Keith
Marris, Rob	Vaz, Valerie
Marsden, Mr Gordon	Watson, Mr Tom
Maskell, Rachael	West, Catherine
McCabe, Steve	Whitehead, Dr Alan
McCarthy, Kerry	Williams, Mr Mark
McDonald, Andy	Wilson, Phil

Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wright, Mr Iain
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Vicky Foxcroft and
Conor McGinn

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Ansell, Caroline
Argar, Edward
Arkless, Richard
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Bardell, Hannah
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Mr Henry
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Berry, James
Bingham, Andrew
Blackford, Ian
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Borwick, Victoria
Boswell, Philip
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brazier, Mr Julian
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brock, Deidre
Brokenshire, rh
James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burns, rh Sir Simon
Burrowes, Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, Alun
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Carmichael, Neil
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Costa, Alberto

Cowan, Ronnie
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Byron
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Dr James
Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Mr David
Day, Martyn
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Donaldson, Stuart Blair
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Drax, Richard
Drummond, Mrs Flick
Duddridge, James
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fellows, Marion
Fernandes, Suella
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fuller, Richard
Fysh, Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Garnier, rh Sir Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
Gethins, Stephen
Ghani, Nusrat
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Grady, Patrick
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grant, Peter
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben

Gyimah, Mr Sam
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matthew
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Heald, Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Hendry, Drew
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Howarth, Sir Gerald
Howell, John
Howlett, Ben
Huddleston, Nigel
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Boris
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kennedy, Seema
Kerevan, George
Kerr, Calum
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Law, Chris
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lopresti, Jack
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
Mc Nally, John
McCaig, Callum
McCartney, Jason
McCartney, Karl
McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
McDonald, Stuart
C.
McGarry, Natalie
McLaughlin, Anne
McPartland, Stephen
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalf, Stephen
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Monaghan, Carol
Monaghan, Dr Paul
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mowat, David
Mullin, Roger
Mundell, rh David
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newlands, Gavin
Newton, Sarah
Nicolson, John
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
O'Hara, Brendan
Offord, Dr Matthew
Oswald, Kirsten
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Philp, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
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, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette

Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, David
 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
 Stephens, Chris
 Stephenson, Andrew
 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
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Derek
 Thompson, Owen
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig

Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vaizey, Mr Edward
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame
 Angela
 Weir, Mike
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr
 John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wilson, Sammy
 Wishart, Pete
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Noes:
 Guy Opperman and
 Jackie Doyle-Price

Question accordingly negated.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I would be grateful for your advice. The House will be aware that last week a statutory instrument was passed upstairs in Committee that would allow surface-level drilling in national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty for the purposes of what is commonly known as fracking. It is yet to be taken on the Floor of the House, but today the Government issued a consultation on this very subject on their departmental website, which at the very least causes considerable confusion, but at worst may supersede the statutory instrument itself. Have you received any indication from a member of the Treasury Bench or a Government Minister that they intend to make a statement on the subject to the House?

Mr Speaker: I am bound to say to the hon. Lady that I have received no such indication. To date, nothing disorderly has occurred and, as I understand it, the relevant regulation has not been passed. Whether the issue of the consultation paper is to the taste of the hon. Lady or others is a matter for her, but with regard to propriety and order, nothing improper or disorderly has occurred.

I must answer factually that, as of now, I have received no such indication, although what might be thought to be a request for such a statement will have been heard on the Treasury Bench. I thank the shadow Secretary of State for what she has said.

Business without Debate

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Ordered,

That Mr Richard Bacon, Deidre Brock, Mr Nicholas Brown, James Cartlidge, Sir Edward Leigh, Ian Murray and Mr Andrew Tyrie be appointed, and that Stella Creasy and John Pugh be discharged as members of the Public Accounts Commission under section 2(2)(c) of the National Audit Act 1983.—(*Chris Grayling.*)

EUROPEAN UNION DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 119(11)),

EU MERGER CONTROL

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 11976/14, a Commission White Paper: Towards more effective EU merger control, and Addenda 1 to 3; and supports the Government's approach of questioning the proposal to widen scope of the EU Merger Regime (EUMR) to include acquisitions of non-controlling minority shareholdings, given that the evidence does not suggest it is justified.—(*George Hollingbery.*)

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION (COMMITTEES)

Ordered,

That the Prison and Young Offender Institution (Amendment) Rules 2015 (S.I., 2015, No. 1638), be referred to a Delegated Legislation Committee.—(*George Hollingbery.*)

PETITION

Parking Restrictions in Scunthorpe

7.15 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): The petition is from constituents who have been affected by the changes in parking regulations that were brought about in order to address one problem and have created another problem for the health and wellbeing of my constituents on Newland Drive.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Scunthorpe County Constituency, Declares their objections to the parking restrictions which have recently been imposed by North Lincolnshire Council on Newland Drive, Scunthorpe.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to request North Lincolnshire Council to review the new parking restrictions and the impact on local residents.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P001552]

Palliative Care

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*George Hollingbery.*)

7.16 pm

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I am pleased to have secured this debate tonight on the important topic of access to palliative care for those who are dying. There are three key reasons why this debate is so timely and so important. First, it follows hot on the heels of the assisted dying debate that we had here on 11 September. No matter how Members voted, there was cross-party support for the movement for better access to palliative care in this country. Secondly, it is an important subject because from my experience as a cancer nurse working in one of the best cancer units not only in the country but in Europe, I have seen at first hand the difference that good palliative care can make, not just to patients and their families at the time of death, but in the last few weeks and months, making patients' lives as fulfilling as possible.

Thirdly, the debate is important and timely because it fits in with the discussion of the Access to Palliative Care Bill in the other place. That Bill aims to ensure that wherever people are in the country and whatever disease they are suffering from, palliative care services are available to them. It would put palliative care services into the mainstream for the many, not the few.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. Should we not see palliative care in its broadest sense, including medical care as well as social care? That co-ordinated approach could make end of life far more tolerable and would mean that people had to go into hospital to a far lesser extent.

Maria Caulfield: I agree, and I will highlight that point later in my speech.

For me, palliative care is about support and services that help to achieve a good death and underpin the care in someone's final weeks and months of life. What happens now is that all too often the provision of palliative care is distributed on the basis not of need but of availability, and depends on the diagnosis, where the person is treated, and sometimes even their age, leading to a patchy and ineffective service. We heard during the Adjournment debate on Monday night about the impact of not having good bereavement services, which stays with relatives not just at the time someone dies but for years afterwards, and may never go away if they have had a bad experience.

This patchy service continues despite all the hard work in recent years reviewing palliative care provision across the country. As far back as 2008, an end-of-life care strategy was produced, and in 2011 the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence produced quality standards, yet palliative care services remain patchy. To highlight that further, let us look at a few more statistics.

Unfortunately, we know that 100% of us will die eventually, and that three quarters of those deaths will be expected. That means that three quarters of the population could benefit from palliative care, but currently only 48% of people who have palliative care needs receive palliative care support. Of the 500,000 deaths

that occur in this country every year, 82.5% are among the over-65s, yet fewer than 15% of that group have access to palliative care. That tells us that those who need it most often have the hardest job accessing it. For older people, death is often seen as inevitable and not something that palliative care should be helping with.

More shockingly, between 50% and 70% of people who are dying say they would like to die at home, but only 30% actually do. Most people end up dying in hospital—just over 50%. Hospitals are amazing places, but they are acute settings helping to deal with urgent and emergency cases. While they do need to do more to provide better palliative care, we need to invest in our excellent hospice movement and facilities so that if people want to die in a hospice, they can. We also need to support our community outreach programmes so that if people want to die at home, they can have that choice too.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The need for palliative care always comes at a time when people and their families are feeling vulnerable. The importance of charities and churches at that time is something that we all know very well. The hon. Lady referred to hospice care groups and organisations. Does she agree that their role should be recognised more by Government and by the authorities so that they can take better advantage of hospice care and do better for those people through it?

Maria Caulfield: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I absolutely agree. That point is picked up in the Bill.

The most shocking statistic concerns the diseases that people are suffering from. The London School of Economics says that 92,000 people a year miss out on palliative care help. At the moment, 88% of our palliative care provision goes to people with cancer. As a cancer nurse, I am certainly not saying that that needs to be reduced, but the majority of deaths are due to other diseases. Only 29% of people die of cancer, with 28% of deaths due to heart disease, 15% due to respiratory illnesses, 10% due to stroke, not to mention Alzheimer's disease, motor neurone disease and multiple sclerosis. Until we ensure that palliative care provision is mainstream, and not just for patients with cancer, the majority of people will be denied access to a good death.

The Bill introduced in the other place comes up with solutions to resolve this situation and place the responsibility firmly in the hands of local clinical commissioning groups to ensure that all patients, no matter where they want to die or what disease they have, will get access to palliative care services. That will take the pressure off existing acute facilities that are currently having to provide them. The Bill makes some key practical proposals. The first is about the ability to admit people directly to palliative care facilities. This happens really well in a lot of places, but it does not happen everywhere. That goes back to the point made by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) about investing in our hospices to ensure that it can happen more widely. The Bill talks about support for healthcare professionals in all settings, so that whether they are an intensive care unit nurse or someone who works with motor neurone disease, they have a signposted facility to access specialist palliative care that helps them to help patients manage their symptoms.

[*Maria Caulfield*]

The Bill fits very firmly into the Government's seven-days-a-week NHS in calling for the availability of seven-days-a-week palliative care services. As I know only too well, it is at 4.30 pm on a Friday that a patient will phone up in pain and say they cannot cope, when pharmacies are closed and it is possible to get a prescription but not a drug. Someone who is breathless and needs a chest drain often has to wait until the Monday morning, in the meantime being admitted to A&E or a medical assessment unit and then finding it very difficult to be discharged to go home. This is why we need a seven-days-a-week palliative care service.

The Bill calls for some really basic things that should exist now but do not, such as sufficient equipment for our community services. It is unbelievable that a ward nurse who wants to discharge someone with a morphine pump cannot do so because the pump belongs to the hospital. Unless the community has a spare pump, that patient will not go home. That is why only 30% of people are dying at home—they are stuck in hospital because communities do not have the necessary equipment to look after patients. There are shortages of mattresses and feeding pumps, which would make a crucial difference if they were available.

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on calling this debate on such an important and often overlooked issue. I support what she is saying 100%, but does she agree that it is not just the NHS, the community and the charitable sector that need to join up? Joining up health and social care would enable the seamless transition she is talking about.

Maria Caulfield: Absolutely. I am touching on some of the Bill's highlights, but we also need to incorporate social care, because that is often the kind of support that carers need in order to be able to look after relatives.

The Bill also highlights the fact that medication is not available at all times. I know only too well that if a patient's pain needs to be better controlled, they can get a prescription but they cannot get the drugs on a Saturday or Sunday or during the night. Once again, they are admitted to A&E for help in managing their pain. That is not acceptable.

Practical solutions are available to enable people to choose where they want to die. I was disappointed by the response of Lord Prior of Brampton in the other place when he dismissed the Bill so easily by saying that we did not need to legislate for good palliative care. I strongly disagree. If we can legislate for a charter of budget responsibility, which I strongly supported because it is important for this country to run a surplus, and if we can legislate to freeze VAT and national insurance because that is also vital to this country, and to charge 5p for every carrier bag, why can we not legislate to provide good palliative care for every person who needs it?

I urge the Minister to consider the Access to Palliative Care Bill, which is currently going through the other place, as a way to improve access to palliative services and to support patients, families and NHS staff.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): On legislation, does my hon. Friend agree that it gives us as individuals and

families the opportunity to start thinking about the unthinkable, to improve the process and to shape the palliative care we will want in the future?

Maria Caulfield: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. We need to make death a normal part of life, but until palliative care is available to everyone it will still be seen as something that happens in dark corners in hospitals, when it should be happening at home.

The NHS is supposed to be there from cradle to grave, but this country is not getting death right. People are going abroad to commit suicide because they cannot face a natural death. We are doing something fundamentally wrong. I therefore ask the Minister to consider legislating on access to palliative care. Years of reviews have not solved the problem. With 100% of us facing death, we need to ensure that end-of-life care is treated as a priority.

7.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (*Maria Caulfield*) for bringing this very important subject to the attention of the House and for doing so with her characteristic passion and verve. It has been a pleasure to answer her points in several previous debates. She has made her points with great clarity and it is with great pleasure that I will respond to every single one.

I will start where I finished on Monday night. This debate is timely, because it follows closely on that evening's Adjournment debate, which was brought to the House by my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (*Will Quince*) and to which other Members contributed with such great passion, interest and detailed knowledge. I firmly believe that, unless the NHS understands that the basis of care is not the end point of healthcare but a good in and of itself, we will not build a satisfactory foundation for the medical care that we hope is the experience of the majority in the NHS. For people for whom the end point is not recovery, but good and decent care, we must ensure that such care is embedded in the foundations of the NHS. If we do not, we will not provide a suitable foundation for good care throughout the system. That is why I see palliative care not as something that is nice to have—an added extra or a bonus within the NHS—but as something that is crucial to the delivery of good care throughout the system, whether or not people are likely to survive at the end of their care in hospital, in the community or at home.

I share my hon. Friend's judgment of the debate on the Assisted Dying Bill, which I found fascinating. No matter where Members came from in that debate, what was clear was their wish to cherish, support and improve the palliative care services in our country and to ensure that people had access to the very best services not only in the UK, but in the world. That is where I will start my general remarks.

My hon. Friend is right to point out that the provision of palliative care is variable across the country, and I will turn to that in a second, but it is one of the areas that we should be very proud of, not least because of the dedicated work that people like her provide across the system in specialist settings and because of the unique gift that we have in this country of the hospice movement.

That is why the Economist Intelligence Unit, only a few weeks ago, judged that this country had the finest palliative care in the world in terms of access to services and the quality of those services. I do not say that in order to say that there is nothing to do—quite the opposite. The Economist Intelligence Unit pointed out that there are examples of extraordinarily good care across the country. I want to ensure that the experience is not variable, and that no matter where one is in the country, one receives the finest care.

Where should one look? I will point to a few examples of where exceptional care is being provided. In Bedfordshire, Sue Ryder has brought together palliative care services across the county. There is a brilliant linking up of services, whether they be in the community, in hospital or at home. As my hon. Friend knows well, home can encompass care home settings and private homes. That is a beacon of good practice that has been brought together by an expert charitable institution.

The Airedale, Wharfedale and Craven clinical commissioning group has blazed a trail with its expertise in palliative care, particularly through its adoption of the gold line telephone number, which is used not just by clinicians, but by families. People are lucky if they need palliative care and live in the Airedale clinical commissioning group area, because they are likely to receive the very finest palliative care available anywhere in the world.

I know that my hon. Friend has experience of hospital palliative care as a cancer nurse at the Royal Marsden, where exceptional care is provided that is comparable with the best care anywhere in the world. She will also be familiar with the work that is done at Frimley Park, where there is a comprehensive palliative care programme that goes across the hospital and is not seen as a bolt-on extra. The John Radcliffe hospital in Oxford has a similar approach with similar ends.

Sarah Champion: The Minister is citing excellent examples, but does he agree with me—I think that this is the intention behind the debate—that we should not just have exceptional examples, but 24/7 care wherever people are and whatever their condition is?

Ben Gummer: I agree completely with the hon. Lady. I was just about to turn to the very useful intervention that she made earlier, in which she said that palliative care is a mark of the integration of the health and social care sectors. It is no coincidence that one often sees good palliative care where there is good integration of health and social care. In a sense, the state of palliative care is a proxy for where care is well integrated and where it is not. That is why it should be seen as part of the larger challenge of achieving successful integration, on which there is a good deal of cross-party agreement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes mentioned the fact that many people do not die where they would choose. She will be aware of the Choices survey, which was launched by my predecessor in the coalition Government, the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). It has reported, and the Government have committed to reply to it. She can take that as an indication that there is policy to come, and that we will study carefully the things we have set up. We intend to ensure that people have greater access to the services they require to ensure that they can die where they wish.

We made that commitment in our manifesto—we were very clear about it—and we intend to deliver on it, as we intend to deliver on the rest of our manifesto.

My hon. Friend was entirely right to point out that that will require changes in services where they are not good. That will require commitments on palliative care nurses and the spreading of training. They have been achieved in Airedale, but have not been achieved in other clinical commissioning groups, where care is sometimes significantly lacking. There is much to do in some areas of the country. If I may use Bevan's words, it is about universalising the best. We know what the best looks like. We now need to ensure that we spread it across the rest of the country.

My hon. Friend was right that palliative care has, unfortunately, in some cases been associated with cancer care. That is not how it should be seen. She will be aware in great detail of the European Partnership for Action Against Cancer system, which is being used to ensure that cancer patients can indicate their wishes for the end of life. It can also help clinicians to manage that end-of-life period. The EPAAC system was originated and developed specifically for cancer patients, but we intend to roll it out for patients no matter what the cause of their death.

My hon. Friend mentioned the need to provide services 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Without wanting to state the obvious, that is one reason why we want to get a seven-day NHS working. When people need the NHS—whether they need medical attention that will save their life or pain relief that will mean that the end of their life is bearable—it cannot be right if treatment is deferred to a Monday because we do not have services available on Saturday and Sunday. That is the crux of what the Government are trying to achieve across our NHS reforms: we want to achieve a truly seven-day NHS.

Briefly, on the Bill introduced by Baroness Finlay in another place, I cannot disagree with the general sentiments of the proposal. The degree of variability that we have is obviously wrong and we must put it right. It should be right, in a sense, to say, "Let us legislate in order to make it so." I have reservations about the Bill—I have made them clear to Baroness Finlay—but I should like to outline them to explain why I believe it may not achieve what it wants to achieve, and why, on a wider point, it might be counter-productive.

If enacted, the Bill would be the first instance in the history of the NHS that we have made specific clinical demands on clinical commissioning groups about a specific clinical area. To take an analogy, we have not had a cancer services Bill that demands things of CCGs on cancer services. The Bill would therefore set a precedent, which requires very careful consideration. My current judgment, and that of the Secretary of State, is that we do not want to determine that demand from the centre in the manner in which Baroness Finlay wishes.

There are other instruments for achieving what Baroness Finlay wishes to do, such as the mandates to CCGs and to Health Education England. There are ways to achieve by similar means the same ends that she wishes to achieve, which is putting certain obligations on CCGs to ensure that they commission care in a way that we expect. We need to be careful about how we do it. Airedale is so good because it has come to that point by

[Ben Gummer]

itself and developed its approach organically. Other CCGs around the country have come to equally good solutions in a different way.

I would not want to impose a solution from the centre that squashes the local innovation of good leaders. I think we can all agree that the NHS in the past has not been good at allowing staff locally to celebrate leadership and innovation. There are lots of brilliant people in the NHS who have great ideas, but they do not feel empowered to bring them forward. We need to be careful, therefore, about imposing solutions from the centre, either from the Department, NHS England or this place, that do not recognise the ability of local people to come up with local solutions. I have told Baroness Finlay that I want to develop policies that do what she wants to do but not by the means she proposes. I hope to empower local people to get to where she wishes to go, and I hope to do so in a manner that celebrates success and exposes failure, so that we can put it right, and universalises the best as quickly as possible, without taking a top-down approach, which might have the contrary effect.

We are in a better position than other countries because of the remarkable work of charities and voluntary bodies over the last few years, and we have now accumulated a mountain of evidence from charitable groups and Government. My hon. Friend pointed to the 2011 NICE guidelines, but there were also the five priorities outlined last year in “Priorities of Care for the Dying Person”, and we now have the NHS Choices review, to which the Government will respond. We have enough paper evidence. We know what looks good, how to make it happen and that it needs to happen, and we know that many people die in circumstances that leave much to be desired. I

point in particular to those who die in hospital. It is clear from the VOICES survey, which tracks the experience of families and individuals at the end of life, that people’s experience of dying at home and in community settings, especially in hospices, is generally much higher than in hospitals. Broadly—I generalise—half of people in hospital do not have an optimum experience of death.

We can change some things quite quickly, but we have got to this point because of the sustained effort of many years and the accumulation of evidence in a clinical area where Britain leads the world. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and other colleagues with expertise in this area, to the many academics who have worked hard on this, and to the hard work of NHS England and its director of palliative care, Professor Bee Wee, who is a remarkable clinician. Over the next few years, as we fulfil our manifesto pledge, I hope that all parties can work together on this, calling on the experience of people from every part of the country—it was great to hear from the hon. Members for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who shared their experience from other parts of the UK. If we can bring all this together, I think we can do something rather remarkable for people with no medical hope at the end of their life but to whom we should give the absolute guarantee that their care will be exceptional and will make what is never going to be a happy moment at least bearable and full of meaning for them, their families and their loved ones.

Question put and agreed to.

7.43 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 4 November 2015

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Prefabricated Housing

9.30 am

Damian Collins (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered modern prefabricated housing.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time in a Westminster Hall debate, Mr Owen. I thank colleagues who are present this morning to consider this important subject. I chose to use the word “prefabricated” in the motion because I thought that would give Members the clearest steer on the subject matter, although the housing industry’s preferred terminology is “off-site manufacturing”.

For many of us, prefabrication conjures up images of the immediate post-war era, when it was one of the solutions to the country’s incredible housing need, but things have moved on a lot in the prefabricated market. Modern methods of off-site construction and manufacture and on-site assembly have transformed the use of the technology and its application in modern housing. People may have seen modern retail parks such as BOXPARK in Shoreditch, east London, which was assembled from box units and can be disassembled and moved away, and wondered whether such methods are possible in housing and an answer to the our dire housing needs. I believe that they could be. The purpose of today’s debate is to explore that and to ask the Government what opportunities exist to incentivise and encourage the development of the technology.

There is no doubt that housing need in this country is great. The record modern high for house building completions was set in 1988. It is now estimated that 230,000 new accommodation units a year are needed. In the past few years, the Government have introduced incentives and simplified the planning system and announced schemes such as Help to Buy to help more people on to the housing ladder, but despite the success of such programmes and the welcome increase in the number of housing starts and completions, the number of completions is still running at around 130,000 a year—considerably less than the target. In many ways, that is a moving target. It would be nice to have the luxury of believing that if we could just catch up with the lost years of house building during the recession, we would be in much better place, but while that would be progress, the number of new households created each year is rising faster than we can build homes to accommodate them. That is what is creating the massive pinch in the housing market.

The problem is principally one of supply—the lack of homes to buy and of affordable homes to rent. In previous debates, we have discussed rogue landlords and problems in the private rented sector, and I was pleased to see the measures that the Government are introducing in the new Housing and Planning Bill to give councils more powers to combat rogue landlords.

One of the reasons why rogue landlords exist is the lack of supply of good-quality properties in the private rented sector at affordable prices. Rogue landlords can get away with exploiting their tenants because the tenants often have few options of other places to live. More and much higher quality housing at the lower end of the market is essential.

I said that prefabrication often conjures up images of the post-war era. The building industry has evolved considerably since then, so we should not seek to copy that era’s techniques and methods, but we should certainly consider the ambition. When Winston Churchill famously gave Harold Macmillan the task of building 300,000 new homes, there were the added complexities of post-war austerity and a simple lack of timber with which to build homes. Rather than putting up their hands and saying, “We don’t have enough wood to build the homes we need,” they harnessed the ingenuity of British engineering and design to come up with different techniques and methods of building homes. Famously, they designed the timberless house, which required very little wood to support its construction. With those new ideas and methods, they were able to meet their targets. We should similarly be looking at the new ideas and methods in prefabricated housing to unleash a revolution in the design and delivery of new homes for Britain to meet the Government’s targets and the people’s need.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful argument. He is right that prefabrication has moved on tremendously over the years. Does he agree that we should consider prefabrication not only in housing, but in schools and hospitals? Portakabin in my constituency has just signed a deal to provide a huge school project worth £44 million and is moving the technology further on every year.

Damian Collins: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When thinking of portakabins, some of us may think of the rather inadequate buildings that we inhabited at school in the 1980s, but things have moved on a lot. We are looking at modern, fully furnished, fully functioning units that can be designed for almost any need and assembled quickly in any place to do any type of job. As my hon. Friend said, be it for schools, offices or accommodation, the units have many uses and can be delivered to an exceptionally high quality and specification. It is that sort of technology and approach that we want in the housing market.

I recently met the architectural practice Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners because I wanted to find out more about the Y:Cube project that it recently delivered in Morden, south London, which I know the Housing Minister has visited. The project involves specially designed pods that are manufactured off-site. The build cost for a one-bedroom studio flat in the development could be as little as £30,000 to £35,000, and they can be rented out from £150 a week. The units can be built in the factory in a week and assembled on-site in a further week. A whole project—not just a single unit—can be delivered in about a third of the time of a traditional development. The practice believes that it can deliver a block of 50 accommodation units in less than 11 months from the moment that a planning application is presented to the council to tenants actually living in the building, which is a radical change in the time it takes to deliver a project of such complexity.

[*Damian Collins*]

Referring back to my hon. Friend's intervention, the modern technology used in the design of modern prefabricated units means that they are cheap to run. Energy bills can be as little as £10 a month—much cheaper than in many of the properties in the private rented sector. The construction price is also low—it could be a third less than that of even the most affordable housing units currently being built. Prefabrication totally changes the economy of the housing market for both developers and tenants. It provides an opportunity for much lower rents and prices, based not on subsidy but on the fact that the property itself is much cheaper to construct using modern methods.

The value of a property is based not only on the materials and labour used to construct it, but on the value of the land on which it sits. The Government could consider whether their land assets could be made available to support the use and development of modern off-site constructed housing. Smaller plots of land, which are often uneconomic to develop and not of interest to house builders, could be used. We have a crisis in housing supply, but not necessarily among house builders, which have many projects to work on. The economies of scale that they get from delivering a large housing estate of thousands of properties cannot be derived from a relatively small piece of land that might be owned by a local authority or a public body such as Transport for London, where perhaps only a few flats could be delivered. New methods of off-site construction make such developments much more viable. Units can be constructed off-site and assembled on-site quickly with little disturbance to local residents.

One of the biggest challenges for the construction industry is waste, but there is virtually no waste with off-site construction and on-site assembly. Furthermore, when land already owned by local authorities and public bodies or land with little commercial value because of its location and restricted size is used, methods of off-site construction come into their own. When local authorities compile a register of brownfield sites under the new Housing and Planning Bill, perhaps the Minister will ask them to include a schedule of sites suitable for off-site construction housing projects—suitable because of the land's limited commercial potential and value, and restricted size.

Off-site construction homes also come into their own for companies that are as yet uncertain about what the best value use of their land holdings will be. Some land might be developed for commercial or residential purposes but is not being utilised at the moment, and some of us get frustrated at land being held in land banks as an asset, and not released to meet its full potential because of market circumstances. The great thing about off-site construction and on-site assembly is that homes can be removed and reused in a different location. For example, a major developer with a big project to be delivered over 10 years or more might look at short-term delivery of housing units on a site—low-cost units to rent that could be moved on later. The Government—particularly the Ministry of Defence—have land assets, but they might be reluctant to sell to a commercial developer, or not want to release too much land in one go, thereby devaluing their assets, so they might look at whether some of their sites could be used for the deployment of prefabricated housing as an interim measure.

The technology is such that the units are advanced, well designed, well insulated and durable. Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners told me that the units in the Y:Cube project they worked on met all modern building specifications and would have a life of 60 years or more, so they could be delivered not only for low-cost rented housing, but to purchase at low cost. The units are mortgageable, because of their 60-year life.

There is massive potential for such construction and I want local authorities and the Government to look at their available assets for sites that could support the development of the technology. They should also look at the roll-out of the factory units to construct the properties, because new factory jobs can be spread around the country so that the houses are built in factories close to where they will be deployed. That might be a useful tool for economic regeneration in areas where that is needed.

The project in Merton, south London, will followed by others in Lewisham and elsewhere in the city. The technology suits the London market in particular, where the gap between people's average earnings and the average property price is so wide that property ownership is out of reach to many people. That has also pushed rents up. Those challenges are faced throughout the south-east and, in many ways, throughout the country. Prefabrication could be a solution to rebalance the market not through subsidy, but through the development of new technology to offer new choice and lower prices.

I look forward to what the Minister will say about such opportunities. The scheme that I outlined is by no means the only one—Urban Splash has a project in New Islington, in Manchester, in which people can in effect pre-order and pre-design their home before it has been constructed. It will be manufactured off-site and then assembled on-site to their exact specification. Again that can be done for less cost than might normally be the case in the construction sector, certainly where that level of purchaser design is part of the end product. Other companies are also looking at similar schemes. We could be on the verge of an exciting new technology, which could revolutionise the design and delivery of homes in this country. I will welcome the Minister's views.

9.44 am

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure, Mr Owen, to serve under your chairmanship for the first time in a Westminster Hall debate.

I thank the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) for securing the debate. I agreed with a lot of what he said, so there is a risk that he will think that I have cribbed his speech. The debate is timely given that earlier in the week we had Second Reading of the Housing and Planning Bill in the House. We discussed the right to buy in social housing, which I spoke against for various reasons. One thing that was agreed, however, given the right to buy, was the need for replacement housing to be put back into circulation. Obviously, as has been said, prefabricated housing or off-site construction is one way to speed up that process cost-effectively.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the term “prefabricated housing” takes us back to the image of post-war housing. Although those prefabricated houses are now somewhat maligned, I agree that we have to compliment the ingenuity of the time. The houses served a real need,

providing housing on site quickly when there was a shortage of raw materials. Also, the people who stayed in those prefabricated homes in general loved living in them, and some remain today, which is a testament to how well the houses were built, although in energy efficiency they no longer serve modern purposes. When I was a councillor with responsibility for housing, adapting that older prefabricated housing to energy-efficient standards was a real challenge, if not impossible. It is therefore good to revisit the prefabricated home with modern technologies for the new house build.

Over the years in Scotland, especially in the private housing sector, there has been a switch to kit houses, with much of the frame built off site for quick assembly on site, speeding up the whole building process. It makes sense that off-site construction has evolved further to provide complete wall panels, which come with insulation or even services included, and modular units.

In off-site construction, “modular units” is a more popular term than “prefabricated houses”, because it does not have quite the same connotation in the imagination. Modular units are now used for schools and offices, and we have heard about a retail development. No one looks at those units and thinks, “Oh, they were prefabricated”, or, “That’s off-site construction; it will only have a 10-year lifespan.” They look and feel permanent and have similar lifespans to traditional builds. It makes sense for modular units to be extended into the housing sector.

Damian Collins: The delivery of the London Olympic games was a triumph for UK design and architecture in many ways, and a prefabricated or off-site-constructed unit was used for the basketball arena. It was a temporary building that was constructed for the games, but could then be disassembled and relocated to other places around the country.

Alan Brown: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point about the successful delivery of the 2012 Olympics and prefabrication helping to control budgets.

It might surprise the House to know that Scotland is ahead of the curve with off-site construction and prefabrication. In 2013 there was an estimated construction value of £125 million in Scotland, compared with only £46 million in the rest of the UK. That illustrates a stark difference. Also in 2013, it was estimated that 50% of new houses in Scotland had an off-site build element, which again is a much higher rate than in the rest of the UK. We also have a much higher new build rate in social housing and private housing, and the 50% rate clearly contributes to that. Scotland’s housing growth also means a potential increase in exports, creating new jobs and keeping traditional construction jobs on site. There has been a real fillip for the construction industry.

I agree that there is less waste on site when there is off-site construction, and vehicle movements to and from the site can be reduced by up to 40%. We should consider that housing developments often take place adjacent to existing houses, so that reduction in movements is great for reducing disruption to local residents. Of course, having fewer vehicles also brings a safety benefit.

Damian Collins: Does the hon. Gentleman agree—I would also welcome the Minister’s thoughts on this—that we could consider off-site construction and assembly as having an advantage in the planning system, because there is less disruption to residents during the construction phase than with a normal build?

Alan Brown: I agree. When I was a councillor I was also chair of planning, and I know that the number of vehicle movements drives a lot of objections from local residents. I was in committees where we debated planning conditions to control and limit the times of movements. If we had a system that much reduced vehicle movements in the first place, that could certainly speed up planning and take some of the heat out of those considerations.

Off-site construction clearly speeds up the construction process. The trick is to have utilities on site ready for assembly. Utilities are the one risk to construction programmes, but that risk exists in traditional build as well. I am sure we have all heard about problems with getting utility companies to stick to their programme and engage with developers. As we increase the number of off-site constructions, we need to ensure that the utility companies are up to speed and do not cause delays, because delays inevitably mean that people do not get into their new-build homes quick enough.

I have outlined the advantages of this type of construction, which has seen real growth in Scotland. I want to highlight a couple of specialist companies—it is no surprise that we already have such companies operating in Scotland. Rural House, based in Skye, does more robust prefabricated designs for the more inclement highland weather. Its houses are also aesthetically pleasing; they are designed to look like traditional steadings.

In my neck of the woods, but in a neighbouring constituency, there is the Wee House Company, which was started up by an entrepreneurial 22-year-old. It can produce one or two-bedroom models in three weeks, with costs that start at £68,000. In a debate the other day there was much discussion about what was deemed affordable housing, but it is clear that units that start at £68,000 fall in that bracket.

Off-site construction has a real future in the house building industry. To steal a quote, “Let’s not call it prefabrication.”

9.53 am

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): May I say what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen? I congratulate the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) on introducing an interesting element to our housing debate.

This week we have rehearsed the point well that we are in the middle of a housing crisis. Last year’s output was only 117,000 homes, and we need about 245,000 a year, so anything that can help us to plug that huge gap in supply has to be looked at carefully, especially given the number of homes we are producing for social rent: we produced fewer than 11,000 last year—nowhere near enough. We should be delivering about 78,000 each year if we are to meet need. We should therefore look in some detail at providing what the hon. Gentleman rightly described as off-site housing, rather than prefab housing.

This is not an easy debate. The hon. Gentleman said that we do not come to this issue in a vacuum, because a number of us have experienced prefab housing built between the wars, and during and after the second world war—housing that had to be demolished in the 1970s and rebuilt. Results varied across the country. Some prefab estates lasted much longer than that, and many people who live in them really like them, but many of those houses were of insufficient quality to last and had to be demolished. We need to be careful to say that we are not talking about that sort of housing.

[*Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods*]

The Government's off-site housing review report, commissioned in 2013, suggested that prefabricated construction methods could form part of the solution to England's housing supply crisis. It would be helpful to hear from the Minister what the Government are doing about that report, and whether they plan to incentivise the building of that housing in any way.

The report highlighted examples such as Y:Cube, a prefabricated home scheme developed by the YMCA in London that boasts self-contained, one-bedroom flats with their own bathroom, living room and kitchen—all in a compact unit of 26 square metres. Those homes are for vulnerable young people, and it is encouraging that they meet code level 6 energy requirements. A three-week test showed that each home could be lit and heated to 20° C all day and all night for £7 a week. That is really good in terms of energy costs, and the home has a lifespan of 60 years or more.

Damian Collins: That scheme, which was designed for vulnerable people, is very exciting. It also makes it possible for someone who lives in a house in multiple occupation to think about having a home of their own.

Dr Blackman-Woods: I absolutely agree. The task is to try to envisage a wider role for such specialist housing. I think that we can see that, but there is a real issue about how we can spread it more widely. I want to raise a couple of issues that need to be taken on board if it is to have much wider application.

Although the units in that scheme in south-west London had high energy efficiency and insulation specifications, that is not always the case. Some off-site housing still has poor insulation, or uses insulation materials that will not stand the test of time. That must be taken on board.

Points were made about off-site construction using less raw material. That might be the case in construction, because when houses are built in a factory to the same design, companies will create less waste. However, in transporting these units, a lot of wood and plastic is often used; those issues need to be taken on board.

Julian Sturdy: Surely when new houses are built, those materials are moved on to the site anyway, so movement is irrelevant.

Dr Blackman-Woods: I am listing things that need to be taken into consideration. It is as if we had a balance sheet and needed to see the evidence. That is the point—we need evidence, and we need to make sure that these issues are addressed. The hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe said that he wanted a revolution. I am not suggesting for a minute that there is no role for this sort of construction, but before it becomes more widespread throughout the country and across different types of housing—before the revolution—we need to be sure that we are not building up problems with transport, or with more movement on and off site. We also need to ensure that people have the right skills to construct the units properly.

Damian Collins: One attractive thing about the schemes is that not only can we use a factory at a distance from the site, but pop-up factories can be built on site, to create the units where they will be deployed.

Dr Blackman-Woods: That is a point well made. If apprenticeships can be attached to those factories, that will be helpful. We need people with the skills to construct the units.

Julian Sturdy: The hon. Lady is being very generous with her time. She is absolutely right that we need a skilled workforce to deliver the units. As I have mentioned, Portakabin employs nearly 2,000 people in my constituency. I have visited and looked at what that skilled workforce has delivered, and the results are huge. Portakabin is an exemplar for delivery in apprenticeship schemes as well. It is driving this sector forward, as are other companies across the country—there is a UK-based industry that can drive this construction forward.

Dr Blackman-Woods: That is helpful. It would be good to hear more about what is happening in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and perhaps for some of us to see that work and talk to the company, so we can better understand the industry, how it is emerging and how it could be rolled out elsewhere.

Alan Brown: We should be careful not to associate a potential lack of construction skills solely with off-site prefabricated house building. Whatever type of house building is undertaken, the skills need to be there, and the sector has to be able to deliver the homes we need. The hon. Lady's point is not necessarily pertinent only to what we are considering. Construction skills are generally transferable, anyway, as tradesmen can adapt to different styles of construction.

Dr Blackman-Woods: I agree with that. We need to develop skills right across the construction sector, as there is a skills shortage, but that is no reason not to consider that shortage with regard to off-site construction.

As the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe mentioned, we also need land for the units. That factor needs to be considered, along with infrastructure. When thinking about a unit's cost, it is easy to get carried away and think it is much cheaper than it actually is, because land has not been factored in. The cost of land varies around the country, but it can be very expensive indeed. Size is also an issue; many costs quoted are for small units. Although such units may suit some people in some sectors of the housing market, they will not suit everyone, and larger units tend to be much more expensive.

Finally, there is the issue of mortgage availability. If prefabricated units are to be rolled out more widely, they have to be of a construction type that will attract mortgages. They must be seen to have some longevity; the fact that the units appear to be short term seems to be what prevents mortgages from being given. We need to change the thinking about the units; I am simply highlighting the issues that we need to address.

I have looked at what is available on the market. It is good to hear from the hon. Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) that Britain is leading the way on innovation in these products, because a lot of the information in the press is about companies abroad—especially American, Australian and German companies—that have developed units for use primarily in their own countries. We seem to rely quite heavily on German companies, so it would be good if we could get an exchange of knowledge going with German developers.

I will list some interesting examples. Topsider makes two-bedroom homes ranging from 60 square metres to 250 square metres, which can be built at a cost of between \$60,000 and \$350,000—that range is just huge. I emphasise my earlier point that these units are not necessarily cheap. In Germany, homes made by Baufritz are very expensive, as are some of the Australian-made ones, because they are high-end and use very good materials. They are a premium housing product, rather than a cheaper, more widely deliverable one.

I have talked a lot about issues that need to be addressed in rolling out such units, so lastly I will talk about some of the possibilities. We know that these types of homes can deliver impressive reductions in energy bills. They can also lead to faster construction and so a faster return on investment. Modular construction can reduce an overall completion schedule by as much as 50%. Speeding up housing construction is important, given that we need to increase supply very quickly. Because the units are produced indoors, they are, to a degree, unaffected by weather, increasing work efficiency and avoiding damage to building materials.

The units can be low waste, as the manufacturer is constantly building to the same plans, so often knows exactly what quantity of materials to use for any given job. That avoids the need for skips going on and off construction sites—we have all seen that. Units can be environmentally friendly, and not only because of the reduction in waste; if constructed properly, they can reduce disturbance on site. The properties are flexible, and can be extended or reduced because of their modular components; they could therefore be good housing for families, who could add to their home as their family grew. The builds are also often healthier, because of the controlled environment. Having said that, maintenance and repair can sometimes be more complex and costly; that needs to be factored in.

The real issue is how we ensure that the units and properties are well designed and of good quality to begin with, and that such properties can be produced at scale, as that is where the sector has failed in the past. Does the Minister intend there to be any financial incentives for the sector, particularly for low-cost housing? If so, how will he seek to ensure that we do not repeat the errors of the past and are able to welcome this innovation in housing design and delivery?

10.9 am

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) for securing this debate on a genuinely important subject. We have an opportunity to ensure good-quality affordable housing. Both he and my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) were right to highlight that this country has the opportunity to lead the way and showcase some of the excellent work done in this sector of the industry. That is why I was rather disappointed and slightly surprised by the remarks of the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods). I cannot quite work out why the Labour party wants to spend so much time talking down the British housing industry. The hon. Lady spent more than five minutes talking about all the things she thinks are wrong in the industry.

Dr Blackman-Woods: I do not think I suggested for a minute that the Labour party would not support these innovations. I was arguing for good-quality design that could be rolled out at scale without repeating any of the problems of the past. I want to make it clear that the Labour party welcomes these innovations.

Brandon Lewis: I am pleased that we have managed to elicit that statement, given that we spent eight minutes listening to the hon. Lady list all the things in the industry she is not happy with. If Labour Members spent some time looking at what was going on in the British off-site and advanced construction industry, they would see that there is some phenomenal expertise out there. I am sure the industry will want to explain to them some of the things my hon. Friends and I have heard about through talking with the industry and visiting sites. I will talk more specifically about some of that later.

Today's debate follows on from Second Reading of the Housing and Planning Bill and the problems we heard about then. The hon. Lady talked about the number of housing starts, but she, rather like the shadow Housing Minister, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), seemed to forget that there were 75,000 and 88,000 housing starts respectively in the last two years of the Labour Government. That is the inheritance we had to build on, and the industry can play important part in that. Fortunately, despite what the hon. Lady said—her figures are somewhat out of date—we were back up to 136,000 starts in the last recorded 12 months, which is a big improvement on the disgraceful situation that Labour left, with just 75,000 starts in its last year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe will be fully aware that, during the recent election campaign, the Conservative party made it clear that increasing home ownership and house building would be a top priority. He was right to highlight the fact that the industry has a big part to play. We have been working on this issue since 2010 and, as I said, we have built the numbers back up, although nobody disagrees that there is still a long way to go. We want to see a lot more happen, and that is where the industry has a large role to play.

The number of first-time buyers has doubled since 2009, so our success in that respect is already apparent, but our ambition, which we are determined to realise, is to go further. A fully functioning and efficient housing market is vital to meeting the aspirations of working people and to raising our country's productivity. That is why we are committed to encouraging not only home ownership, but increased housing supply, to make sure that we have more good-quality homes that people can afford to buy and that we support all parts of the housing market and all tenures.

The way we do that is equally important. We need to deliver more new, high-quality homes, with well thought out interior design, built quickly and efficiently. As was outlined by my hon. Friend today and earlier this week by my Norfolk neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon), the industry can play a part by linking with custom build to make sure we remember that a house is built for a customer. We need to design homes that are right for the people who will live in them. The Government's proposals in the Housing and Planning Bill are designed to achieve that.

[Brandon Lewis]

We want to see innovation in the house building and construction sector. I want us to have a diversified industry—one that does not rely on the same old companies and build in the way we have for the last 50 to 100 years. The way we build homes—traditionally using the larger builders—involves the same techniques that have been used for 50 or, arguably, 150 years. On average, it can take 20 weeks to build a house, should there be—I say this only somewhat tongue in cheek—a good flow of weather. We need to move to a system where homes are built in weeks, if not days.

Innovation and new ways of working are key to the sector's future. Industry needs to innovate to stay competitive. That applies to the construction of homes as much as to any other field. If the larger developers do not take these types of construction forward in the years ahead, there will come a point—even the chief executives of these companies have said this to me—where they risk being left behind. Competition is good for the industry. Homes in China are being constructed using 3D printers, and they are assembled in a matter of hours. It is suggested that such homes cost about £300 a square metre and it is claimed that they will last for 150 years. That might be a bit beyond where our market is, but it is certainly the kind of innovation that is coming. Such innovations should be a key part of our housing industry. Building the housing we need quickly and cost-effectively, so that people can move in within days of assembly starting, could transform this country's rate of housing delivery from the 20-plus weeks we see with traditional techniques.

We are talking about modern prefabricated homes, but like others I like to use the phrases “off-site construction” or “advanced construction”. In our recent discussions with industry, we have been referring to advanced housing manufacture. Homes built using such techniques—there is a variety out there—are finally starting to set the benchmark for the latest, cutting-edge designs. They are built in highly controlled factory settings and the parts are assembled precisely and on-site. Advanced housing manufacture can not only deliver high-quality homes, but help to build them quickly and efficiently. The method is now being used widely in advanced economies around the world.

The Government are keen to encourage more innovation in the way we build homes, and we are doing that through our housing programmes. The hon. Lady asked what we are doing, so let me outline that. Through our housing zones programme, 30 brownfield sites across the country will be developed using £600 million of public funding, and we are encouraging the use of innovative construction on those sites. As my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe outlined, brownfield sites are often in built-up areas, where small plots and busy streets are a perfect match for advanced techniques. It is good to have debates such as this so that we can highlight some of these points, and I hope people will take note of what is said this morning.

We are also funding innovation through our multibillion pound affordable housing programme. So far, a fifth of the homes in the homes and communities programme after 2015 will be built using innovative construction techniques. Our £1 billion Build to Rent fund is also helping to build 10,000 good-quality homes for private

rent. Fifteen schemes to create more than 4,000 new homes are already in contract and more deals are in the pipeline. Again, we are encouraging innovative construction through that programme, and the private rented sector fits that approach perfectly. We are also backing the market with our £150 million Custom Build Serviced Plot Loans fund, which pays for the preparation of shovel-ready sites. Large numbers of custom and self-builders prefer to use off-site construction techniques, because they appreciate the high-quality, sustainable designs and the rapid construction.

Small and medium-sized builders are vital to achieving the higher levels of innovation we all want. We are supporting them through our £525 million Builders Finance fund, which provides loans to unlock small sites, and the £100 million Housing Growth Partnership run by the Lloyds group—we are partnering Lloyds in that—which helps small builders to invest in new projects and to develop their businesses.

The wider Construction 2025 strategy sets ambitious goals for reducing costs and speeding up the delivery of construction projects, as well as encouraging innovation in the sector. We are supporting construction firm Laing O'Rourke to develop its advanced housing manufacturing factory facilities through a £22.1 million grant from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. There is also funding from industry more widely.

The Government are supporting the development of new apprenticeship and training programmes with a focus on off-site construction. Those are being led by industry players such as Laing O'Rourke and Skanska. It is important that we develop skills in the sector. What is beneficial about the programmes is that the skills they develop are different from the skills used in traditional techniques, and they can help with the huge skills shortage we have in the house building industry.

I welcome moves by industry to promote innovation in house building and to point the industry towards the future. I also welcome the opportunities presented by the techniques we are discussing. Last year, Buildoffsite launched its new housing hub to promote the benefits of advanced housing manufacturing. The hub aims to promote knowledge-sharing between clients and suppliers; raise awareness of new techniques; encourage new members; and develop a methodology to demonstrate the value of off-site solutions. The hub is continuing to encourage wider take-up of the Buildoffsite property assurance scheme, which aims to give lenders assurance about the quality and durability of homes built using innovative construction methods. As my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe rightly said, the lifespan these construction methods give—in many cases, as I outlined with the China example, it goes way beyond 60 years—makes these homes very viable for mortgage lending. I talk to mortgage lenders regularly about that and other schemes to make sure they are aware of the opportunities.

It is great when innovative schemes are brought forward, and I will describe some that I have seen. The Accord group in Walsall has a scheme providing homes for rent. They are made in a factory and assembled across the road on a housing site, and the staff are people who live in the area. I saw two homes being built in a day—a very impressive rate of building. Even if it was done to show off for “The One Show”, it proved what can be done. Bearing in mind comments made about skills this morning, I found it particularly interesting that of the 17 or

18 staff on that site, all but one of them, I think, had either been unemployed or had no experience of the housing industry before starting work, yet within a couple of weeks they were playing a part in building new homes. That is a good example how this approach can change the skills supply for the industry.

Innovative construction is also being used as part of the Bicester garden town scheme. High-quality energy-efficient homes are being built for rent, shared ownership and sale. I have also visited an off-site construction company in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk, who is in the Chamber this morning; people are even being taught how to build for themselves. That is a great opportunity for young people to learn a skill and to be part of building their own home. It fits perfectly with my hon. Friend's ambitions for the use of off-site construction in custom and self-build, which he is passionate about.

I recently helped to launch the Y:Cube scheme in Merton, which has been mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe and others. Well designed, high-quality homes have been built there, using advanced housing manufacture; and they are being made available for rent to young people in the local area. Those homes offer affordable accommodation for single people who are volunteering or who are in training, education or full or part-time employment. They are well designed, drawing on the creativity of high-quality architects—some of the best we know, such as Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners. They use new forms of construction to save time and costs.

I have visited a factory in Derbyshire where homes are being manufactured quickly and efficiently, again showing the possibility of a different skill set. The clean indoor environment extends the working life of people in the industry. Some of the units developed there are being used by Urban Splash, which is developing an exciting custom build scheme in Manchester, using off-site construction to enable buyers to customise their homes and create a bespoke solution, tailored to meet their needs. That is exactly the kind of development we want in the housing sector.

At Creekside Wharf in Greenwich, Essential Living is using an innovative modular technique to produce high-quality homes for private rent. All those schemes are just examples demonstrating the benefits that advanced housing manufacture can bring. They are a sample of what is happening: faster construction and good quality design and build, with low energy bills and the creation

of jobs and homes. Council and social housing can also reap the benefits, as I have seen from the south Norfolk company that has developed homes for the local authority in Great Yarmouth.

Challenges remain, however, including shaking off stereotypical images of prefabricated housing based on some poor-quality past schemes such as the hon. Member for City of Durham described. We do the industry no justice by making such comparisons. What now exists is different; it is innovative and the quality is high. We need faster and more widespread take-up by a range of industry players who will encourage collaboration between developers and architects and work with communities, home buyers and planners, with the support of lenders. Then we can get things right. We need to build more homes in communities. Buyers, self-builders, renters and communities across the country appreciate homes of high quality and thoughtful design that are affordable and that are built quickly, in the right place. Advanced housing manufacture can achieve, or help to achieve, all that. It has enormous potential to create jobs and growth through a new factory-based industry. I encourage industry to go further with it, and use it more often. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe again on securing such an important debate.

10.23 am

Damian Collins: I thank the Minister and all hon. Members who took part in the debate. As the Minister said, we are at an important stage in the development of the advanced manufacture of homes for Britain. I was pleased to hear about his personal interest in the subject, as well as the Government's interest, and about the role that advanced manufacture has in meeting the housing targets we have set for affordable homes to rent or buy. I hope that local authorities and public bodies that pick up on the debate will consider the use that they could make of such techniques in meeting their housing targets. I shall talk to the councils in my constituency about it, and I hope that other hon. Members will do the same. I am sure that we shall return to the subject in future housing debates.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered modern prefabricated housing.

10.24 pm

Sitting suspended.

Secondary School Places (London Borough of Sutton)

11 am

Paul Scully (Sutton and Cheam) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered secondary school places in the London Borough of Sutton.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. Some years ago, school place planning around London dictated that a number of schools, especially across Sutton, should contract in size. Across London, though, it was quickly discovered that the plans were horrendously wrong, and that in fact the exact opposite was required: there were more people moving into the borough, there was a higher birth rate than was originally predicted, and during the economic downturn fewer parents sent their children to nearby independent schools.

The London Borough of Sutton moved to expand primary schools across the area. Bulge classes and permanent new buildings sprang up in every school. Despite a number of people asking about secondary education, the council seemed to forget that children have a funny habit of growing up and needing secondary school places. We were assured that the council could cope.

Secondary schools have been through the same process as primaries. New buildings and classes have popped up. Stanley Park high school in Carshalton has moved to a new location and expanded considerably as a result. I was on the project board for that school when it was built; it was one of the last Building Schools for the Future projects. It was built on a former hospital site after more than a year of wrangling between two public bodies: the council and the NHS. Between them, about £1 million of taxpayers' money was spent on legal fees. From that experience, I know about the difficulties and inertia when working with the public sector.

In subsequent years, the private sector, which on the whole is far more nimble, started to look at Sutton after development opportunities in surrounding boroughs were exhausted. Many of the plots of land that might have made a good school site were snapped up for residential, retail and other mixed development. Now, we are scratching around to find sites that can deliver the infrastructure improvements required to support an expanding population.

Sutton has a particular environment when it comes to schooling. It regularly features at the top of the list of local education authorities for results, which is one of the biggest attractions for families coming to Sutton. At the centre of that excellence are its five grammar schools. Those selective schools have deservedly excellent reputations. However, their existence means that Sutton is a net importer of children, with students coming not only from neighbouring Croydon and Merton, but from central London and even the south coast. Pressure is therefore more acute in Sutton than in many other parts of London. If Wallington County grammar school applies for and opens an annexe in Croydon, as has been reported, that may help to alleviate the situation regarding school places in the east of the borough by keeping children in Croydon closer to home, but there is still a long way to go to secure enough secondary school places in the coming years to satisfy predicted demand.

I will quickly share the chronology of events that has led us to an impasse in trying to secure the school places that we so desperately need. In November 2012, Sutton council acknowledged that a new secondary school might have to be built in Sutton as early as 2015. Early reports showed that the predicted shortfall in places would be most acutely felt in the centre and to the north of Sutton town centre. In June 2013, Sutton council's education committee instructed officers to investigate sites for a new secondary school. That October, the same committee noted that a new secondary school would probably be required in 2017 or 2018. In the following January, the council confirmed that a new 10-form-entry secondary school would be required in 2017. That was the advice from the secondary schools partnership—a body made up of senior representatives from all the local secondary schools. The reference to 10-form entry was later changed to eight-form entry, which remains the estimate today. However, it was reported that the council did not have sufficient resources to build that school.

In December 2013, the then MPs came out in public as supporting part of the soon-to-be redundant Sutton hospital site as their favoured location for a new school opening in 2017. That site is in the south of the borough, close to the Surrey border.

In March 2014, the council's secondary school expansion plan acknowledged the difficulty of identifying suitable sites for new schools:

“Due to the difficulty in acquiring even one suitable site, any new school should be as large as possible...to take greatest advantage of such a site.”

In June 2014, the council's education committee was told that a site for a new secondary school would have to be acquired

“in the very near future”,

and there was a lead-in time of two to three and a half years for getting the new school open. Therefore any site would have to be sorted as early as 2016 for even a 2019 opening.

At that time, the council was refusing to share with the public the long list of sites that it was looking at, so I starting looking myself and noticed an overgrown, derelict, full-size artificial football pitch at the back of a park in Rosehill, just to the north of Sutton town centre, where demand is most acute. At the time, that was out to tender for a five-a-side football pitch arrangement after years of being left unused and locked up. The council already owned that land, so it would clearly save money. I spoke to the owners of Sutton Sports Village, a world-class tennis academy immediately adjacent to the site. They were supportive of a school being located there and expressed an interest in sparking up a partnership when it eventually opened.

In November 2014, Sutton Council announced that it had identified two sites for a new secondary school: part of the Sutton hospital site and Rosehill all-weather pitch, my preferred site. It commissioned feasibility studies for both sites, despite the fact that the Education Funding Agency, which is ultimately responsible for choosing the plot, would conduct its own. Before the council's studies were complete, the council spent about £8 million buying land on the Sutton hospital site from the NHS. That parcel of land was not the same as the one first envisaged as suitable for a school. In fact,

the council's own feasibility study, when it was completed, showed that it was only 20% of the recommended size for an eight-form-entry secondary school. There would be no playing fields, no recreational area. In reality, to fulfil demand, any school on that plot would have to be in the order of four storeys high, built close to the street line, and just 2 metres from the closest family home. It would be totally out of keeping with the area, and as someone who served on Sutton's planning committee as a councillor for four years, I cannot envisage how such a proposal would ever get planning permission from anyone with an independent eye.

In June 2015, the EFA confirmed that the Sutton hospital site was too small, but cleared the Rosehill site to proceed, leaving it as Sutton's only viable new school site. The council and the EFA continued talks over the summer, leading the EFA to believe that heads of terms would soon be agreed when I met the person in charge of negotiations on 16 September. However, just two days later, Sutton council's political administration pulled the plug on that site, saying that they would not release the land at Rosehill and insisting that the school could be built only on the land at Sutton hospital.

Last month, the approved sponsor for the proposed free school, the Greenshaw Learning Trust, said that the land that the council had bought at Sutton hospital was not sufficient for the school that it has approval for, and that it is still looking for a site. The EFA has confirmed that it is helping it in that endeavour. And so we reach the current deadlock.

There are three options for moving this matter on. The EFA can try to buy more land at the Sutton hospital site, which will cost even more money, leave the school in the wrong part of Sutton, and start to eat into land that is earmarked for an ambitious joint venture for a cancer research hub between the council, the Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust, the Institute of Cancer Research and the Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust. That would be an expensive short-term fix that would hamper strategic plans, and all because of an intransigent approach at this stage. A new provider on the site would not get Department for Education approval for a free school until next summer at the earliest, delaying the project for yet another year. There is also the small matter of the chief executive of the relevant hospital trust making it clear that he has no interest in selling off more of the site.

The second option is that another site could be found. There are examples of free schools across the country that have been built in unconventional styles. Fresh thinking may throw up an interesting use of an as yet unidentified site. I like to think that I am up for a bit of creative thinking, but over the last two years nothing, but nothing, has come to mind.

The third option is the most obvious: to look again at the Rosehill site. The political administration of the council—the senior Liberal Democrat councillors—dismiss that site, as it is classified as metropolitan open land, but that environmental argument is inconsistent for a number of reasons. Sutton council was happy to build an incinerator on metropolitan open land in another part of the borough. It is also planning a primary school on metropolitan open land in Hackbridge. It appears that only metropolitan open land on this site, in the ward represented by the leader of Sutton council, is immune from consideration this side of the 2018 local

elections. In fact, the site has not been dismissed as being unavailable for any secondary school that is required by 2020, so we may see a school here anyway—just too late.

Sutton is fortunate to have many parks and open spaces, so I did not easily reach the conclusion that this site was best. As London expands and local residents wonder how their children will be able to afford housing in the area where they grew up, we need to plan to meet that demand and to cope with the resulting pressure on infrastructure. The Rosehill solution addresses that as best it can. That was echoed by a valuer who looked at the site and said that it was the best site for a school that he had seen in years. The footprint of the school building can be contained on the plot of the derelict artificial pitch. Car parking can be limited to an already-concreted area to the north of the site. Not only can the parkland remain, but if it is used as playing fields it can be maintained by the school and shared with the community.

I regularly speak to the Mayor about the need for a Sutton tram extension, which is included in his plan for London. The proposed route for that tram extension runs along the front of Rosehill. A train station is close by, and several buses run along the two roads that surround the site. That is in contrast to the junction at the Sutton hospital site, which would inevitably have to be remodelled to cope with the increased traffic, and which has fewer public transport links.

There are two secondary schools close to the Rosehill site: Greenshaw, which is the original school behind the Greenshaw Learning Trust, and Glenthorne. Both are incredibly popular and successful schools, and they are regularly over-subscribed. There is only one secondary school near Sutton hospital, Overton Grange. That might seem, at first glance, to suggest that there is a shortage of spaces in the south, but I believe that Overton Grange has been less popular than the other schools in recent years, so it has been under-subscribed. The biggest centre of demand appears to be in the roads around Sutton bus garage, to the north of the town centre. Although the Minister represents a seat close to Sutton and Cheam, I would not expect him to know the exact geography of the area, but I am always happy to show him around. Suffice it to say that Sutton bus garage is only five to 10 minutes' walk from the Rosehill site.

We need immediate action. Residents have been waiting for years to see something at least get started. Just as we thought that was happening, things came to a juddering halt when the matter became politically difficult. It was put off in the lead up to the 2014 local elections, and again before this year's general election. We cannot have the 2018 local election dictating school place planning policy in Sutton. We need proper reconsideration of the council's position in a measured and open way. We cannot allow the council to continue with the approach that it has been taking lately, and that has spurred me to bring the matter to the Minister. The first that the EFA and the approved school provider, the Greenshaw Learning Trust, knew about the decision to about-turn and refuse to release the Rosehill site was via a press release that they received indirectly. That is no way to conduct business. Not a lot gets me annoyed, but playing politics with the education of our current cohort of nine-year-olds, who risk not getting a local school place in two years' time, frankly appals me.

[Paul Scully]

I cannot help thinking that when the Mayor looks at the issue when he is considering whether to invest in the tram extension, when international cancer research companies look at the proposed London cancer hub in the south of Sutton, or when developers look to Sutton for opportunities to build the housing that we so badly need, they will think again. They will wonder whether the time, energy and money spent on early planning might not be wasted, because the rug may be suddenly pulled out from under their feet on a political whim. They will be reluctant to work with a local authority that conducts its discussions via press release.

Sutton council says that it can open a school on the Sutton hospital site, but there is no evidence of any achievable plan. We need a school to accommodate 240 pupils in just two years' time simply to start meeting demand. We know that a school will take two to three and a half years to build, and we still do not have a site. Securing planning permission for any site will not be straightforward. I am all for local decision making, and I am very much in favour of greater local accountability, but I do not believe that the parents of those nine-year-old children are aware of the totally avoidable crisis that we face as a direct result of the locally elected representatives. I hope that the Minister can help to break the impasse by stepping in and getting the council to take a truly strategic, common-sense view, breaking the deadlock, and securing the school places that the council is failing to provide, and that we so desperately need.

11.14 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr Sam Gyimah): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Paul Scully) on securing the debate. I have noted his invitation to join him for a tour of his constituency. I look forward to a formal invite, and I would very much like to visit the constituency in due course. He has brought to the House an important issue that will have a significant impact on the residents of Sutton in the coming years, and I share his confusion at the outcome of the council's deliberations on the Rosehill site.

First, I want to take the opportunity to reiterate the Government's commitment to one of our key priorities: ensuring that there are sufficient school places across the country. We have already shown the strength of our commitment to making sure that every child has access to a good-quality school place. We plan to invest £7 billion over the Parliament to provide new school places, including through basic need allocations to local authorities. That is £2 billion more than was allocated for school places under the previous coalition Government, and almost four times as much as was allocated from 2007 to 2011.

Ensuring that every child has access to the benefits of a good-quality education is a fundamental responsibility of all of us across the education system. As my hon. Friend knows, the statutory duty to provide school places rests with local authorities. Our financial commitment is a concrete demonstration of the level of importance that the Government attach to the provision of school places, and to our wider commitment to ensuring that every child has a good school place.

We committed in our manifesto to delivering at least 500 new free schools during this Parliament, creating 270,000 school places. Since the election in May, 18 new free school applications have already been approved, and many more are now entering the process. We continue to encourage businesses, cultural and sporting bodies, charities, community groups and parents to come forward with proposals for new schools, to add to the 304 open free schools and the more than 100 that are currently in the pipeline.

It is important that local authorities across the country see, and seek to capitalise on, the opportunity presented by the free schools programme. Such schools work alongside local authorities to create the school places we need to provide a good education for our children, and many authorities are choosing to work actively with the Government to meet that challenge.

As well as funding places, the Department keeps a close eye on the progress that local authorities are making in meeting basic need. Between 2010 and 2014, more than 445,000 new places were created through the work of local authorities and, of course, the Government's free schools programme. Many more places have been delivered since then, and thousands more are in the pipeline. In 2013 and 2014 alone, local authorities reported adding an additional 110,000 primary and 74,000 secondary places into the system. The free schools programme is also adding significant capacity to the system; more than 153,000 new places have been created by the 304 free schools that have been established, with the promise of many more to come.

I pay tribute to all those in authorities and in schools who have helped to deliver the significant progress we have seen in recent years. The task, however, is not yet done. As the numbers I mentioned some moments ago suggest, the increase in pupils moving through the primary phase is now beginning to be felt at secondary level. My hon. Friend touched on that. Local authorities and academies must rise to that added dimension of challenge at the same time as primary numbers continue to grow, albeit less rapidly than in recent years. We should not pretend that meeting that challenge will be easy, which is why we are committed to helping both with funding and by establishing new schools directly under the free schools programme.

As a thriving global city, London has a large part to play in meeting that challenge. Some 35% of the new places delivered by 2014 were in London, and the capital will have a big part to play in meeting the challenge in the coming years. As my hon. Friend highlighted, the London Borough of Sutton has its own local context, with a wealth of strong local schools attracting pupils from beyond its borders. The popularity of those schools is a healthy sign, and I commend those who work in them.

A key strength of the current system of co-operation on school places, and one that is particularly seen across London, is that pupils can access schools beyond the border of their own local authority and find the school that is best suited to their needs. We do not want to lose that strength, nor the resilience that it helps to bring to the system. However, we need to find ways to support the boroughs that most keenly feel the impact of cross-border movement, such as the London Borough of Sutton.

The way that we provide funding for new places recognises that movement and is based on local authorities' own assessments of the number of pupils they expect to

have. That approach has helped the Government allocate Sutton council more than £110 million of funding for school places from 2011 to 2018, making it the 18th highest-funded authority for basic need in the country, and that funding has been put to work. Sutton council worked with its schools to put in place an additional 2,289 primary school places and 1,143 secondary school places between 2010 and 2014, with plans to create many more when they are needed in the coming years. That leads me to the matter in hand.

The Government are helping Sutton council to meet its places challenge directly, with the approval of the Sutton free school, which will see the borough join the many local authorities that have already benefited from the free schools programme. As my hon. Friend mentioned, the Sutton free school is scheduled to open in 2017, and is being built to provide eight forms of entry and a welcome new capacity of 1,550 places to the borough. The new school will add to the variety of options in the area and give parents even more choice in selecting the right school for their children. The school represents an exciting opportunity to broaden provision within Sutton and, with the co-operation of the council, it and other free schools can be delivered to help to meet the need for new school places. I am therefore perplexed by the current situation.

The Department for Education had meetings with officers of Sutton council about the Rosehill all-weather pitch site and was told that the council would agree for the land to be transferred to the Department for the school. I am seriously disappointed that the council has since changed its mind about the site and removed it as an option. Rosehill remains the preferred site for the Sutton free school due to its size, its access to playing fields and being in a good location for a much-needed, large, eight-form-entry secondary school. It is on metropolitan open land, but building on such land would not be a precedent in Sutton. Indeed, as my hon. Friend mentioned, there is an incinerator on metropolitan open land in Sutton at the moment.

The alternative site, the Belmont hospital site, could accommodate a smaller secondary school to help to meet the need for places from 2018 onwards. However, in its current form it is not suitable for the Sutton free school. Other free school proposers have been in talks with the council about a further, smaller secondary school in the next round of free school applications next year. Given the demand for secondary school places that is projected by the council, the ideal solution would be to take forward plans for both sites, with a proposer to be identified for a second school on the Belmont hospital site.

At this early stage, we still have the opportunity to review the options for bringing forward two much needed secondary schools in Sutton. I urge the council, in the strongest terms, to reconsider its plans to meet its basic need for secondary school places. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this important issue.

Question put and agreed to.

11.23 am

Sitting suspended.

Treasury Support for UK Science

[STEVE McCABE *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the role of the Treasury in supporting UK science.

First of all, let me say that it is a real pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe.

I start my speech today with the simple assertion that science is a critical part of our everyday lives. It is important not only because it explains the world we live in—the world we see, hear and feel every day, which we all take for granted—but because it also makes the world of tomorrow. It shapes the future in a way that fascinates most people, and it does so with breathtaking speed. Who knows what will be possible in the future? Without science, our world would be a very different place and many of the things that we take for granted would not exist. We live longer, thanks to science; we live better lives, thanks to science; and we live broader and more expansive lives, thanks to science.

The UK, for its part, has always punched above its weight in science and innovation. Our laboratories, universities, research councils and innovation bodies are world-leading. To exemplify this point, I will refer to the startling statistic that although the UK's population equates to just 0.9% of the global population, we account for 15.9% of the world's most highly cited scientific research articles; since the start of the 20th century we have had 78 Nobel prize-winners, 12 of them since 2004.

We are first in the world for the impact of our science. We have built a strong record of converting science-driven discovery into economic gain, with the UK now ranked second in the world for innovation, and for every £1 invested in public research and development, there is a boost of between 20p and 30p per annum in perpetuity. The UK knowledge economy sustains a third of our businesses, with wage rates 40% higher than the average wage in the field. To be fair to previous Governments, investment in science and innovation has delivered impact in many of the areas identified as priorities, such as promoting innovation, growth and—very importantly—improvement in public services.

Maintaining our leading position in science is increasingly difficult, though, thanks to an increasingly competitive global marketplace. With countries such as India, China, and South Korea increasingly competing in the technology stakes, it is becoming clear that we need not only to maintain our research base, but to grow it. To do that, we need a commitment from Government to invest in science. It is time to take stock, to remind ourselves just how important science is to our economy, and to assess how seriously we may be damaged if we fail to support our scientific research base with adequate public funding. In my view, the most persuasive way of making the case for the importance of science to the economy is to seek a simple answer to a simple question—what has science ever done for us?

For a start, let us look at one of the major contributions made by my home city, Sheffield, which of course is where stainless steel was invented, just over a hundred

[Angela Smith]

years ago. Stainless steel is a technology that literally changed the world, to the extent that we do not even realise now how widely it is applied in the technologies that we all enjoy. Let not us forget either that Sheffield is also the home of Ronseal, which not only does what it says on the tin, but plays a leading role in developing environmentally friendly coatings for use in the home. Sheffield leads the way even now, with two fine research universities and its Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre, the original model for the country's catapult initiatives. In joint ventures between Sheffield University and companies such as Rolls-Royce and Boeing, cutting-edge materials are being developed for the aerospace industry, such as the use of carbon fibre blades for the next generation of aerospace engines and lightweight aeroplane bodies.

In the chemicals field, the UK leads the way. Chemical and pharmaceutical products are our largest manufacturing export, with the chemicals sector alone enjoying an annual turnover of £60 billion. It sustains some half a million jobs throughout the country—well paid, for the most part—finds solutions that make life better and more secure for all of us. Let us bear in mind that penicillin is a British discovery that has transformed medicine, saving countless lives. Today, the pharmaceutical industry employs 68,000 people in the UK, with 23,000 of them employed in highly skilled R and D roles.

The work goes on. British scientists from across the spectrum work on projects that impact on every aspect of our lives, helping us to meet the challenges of today—not just the obvious challenges, such as using agri-tech research to help to feed a growing world population or how to use modern science to develop the technologies we need if we are to achieve a truly low-carbon economy, but other challenges that are none the less important. For instance, researchers at the University of Leicester have developed new technology that reveals previously undetectable fingerprints on metal objects; the method has been used in more than 100 criminal cases so far and is enabling the reopening of closed cold cases. Also, research into the structure of graphite is extending the lifetime of the UK's nuclear reactors, resulting in an effective saving of £40 million to date and helping not only to keep the lights on but to reduce the country's carbon footprint.

As we can see, science is all around us. It gives us hope for the future, for our health, for our security, for our living standards and for the sustainability of our living standards. We are good at science here in the UK—after all, we are the country where Newton discovered gravity and Faraday made early advances in harnessing the power of electricity, fundamental advances that revolutionised our understanding of the world.

Science has done a great deal for humanity and it is precisely because it fulfils such an important role in changing lives that it is also vital to our economy, particularly if we are to maintain and grow our economy and our knowledge base. A modern knowledge economy has to be underpinned by science. For example, my constituency is home to Tata's Speciality Steels, which works at the top end of high-value steelmaking. Tata knows that it has to stay ahead of the game with its research if it is to survive the challenges presented by developing economies such as China. It almost goes

without saying that if steel is one of our foundation industries—I think it is commonly accepted that it is—science is one of the vital foundations of steelmaking itself.

Our position on science has been strong. The UK has enjoyed a powerful public research base, creative innovation mechanisms and a supply of highly skilled workers, who help to drive up our productivity and further develop our knowledge economy. Our position on science has encouraged inward investment. The UK is the largest recipient in Europe of such funding, despite the squeeze on public investment and the long-term neglect of our science capability. However, this rather unbalanced approach to investment cannot continue without damaging both the UK's reputation and our economy. Government investment in R and D acts as a powerful magnet for industry investment, both domestic and foreign, and the announcement in the comprehensive spending review of any more cuts would risk damaging our overall funding profile even more.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): I am sorry that I missed the very beginning of my hon. Friend's excellent speech. On her last point, does she agree with me that it would be a great mistake if the tax credit grant element of research help to industry was converted into loans, which has been mooted in some quarters and which businesses that carry out a lot of R and D are very worried about?

Angela Smith: I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend that any fiscal levers designed to improve the research profile of UK science should be maintained.

It is worth mentioning that according to a study by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, every £1 of public investment secures an increase of between £1.13 and £1.60 in private funding. The importance of public funding for science is underlined by comparisons with our international competitors. The comparisons are not flattering—indeed, since the mid-1980s, our investment in science and innovation has fallen behind, leaving us sixth in the G7 for overall spending and last overall for public investment alone. South Korea enjoys public and private investment in science equivalent to 3.6% of GDP—no wonder it looks likely that South Korea, rather than Forgemasters in Sheffield, will be making the pressure vessels for our nuclear power stations—and in Germany and the USA, the figure is 2.8%. Here in the UK, the figure stands at just 1.7%.

We have punched above our weight, but it is clear that that cannot continue. Comparatively low levels of investment in research and development risk losing any competitive advantage we have over other innovation leaders who are investing more. As we all know, our economic productivity has already fallen by at least 15% from a pre-financial crisis position of steady growth. International studies demonstrate impressive and positive impacts on productivity from increased scientific research and development profiles, and it is clear that our 1.7% GDP investment rate is causing problems.

I acknowledge, of course, that the Government ring-fenced funding during the last Parliament and that that decision helped to keep safe £1.2 billion of private sector investment, but it is also true that the cash limit on research and development represented a real-terms cut of around £1 billion. Although that decrease has

been weathered in the short-term, if extended, it risks serious damage not just to our science base, but to the economy itself. If this Government and this Chancellor are serious about rebalancing the economy and closing the productivity gap—as a northern MP, I include the northern powerhouse in that—we need to see robust and secure funding plans for science put in place. How can we hope to become, as the Chancellor wants, the highly skilled, highly advanced economy with a healthy export profile and a healthy balance of payments if we allow our science base to slide further down the international league tables?

As we come to the all-important comprehensive spending review, we need to see the Chancellor's warm words matched with a commitment in the review to tackling the underfunding of science in our economy.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I commend the hon. Lady on securing this debate and on making a powerful speech. She talks about the forthcoming spending review. Does she agree that we would like to see more than just words about one nation science? The Minister and his colleagues should liaise with the devolved legislatures across the UK, particularly on universities, so that one nation science becomes the reality, rather than just a soundbite.

Angela Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. I agree that wherever in the UK a university is, if it is demonstrating real expertise in a scientific discipline and it comes up with good, robust proposals that are approved by its peers in the scientific community, it should benefit from an equitable spread of funding for research and development.

I conclude by asking the Minister for assurances about future public funding for our science and research base. First, will he commit to maintaining the ring fence for Government science spending over the next period, and will the Treasury fund real-terms protection of the science budget? We need funding stability, and we need to encourage business confidence. We also need to maximise our capital investment. I know that the capital budget has been settled, but too many science facilities remain under-utilised, which is wasteful and damaging to our economic growth ambitions. We need to align capital and resource investment to maximise the return, but we also need to rebuild our science base, as I have already pointed out. Will the Minister therefore also commit to an ambition to increase spending on science when sustained economic growth returns to the economy? Such a commitment in the CSR will send out the right signals to investors and scientists everywhere and ensure confidence that the UK is determined to use its science base to build economic success.

The Minister might also like to comment on the need for a broad spectrum of public investment in scientific infrastructure, from lab bench through to mid and large facilities. Equally, it would be welcome if he commented on the principle of allocating scientific funding according to a gold standard, based on independent expert peer review of research. That was the point I was trying to make to the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell).

Finally, it would be reassuring to hear the Minister acknowledge the importance of curiosity-driven fundamental research. It is easy to understand the importance of applied scientific research, but some of our greatest achievements—scientific and economic—came from

fundamental research. Laser technology is a good example of that and I am sure everyone can think of other examples. Although private investment is important to increasing our science research base, without adequate public support we will see that investment increasingly put at risk. Already we are falling behind our competitors, and in today's world to stand still is to fall behind.

Today's debate has been heavily supported by the royal societies and the universities, which I thank for their help and interest, and by numerous organisations spanning food and drink, pharmaceuticals and health. From the British Medical Association and Arthritis Research UK through to the Food and Drink Federation, the interest in the debate has been immense. That all emphatically underlines the sheer extent of the reach of science—I have tried to convey that in this debate—and thus its importance to the economy.

The debate, in title and in application, demanded a response from a Treasury Minister. The fact that the Chancellor's ministerial team chose to bypass the opportunity to talk about science goes against the spirit of Westminster Hall debates and is deeply disappointing. No blame is apportioned to the Minister here now—we are glad to see him here—but where is the Treasury Minister? The Minister for Universities and Science can do more than repeat the speech—good as it was—that he gave in response to the excellent and well attended debate on this topic that was recently brought to the House by the hon. Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew). After all, it is official Government policy to support science. They have developed a science and innovation strategy, which states that

“capital investment alone is not sufficient to ensure our research infrastructure is able to continue to deliver world class outputs. We recognise that our science base requires adequate resource funding, and will give full consideration to these requirements when we take a decision at the Spending Review next year.”

On the basis of that statement, I call on the Minister not only to ensure that Treasury Ministers are made aware of today's debate, but to commit to being an ambassador for science to the Treasury. He needs to go out there and make the case for science funding. I look forward to his response.

2.48 pm

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I offer my congratulations to the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) on securing this debate on UK science. It is an important subject, and it is great to be able again to make the case on behalf of the UK science industry before the spending review. British science is world-leading in many areas, is highly productive, has the capacity for increased investment while maintaining its productivity and is vital in maintaining our competitive advantage.

As the hon. Lady said, the UK population represents only 0.9% of the world population, but produces 15.9% of the top-quality research findings. A productive research environment must have Government investment in science capital and resource, such as the National Graphene Institute, which will secure Manchester as a leading centre of graphene research and commercialisation. We should not allow the UK's current and historic strength in science and research to lead to complacency. Having worked in the mass spectrometry industry for nearly

[Chris Green]

20 years, I know that our science enables world-leading businesses to flourish in Britain, often producing the low-volume but high-value goods that we need. Jobs in science are often the most rewarding and interesting. They also encourage entrepreneurship and the development and commercialisation of innovative technologies.

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Research, investment and experience in facilities can often attract investment such as we have seen in Southampton, where Lloyd's Register has come to the Boldrewood campus of the university, providing the biggest link-up that we have in this country between a university and a commercial enterprise.

Chris Green: It is always good to hear such fantastic examples of link-ups. I am sure all the Members here will have many other such examples.

Science strengthens economic growth, productivity and the UK's ability to compete in an increasingly competitive market, as was highlighted earlier. It is a highly effective way to invest public money to drive economic growth. Although we in Britain invest less in research and development than many of our competitors, it is not because of the lack of excellent opportunities for research. We can significantly increase our research investment without reducing the quality of the research. That will then increase the base from which innovation and commercialisation starts.

The past five years were about creating economic stability, and it was right that the Government protected the science budget, but the next five years must be about building upon what we have secured. The science and research ring fence was an important signifier of the Government's commitment to the value of research. The flat-cash protection has maintained the UK's position during a time of economic uncertainty. Now we should be planning and investing so that we encourage further investment to build and create the industries that we as a country want. By investing in science through the dual support system with a mix of project-based and institutional-level funding, the Government leverage investment from charities and industry, generating further scientific and economic growth. It is estimated that each additional £1 of public funding has the potential to give rise to an increase of up to £1.60 in private funding for both industry and charities.

A strong science industry is a vital base for preparing for our future needs in many policy areas, such as food security, national security, antimicrobial resistance, health innovation and meeting the needs of an ageing population. Government investment levels must take that into account when we decide what message we want to send to investors in Britain and across the world.

Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): I commend the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) for securing this debate and for the manner in which she has conducted it.

Some 68% of Welsh universities rely on UK Government funding, and the ring fence that my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) has touched on is extremely welcome. The universities are very much

looking to the end of this month. I commend GE Healthcare for the work that it has done in my constituency. It has worked with the university, using the block funding, to build an innovation campus and to work with the public and private sectors, much as he has described. They are working together to invest in the Government's long-term economic plan, but they are also creating jobs in Cardiff.

Chris Green: Our national Government have a huge role in ensuring that we have strong science throughout our United Kingdom. There are many great instances in Wales. I used to do a great deal of travelling up and down the country in my previous job, and I recognise that there is investment right across our United Kingdom, as far as the University of Highlands and Islands in Thurso. It is a bit of a long trek up there, but it is fantastic to see investment right across the country. We must reflect on the needs and benefits that exist in our thriving scientific sector.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Order. I do not want to impose a time limit, but if people try to stick to five or six minutes, we can get everybody in with ease.

2.54 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) on securing this important debate and on her excellent speech.

Supporting UK science should absolutely be a priority in this Parliament and beyond, and I hope the Chancellor will take heed of the points made here today. As Members will appreciate—they have probably heard me say this before—Cambridge is a leader for science in the UK.

Mr Andrew Smith: Along with Oxford.

Daniel Zeichner: Along with Oxford, of course.

Cambridge is a buzzing hub of research labs, biotech companies and innovation centres, and science is fundamental to both our economy and our collective identity. Nearly 60,000 people are employed in the Cambridge cluster alone. It is thought by some that Cambridge and its leading scientific reputation are untouchable. That is not the case. We must not take our assets for granted. Only with careful future planning and sustained, stable economic investment can Cambridge continue to function as a centre for scientific excellence, attracting investment and expertise from around the globe.

I want to see Cambridge's scientific stature secured, but I also want to see the knowledge economy increasing across the entire country, ensuring that the UK remains a leader for science on the world stage. This is not a zero-sum game. Cambridge doing well will help other parts of the country. Cambridge going backwards causes the whole country damage. A genuine long-term strategy for science is vital if we want to promote innovation and increase productivity in our country. The Chancellor says that that is what he wants, but the wrong decisions over the next few weeks risk sending us in the wrong direction.

The Government and their cheerleaders helpfully remind us about the long-term economic plan—I see that some Government Members recognise that phrase—but we need that to be a reality rather than a soundbite. The truth is that in the previous Parliament we actually saw a substantial real-terms cut in science funding. The Campaign for Science and Engineering has shown that the resource budget accumulated a real-terms shortfall of £1 billion during the previous Parliament. Data from the OECD suggest that our country's investment in research and development has been on a downward trajectory for the past few years and is well below the EU average of 0.64%. As Universities UK tells us, the UK comes 27th in the EU27 and eighth in the G8 in total science and research investment as a proportion of GDP.

The argument is familiar. The Minister has told us before that we still do well and that we punch above our weight, but as the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), the Chair of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, has pointed out on more than one occasion, it may be that we do well because of funding from the past. We cannot assume that with lower levels of public support we can continue to be competitive when other countries are upping their game.

Let me raise one specific worry. Many are talking about it, but I was struck by a representation from a biotech company in my constituency, Discuva. It develops new antibiotics to combat antimicrobial resistance and recently won an innovation award from Innovate UK. Indeed, I believe the award was presented here by the Minister. Discuva received a biomedical catalyst grant in 2012, which helped grow its business enormously, giving it the necessary risk capital to take chances and ultimately sign the world's largest preclinical antibiotic drug discovery deal with a major pharmaceutical company. Its products will feed into the UK healthcare system, saving lives, reducing the healthcare burden and consequently increasing GDP.

I am sure we will all champion such businesses, but Discuva is just one of many that have expressed alarm over the suggestion that the Treasury is considering swapping research grants for loans. It tells me that this would be disastrous for companies in its sector. It argues that a significant loan on the books of many small to medium-sized high-tech companies would make them technically insolvent and affect relationships with potential investors, presenting a major business obstacle. I hope the Minister can assure us today that those suggestions are just speculative rumour in the wider rumour mill, and that those important grants will not be converted into loans.

I conclude by reminding Members that the Treasury has repeatedly said that it will prioritise spending in areas that drive productivity and growth. Well, 51% of UK productivity growth between 2000 and 2008 was due to innovation, with 32% being attributable to changes in technology resulting from science and innovation. That tells us that we need to see greater investment in mechanisms that support innovation—more, not less.

I have a suspicion that the Minister is largely persuaded by the strengths of the argument, but for reasons we all understand he will possibly have to be circumspect in his reply today. Those of us battling for science and innovation wish him well in his battles over the next few weeks. Funding for a secure, long-term, successful science and innovation sector is vital for the future prosperity

of our whole country, and it must not be sacrificed for a short-term political fix. It is important that the Minister is successful and that the dead hand of the Treasury does not win out yet again.

2.59 pm

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) on securing this debate.

I do not want to rehearse all the advantages that come from spending on science, other than to say that we in Northern Ireland have found that it has helped us to increase investment. There is a strong correlation between what a company spends on science, research and development and its ability to export and about two thirds of increases in productivity are the result of spending on innovation, research and development.

In a debate such as this, I suppose the first question people will ask is: a lot of the work on improving science spending in places such as Northern Ireland and Scotland is done by the devolved Administrations, so what are they doing? In Northern Ireland, we have focused on a number of areas. First, £45 million is being spent on research facilities in universities, and by 2020 we hope to be funding 1,000 postgraduate research places a year in local universities. That will not only allow universities to increase their research capacity but ensure that there is a pool of skilled labour for the inward investment that we hope to attract. Invest NI has devoted £80 million a year to bringing projects from the lab to the marketplace.

Those are examples of the positive things that the devolved Administrations can do, but it is important to note that the devolved Administrations are dependent on decisions made by the Treasury and central Government. Their ability to do those things and to be innovative in their policies depends on the core funding that comes to them. That is not to say that they should not or do not look for other ways of attracting additional funding, bringing in their own resources and prioritising their own spending, but because the block grant is the main source of the spend available to the devolved Administrations and since most tax policy is decided centrally, there is a role for central Government.

I have four points to make about central Government's role in spending on science, innovation and research and development. First, although it was ring-fenced over the five years of the previous Government, central Government spending has fallen by 15% in real terms. That affects the resources available here in England, but also, through the Barnett formula, the amount of money available to the devolved Administrations. I know we have difficult spending decisions to make, but look at the success of science spending. I will not repeat the figures that have been quoted already, but that money translates into a very high success rate, as shown by the many research papers cited as a result of the work financed by that spending. When the Government are deciding on spending priorities, surely the priority should be those areas where the spending is actually seen to work.

Secondly, I want to discuss the distribution of money. I was pleased by the Minister's speech at Sheffield's Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre about one nation science. I am sure he will regret ever saying this, but he said that one nation science

“means developing that excellence for the whole country, making sure all areas and all groups of people can reach their full potential”.

[Sammy Wilson]

That is not happening in practice. If one looks at the money distributed by the research councils, although Northern Ireland has 3% of the population, we receive only 0.7% of funding—indeed, per head of population, seven times more money from the research councils goes to London as to facilities in Northern Ireland. The Minister could well argue that London has greater capacity, but we have proven ourselves. For example, although we account for only 0.03% of the world's population, 0.3% of the research papers that are cited as being highly significant come from Northern Ireland. We perform 10 times better than our population distribution would suggest. We do need to look at how the money is distributed across the United Kingdom.

Thirdly, there are additional sources of money, especially the Horizon 2020 funding that is available from the European Union. I am no great fan of the EU, but the money is there. A condition of that funding is that there must be collaboration between companies and universities in different member states. What could central Government do to improve performance and encourage that kind of collaboration? It helps to expose companies and universities to new knowledge and markets, and there is value in that.

Finally, the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) mentioned research and development tax credits. There is talk about whether they should be translated into loans or kept as tax credits, but the one thing I know is that those tax credits are an important way of levering in private finance. Last year, their notional cost to the Treasury was £1.8 billion, but that drew down £14.3 billion of research and development, expenditure and innovation. To me, that is a good return for a fiscal measure, so those tax credits should be maintained.

I know that not all the points I have made fall within the Minister's remit, but the Government should consider them when dealing with this important issue.

3.7 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) on securing this important debate.

There are real anxieties among the scientific community and associated industries about the current scale of science spending. Following the 2010 spending review, the science budget was frozen in cash terms at £4.6 billion, but that meant a real-terms drop of 10% over the Parliament. By 2012, UK public investment in science fell to less than 0.5% of GDP—a lower rate than any other G8 country had invested in R and D in the preceding 20 years. The G8 average is now 0.8%, whereas the UK Government spent a mere 0.44% on science.

Last week, I had the privilege of visiting the University of Glasgow's Centre for Virus Research. It is leading the world in developing treatments for hepatitis C and is carrying out sector-leading research into insect-borne viruses such as the dengue virus, which could have devastating effects on the world's population, more than 40% of which currently lives in a dengue area. The centre recently put together a new funding application; it has increased by £3 million since its last award was received, but staff there told me that the additional

£3 million is not required to do anything new or make great steps forward; it is needed merely to keep the centre's head above water. Flat cash really does mean a real-terms cut. Addressing the Science and Technology Committee recently, Universities UK spokesperson Dr Dandridge stated that long-term under-investment in publicly funded research in the UK is leading to an erosion of capacity. That is a really serious allegation.

The Minister for Universities and Science, who is with us today, has previously stated:

"The UK Government is committed to maintaining the strength of the UK's world-class research base".

I welcome that, but I would add that we have to balance business innovation with blue-skies research, which, as the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge said, is research that has no immediate application. It is research for the sake of doing research, and scientists often enjoy it the most, because they have a free hand. When we take from one to the detriment of the other we will have long-term problems.

The hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) mentioned our science infrastructure, and I completely agree with what he said. In terms of current infrastructure investments, the Treasury has recognised that there is a territorial dimension to the science budget. We keep hearing about the northern powerhouse. In the autumn statement, we heard about the £235 million investment in the Sir Henry Royce Institute, which follows a £100 million investment in Manchester's National Graphene Institute. That is great news for Manchester, but with the majority of science infrastructure projects remaining in the so-called golden triangle, we have a real issue if we are talking about developing centres of excellence across the UK. There is a need to map out investment thematically and territorially to make sure we make the most of the talents we have available. It is important to identify the governmental structures and Departments that are best placed to optimise investment in a local context.

The Chair of the Science and Technology Committee, the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Nicola Blackwood), recently asked the chief scientific adviser why the taxpayer should,

"among all other priorities, fund science and research?"

He responded:

"I would...focus resources on the things that so demonstrably contribute to productivity...Against that background, I would back science."

With his final point, I wholeheartedly agree.

3.13 pm

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) for securing this important debate.

The depth and breadth of the UK science sector belie the UK's size, but people should make no mistake: the UK is in the midst of the fast growth of a modern scientific revolution. Having started slowly during the first half of the last century, that revolution has gathered pace and, as the Government recognise in their productivity plan, it is driving UK growth. Yet we have heard the statistics, which I will not repeat, and about the sector's worries. I have met many pharmaceutical companies and agri-tech companies, and they have repeated those worries to me, too.

To turn to the positives, the UK is a leader in Formula 1 racing car development, with seven of the 10 Formula 1 constructors based here. The worldwide revenues of almost £4 billion that we see from the sector are testimony to the fact that Formula 1 has settled here. The industry's development in the UK delivers improvements not only to our cars and bikes, but to our advanced engineering sector and, more importantly, our hospitals. It delivers innovative design and thinking across sectors. In just five years, the UK has gone from 14th to 2nd in the global innovation index, but it is important that we keep up the pressure. The future of the industry in the UK lies in leading its competitors. We look forward to welcoming the world's first 1,000 mph car from the British-led Bloodhound Project. That would not be happening if we were not investing in such industries or in other science and research-led fields. If we do not continue to fund the industry, not only will the UK fall behind, but we could well lose its science sector.

We have seen huge medical advances in the last 40 years—indeed, the first test-tube baby was British. Some 380 pharmaceutical companies are based in the UK, employing 70,000 people and with an annual turnover of £30 billion. The medical technology and medical biotechnology sectors employ more than 96,000 people and have a combined annual turnover of a further £20 billion. As we have heard, the life sciences industry is truly a jewel in the crown of our economy. Companies, universities and charities invest hundreds of millions of pounds. Last year, Cancer Research UK alone spent £434 million on research institutes, hospitals and universities across the country.

The Government do provide essential investment in UK science, but we still fall short compared with our major competitors. As the hon. Lady mentioned, we invest over 50% less than South Korea, the world's leading investor. We need to make sure we are in the premier league. We must support the industry to research, to learn, to fail and to grow. That will ensure that the UK continues the push global boundaries in research and development.

As Members have pointed out, we lead the world in research in many disciplines, and all with a population that is less than 1% of the world's total. To keep our place at the top of so many fields, it is vital that we do not simply rely on private initiatives, but back our pledge to industry with a commitment. Science has the potential to grow our economy and expand our horizons, giving us far more bang for our buck than most areas.

The science sector can deliver if it is helped, but as in many cases, simply handing over money is not the answer. To ensure that we get the most out of the sector, we must look to schemes that incentivise the best in the field and drive growth. We need competitive bidding processes to reinforce successful organisations and tax breaks to alleviate the load on start-up businesses and to grow cutting-edge enterprises. We also need match funding, especially in the academic arena, for R and D projects. As the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) mentioned, assistance through Horizon 2020 is a good idea. Greater input from the scientific community in apportioning grants would also give far greater credibility to funding.

The Government invested £198 million through the charity research support fund only last year. One benefit was that that levered in £805 million from charities,

which was then invested in our universities. The Treasury's investment in science supports breakthroughs in pharmaceuticals and prevents and cures diseases. Spending and saving are a double win in this ageing society.

It is important that we push the boundaries—that we make a real difference to our scientific heritage. However, while the science industry is proving that it can deliver the results, it is up to a strong and committed Government to deliver the security. I therefore urge the Government to continue to protect the science budget across Departments this November, to unleash the full potential of the UK and the science industry.

3.18 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I commend the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) on bringing this issue to Westminster Hall for consideration.

I spoke to the Minister beforehand, so he knows which two issues I shall bring to his attention. I want to take up the issue of Northern Ireland, which was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson). I want to give two examples of science funding enabling universities in Northern Ireland to move forward with tremendous innovation and long-term vision to create and perfect medicines and research that will benefit people with diseases.

In Northern Ireland, we benefit from funding from a range of sources, including the EU, industry and charitable bodies, and others, including the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), have mentioned where moneys come from. A raft of funding comes into play. The key to that is the large amount of funding that comes centrally from the UK Government, which could be at risk if the UK science budget is cut in the spending review.

The UK science budget funds UK research councils, which in turn fund 15% of the research done by higher education institutions in Northern Ireland. The science budget also funds recurrent research funding. When I was about eight, which is a long time ago, I played with dominoes; one hits the next, and so on right round. There is that sort of domino effect with funding. The recurrent research funding covers 35.5% of the research income of higher education institutions in Northern Ireland. In addition to funding from the UK science budget, Northern Ireland also receives money from other UK Government sources that are not part of the UK science budget, such as Government Departments and Innovate UK. That represents some 22% of the research income of higher education institutions in Northern Ireland. A significant amount of Northern Irish universities' research income is provided for by the UK Government. I am sure that that shows how important the budget is to the Province, to our students, and to innovation.

We need to continue with positive steps that will send out a strong signal of stability to the industry not just in Northern Ireland but across the United Kingdom. Evidence shows that private sector funding of science follows the lead of public sector funding.

The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson) *indicated assent.*

Jim Shannon: The Minister is nodding—in agreement, I presume; and if I am right I will get positive answers later, which is good news. In the UK every £1 invested in public research and development results in an average £1.36 research and development investment by the private sector; spend £1 and get £1.36 in return—that must be good news.

I will give two examples of STEM research in Northern Ireland universities, and the first is at Queen's University Belfast, which has been doing research on cystic fibrosis and the optimal delivery of antibiotics. Work on cancer and heart research have also been done there. The new drugs being created there, and the advances being made in medical treatment, are world-leading. Professor Cliff Taggart of the school of medicine, dentistry and biomedical sciences has been leading research into the delivery of antibiotics in cystic fibrosis. He has said:

“One of the big problems is getting drugs delivered in such a way that they are effective. Infection takes hold at a very early stage in life and constant treatment with antibiotics through the years will inevitably lead to antibiotic resistance.”

However, with the science funding provided centrally, Queen's University is building up a drug to respond to the cystic fibrosis lung issues, and the build-up of mucus and other secretions.

Professor Taggart and his colleagues came up with the idea of devising compounds that combine antibiotic and anti-inflammatory entities. That is what they do with the money coming from the Government, along with the other moneys that flow to them. Professor Taggart has commented:

“The life expectancy of someone born with Cystic Fibrosis used to be six months. Now people are living until their thirties, although they need huge numbers of drugs to keep them alive. Our aim is to develop a drug that will dampen the bacterial load and inflammation much more dramatically and allow individuals to have a lifespan that goes beyond what it currently is.”

That is the job that is being done at Queen's University Belfast. It happens because the Government fund the science budget and help universities throughout the United Kingdom to make advances.

Researchers at Ulster University have taken an important first step towards the first cure for hereditary blindness, pioneering a personalised medicine that targets and repairs genetic damage in part of the eye. The scientists have discovered a treatment that can repair damage caused by cloudy deposits in the cornea, the outer clear part of the eye. That condition, called corneal dystrophy, worsens with age, eventually leading to blindness. Using a novel DNA-editing technology—clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats—Ulster University's vision science experts have designed a method of targeting the specific DNA or gene in the eye that is responsible for the cloudy deposits, and they are now making progress towards human trials.

I have outlined truly amazing positive developments—world-leading medical advances, to benefit not just for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland but the world; and I am sure that there will be many others. I hope that the Minister and shadow Minister will take on board the importance of the great work done using the science budget. More such work could be done; a budget cut now would be detrimental to innovation and advances.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): May I ask the Front Benchers to make sure that they leave a few moments at the end of the debate for Angela Smith to wind up?

3.25 pm

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): It is a pleasure to take part in a debate under your wise chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I hope that that quality of wisdom will appear in the Minister's response. I congratulate the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) on raising this important matter. I have a personal interest in the topic, not least because my late brother chaired the science and technology committee of the OECD at one stage, and was also secretary of the Science Council of Canada. Although I am not a pure scientist as he was, I have a deep commitment to the issues that the hon. Lady raised.

I was particularly interested in the hon. Lady's opening remarks about the pace of change driven by science. It reminded me that several years ago I attended a lecture by Professor Tom Stonier. He related some statistics to the effect that in the last 25 years of the 20th century, more people had been working on pure research than in the entire previous history of the world. That fact, and advances in new technology and computing science that enable information to be processed very quickly, mean that we live in a world where the pace of change is great and accelerating. People at the forefront of that have a great advantage, but that pace of change means that those who do not keep themselves in the frontline can too easily fall behind rapidly. That is my concern.

Several of this afternoon's fine contributions by hon. Members from various parties have touched on the balance between blue-sky thinking, and thinking that might be said to have a business-innovatory basis. I have felt concern at times reading remarks by the Minister, which seem to show him as heavily biased towards business-related innovative research. It is too easy to forget the importance of true blue-sky thinking, and how often its results cannot be predicted. Nevertheless, some of the most profound scientific effects and advances happened simply because someone with an inquiring mind was interested in finding out more. I have every sympathy with the 30 academics—including four Nobel laureates—who wrote to *The Daily Telegraph* on 2 June 2014:

“Sustained open-ended enquiries in controversial or unfashionable fields are virtually forbidden today and science is in serious danger of stagnating”.

No one who has taken part in the debate would want British science—or Scottish or Northern Ireland science—to be compromised in any way, or to stagnate because of a failure to understand the importance of blue-sky research.

I was impressed by the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North West (Carol Monaghan), not least because the statistics she gave mean I can glance past two or three of my own paragraphs. A comment I would make on those statistics is that all current measures of research intensity confirm the same thing: that the UK is now a laggard compared with other advanced societies. We are, as she said, at the bottom of the G8, and we lag behind on a host of other measures.

I was interested, as I always am, in the contribution of the hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), who spoke about the contributions in the Northern Ireland economy, and the way that funding from the Northern Ireland Executive is geared towards research.

He said that no doubt the same was true in places such as Scotland. I can confirm to him and the Minister that that is only too true. Notwithstanding the erosion of the amount of flat cash in recent years, and the constraints caused by the Scottish Government's limited powers because of the reserved nature of the spending, they were able to increase expenditure on research and knowledge exchange by 11% in 2013-14, and by 38% since 2007. They did that not because they received extra money, but because they chose to protect the research and science budget as much as possible. Scotland has a long history of supporting science, and I would like to think that the Scottish Government's willingness to choose to make sacrifices in other areas to sustain scientific research is something that the UK Government will follow in the spending review.

As we have heard from many Members, there is a strong economic case for investing in science, which helps to drive and sustain the economy, but there is much we still need to understand. We need a better understanding of all the connections that are essential to driving progress in scientific fields of endeavour. One of the key means of stimulating progress and innovation is to engage different types of thinkers and researchers through networks, so they can feed off one another—a factor acknowledged by many writers.

One of my teachers many years ago was the late Professor Tom Burns. He was noted for many pieces of research, including a fairly seminal book in the early 1960s called "The Management of Innovation", in which he pointed to the importance of networks of interacting researchers, scientists and the like. That is something that universities and the academic community are particularly well equipped to do. Hughes and Martin, writing about the value of public sector research and development, captured this pretty well:

"the issue is not so much about isolating and assessing the impact of publicly funded research per se nor about determining its optimal level in isolation. It is instead about analysing how best to understand and manage the connections between differently funded and motivated research efforts in an overall system of knowledge production and innovation."

A number of Members mentioned scientific infrastructure. Recent work, most notably that of Dr Stephen Watson at Glasgow University, has pointed to the huge significance of the infrastructure spend component of Government investment in science. There is, however, a huge mismatch between UK Government infrastructure spend for the Oxford-Cambridge-London triangle, and the spend for elsewhere in the United Kingdom. National research infrastructure investment is known to play a key role in driving fundamental scientific discovery and attracting business investment. We therefore need to map out such investment, both thematically and territorially—something that no Government have ever done.

In conclusion, I have four questions to pose to the Minister, one of which relates to the tax credit issue, but I am not going to rehearse that argument because other hon. Members have already made it fully. First, what is the Government's view of my argument that more, not less, investment in blue-sky scientific research is needed? Secondly, will the Government commit to restoring the scientific budget spend to at least 2010 levels, in real terms? In other words, will they undo the cut of the previous Parliament? Thirdly, will the Government commit

to reviewing infrastructure spend in science to ensure that the talents of the scientific community in all parts of the United Kingdom are properly supported? Finally, will the Minister confirm that there is no prospect of converting any element of research funding into loans?

3.34 pm

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) on securing this important debate.

I am grateful for the contributions of hon. Members from all parts of the UK, including the hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green), my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), the hon. Members for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Roger Mullin) and for Strangford (Jim Shannon), and others. They raised a range of issues, including the need for a long-term strategy, which is vital for innovation; the need to focus resources where they work; the importance of research through the universities; the need to build connections to ensure we get the most out of contributions and the progress that comes from that; and the need for strong and committed Government action. Notwithstanding the contribution that the Minister will make, it is disappointing that there is no Treasury Minister here today, because this is essentially a Treasury debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge said that the UK has always punched above its weight in science and innovation. We should be proud of our record, and as politicians we should recognise our role in ensuring that success for the future. I thank all the organisations that have contributed in so many ways to the debate, including the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Royal Society of Biology, the National Centre for Universities and Business, the Campaign for Science and Engineering and many others.

Science matters, and Treasury support for UK science is absolutely critical, not least because of the pivotal role of scientific research in driving innovation and productivity and its importance in building the high-tech, high-skilled economy that we need. This issue is at the very heart of the choices and questions facing our country. We need strategic and sustained investment to secure our future prosperity.

Independent analysis suggests that every pound spent by the UK Government on research and development raises private sector research and development output by 20p a year in perpetuity. Even that is an underestimate of the full multiplier effect of public investment in science and research, because Government investment stimulates additional private sector investment. The scale of public sector investment is greater than what the private sector can do on its own, as the lead that other countries have over us shows. Government investment also has a wider role in developing the wider capabilities that we need.

The Chancellor likes to talk about his support for science, but, as in so many areas, there is a gap between what the Government say and what they do. Their record of investment in our country's future is not as good as we want it to be. They like to boast about the success of catapult centres, which we support—indeed,

[*Seema Malhotra*]

they were an initiative of the previous Labour Government—but the support that those centres receive under this Government falls short of the amount provided to comparable schemes in other countries such as Germany and France, which benefit from more than 10 times as much public support. We under-invest in the science-industry linkage. Similarly, Finland spends about 10 times as much per capita on innovation funding as our Government do.

The protection that the Government say they are providing to the science budget is only in cash terms, which means that inflation has eaten up about £1 billion of its value over the past five years. The Government's commitment to science needs to be subjected to critical scrutiny. This is no time for complacency. There are disturbing signs that we are falling further and further behind key competitors when it comes to investment in innovation and technology, which is critical for future business growth and our competitiveness in the global economy.

The previous Labour Government established a target to increase UK R and D, both public and private, to 2.5% of GDP by 2014. The latest official figures from the Office for National Statistics show that R and D expenditure was at 1.67% of GDP in 2013. We are behind many countries and behind the EU average. OECD figures for 2012 show that the US spent 2.8% of GDP on R and D and that new global players, such as China and South Korea, were forging ahead of us. Furthermore, the UK continues to have a lower level of business R and D spending than the OECD average. That has been exacerbated in recent years by short-termism in corporate planning.

A recent report from PwC is clear that the UK lacks the skilled workforce and the necessary skills to complement and drive R and D at scale. As a result, we continue to fall behind our competitors. Recent labour market trends have confirmed the importance of technology-related investment in creating new jobs. As Sherry Coutu's report for the previous Government shows, we face a worrying scale-up gap, with too many small businesses struggling to access the skills and support they need to grow into global players. Just two of the world's top 20 companies for R and D spend are located in the UK. One of them, GlaxoSmithKline, is based in Hounslow, which is my borough, and both of them are pharmaceutical companies. We continue to need long-term leadership from Government to ensure that businesses get the support they need to be able to scale up.

All the trends demonstrate that, contrary to the current Government's outdated *laissez-faire* attitudes, we cannot rely solely on private sector investment to secure our place in tomorrow's high-tech global economy, nor can we leave the private sector to fend for itself without the support of an active and strategic state. Although standard figures show that the majority of aggregate R and D investment is undertaken by the private sector, that risks obscuring the fact that the public sector delivers most of the research, so that the private sector can concentrate more on development. Moreover, the public sector has a key role to play in ensuring a smooth division of labour between the two, building the relationships and institutions that can foster horizontal linkages between basic and applied research, or science and industry, to maximise the positive feedback effects between the two.

To get Britain to be competitive, it is therefore essential that both public and private R and D not only rise but work more closely together. We need not only increased investment but greater strategic focus. That is why we have asked Professor Mariana Mazzucato, a leading authority on the role of the state in creating innovation ecosystems in which knowledge-led enterprises can thrive, to join Labour's council of economic advisors and to contribute to the development of our plans to ensure that the UK can seize the economic opportunities available to us.

I am glad to be able to add the voice of Labour's shadow Treasury team to the call for support for science and innovation in this month's spending review. I can reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge, all the Members who have spoken today, and all those who care about the future of our science base and our economy that if the Government do not listen, the Labour party will.

3.43 pm

The Minister for Universities and Science (Joseph Johnson): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) on securing the debate, which is the fourth on the subject in as many months. The topic is also the subject of an ongoing Science and Technology Committee inquiry. All that activity underlines the great importance of science to our economy and to Members throughout the House. We have had an excellent debate, which has included fine contributions from Members representing all parts of the country from Bolton to Bury St Edmunds and Belfast, from Pudsey to Cambridge, from Cardiff to St Ives, and from Glasgow to Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath. Many issues have been raised, and I will try to touch on some of them later on, but all Members have essentially made the same fundamentally important point, which is that science is vital and so is the Government's role in underpinning our excellent science base.

A reference was made, somewhat disobligingly, to the "dead hand of the Treasury" in all of this. Given that this debate specifically requests the Treasury's view on our science budget—I am here representing all of Government, including the Treasury—I would challenge that characterisation and point out that the Treasury hand has fed the science base well in difficult times. Let us not forget the financial circumstances that we were in back in 2010 when the decision was made to protect the science ring fence. At a time when we were making decisions that involved discretionary cuts of £98 billion across the rest of Government, the Chancellor decided to protect the ring fence. We can be proud of that decision, and we welcome any scrutiny of our record.

The Chancellor has subsequently followed through on that big statement about the importance of science in our economy. In April last year, he set out his vision in a speech in Cambridge and said that he wanted the UK to be the best place in the world to do science. He has taken action since then to deliver on that ambition with, most recently, the publication of the Government's productivity plan, which sets out our proposals to boost the UK's growth and has science and innovation at its heart. We have a track record of demonstrating our understanding of the importance of science to our economy at a time of difficult decisions elsewhere in public expenditure.

Going into this Parliament, we made clear the importance to us of setting out a clear road map on the capital side of science expenditure. We committed to invest £1.1 billion per annum in the UK's research infrastructure, rising with inflation, from 2015 all the way to 2021. That investment will ensure that the UK stays at the cutting edge of research and will help us to meet some of our greatest challenges. We can see the fruits of that commitment around the country. The Francis Crick Institute, which is almost complete and in which the Government have invested £350 million, will be a world-leading bio-discovery centre that will solve fundamental questions of health and disease. I was pleased to announce the other day that we had entered into negotiations with a preferred bidder for the building of a £200 million polar research ship that will keep Britain at the forefront of ocean science for decades to come. Tonne for tonne, the UK will have the most advanced oceanographic research vessel fleet in the world. I am delighted that the Cammel Laird shipyard in Birkenhead was selected to undertake that important work, which is a real boost for our shipbuilding industry. Earlier this year, I launched a £113 million capital investment partnership with IBM at the Hartree Centre in Daresbury, near Warrington, with the overall investment package from IBM being worth £200 million. There are many more such examples.

The Government's activity is also evident in the constituency of the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge. We are building on its rich history of scientific discovery, to which she alluded, including stainless steel and Ronseal. Innovate UK has invested more than £61 million in Yorkshire since 2010, including more than £12 million in projects in the Sheffield city region last year. I recently announced £10 million of funding for a pioneering component manufacturing facility at the University of Sheffield's Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre. In York, we have invested £27 million in a quantum technology hub to harness the potential of an area in which the UK is a world leader. The University of Sheffield is also home to two nodes of the high-value manufacturing catapult, in advanced machining and materials and in nuclear, with well over 100 industrial partners.

The setting up of catapults, the elite centres that commercialise new and emerging technologies, is another major initiative by the Government to entrench scientific excellence in the regions. Since the general election in May we have continued to roll out our catapult network. In the summer the Chancellor announced a new medicines technologies catapult to be based in Alderley Park in Cheshire, building on a pre-existing centre of excellence. We have also announced a precision medicine catapult to be based in Cambridge.

We have heard contributions from Scottish MPs this afternoon, and I will dwell briefly on Scotland and other devolved Administrations. Scotland is punching well above its weight within the UK, demonstrating its strong science and research base. It receives about 11% of the total pot of research council, Innovate UK and higher education research capital funding, compared with its share in our population of about 8%. I was in Glasgow last week and was delighted to inaugurate the construction of a new £68 million imaging centre of excellence, to which the Government are contributing £16 million as part of the precision medicine catapult. The hub of that catapult is in Cambridge, but an

important spoke in the operation is in Glasgow. I have had dengue myself, so I was pleased to hear about the good work on the treatment of that unpleasant disease being funded up in Glasgow.

I can give many other examples of good scientific activity in Scotland that are in receipt of significant public support, but I also want to mention Northern Ireland, as we have had contributions from some of its Members. We want to do more to help Northern Ireland secure support and be more competitive when applying for grants.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): I apologise for not having been present to speak earlier, but I want to mention the numerous cuts in Northern Ireland as a result of the overall cuts. Will the Minister look at something similar to what we have in shared education, which is a £500 million loan facility? It could work with businesses and with how we do things in Northern Ireland, but be solely for science. In that way we could turn back the cuts that have happened, from primary schools right the way through to universities, which are still doing wonderful things.

Joseph Johnson: We want to help parts of the country that are receiving less than their share of science spend to be more competitive in the allocations of restricted funding. We have recently announced a process of science and innovation audits to enable areas to assess their potential fields of expertise, competence and excellence, so that they may focus on where they have a chance of being world-leading, globally excellent and more competitive. We look forward to helping consortia from Northern Ireland and other parts of the country—including universities, local enterprise partnerships and local authorities—to come together to assess where they can build on existing centres of excellence and become more competitive.

Government and Treasury investment in science goes much further than simply what the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and its partner bodies do. Research and development tax credits have been mentioned a number of times, and they are extremely valuable and fast-expanding support for business investment. R and D tax credits are now worth £1.75 billion in relief to more than 18,200 companies, supporting more than £14.3 billion of innovative investment, as has been mentioned. In that context, I want to mention the patent box, a key initiative in making the UK tax regime competitive for innovative high-tech companies. It helps to drive growth and investment in the UK, creating high-value jobs in innovative industries. Some 639 companies have received benefits totalling £335 million since the relief was introduced in 2013.

UK science investments must be seen in perspective. We must look at the outputs of, as well as the inputs to, our science base. What I have described thus far is serious, substantial and robust investment, which has been delivering real results. We are the most productive science base in the G7, and our scientific impact on the world is out of proportion to our size as a nation and our level of investment. For every £1 spent by the Government on R and D, private sector productivity rises by 20p a year in perpetuity.

Government funding for science is only part of that story. Research and development in the UK also benefits from the private sector spending that the Government

[Joseph Johnson]

help crowd in. Business spending on R and D has risen by 8% to £18.4 billion. In a recent Westminster Hall debate secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), we heard about the important role of medical research charities, such as the British Heart Foundation. Charities receive additional support from the Treasury through gift aid on donations. On top of that, last year we spent £198 million from the charity research support fund.

Last year, Cancer Research UK reported gift aid income of more than £34 million. Overall in the past financial year, UK charities received £1.2 billion in tax repayments on gift aid donations. We have to look at direct Government spending through BIS and its partner bodies in the context of the bigger ecosystem that it creates. When we look at the bigger picture, we see that the UK's overall spending on R and D reached £28.9 billion in the last year for which we have full data—up 7% on the previous year. That is an important context for us to bear in mind.

I will wrap up, so that the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge can conclude the debate. Debates such as this help to highlight the issues and choices involved in our responsibility to fund science. The UK science base is extraordinary; our cutting-edge research base is world-leading; our universities are world-class; we develop and attract the world's brightest minds; and we have earned 14 Nobel prizes in the sciences over the past 12 years as a result. Science is one of our clear comparative advantages in the global race. BIS Ministers are working hard on making the strongest possible case to the Treasury. Our case will of course be balanced against priorities across Government, but we are hopeful that we have made the strongest possible case on behalf of science.

3.57 pm

Angela Smith: I thank the shadow Minister and the Minister for their responses. I particularly thank the Minister for pronouncing my constituency properly, because few people do. I also welcome the debate we

have had and the strong consensus on the issue throughout the House, across all political parties. We have had some excellent speeches.

I go back to my big point, which is about how deeply embedded science is in our society and our everyday lives. Some of our most important innovations have become such a part of our everyday lives that we take them for granted. Stainless steel, for example, forms not only our cutlery, saucepans, washing machine drums and microwave oven liners, but hot water tanks and equipment for such activities as catering, brewing, distilling, food processing, and water and sewage treatment. Every part of our lives is affected by technologies such as the one that produces stainless steel. The key question, therefore, is whether as a nation we want to continue to play a leading role globally in scientific innovations that will shape the world of tomorrow, in the same way as our innovations in the past have shaped the world of tomorrow.

The Minister's response acknowledged the Government's role in underpinning our science base. He also made it clear that a capital commitment is already in place. The Campaign for Science and Engineering has made the point that if the cash ring fence is maintained, the loss in real funding will rise to more than £3.1 billion by the 2020 election. That amount would pay for four research institutes equivalent to the £700 million Francis Crick Institute being built in London—one for the north of England and one for each of the devolved regions. That point is well made.

According to the Minister, the Treasury has funded the science base well in difficult times. I acknowledge that, but the commitment to revenue to match the capital commitment made by the Government is important. The £400 million ISIS neutron source at Harwell will run for only about 120 days this year, instead of an optimal 180 days, because of the lack of revenue funding. That underlines the fundamental point of the debate. We did not quite get the commitments that we were looking for, but the Minister acknowledged our case implicitly. He has told us that he is arguing and fighting hard for science funding. We thank him for that—

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Wanless Review and the Dickens File

[VALERIE VAZ in the Chair]

4 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Wanless Review and the Dickens file.

Valerie Vaz (in the Chair): Before the hon. Gentleman begins, I advise him and other hon. Members that, in line with the House's sub judice resolution, no direct reference should be made to the substance of criminal or civil legal proceedings that are current—that is, those on which a judgment has not yet been issued or on which appellate proceedings are active. Clearly there are still police investigations current that relate to the matters that he intends to raise and I am sure that he is aware that the House would not want him to prejudice those investigations by anything he might say here today.

John Mann: Thank you, Ms Vaz. I assure you that I have no intention of prejudicing any investigations. I am keen to challenge those commentators who say that there is some big conspiracy to hunt out and name people who are innocent, and that everything has been overstated when it comes to historic child abuse. Some have got quite a track record in saying that. I would say to them: Rolf Harris, Stuart Hall, Max Clifford and the former Bishop of Lewes; 1,400 children in Rotherham, children in Derby, in Northampton, in Halifax, in Newcastle, in Oxford, in Telford, in Peterborough, in North Yorkshire and in Wrexham; bishops in Belgium, Norway and Austria—all over the world, there has been a spate of arrests and huge numbers of convictions of people involved in child abuse from the past, so those who say that this has somehow been dreamt up are factually wrong.

My involvement began in 1988 when, looking at corruption in the London Borough of Lambeth, I was told that when boys left children's homes—boys over 16, therefore—they were being cajoled into prostitution. That was being done through various bars in the borough. There were suggestions about how and where, and that was all given to the police. I was told of a place that I had never heard of called Dolphin Square, which was one of the places where those boys were going to parties that involved Members of Parliament. I will refrain from giving the detail I was given. It was given to the police at the time and it has been given many times since. The police told me about a year into that investigation that somebody on high had curtailed the investigation—stopped it. I know; I was there. That is what happened.

Then, several years later, in 1994, Inspector Clive Driscoll, who was looking at a different, possibly related sex abuse scandal in the same borough came to see me. He was taken off his investigations and told to stop investigating. It now transpires that at Coronation Buildings in Lambeth in 1980 another police investigation was curtailed. In that case, special branch moved in to stop it. Therefore, we know that three separate investigations mysteriously disappeared and, in one case, I was there when that happened.

I have no intention of naming names, not because of the advice given, but because that is not appropriate. I do not know who is guilty. That is not my job. It is not

the job of any MP and I have never done that. Let me therefore correct the record. One newspaper, *The Mail on Sunday*, suggested that I had named a Member of Parliament. That is factually inaccurate; it is not true. The story was fabricated. It was taken—I think as a spoiler—from a newspaper called *The Sun*, which said that two MPs had made various allegations. Not true. There are not two MPs and I am not an MP involved in doing that. If I was, I would not have named anyone; I would have given the evidence to the police and kept my mouth shut. It is fair to say that I have given information—evidence in some cases—to various police forces and some of that involved prominent people. I am not naming those people, I have not done that and I will not, because it is for the police to investigate and make a case for prosecution in the courts if they feel that is appropriate. My criticism and complaint is about where that does not happen. It is important that those matters are clarified immediately.

Look at the scale of what is going on. I believe there was a further arrest just this afternoon, but so far in north Wales a whole series of people have been arrested and jailed. That is also the case in other parts of the country. According to Simon Bailey, the chief constable of Norfolk constabulary, there are at the moment 89 national or local politicians, 145 radio, TV and film persons, 38 music industry persons and 15 people from the world of sport under investigation, as well as 2,016 others, including people from religious institutions, teachers and careworkers. That is what the police said to the Society of Editors on 19 October this year. Operation Pallial in north Wales has made over 40 arrests. In Lambeth, people have been jailed—in other words, they were successfully prosecuted. The idea that this stuff is in some way fanciful or made up is again not proven by the facts. The commentators who suggest that are wrong—very sadly wrong.

Let me talk about Nottinghamshire. A gentleman came to see me; he flew in from Canada for a 20-minute meeting—he had not been in this country for 30 years—about an allegation in relation to the Ashley House children's home in my constituency, which he and I knew could not be prosecuted. It was not possible. For a 20-minute meeting—he flew in and flew out just to tell me that. He was not making it up.

The woman who claims to have been abused at Skegby Hall near my constituency and at various other locations is not making it up. The dozens of children at Beechwood in Nottingham who made detailed allegations are not making it up. Those who have come to me in relation to schools and churches or family abuse, including rape as young children, are not making it up. People do not go to their own MP and make this kind of thing up.

The man who came to me alleging that he, aged 11, was forced to work in a foundry full time, and before that, from the age of eight, was forced to work in a field, gave precise locations and precise names. He has a full file of precise records. He is not making it up; he is telling the truth about what happened. The whole issue of children being sold on to farms as slave labour is a scandal yet to emerge in this country. It is a part of this big, historic problem and more will emerge from that.

That is not the conspiracy. The conspiracy was the conspiracy of silence at the time—the conspiracy of connivance, the conspiracy of cover-up. That is the conspiracy. Do you know what the man who was enslaved

[John Mann]

wants more than anything? Strangely, because he never went to school, he cannot read and write, so he wants literacy lessons. This is my battle at the moment. I have a letter on it that arrived in the last hour from a county council that has given him five literacy lessons, questioning whether he needs more, when he was not allowed to go to school because he was enslaved. That is the cost of child abuse in this country.

This debate is about people like that man, who are living with this stuff today. There are people whose lives have been diverted, with many going abroad. Some have channelled it into great success, by being single-minded about their goals in life, but others are very damaged, and many lives have been totally destroyed. These campaigners are not going to go away, because they know what happened. I am fortunate. I was never beaten as a kid; I was not sold or raped as a child, but I have met lots of people who were. Some of the names are jaw-dropping. They are not going to go public, for lots of good reasons, and that is their choice, but the numbers coming forward and who have confided in me are extraordinary. They are not asking for anything to be done; they are supporting the campaign. They do not want to re-live their trauma. The scale of the problem is absolutely phenomenal. I know there will be some sceptics about what I am going to say, and all I can say to them is, "Open your eyes and ears. See and hear what is going on." What is under the surface will always be far bigger than what has emerged.

My approach is to give absolutely everything to the police. Material I have seen recently relating to the Dickens dossier incorporates stuff relevant to North Wales police and to other forces. I will not go into details, because that would prejudice those investigations, but there are dozens of documents that are hugely important.

There were two Dickens files. I have met someone who has not come forward because of the Official Secrets Act but who saw the first Dickens file. There were approximately 16 names in it; they were cross-party and not all were well known, but some of them were. That was the result of research done by Geoffrey Dickens. I do not know whether it is true or not, but I do not know that he gave the file to Leon Brittan in November 1983.

On 18 January 1984, a second person gave a second file to Geoffrey Dickens. I have a copy of that file, which I call the second Dickens dossier, and so do the police. The information in it was provided by two former Conservative MPs, Sir Victor Raikes, the former Member for Liverpool Garston, and Commander Anthony Courtney, a former British Navy intelligence officer and former Member for Harrow East. There was an internal battle going on within the Conservative party, specifically within the Monday club—they were both key figures in that—with a new organisation, the Young Monday club. They were part of that factional battle, and the second file emerged because of it. I do not think that they thought that what they described in the file as paedophilia was of particular importance other than for doing the other side in.

What is significant is the details, the allegations that were made and the fact that those allegations were not investigated. The file is unambiguous. I have an original. I have met, spoken to and got a copy from the person who personally handed it to Geoffrey Dickens, who in

turn then personally gave it to Leon Brittan. In the first line, it says, "GK Young heads up a Powellite faction known as Tory Action." George Kennedy Young, now long dead, was deputy director of MI6. The allegation is that he manipulated a group of people, and that, within that, there were paedophile rings. The file goes into detail about who it is alleged was involved and where. I will not give all the locations because I think some would be sensitive and might identify people, but London is one, Greater Manchester another, and North Yorkshire is a third. I should stress to any journalists listening, that Mr Leon Brittan is obviously not in that file, or indeed the other Dickens file. Geoffrey Dickens was not stupid. He did not give Leon Brittan a file that named Leon Brittan, but there are lots of other names in there.

The file is intriguing, to say the least. Information and allegations in it include allegations of sex with children, names of people alleged to be involved, and suggestions both of locations, including one precise location, and of a third-party organisation that was directly involved. I will not name that organisation. It will all come out—there is no reason why it should not—but it would not help the police if it came out today. It would be a pretty straightforward investigation for the police to look into the precise location that is in the file, but there was no investigation. The question is, why not?

It is worth saying one other thing about George Kennedy Young. He was involved in many dubious activities; he tried to get some kind of private army called "Unison" going. I have seen a range of background documents that would be of interest to anyone campaigning on the Shrewsbury pickets and on infiltration of the miners' strike, with names that correlate. There are a lot of allegations about him attempting to undermine both the Heath and the Wilson Governments. He was clearly a manipulator, and is key to what was going on. I do not know why he is so prominent or why the Society for Individual Freedom, which he set up, is named in this, but he is a significant figure and that may give some sort of reason for why things then disappeared.

After the review by Mr Wanless and Mr Whittam, the Prime Minister said that their report meant that

"people who've been looking for conspiracy theories will have to look elsewhere."

I am not looking for a conspiracy theory. To me, this stuff is fairly simple. There are always simple explanations. But we do not need to look elsewhere any more. I have here a copy of part of what I call Dickens dossier No. 2. It went to Leon Brittan at the time. We need to know why it then disappeared, what happened to it and where the Home Office investigation into it went. Why did the file disappear when such serious allegations are made within it? It is incongruous that there could be no investigation, given the information in here. It is not possible that this dossier would not raise all sorts of issues.

I could reveal more from other documents I have seen, from the same person, that suggest that quite a lot of people were aware of the issues, but it would be inappropriate. I am certain that some people who are named in the file were on the periphery—not involved in anything that could be described as child abuse, but a bit too close for comfort in terms of embarrassment—and they knew some of the sorts of things that might have been going on and had suspicions. I think those people are guilty of nothing other than a loose connection—being

at various events or venues—but they know things. It is clear from correspondence I have seen that some of them must know things.

Part of the problem is that when we talk about paedophilia, most people think we mean under-16s. But at the time the term could be used in relation to 16 to 21-year-old men. With Dolphin Square and Lambeth, the issue is the allegations about Members of Parliament paying for sex with boys over 16 who had been procured from Lambeth children's homes after they had left them. I would call that major sleaze, but at the time, it was illegal. The file also alleges things involving children younger than that. I do not know—I have not got a clue—whether any of it is true, or what bits are true, but there is sufficient information for a major police investigation.

That is why it is absolutely critical that the lid is lifted. We need to know where the file went, why it disappeared and what is going to happen now. The original is with the police. Why did the Home Office and the whole of Government fail to come up with that document, when it had been given to Leon Brittan in 1984? I think the answer to that question will unlock part of the cover-up of the time, explain it and help the police. It is imperative that the Government now reopen the Wanless and Whittam investigation to see why they were not given the file at the time by someone in the Home Office, and why civil servants at the time did not co-operate.

4.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Ms Vaz. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) on securing the debate and on the points he raised. He has been a tenacious and very determined campaigner on this matter.

Before dealing with the specifics of the Wanless review and the Dickens file, it is important to highlight that tackling child sexual abuse is a top priority for this Government. Victims should, and increasingly do, feel able to come forward to report abuse to the police and get the support they need. We have been consistently clear that when an allegation of child sexual abuse is made, whether it occurred now or in the past, it must be thoroughly investigated by the police, so that the facts can be established. Let me be clear: the Government are determined that forces should do everything they can to bring perpetrators of child sexual abuse to justice. Child sexual abuse now has the status of a national threat in the strategic policing requirement, meaning that forces are able to maximise specialist skills and expertise in both preventing and investigating allegations of offending. Police forces and police and crime commissioners must have the capabilities they need to protect children from sexual abuse.

It is sadly only too true that in the past, these horrific crimes were not always given the priority they should have had. We are appalled that abuse was allowed to proliferate in the very institutions where children should have been most protected: schools, hospitals and care homes. Child sexual abuse is now rightly centre stage as an issue that we must confront. I want to be clear—the hon. Gentleman alluded to this—that it is incredibly important that victims feel they can come forward, and will be listened to and believed.

Tackling this issue is a shared effort. The “Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation” report, published in March, sets out the national policy response to the failures seen in towns such as Rotherham, Manchester and Oxford. Collectively, the actions in that report will: strengthen accountability and leadership in professions and local government; address the culture of inaction and denial that led to victims being dismissed and ignored; improve joint working and information sharing, so that agencies intervene early; strengthen the protection of children who are at risk; reinforce law enforcement efforts to stop offenders; and provide greater support for victims and survivors. It is a wide-reaching and ambitious programme of work, driven forward at pace by an inter-ministerial group chaired by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, who shares my deep personal commitment to this important work. I am sure that that broad range of activity will confirm to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw that this Government are absolutely committed to learning from the failures of the past and ensuring they do not recur.

In that context, I turn to the so-called Dickens dossier and the Wanless and Whittam review, which the hon. Gentleman spoke about. It may be helpful if I set out the circumstances and findings of that review. In July 2014, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the Home Office permanent secretary approached Peter Wanless, chief executive officer of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and Richard Whittam, QC, to ask them to conduct a review of two independent investigations in respect of information the Home Office received about child sexual abuse between 1979 and 1999. Peter Wanless and Richard Whittam, QC, were chosen as esteemed, highly experienced and knowledgeable individuals in the field. Their review and findings were published last November.

The Wanless and Whittam review focused in part on how the Home Office responded to information relating to the Dickens file, as well as how the police acted on any information passed to them at the time. As referenced in their report, Peter Wanless and Richard Whittam, QC, were given free access to the Home Office's filing system. They also undertook wider searches in other Departments and agencies, and their requests were complied with. Among their conclusions was the following statement:

“It is very difficult to prove anything definitive based on imperfectly operated paper records system at 30 years remove.

Whilst a sophisticated cover up would be unlikely to leave papers in the general registry system of a major Government Department, extensive searches of paper records for the period, well beyond the Home Office itself, have not uncovered any evidence of organised attempts by the Home Office to conceal child abuse, either in specific documents retained by them or others, or through an obvious pattern of destroyed files.”

Their work shows that the original reviews did not cover anything up, and it neither proves nor disproves that the Home Office acted inappropriately. Likewise, they do not prove or disprove that public money ever found its way to the Paedophile Information Exchange, but they make clear that they saw

“no evidence to suggest PIE was ever funded by the Home Office because of sympathy for its aims.”

Wanless and Whittam made three sets of recommendations for the Home Office, all of which related to how the Department dealt with sensitive allegations, how officials passed such information on to the police, and how the details of those allegations were

[*Karen Bradley*]

properly recorded. The permanent secretary accepted all three sets of recommendations, and the Home Office has undertaken considerable work to implement them in the year since the report was published.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Bassetlaw on locating material that he believes constitutes the so-called Dickens dossier. I am unable to offer an explanation as to why he has apparently been able to locate those documents when the Home Office has not. I can only refer to the outcome of the diligent work by Mr Wanless and Mr Whittam, who met with the hon. Gentleman during their review. I reiterate that neither they nor the previous independent reviewer were able to identify a Dickens dossier within the Department's holdings.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for passing whatever information he has to the Metropolitan Police Service. It is not for the Home Office, or for me in my role as Minister with responsibility for preventing abuse and exploitation, to comment on or intervene in individual ongoing investigations. As such, I will not comment or speculate on what might be in those papers. It is right and proper that any material relevant to the matter or any allegation of child sexual abuse be passed to the police so that it can be properly investigated. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on doing just that. I understand the police are reviewing the documents passed to them, and I look forward to hearing the outcome.

As I said, it is vital that victims and survivors report the abuse they have suffered so that it can be investigated and the truth can be established. The Government are determined that no stone shall be left unturned in pursuit of that aim. That is why my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has established an independent

statutory inquiry on child sexual abuse. The inquiry will challenge institutions and individuals without fear or favour, and will get to the truth. Justice Goddard is leading the inquiry's important work, and is grasping this once-in-a-generation opportunity to expose what has gone wrong in the past and learn lessons for the future. The right place for further consideration of the Home Office's or other institutions' handling of the so-called Dickens dossier and other non-recent abuse allegations is the inquiry, which is free to consider evidence from any point in the past without restrictions and has the power to compel witnesses and call for evidence.

We are committed to the inquiry having the full co-operation of Government and access to all relevant information, including secret information where appropriate. Although it would not be appropriate to give a blanket undertaking that people who have signed the Official Secrets Act will not be prosecuted for reporting information relating to possible child sex abuse offences, the Attorney General gave an undertaking on 15 June that no document or evidence provided to the inquiry would result in, or be used in, any prosecution under the Official Secrets Act, or any prosecution for unlawful possession of the evidence in question.

Finally—I cannot emphasise this point enough—the Home Secretary has been clear that it is vital that the whole Government fully co-operate with the inquiry on its important work. All Departments must and will ensure that they have the systems and processes in place to do so. I assure the hon. Member for Bassetlaw that the Government are determined to uncover the truth. We must all work together to ensure that the inquiry is able to do so.

Question put and agreed to.

Care Homes (Regulation)

4.30 pm

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered regulation of care homes.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Ms Vaz. The purpose of today's debate is to highlight what I believe to be serious shortfalls in the current system for the regulation, inspection and investigation of private care homes and nursing homes. At the moment, I believe, quite simply, that we are letting people down—the people who are least able to speak up for themselves. They are the estimated 300,000 older people who currently live in around 17,000 registered care homes in England. Their average age is 85 and a significant proportion suffer from dementia. They are people largely without a voice and that, I believe, needs to change.

Two and a half years ago, some time before being elected to this place, I was contacted by a constituent in North Devon. He told me the very moving story of his mother, a former resident at a private care home, who had died in 2009. Her son believed then, and still believes to this day, that there are serious questions about the care that she received in the final months and weeks of her life.

In the following years, my constituent has pursued all the avenues open to him to have his mother's case fully investigated. Invariably, though, he hit a brick wall, so he began to look beyond his individual case at the more general question of how care homes are regulated and complaints investigated. He came to the conclusion that the current system is simply not fit for purpose. It is a conclusion that I share, which is why I sought today's debate.

Let me stress that this debate is not about my constituent's individual, specific case. I do not seek to reopen it nor to raise any questions about the standard of care in that establishment today, six years on. Indeed, last night, I spoke to a senior director at the home's parent company to give her that assurance, which she accepted. However, my constituent's individual case is the starting point. That is how it must be, because at the heart of this issue are people, and we must always remember that when we talk about systems, institutions and processes. It is the people who matter, and at the moment, I believe that we are letting them down.

To seek evidence for that, we have to look no further than the website of the Care Quality Commission, the body that currently has responsibility for the regulation and inspection of care homes. Today, that website tells us that of the 700 care homes most recently inspected by the CQC, a staggering 44% have been rated as either "Requires improvement" or "Inadequate". There is no reason to believe that those figures are unrepresentative of the sector as a whole, so that means that four in 10 of all establishments are not currently reaching the required standard. Surely the purpose of any system of inspection and regulation must be to drive up standards. Those figures alone, therefore, suggest that currently the system is simply not working.

Let us look at that system, because it has undergone some significant changes in the recent past, and indeed it still is undergoing change, even as we speak today. It seems to be a process, however, that in its fluidity is

encountering considerable difficulty. We are in a flexible mode, I think it is fair to say, as far as the CQC's arrangements are concerned.

In June 2013, the CQC issued a consultation called "A new start", which proposed a whole new approach to inspection across all sectors, including care homes. That approach was confirmed in October two years ago, and the new provider handbook for residential care came into effect from 9 October last year. In April this year, the CQC introduced a special measures regime, as it was called, for failing services. However, it is clear that there are problems in the implementation of some of those new processes.

The CQC's most recent publication, which was published as recently as 28 October, is called "Building on strong foundations"—I have a copy here, hot off the press. It sets out

"some of the choices it faces in responding to changes to how health and social care is delivered".

Well, it must face some pretty tough choices, because it is pretty clear that what it seeks to do in changing its processes is not fully working.

Let me quote an article from *The Guardian*, which I admit is not one of my usual media choices. The columnist, Michele Hanson, wrote on 28 September this year:

"Do you fancy being a CQC inspector? You can. Anyone can. You don't have to be a social care expert, just have a six-week induction course. And luckily, once you start inspecting, you don't have to inspect everything. You can just inspect a couple of the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE), because they're not all mandatory."

The article goes on to say:

"You can leave out management of medication, or quality of life, or complaints, and you can inspect different KLOEs in different homes, which means you can't compare"

what is good and what is not good. She concludes:

"Which is perhaps why our local care home, rated 'excellent' by CQC"

was exposed on the television a short time afterwards

"over the fearful abuse of one resident".

Clearly, something is wrong with the system. What is the cause of that? It seems, as I said, that the CQC has encountered particular problems recruiting sufficient expert inspectors. In July this year, the National Audit Office found that just 9% of care homes have so far been assessed, because of a shortfall of 160 inspectors. Indeed, the February 2016 deadline to complete the work has now been pushed back to next October.

I have a great deal of respect for the many hard-working staff at care homes and at the CQC. Those care homes in particular receive low wages for a job that I would never want to do. I also have some sympathy for the many care home providers who are having to cope with the ever-changing regulation regime. The goalposts are constantly moving, and it is costly for those care home providers to comply with the system. Care homes have to pay to be registered by the CQC, and, depending on how many residents they have, the cost can be anything from £276 to more than £13,000 a year. It is fairly obvious where those costs are going to be passed on to.

Let us make no mistake. In cases where something goes wrong, it is the care homes and the people who own and manage them who bear the ultimate responsibility for getting things right, but the regulatory framework

[Peter Heaton-Jones]

that we—the state—impose has to help them, encourage them, and yes, force them to improve. At the moment, it does not.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful case and is clearly a strong advocate for fairness and transparency in the care home sector. On whether providers are being managed in the right way by the CQC, is not the point that they have said to Department for Business, Innovation and Skills that they feel that they are being asked to provide paperwork and not care, and that there is sometimes duplication between the local authority and the CQC in how the sector is regulated?

Peter Heaton-Jones: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point. This must be about the elderly people who are in the care homes. They must be the entire focus of those who work in, manage and own those care homes, not the bureaucracy and the paperwork.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate, and it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. You will remember that we looked at this issue in the Select Committee on Health in the last Session, as will the shadow Minister. We welcomed the new inspection regime, but I seem to remember that one criticism we had in discussions in the Committee related to the fact that we are dealing with often very elderly, very frail people who cannot speak for themselves, and one thing that the CQC could perhaps do better is engagement with families. That is not just after an inspection, when everything is all right. It needs to ensure that family members of those in care homes understand what the inspection regime is and how they can engage with it before, after and during the process. Although some of the changes have been positive and there is now perhaps better regulation in England, the people whom we ask to give feedback are often not able to speak for themselves, so we need to engage families much better.

Peter Heaton-Jones: My hon. Friend makes an extremely pertinent point, and I will talk about some challenges in the entire system when it comes to engaging with people. As he rightly says, people have difficulty in understanding the best way to engage with the system.

When things go wrong and a member of the public needs to raise a complaint against a care home, I am afraid the system becomes even less satisfactory. The CQC's website says that it

“is unable to investigate individual complaints”

against providers. So how does someone complain if something goes wrong and they are worried about the care that is being given to an elderly relative in a care home? It is difficult. What can someone do if they fear that an elderly relative is being neglected, mistreated or not given the right healthcare, or if they fear that their relative's life might even be in danger and the care home provider has dismissed the complaint or will not listen to it? The CQC has that said it will not handle individual complaints, so should they go the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman? No, because the ombudsman says:

“By law, the Ombudsman cannot look into complaints about privately funded healthcare.”

If someone tries to go to the ombudsman they reach a brick wall. The CQC will not handle individual complaints and the ombudsman does not accept them. There is one possibility: an organisation called the Independent Healthcare Sector Complaints Adjudication Service. The ombudsman's website states that “you may”—I stress “may”—

“have the option of going to the Independent Sector Complaints Adjudication Service... which represents some independent healthcare providers.”

If someone's healthcare provider is not one of them, they are stuck.

The system is bewildering. It lacks accountability and transparency, and would leave most people confused and frustrated. How are people in care homes supposed to deal with that bewildering system? They may be vulnerable, old and frail and perhaps suffering from dementia. Their loved ones might put all their time and energy into caring for them, but how are they supposed to navigate the system? It needs to change.

What changes am I proposing to try to put right some of the issues I have highlighted? Despite the best efforts of the CQC—I say again that this is not a criticism of individuals at the CQC, much less those who work in care homes—I am afraid that, as currently manifested, it is simply not fit for purpose when it comes to the regulation, inspection and investigation of standards in care homes. Its focus recently has rightly been on NHS hospitals and providers. In light of the Mid Staffordshire scandal and the findings of the Francis report, that is hardly surprising—indeed, it is right—but the unintended consequence has been insufficient focus on the private care home sector.

In the short term, we must hold the CQC to account and insist on significant improvements now, because the situation needs to be addressed immediately. In the long term, it seems to me that the solution is to create a new, single, dedicated body whose sole responsibility is the registration, regulation and inspection of private care homes. Crucially, that body should also be the first point of contact for anyone wanting to raise a complaint about a specific establishment or the care of an individual patient. It would have the responsibility and necessary powers and resources to investigate those complaints thoroughly and rigorously, and in real time.

At the moment, if someone has an immediate concern about the care being given to an elderly relative and the care home either disagrees or denies that there is a problem, there is nothing to be done and nowhere to turn. That could be a matter of life and death. It needs to change, and it needs to change urgently. When things need to be taken further, we need a complaints system that is easier for the public to access and more transparent, and whose findings are accountable to Parliament in individual cases. The current complaints infrastructure is bewildering and is just not working.

My constituent to whom I referred at the start of my speech has lived with the problem for the past six years. Over that time, he has invested a great deal of work, research and thought in it. It has been his life, and it has undoubtedly been part of the grieving process for his mother. He has produced a document that is the product of a lot of work, and I have it here. It contains 24 very detailed points, questions, proposals and recommendations. He is frustrated that despite his best efforts and with a

few notable exceptions, the issue has been largely ignored by the media and not given sufficient focus by politicians. That is something I want to put right today.

In the many hours my constituent and I have spent discussing the issue, we keep coming back to one thing. It is not about processes, systems or organisations, it is about people—people who do not have a voice in a system in which, let us remember, four in 10 care homes currently fail to reach a satisfactory standard on the CQC's own measures. That means that people—vulnerable, sick and elderly people—are not being properly cared for. That cannot be right. We must do something about it. I believe we have a moral duty to do something about it, and that we must act now.

4.46 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you for calling me, Ms Vaz. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones) on bringing this topic to Westminster Hall, setting the scene and explaining its importance from his personal experience and knowledge.

Care homes should and must provide care and services to some of the most vulnerable in society. I believe and the House believes that those who have worked hard and have contributed to society and the economy all their lives deserve appropriate care and dignity in their old age. We have the opportunity to be a voice for those who cannot be a voice for themselves. That is the issue the hon. Gentleman has brought to the House today. The people involved are often at the fringes of society and are of all ages. Many people in care homes do not have immediate family and that is another concern. We read stories in the press and we may be suspicious of them, but they illustrate the problem. There is no smoke without fire, so if there is a story in the press there must be at least some truth in the story.

Some people may be physically unable to look after themselves, including those who are elderly or have learning difficulties, dementia or Alzheimer's. They deserve the very best care in care homes and their families need the assurance that they are well looked after. If someone has dementia, Alzheimer's or a physical disability, they deserve the same treatment and care as others to ensure that their meals are correct and that they are given a wee bit of time, compassion and understanding, as the hon. Gentleman said. It is imperative to do all we can to protect those in care homes and to ensure that they receive the care and dignity they deserve.

I welcome the opportunity to question how the Government intend to improve regulation of the industry so that the people who are cared for are protected. I am always a bit suspicious of statistics—as the saying goes, there are lies, damned lies and statistics—but they are clear. Only 64% of care service providers in England are registered with the Care Quality Commission, so there is a question to be answered. I have great respect for the Minister's understanding and I think the world of him, so I am sure that in his response we will hear the compassionate understanding that he feels personally and as a Minister. I look forward to that.

The Care Quality Commission monitors and regulates care organisations to ensure that they are continuing to meet national standards, and herein we encounter the first issue about regulating care homes. We need to press for much higher levels of registration if we are even to think about improving regulation. We cannot improve

regulation if we do not have registration. I hope that we can make higher levels of registration a key part not just of this debate, but of the Government response. We cannot improve regulation if 36% of care service providers are not registered with the main body for monitoring and regulating the industry. Indeed, we should express immediate concern about whether those unregistered care providers are up to the national standard. I am not saying that they are not, but Government observation and monitoring is needed to ensure that they are.

Last year, following years of scandals, the Care Quality Commission announced that it would reinspect all care services and then rate them individually. We do not want to go into too much detail about the most horrible stories and incidents, but they do resonate with all of us as elected representatives. Care homes judged to be inadequate would be shut down and their directors banned from working in such positions again.

Andrew Percy: The hon. Gentleman is making a very important speech. He references the examples of abuse, mainly involving physical abuse, that we have heard about. Does he share my concern that in other care homes the problem is not physical abuse, but people not receiving proper nutrition? It is a national scandal that £13 billion of NHS money is spent every year dealing with poor nutrition, much of it in the elderly population. There are no doubt some very good nursing homes and care homes, but the quality of the food in homes often contributes to the decline of residents, and the CQC needs to get a handle on that as well.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention; he is right. I tried to make the point earlier about the food that residents eat and its nutritional value, and about the time that may need to be spent looking after someone and feeding them. I thank the hon. Gentleman for highlighting another very important issue.

The National Audit Office found that just 9% of services had been assessed as of July this year, despite the deadline for inspections being February next year—a deadline that has been pushed back. Obviously, the February deadline cannot now be met, because 91% of homes cannot be inspected in that time, but perhaps when the Minister responds we can get an idea of a new deadline in relation to the inspection regime.

However well intended the Care Quality Commission system is, there are clear failings in the current way of doing things, and today's debate gives us the opportunity to discuss the way ahead in terms of improving the poor rate of inspection. The right hon. and hon. Members who are here will illustrate that very clearly. Concerns have been raised across the political spectrum, both in newspapers and by political representatives, and I hope that the solution to those concerns can also be found on a cross-party, bipartisan basis. After all, this matter concerns us all. It is not a matter of scoring points—it is never that with me anyway, but it certainly is not with anyone in this debate, because we all have the same focus and commitment to delivery of the same level of care and to ensuring that all homes reach a certain level.

We have had many issues in the past in Northern Ireland. I know that this is a devolved matter and the responsibility of someone else, but having the appropriate protection and regulation is so important to ensuring

[Jim Shannon]

that abuses are not happening. The historical and the up-to-date abuse cases that we see in the papers need to become a thing of the past.

We can come together from both sides of the House, set the right course, address the issues and hopefully, through the Minister and the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), provide some direction in relation to the solutions. I hope that my contribution and the issues I raised have been noted by the Minister—indeed, I know that they have been—and that they will prove useful to eliciting a strategy and a response from Government to ensure that this matter is addressed correctly as a matter of urgency, as the hon. Member for North Devon said, and to the best of our ability.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Valerie Vaz (in the Chair): Order. I intend to start the winding-up speeches at 10 past 5.

4.54 pm

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): Thank you, Ms Vaz. I shall endeavour to speed through my comments. First, I commend my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones). We are both MPs from the south-west, and our constituencies have a significant number of elderly residents and therefore of care homes and nursing homes. The issue he raises is crucial, but perhaps I can take the opportunity to broaden the debate, because I believe that the problem is not as simple as just the CQC. Many of his points about the CQC were well put, but this is a broader challenge.

I shall start by explaining that nine statutory bodies—all independent and all accountable to Parliament—are overseen by the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care, so it is a question of looking not just at the CQC, but at all those bodies together. You can appreciate, Ms Vaz, that nine bodies will inevitably have various sets of regulations, which will not necessarily be consistent and work well together. Indeed, the Professional Standards Authority report in 2015 made it clear that the regulatory framework was unfit for purpose.

However, this is not just about the regulatory framework; it is broader than that, too. Rules and regulations do not make people good. Regulation is about trying to ensure best practice and that those who default are made to sort the situation out. As my hon. Friend said, too much bureaucracy takes the care out of caring, and this is really about care. It should not be about bureaucracy—box-ticking. It should be about ensuring that elderly residents are properly respected and cared for.

The Professional Standards Authority has concluded—unsurprisingly, given its oversight of nine authorities—that less is actually more. It suggests that we need a new framework and that we should look at sharing objectives across all the regulators and sharing the theories of what works so that there is a consistent approach. Most importantly, we should rebuild the trust among the professionals, the public and the regulator, because at the moment there is an awful lot of mudslinging among the three and that is not helpful. What we need is a good system that works for our society. We also need proper risk assessment models to ensure that we are looking at the things that really matter and actually put residents at risk.

There are, inevitably and tragically, many cases that none of us want to be repeated. It almost goes without saying—my hon. Friend has already made it clear—that there are plenty of examples. Indeed, the statistics demonstrate that there is clearly something wrong. The report “The state of health care and adult social care in England 2014/15” showed that 60% of providers found to be inadequate were not improving, so there is clearly something not quite right. In Bedfordshire the Old Village School home managed to go from “good” to closure within six months; previously it had been excellent. There is clearly something at the root of this that is not just about regulation and bureaucracy, but is more fundamental.

Before I move to that broad picture, I have a couple more thoughts on the Care Quality Commission itself. I have met Andrea Sutcliffe on a number of occasions and I believe that she is cognisant of and takes seriously the concerns raised by my hon. Friend. However, there is a challenge, which is that the remit of the CQC was expanded to cover so much that in reality it is almost inconceivable that it could do the job properly, to the right standards, given how stretched it is. Indeed, in its own survey in 2014, 40% of CQC staff felt that they were not adequately trained. There is clearly a challenge—about regulation, about structure and about asking an organisation to do more than realistically it is capable of doing. If that is the case, we should not be surprised when things fall apart.

There was an interesting comment, however, from the National Audit Office. It said that the CQC does not know whether its model for predicting staff numbers is accurate enough. That, for me, goes to the heart of the matter. We can have as much regulation as we like, but if we do not have staffing right—if we do not have the right numbers or the budget to pay for them—inevitably, there will be huge problems.

I have looked at the care home reports for Teignbridge District Council in my constituency. The new regime and the five new tests came into play April this year, and the new tests are absolutely on point: the home must be safe, efficient, caring, responsive and well led. That is absolutely right. Twenty-one of the 70 care homes in the area have been inspected and 10 have been found to be good. I share my colleague’s concerns about the homes that were not found to be good, but I took to reading the reports to find out what they actually said. Although the reports covered 10 or 15 different areas, if I dug down to the root causes I found that they were really about staff and the adequacy of both numbers and training.

I meet people from my care homes regularly, every three months, and they tell me that if hon. Members do as I did, they will reach a similar conclusion—that it is a real challenge to find the managers needed to run the homes. Without those managers, the homes are found wanting but they have no ability to resolve the problem. There is a similar challenge in the shortage of nurses. Being a nurse in the care home sector is much more challenging, I think, than being a nurse in the NHS. Care home nurses often work on their own at night, whereas a nurse in an NHS hospital will be surrounded by lots of colleagues. In the care home sector, nurses often work with difficult individuals who have complex problems, often including dementia, with all its attendant behavioural complexities.

The feedback from those responsible for care homes in my constituency conveys much frustration. They understand the role of the CQC, but they feel deeply frustrated that they cannot always put right the things that are found to be wrong. That must be incredibly frustrating. They feel that there needs to be a new balance between scrutiny and support. Although they feel it is right that they are properly scrutinised, they also feel that there is a lack of support. I had the pleasure of talking to the Minister only yesterday, and he was at pains to tell me that the CQC was indeed endeavouring to provide such support. I said to him then, and I will repeat it today, “They don’t see it and they don’t feel it.”

In the old days, under the CQC’s predecessor, care homes received guidance as well as criticism. Because of the desire to separate the two, which I can understand conceptually, they now feel as though they are left on their own. I am proud of our Devon homes, because we have produced our own kitemark for dementia care, as a result of which the homes work together, peer review each other and provide their own training schemes. I think that that is a good way forward.

For me, the big question is: are we looking at everything that impacts the system that endeavours to provide care in care homes and nursing homes? I do not think that we are. There is a big piece missing—the commissioning. At the moment, we review and scrutinise the provision of care, but we do not scrutinise the commissioning done by local authorities and unitaries. If they do not get the commissioning right and ensure that the right providers are providing what is needed, the system will fall down. I have, for example, seen individuals placed in care homes who should be in nursing homes because they have needs that are well beyond the capabilities of a non-nursing care home. That is something that must be critically and urgently addressed.

I am also concerned that we should look in a fair and balanced way at what we are paying our providers. At the moment, commissioners are not in any way held to account for what they pay providers. There is no standard review of the pricing across the country. If pricing is worked out on an ad hoc basis, the amount of money that local authorities pay their providers will vary across the country. At the end of the day, however, although there will be minimal differences in some staffing costs, by and large the costs will not be as diverse as the pricing structure indicates. There needs to be a proper analysis of the prices paid and what we are getting for the money. Are we getting tin tacks, or are we getting platinum? Is the situation as diverse as I fear it is? As a civilised society, we need to determine what we should be giving our citizens, and we need to ensure that that is delivered consistently across the country. The failure to do so will give rise to safeguarding issues.

My final point on commissioning is that we should separate commissioning and provision. At the moment, a local authority can do both, so there is a potential conflict of interest. I am conscious of the fact that time is not in my favour and you would like me to move on, Ms Vaz. I have made most of the points that I wanted to make, so I will just say that dealing with that is a key issue. Regulation is only part of the problem. As the sun slowly comes out, we need to start to fix the roof, and this has to be a key part of that process. We need a proper system of care, not merely compliance. It needs to be properly funded, and staff need to be properly trained.

5.5 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I will be very brief, because I have already made the points I wanted to make about nutrition, and about family involvement and engagement in the inspection process. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones) on securing this debate on a subject that has always bothered me in my other role, which members of the Health Committee have heard a lot about, as a volunteer first responder with the ambulance service in Yorkshire. In that role, I have spent a lot of time in care homes, and there is a real mix of standards.

There are two things worth raising with the Minister that bother me and that, I hope, broadly come within the scope of this debate. One is the quality and dignity of care for elderly patients in care homes. When they need to be taken to hospital, they are often, sadly, taken on their own. I remember watching a very elderly lady who was having a suspected stroke on a hospital trolley at Scunthorpe hospital. She was alone and obviously very distressed. The ambulance crew were doing the best that they could, but they were booking her in and all the rest of it. I remember looking at her and thinking, “I would not want that to happen to my grandma.” That happens too often.

The second point is about the need for an understanding of palliative and end-of-life care in care homes. That is an issue of training and standards. I have been called to care homes where I have had to try to resuscitate people who are clearly at the end of life in a very unpleasant situation. We must get better at that, because we know what inevitably happens to many people in care homes before they even get to nursing homes, so proper training must be given. In that respect, proper standards of care and the quality of training of people working in care homes are in desperate need of improvement. In some areas and some care homes, those things are very good. I have a wonderful care home in my constituency, which has a cinema and a hairdresser, and it is lovely to go into. It does not have some of the problems found in other care homes. People have to pay for that, however, and only those who can afford to do so get it. Too many people cannot afford that, so they do not access the same quality of care or staff training. I hope that the Minister can respond to those two brief points.

5.8 pm

Natalie McGarry (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones) on securing this important debate. Ensuring that our older people, and those of a younger demographic who have complex needs, have access to high-quality care is a vital role and duty of any Government, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate. Across the political divide, and in all parts of the UK, our older people deserve comfort, dignity and decent care. Many important points have been raised, and I think we all agree that strong regulation must be in place to ensure that care facilities that provide vital support meet the highest possible standards. With an increasingly ageing population, that is a necessary consideration that transcends party politics. It is not for me—a Scottish National party MP for a Scottish constituency and a spokesperson for the party—to dictate English policy on a matter that is devolved to Scotland,

[Natalie McGarry]

but I hope that by sharing the approach we have taken in Scotland, I can help to inform the debate and show some examples of best practice.

Members have contributed thoughts and experiences from their constituencies. The hon. Member for North Devon made the important point that we are talking about people, not merely systems and processes. He was a powerful advocate for our agreeing to ensure quality care for everyone. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) constructively articulated the need for cross-party consensus and argued for compassion and care. The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) made a pertinent point about nutrition and standards, and spoke of the requirement to engage families in the care process. He brought his own experience to the debate. The hon. Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) successfully broadened the debate beyond the regulatory framework and the CQC, and raised a key concern about pay in the sector.

The debate has underlined the need to get things right for people in care everywhere. That was the key point of emphasis in our approach in Scotland, where Scottish Ministers have developed national care standards to ensure that everyone in Scotland receives the same high quality of care, no matter where they live. By articulating clear standards underpinned by the principles of dignity, privacy, choice, safety, realising potential, and equality and diversity, we are able to explain what someone can expect from any care service they use. The standards are written from the point of view of the person using the service, and help people to raise concerns or complaints.

Although the national care standards have served Scotland well, and ensured that we have a clear and robust regulation regime, the Scottish Government have committed to undertaking a review and are consulting the public on updating those standards. The SNP believes that the rights of our older people to decent care and dignity in care homes are human rights, and that is at the heart of the Scottish Government's consultation. The Care Inspectorate and Healthcare Improvement Scotland are asking everyone with an interest and involvement in health or social care—personal or professional—to take part in the consultation, which will help the standards evolve to meet the needs, rights and choices of people across Scotland. I especially urge anybody with experience of care homes to give their input to the process in Scotland, as the consultation closes on 10 December.

Standards of safety were addressed in Scotland's care homes following the tragic fire at Rosepark care home in Uddingston in 2011. In March 2014, the Scottish Government put revised guidelines in place to ensure the utmost standards of safety and care, and they continue to progress their improvement agenda. Improving safety, care and regulatory standards in care homes is a key priority for Members of all parties. The Rosepark case and the Scottish Government's response underscore the importance of learning lessons from failings.

We need an open and inclusive debate on standards in care homes that involves all parties and, most importantly, members of the public who use the services—a debate that carefully considers how we can improve the care experience for all. In the past 45 minutes, we have made at least some contribution to the wider debate. I thank

the hon. Member for North Devon for securing the debate, and I look forward to what I am sure will be a proactive and constructive response from the Minister.

5.13 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate with you as our chair, Ms Vaz. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones) on securing this debate on an extremely important issue. I have read the document he referred to, which was sent to me by his constituent. I sympathise with his constituent and others who have lost their loved ones in similar circumstances; those are tormenting times for people. If any patient is failed by the NHS or a care provider, we must ask them serious questions about what went wrong. We must try to ensure that no patient or family member has to go through a similar situation. Often, what family members want is for nobody else to have to suffer in the way that they have.

The regulation of care and nursing homes is extremely important, particularly as more people are likely to rely on those homes given our growing elderly population. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the CQC and its recent reports and developments. It said in its "State of Care" report that

"there is room for improvement across the whole of the adult social care sector."

That is a very damning conclusion for it to come to, having moved into social care and nursing care inspection. The hon. Gentleman referred to the statistics. Only around two thirds of social care provision was rated good or outstanding, and 7% of services were rated inadequate. It is of even more concern that fewer than half of nursing homes were rated good or outstanding; 10% received the lowest rating of inadequate. Out of 1,275 nursing homes that the CQC inspected, 127 homes were rated inadequate. That is very serious if we think about how many people are in those homes. Would any of us accept that standard for our grandparents, mothers, fathers, wives or husbands? Of course we would not. We would demand the highest standards for our family members, as the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) mentioned.

The CQC found examples of extremely bad practice, including a nursing home with an overpowering smell of urine and with mould on the walls, and a care home that did not administer medication properly. Recent evidence to the Public Accounts Committee showed that improvements were needed to the CQC's regulatory regime. However, the CQC now appears to be having to manage with fewer resources. I understand that it plans to pioneer a new approach of "co-regulation", with providers sending in

"self-assessments of how they think they're doing",

which the CQC would then verify. When less than 50% of nursing homes are judged to be good or outstanding and 10% are rated inadequate, I find that very concerning. This is not the time to move to a system of self-assessment—a move that seems to be driven by a projected cut to the CQC's resources. As the hon. Member for North Devon said, it already has serious staffing issues, with one third of its inspection positions vacant.

More needs to be done. We covered that well during the debate. I agree that more needs to be done to help families to raise cases of bad practice, so that lessons

can be learned—a point that the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) touched on when he talked about the CQC working better with families. Complaints about health and social care are dealt with by different services, which follow local complaints processes. The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman looks at complaints about the NHS, the independent Health and Social Care Advisory Service undertakes investigations, and the Local Government Ombudsman investigates issues regarding local authorities and adult social care. It is clear that care is changing, but care in nursing homes always spanned all those areas.

Vulnerable older people being cared for in nursing homes can rely on a variety of health and social care professionals. In nursing homes, older people often have a number of medical and care needs, which are dealt with by different people, including care assistants, nurses, GPs, and through hospital treatment and care. We need to ensure that the regulation of the sector takes that into account. When there are failures by multiple organisations, all those involved must be held to account. That very thing—the changeover—makes it difficult. How can the regulatory framework for nursing homes be improved to deal with that overlap? We are now talking about the integration of health and social care in Greater Manchester and other areas of the country, but we need a regulatory and complaints system that works with what we have. We should be striving for a health and social care system in which all older people receive the care that they need. If that does not happen, we need clear procedures enabling people to have their issues investigated. It is not clear where family members can go if they become alarmed that care is not being provided adequately.

The social care system helps some of the most vulnerable people in our society. When they do not have a voice, we must ensure that they are heard. In this debate we have heard some worrying statistics about care not being provided as it should have been. We need to improve our regulatory and complaints system, so that we learn from cases such as that of the constituent of the hon. Member for North Devon. I am glad that there has been quite a bit of consensus in the debate about the need to improve standards of care and regulation. We look to the Minister to tell us how that improvement might happen.

5.19 pm

The Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Vaz. You will not find a lack of consensus here today; I am glad to start off in that way.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones) on securing this debate, which has been really good. Colleagues have made some very moving and pertinent points. I find myself in the position that Ministers find themselves in; understandably, I have responsibility for an inspection and regulatory regime that we are all working hard to ensure does its job of protecting people in the manner that we all described. Inevitably, however, the issues that arise are always the things that go wrong. The question is how to strike the balance between, on the one hand, giving an assurance about the chief inspector of the Care Quality Commission, and the assurance that our degree of concern about what happens in care homes is

absolutely appropriate, and, on the other hand, in no way being complacent about the issues that colleagues spoke about, and about where the problems are. That is what I hope to address.

I am really appreciative of the contributions made. I will come to the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon in a moment. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) spoke with his usual decency and compassion. He wants speedier action, and he recognised our non-partisan sense of interest in those who require care. My hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot (Anne Marie Morris) made a number of interesting points, including about managers in care homes. When I have spoken to CQC officials and others, I have found that issue to be vital. If there is good management, it will be a good care home; if there is not, it will not be. The lack of registered managers is a genuine problem, and we are on to that. The issue of commissioning is also underplayed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) spoke movingly about the issue of loneliness and isolation. He talked about someone who was taken from a home in an emergency, needing urgent care, who found themselves on their own. That raises questions about the extent of care delivered to individuals in those circumstances, and I hope that anyone who heard that would question their procedures to ensure that it did not happen to anyone they were looking after.

This morning, I met Unison officials in the office and we had a word about training standards. We have to be absolutely certain that training is available for all who are active in care homes. As we know, there is the skills care certificate. However, I am led to believe that we cannot be sure that everyone is getting the training they need, and as a result of this conversation, I am really interested in finding out what more we can do to ensure that training is available for all.

Andrew Percy: One area of training where we really could help to take the pressure off the ambulance service is in relation to falls, which place a huge demand on our local health services. Paramedics often say to me that they feel those falls could be dealt with more appropriately by care home staff—or even avoided—if staff were trained properly.

Alistair Burt: I take my hon. Friend's point, which confirms what I was saying about the need for training, and for appropriate treatment and rehabilitation to be available after falls. The role of occupational therapists should not be minimised after such incidents.

I am all too willing to hear from the hon. Member for Glasgow East (Natalie McGarry). The fact that this matter is devolved is of no interest; what is important is that we share best practice and best standards of care. I very much appreciate her contribution. The hon. Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) again challenged me on what we are doing, and really is the meat of the remarks I prepared to give in response to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon; I am grateful to him for sharing those with us before the debate.

Let me put one or two things on the record. The Government are committed to improving the quality of adult social care, and to ensuring that people receive high-quality and compassionate care. We have taken a number of firm steps in that regard, and that is partly

[Alistair Burt]

because of the sort of issues raised today. However, we are in a relatively early phase of the use of the new powers given to the CQC, and in a sense this debate reflects the sort of baseline from which we all have to work.

My hon. Friend referred to the experiences of his constituent, whose mother died in a local care home, and he spoke powerfully about the frustration that his constituent experienced in raising concerns with the care home provider and other bodies, such as the CQC and the local clinical commissioning group. We offer our condolences to my hon. Friend's constituent, and I share his frustration that the experiences of service users and their families have not always been central to the provision of care or the oversight of regulation. I know that my hon. Friend's constituent has met senior staff at the CQC on more than one occasion, and I hope that those meetings were helpful to him. However, I appreciate that this debate is not an opportunity to reopen this case, which I know the CQC has investigated extremely thoroughly.

Picking up on some of the concerns expressed today, I want to reassure my hon. Friend that we have come a long way; we have made real improvements in the regulation of adult social care in quite a short time, but of course there is more to do. Our reforms to the CQC have been central to those improvements. The regulation of adult social care has three key roles: first, to identify poor practice and take action to protect service users from the risk of harm; secondly, to encourage improvement by identifying areas of weakness; and, thirdly, to highlight and share good practice and success. All these roles are built on the foundations of effective use of data and rigorous inspection. In that respect, the CQC has been transformed in recent years, not least by having been given new powers in 2014, which is obviously not all that long ago. Those powers need to be built on.

The CQC has put in place specialist inspection teams under the leadership of the chief inspector of adult social care. These teams include “experts by experience”—people who have personal experience of care—and inspections now take particular account of the views and experiences of the users of services and their families.

The great majority of CQC inspections are unannounced. In a very small number of cases, when there are good practical reasons for doing so, notice may be given, but in the vast majority of cases services are not tipped off or warned that an inspection team is on its way. Providers registered with the CQC are required to meet a new set of fundamental standards that govern the quality and safety of services. These standards only came into force on 1 April, but they are the standards of safety and quality that providers must always meet. The CQC has a range of enforcement powers that it can use against providers that breach these fundamental standards. These powers vary from issuing warning notices and fines and imposing conditions on a provider's registration, to cancelling registration, which withdraws a service's permission to operate, thus closing it.

The new fundamental standards include two important new registration requirements. The first—the duty of candour—requires providers to be open with service users about all aspects of their care, and to inform them

when there are failures in their care. The second—a “fit and proper person” requirement for directors—ensures that accountability for poor care can be traced all the way to the boardroom if necessary.

The CQC's model does not just assess whether providers are meeting the fundamental standards. The CQC asks five key questions of each service: is it safe? Is it caring? Is it effective? Is it responsive? Is it well led? All inspections deliver a rating for each of these five key questions on a scale running from “inadequate”, through “requires improvement” and “good”, to “outstanding”. Inspections also result in an overall rating for each location.

There was much talk about what has been found so far in relation to those ratings, with a small number of providers deemed to be “outstanding” and more providers deemed to be “good”. However, a number of providers were deemed to “require improvement” or be “inadequate”. In starting its inspection process, the CQC looked first at those providers that might have more difficulties than others. The CQC is aware of what is going on, and it started its inspections at the end of the scale where it expected to find difficulties. That was designed not to force closures, but to recognise where improvement and support, which my hon. Friend the Member for Newton Abbot mentioned, is so important. In 40% of those cases, improvement has been made; on a subsequent inspection, things were found to have improved. However, that still leaves a percentage of those providers having not improved, and I think it is those providers that have been highlighted today.

Having met Andrea Sutcliffe, I am quite confident that her determination is exactly the same as that of everyone in this room. However, it is clear that there are so many places to cover that we have to be certain of ensuring that the standards that we have spoken of, and that the CQC is working to, will be delivered by all providers. Those are standards in training, management and ensuring effective monitoring.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Devon used the phrase, “There's nowhere to go”, in relation to someone having concern about an individual. I would not want that to be the message; I would not want anyone to feel that they had nowhere to go if they felt that someone was at risk of being, or was being, ill-treated in a care home. That is not the case. The truth is that if someone has such a fear, they can contact the CQC, which will act if it agrees that a person's safety or wellbeing is at risk, and if need be the CQC will contact the police. I would not want anyone to think that if they knew of someone in a care home being ill-treated, there was nothing they could do as of this moment. They can and should do something.

However, it is also clear from the nature of the debate that if the CQC's most recent report has set a baseline, there are things that we need to do and improve. The sort of information available to us through our constituents, and the sort of interest that specialists such as those here have taken, will give me good guidance on how to ensure those improvements are seen through.

5.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No.10(14)).

Written Statements

Wednesday 4 November 2015

CABINET OFFICE

Strathclyde Review

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): The Government have commissioned Lord Strathclyde to lead a review into how to secure the decisive role of the elected House of Commons in the passage of legislation.

By long-standing convention the House of Lords does not seek to challenge the primacy of the elected House on spending and taxation. It also does not reject statutory instruments, save in exceptional circumstances. Until last month, only five statutory instruments had been rejected by the House of Lords since World War II, none of which related only to a matter of public spending and taxation.

The purpose of the review is to examine how to protect the ability of elected Governments to secure their business in Parliament in light of the operation of these conventions.

The review will consider in particular how to secure the decisive role of the elected House of Commons in relation to its primacy on financial matters, and secondary legislation.

Lord Strathclyde will be supported in his work by a small panel of experts:

Jacqy Sharpe, former Clerk of Legislation in the House of Commons and Clerk to the Joint Committee on Conventions in 2006;

Sir Stephen Laws, former First Parliamentary Counsel; and

Sir Michael Pownall, former Clerk of the Parliaments

Lord Strathclyde and the panel of experts will not be paid a fee for their work on the review. Lord Strathclyde will aim to submit his recommendations to the Prime Minister by the end of the year.

[HCWS292]

TREASURY

Fuel Duty Fraud

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Damian Hinds): The Government are committed to tackling fuel fraud. HMRC's oils fraud strategy has seen the UK tax gap for fuels reduce from £1.5 billion in 2002 to around £100 million in 2013-14. In Northern Ireland, where this issue has been a particular problem, the illicit market share has been reduced from 26% to 8% over the same period. However, the Government recognise there is no room for complacency.

One form of fuel fraud is fuel laundering—the removal of chemical dyes and covert markers from rebated fuel to give the appearance of legitimate road fuel. To tackle

this problem, the UK, together with the Republic of Ireland, introduced a new fuel marker, Accutrace, from 1 April 2015.

Since its introduction, HMRC have been monitoring its performance. I will deposit a copy of HMRC's evaluation, based on the first six months' worth of data, in the Library of the House.

The review suggests the new marker is having a positive effect, but it is too early to say if the reductions are sustained, or to establish causality. HMRC will continue to monitor the impact of the new fuel marker and will publish a further update on the first 12 months of data. HMRC will keep the fuel marker under constant review and will take further action if required.

[HCWS289]

EDUCATION

Design and Technology GCSE

The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb): We are reforming GCSEs to make sure that they give students the best possible preparation for further and higher education, and for employment. We want new GCSEs to set expectations which match those of the best education systems in the world, with rigorous assessment that provides a reliable measure of students' achievement. The reforms are extensive and represent a new qualification gold standard.

Today, I am publishing subject content for design and technology GCSE, for first teaching in 2017. This follows a public consultation which ran from 1 July 2015 until 26 August 2015. The new content moves the subject on from its craft based roots into a cutting edge qualification focused upon both design and making, that will better prepare students for further study and careers.

The content emphasises the iterative design processes that all students should understand and be able to demonstrate and which is at the core of contemporary practice. It will allow both breadth and depth of knowledge, without limiting students on the materials they can work with, enabling them to make choices appropriate to their design, rather than creating a design around a particular material.

The new GCSE also sets out in greater detail the mathematical and scientific content that students must know and understand in relation to design and technology.

These changes aim to ensure that all students have the knowledge and skills to design and make prototypes, using the best material, equipment and techniques, to solve real world and relevant problems across a range of contexts.

The new GCSE in design and technology will be introduced for first teaching in September 2017.

The GCSE content document, and the Government's response to the consultation are attached to this statement.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications>.

[HCWS290]

HEALTH

Junior Doctors Contract

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt):

This Government are completely committed to the values of the NHS—the same values that encourage aspiring doctors to take up a career in medicine.

Junior doctors are the backbone of the NHS, but the current contract has failed to prevent some working unsafe hours, and does not reward them fairly. We know also that they feel unsupported because consultants and diagnostic services are not always available in the evenings and at weekends.

Today a firm offer for a new contract has been published by NHS Employers. The new contract will be fairer for doctors, safer for patients and juniors alike, better for training, and will better support a seven day NHS.

This offer builds on the cast-iron guarantees that I have previously offered the British Medical Association (BMA) including that we would not remove a single penny from the junior doctors' pay bill, and we would maintain average earnings for junior doctors. The proposals offer an 11% increase to basic pay, with further increases linked to progressing through training and taking on roles with greater responsibility—instead of being based on time served.

Our ambition for the NHS to be the safest healthcare system in the world is underpinned by reducing, not increasing, the number of hours junior doctors work each week. Juniors will be supported by improved contractual safeguards—the best protection junior doctors have ever had against working long, intense and unsafe hours. For example, no junior will be required to work more than a weekly average of 48 hours without consent and those who opt out of that legal limit in the European working time directive will not be able to work more than a weekly average of 56 hours. The number of hours that can be worked in any single week by any junior will be limited to 72, down from 91; there will be a 13 hour limit on shifts; and there will be no more than five consecutive long days or four consecutive nights, compared to the current contract which permits seven consecutive night shifts or up to 12 consecutive day shifts.

Putting patients first is the responsibility of employers and staff. Where doctors are asked to work in conditions that they believe are unsafe, including being asked to work patterns that put patient safety at risk, they will be asked to use reporting mechanisms available to them to raise the issue with the board of their trust, and reporting data will now be available for the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to use during inspections. We would expect trust boards to look at any such report and decide how to respond to it; and we would expect the CQC, when it carries out an inspection, to look at how the board has responded to this and other data reporting safety incidents and concerns—a tough new measure to ensure safe working.

In order to better support a seven day NHS, basic pay will increase by 11 % to compensate for an extension in plain time working on Saturdays during the day and on weekday evenings, and there will be enhanced rates for hours worked at nights, on Saturday evenings and Sunday.

The Government have also decided that plain time will be extended only to 7pm on Saturdays, instead of 10pm on Saturdays, and want to improve training and ensure better clinical supervision from consultants as well.

We will offer new flexible pay premia for those training in hard-to-fill training programmes where there is the most need, such as general practice, emergency medicine and psychiatry, and we will protect the salaries of those who return or switch to training in these programmes. Junior doctors who take time off for academic research that is part of their NHS training, or which contributes to the wider NHS and improvements in patient care, will get additional pay premia to make sure they do not lose out.

Today, I have also written to all junior doctors in England confirming that no junior doctor working legal hours will receive a pay cut compared to their current contract during transition. Around three quarters will see an increase in pay and the rest will be protected. The exception to this is those who currently receive up to a 100% salary boost as compensation for working unsafe hours. Instead, new contractual safeguards will ensure they are not required to work unsafe hours at all. To see how the offer affects them, junior doctors can now log on to a pay calculator published by NHS Employers where they can calculate projected take home pay.

Our preference throughout has been, and continues to be, to reach agreement through negotiations. We have maintained that, in reforming the contract, we must put patients right at the heart of everything the NHS does every day of the week. A fair, sustainable contract with stronger safeguards, together with the greater availability of consultants at the weekends and evenings, is good for patients and good for junior doctors.

The details published today represent the Government's offer in England, which will be for doctors and dentists in postgraduate training programmes overseen by health education England.

Since they withdrew from negotiations in October 2014—despite agreeing the need for change as far back as 2008—the BMA have refused to return to the table. In light of today's announcement we hope that the BMA will now agree to return to negotiations.

[HCWS288]

PRIME MINISTER

Wilson Doctrine

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): On 17 November 1966, Harold Wilson made a statement to the House regarding the interception of the telephone calls of Members of Parliament. He said that there was to be no tapping of the telephones of Members of Parliament. If there was a development that required a change in the general policy then the Prime Minister would, at a moment as seemed compatible with the security of the country, on his own initiative, make a statement in the House about it. Together with a number of clarifications to that statement made by my predecessors over the years, this has become known as the Wilson doctrine.

One of the clarifications extended the doctrine to Members of the other place. Another extended it to electronic surveillance that is authorised under a warrant signed by a Secretary of State.

I, and my predecessors, have confirmed on numerous occasions that the Wilson doctrine continues to apply. This remains the case.

With the publication of the draft Investigatory Powers Bill today, and also prompted in part by a recent judgment of the Investigatory Powers Tribunal and the debate in this House on 19 October, I wanted to explain this Government's position on the Wilson doctrine.

First, the interception of communications of any person, including Members of Parliament is governed by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA). This, and the code of practice issued under it, set out a series of robust safeguards for any instance of interception. There is independent oversight from the Interception of Communications Commissioner. This is the current legal framework for the interception of communications.

Second, I do not believe the Wilson doctrine was, or is, an absolute bar to the targeted interception of the communications of Members of Parliament or an exemption from the legal regime governing interception. The Home Secretary has made that position clear in the House on a number of occasions. The doctrine recognised that there could be instances where interception might be necessary.

Third, some have assumed that the Wilson doctrine requires the Prime Minister of the day to approve any proposed instance of the targeted interception of a Member of Parliament. I do not believe the doctrine itself requires this. It simply indicates that in certain circumstances the Prime Minister would make a statement to the House at a time of his choosing when national security allows. However, it is the policy of this Government that if there was any proposal to target a Member's communications then I would be consulted by the relevant Secretary of State.

Fourth, I can confirm that, in future, as a matter of policy the Prime Minister will be consulted should there ever be a proposal to target any UK parliamentarian under a warrant issued by a Secretary of State, notwithstanding the general policy set out in the doctrine.

This applies to Members of this House, Members of the other place, the Scottish Parliament, the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Welsh Assembly and UK Members of the European Parliament. It applies to all activity authorised by a warrant issued by a Secretary of State: any instance of targeted interception and, electronic surveillance and equipment interference, when undertaken by the security and intelligence agencies. This is in addition to the rigorous safeguards already in the legislation itself. This means that, going forwards, the safeguards for all parliamentarians will be the same, with one exception: the Prime Minister will play no role should there ever be any proposal to conduct any such activity by Police Scotland, where these warrants are authorised by the Scottish Government. It would be up to the Scottish Government how they wish to handle any such case, should it ever arise. Updated interception and equipment interference codes of practice which make this policy clear have been laid in Parliament today.

Fifth, the draft Investigatory Powers Bill, published today, will update the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act and provides for even greater safeguards. The Bill will establish Judicial Commissioners to review warrants and also puts the Prime Minister's role on a statutory basis. This will provide for further scrutiny by an independent judge on top of Secretary of State authorisation. The independent judicial scrutiny, alongside the role of the Prime Minister, will establish a tripartite process should there ever be a proposal to target a parliamentarian: the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister and the Judicial Commissioner.

Finally, I want to clarify today the safeguards for any targeted requests for communications data of parliamentarians. These are set out in the acquisition and disclosure of communications data code of practice. While there is no role for Secretaries of State or the Prime Minister in approving these requests the code requires that special consideration must be given by the public authority requesting the data.

Harold Wilson made his statement almost 50 years ago when there was no legislation on interception or independent oversight. The world has moved on since then. My statement today sets out how this Government continue to apply the doctrine in the 21st century.

[HCWS291]

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