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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 19 November 2015

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The Secretary of State was asked—

EU Renewable Energy Target

1. **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What steps she is taking to ensure that the UK meets its EU renewable energy target by 2020. [902218]

5. **Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the UK's progress towards meeting its EU renewables target by 2020. [902223]

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): We are making good progress towards our 15% renewable energy target for 2020, and I am confident that we will meet the next interim target of 5.4%, with provisional figures showing that 6.3% of final energy consumption for 2013 and 2014 came from renewable sources.

Rachael Maskell: With the UN climate change conference just days away, on top of renewables subsidies being removed, we have learned that the UK will fall significantly short of its renewable energy target. While Labour led global talks, is the Secretary of State going to Paris to learn about the consequences of her cuts or to apologise to future generations?

Amber Rudd: I am delighted to say that there will be plenty of opportunities during this Session to talk about Paris, and I look forward to doing so. On the specific question of the renewables target, I repeat to the hon. Lady that we are making good progress at the moment. [*Interruption.*] There are issues, but we are expecting to exceed our interim target. There is more to do, and I am delighted to say that I am working across Government with the Department for Transport and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to ensure that we do it.

Paula Sherriff: Does the Secretary of State agree that meeting our renewables target should not just prevent catastrophic climate change but benefit UK workers through the creation of green jobs? Will she commit to ensuring that projects such as the Beatrice offshore wind project, which benefit from public funding, create the sorts of skilled supply chain jobs we need rather than subsidising private companies abroad?

Amber Rudd: I certainly agree that the direction in which this Government are going in supporting renewables and meeting our low-carbon targets will continue to lead to the growth of the green economy, which is a really important addition to the growth in the economy nationally.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): The announcement yesterday to phase out coal with gas is equivalent, in one announcement, to doubling the amount of renewables we have in our system, and it is possibly the biggest reduction in carbon ever announced by a Secretary of State. Does she believe, though, that any of our EU partners will follow us in taking this route?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for pointing out the announcement that I made yesterday which shows such strong leadership in reducing carbon emissions in Europe and in the world. It is interesting that he asks me whether other European countries will do this. I am not sure they will. We are not ones to lecture our European friends, but I can tell him that I have had a lot of congratulations and comments of a positive nature about it internationally.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Given that the increase in global temperatures over the past two centuries has been minute, that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change itself has said that most of it is perfectly natural, and that there has been no increase in global temperatures for 16 years, is it not time to simply reject these renewables targets and concentrate on our manufacturing industries and bringing down prices?

Amber Rudd: I always enjoy hearing from my hon. Friend, but I must say that I do not share his views. I believe that there is a settled view that is supported by science, and it is right that we take action, but I hope that this Government can demonstrate that we can do so while growing the economy. That is the evidence that we are showing people internationally, and that is why we are providing such strong leadership.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Given the leaked letter that indicated the purchase of renewables from abroad, will the right hon. Lady make sure that the Scottish islands are in the mix and that we go there for renewable energy? The wind resource is so great that I did not get off Barra on Monday.

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that yesterday I made an announcement continuing our support for offshore wind, which includes a potential application from the highlands and islands project. I hope that that was welcomed by him and by other promoters of offshore wind. I look forward to having further conversations with them, because offshore wind has a strong future in this country, but one that will also drive down prices.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): The borough of Kettering is doing more than most in contributing to the national renewables target, with a major wind farm at Burton Wold, another one at Rushton, and lots of applications being received for solar farms. However, one of the big issues is the delay in connecting these new

farms with the national grid because of the lack of suitably qualified engineers across the country. What can the Department do, with industry, to solve this problem?

Amber Rudd: It is good to hear of so much progress being made with renewable energy in my hon. Friend's borough. We are working closely with industry to make sure that we support the skills and will continue to do so.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): There seems to be a difference of opinion between my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) and the Secretary of State on progress towards our targets, but let us assume that the Secretary of State is right. If we are making such good progress, and bearing in mind that this is likely to be the warmest year on record, is now not the time to stretch ourselves by going to Paris with even tougher targets, to incentivise more renewables in the system?

Amber Rudd: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that we have the toughest targets in the whole world.

Christian Matheson: Make them tougher.

Amber Rudd: "Make them tougher", he says from a sedentary position. We are well admired internationally, not only for our tough targets, but for our announcement on coal yesterday and for our structure of carbon budgets and constant monitoring. I am proud of that and I wish the hon. Gentleman would be, too.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Progress has been much slower in meeting heat targets. The renewable heat incentive is due to close and as yet we have had no assurances of what will come next. Can the Secretary of State assure us that there will be continued support for decarbonising the heat sector?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman is entirely right. The two areas of renewable energy where we need to make progress are transport and heat. The renewable heat incentive has been a success, helping 50,000 homes. My proposal for continuing it is currently with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, so we will have to wait until after the spending review.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Does the Secretary of State agree that subsidising progressively unaffordable fossil fuels, many of which are produced abroad, while cutting off support for renewable energy at home when schemes are on the verge of being self-supporting, mitigates our chances of reaching our targets?

Amber Rudd: It is not about one or the other. We intend to meet our targets while achieving the balance of supporting renewable energy and having fossil fuels as part of the mix. That is how we deliver secure, efficient and low-cost electricity nationally.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): Thousands of jobs have already gone and thousands more are at risk since this Government slashed support for renewables. Ministers have blocked onshore wind developments, slashed support for solar and are chopping and changing energy policy so often that the CBI says they are deterring potential investors. How many more renewable energy companies

must go under—how many more jobs must be lost—before this Government will live up to our international commitments and end this assault on Britain's clean energy industries?

Amber Rudd: It is disappointing that, when talking about clean energy and low carbon, the hon. Lady failed to mention yesterday's announcement. We are the first large developed country to announce a date for taking off coal. That is a great achievement and it is important as part of our future low carbon emissions. Our plan is for a green economy. We are continuing to develop jobs as well as support manufacturing and industry. I am proud of the direction we are taking.

Wholesale Energy Prices

2. **Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): What assessment she has made of the effect of recent trends in wholesale energy prices on household bills. [902219]

16. **Nusrat Ghani** (Wealden) (Con): What assessment she has made of progress by the major energy suppliers on reflecting wholesale gas prices in consumer bills. [902235]

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (**Amber Rudd**): Lower wholesale gas and electricity costs have contributed to the price of fixed-rate dual fuel tariffs falling by £100 compared with last year. Average domestic gas prices have reduced by 6.5% since the start of this year. All the major energy suppliers have reduced their standard gas tariffs at least once this year. The Government expect suppliers to make sure any reductions in the costs of supplying energy are passed on to consumers.

Suella Fernandes: In order to keep household bills down, it is vital that we invest in energy infrastructure. Does the Secretary of State agree that the proposed IFA2 interconnector station at the Daedalus airfield in Gosport, which will connect to Chilling in Fareham and provide a second electricity link between Britain and France, is a welcome development that will make a positive contribution to affordability and sustainability?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is right to say that interconnection can bring important, significant benefits to consumers by enabling access to cheaper electricity overseas, lowering household bills and supporting security of supply. The IFA2 project, along with others involving France, Norway, Belgium, Denmark and Ireland, is progressing through Ofgem's regulatory regime, which is designed to bring forward interconnector investment in the consumer interest.

Nusrat Ghani: Rising wholesale energy prices have a particular impact on the elderly, with an estimated 540,000 older households in fuel poverty in recent years. Evidence shows that a large number of elderly people are prevented from switching to cheaper tariffs, which can be found only through online comparison sites, because they simply do not have access to the internet. What is the Department doing to ensure that the major energy suppliers are making their cheaper tariffs accessible to the most vulnerable in society?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Switching is an important way to save money and reduce costs, and there is a huge choice available online. However, there is a problem for people who are not online, which is why my Department has funded, for the third year, the big energy saving network. The network provides funding for direct face-to-face advice, targeting the most vulnerable in society to help them through the switching process and ensure that they are accessing the cheapest tariffs.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): Household bills in this country will never be manageable until the Government understand that it is not just the wholesale unit price of energy that matters, but the number of units each household needs to buy. We can make massive bill reductions with energy efficiency, and we can also end the scandal of so many British children going to bed tonight in cold homes. We have to do this. Ministers have promised me action for many years at the Dispatch Box. This Government's record is abysmal. Come on, Secretary of State, let us do this for Britain.

Amber Rudd: I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's conclusion, but I share his view that energy efficiency is an incredibly important way of saving money and helping householders. One of the most important ways of doing that will be through smart meters. Once people can access and see how much energy they are using, they will be able to use less of it. We are proud of the smart meter roll-out. We expect every household and business to have one by 2020.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I spoke to the Secretary of State about this beforehand. Yesterday, I met Age UK, which informed me of its concerns about the lack of energy efficiency schemes for those living in park homes. Ever mindful of the fact that the age of those living in park homes is from 55 upwards to perhaps 80, if she wants to make efficiency savings for them, she could reduce prices. What has been done for park homes?

Amber Rudd: We addressed some of the issues that are particularly challenging to park homes in the fuel poverty targets under the previous coalition Government. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that more needs to be done. It is particularly difficult for park homes without electricity meters. Those with electricity meters can access support, but the ones without them find it more difficult. I will certainly take that matter away and review it.

Renewable Energy: Subsidies

4. **Mike Freer** (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): What assessment her Department has made of the likely effect of changes to subsidies on the predicted deployment rates of renewable energy by 2020. [902221]

9. **Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): What assessment her Department has made of the likely effect of changes to subsidies on the predicted deployment rates of renewable energy by 2020. [902227]

17. **Stephen Hammond** (Wimbledon) (Con): What assessment her Department has made of the likely effect of changes to subsidies on the predicted deployment rates of renewable energy by 2020. [902236]

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): Even with the actions we are taking to control levy control framework costs and to protect consumer bills, we remain on track to deliver at least 30% of our electricity from renewable sources by 2020. Detailed assessments of the impact of cost control actions were published by my Department alongside each of the measures as they were announced.

Mike Freer: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government remain committed to renewables, while being tough on the costs of subsidy?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There was a focus on the levy control framework, which was particularly my approach, as soon as we came into government. I was shocked to find the scale of the overspend and have therefore responded in order to keep consumer bills under control.

Mims Davies: In Eastleigh, solar generation has leapt ahead due to the feed-in tariff, and many of my constituents want that to continue. Will the Secretary of State ensure that clean energy is supported and that both large and small solar energy generators in my constituency are not harmed by future changes?

Amber Rudd: I reassure my hon. Friend that we remain committed to clean energy, but in a way that minimises costs to consumers and maximises the benefits of the renewable industry to the UK. Our support has significantly driven down the cost of renewable energy and led to greater than anticipated levels of deployment.

Stephen Hammond: May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her speech yesterday and warmly welcome her determination to reach zero subsidy? Does she agree with me that if we eliminated all subsidy for large-scale solar PV—photovoltaics—and concentrated it on domestic and small-scale solar PV, we could actually achieve our renewables target, protect jobs and reach zero subsidy and grid parity within the LCF earlier than 2020?

Amber Rudd: I share my hon. Friend's enthusiasm for reaching grid parity and his support for solar in general. Solar has been a great British success story: costs have come down and delivery has far exceeded expectations. He will be aware that we are considering the consultation at the moment. The consultation closed after we received the responses, and I will report back on it. I will take his suggestions under advisement.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State now have a go at answering the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) about how many more thousands of jobs will be lost in the renewable energy sector as a result of her Government's decision to pull the plug on solar and onshore wind? How does she respond to the comments of the United Nations chief environment scientist Jacquie McGlade, who recently said that Britain now, under the Tory Government, is sending a "worrying signal" by "shifting away from clean energy as the rest of the world rushes towards it"?

Amber Rudd: Once more, with the right hon. Gentleman's comment, we hear an Opposition Member fail to mention the fact, as announced yesterday, that we have put a date on the end of coal. I have received huge congratulations

from international commentators. The situation is completely different from the one he tries to paint. The Government are committed to growing the renewable industry, are proud of the amount by which it has grown and will continue to support it, including through job creation.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Progress in renewable electricity generation has been put in jeopardy, particularly in rural communities, with the ending of renewables obligation certificates for wind turbines for farm generation of electricity. Will the Secretary of State provide a response that brings hope to those in rural communities?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Lady will be aware that Northern Ireland has the option to fund that itself. We made a decision, which was set out in our manifesto, to provide no additional support for onshore wind and we will stick to that.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Onshore wind is demonstrably the cheapest form of renewable energy, yet its route to market has been constrained. The Government's no new subsidy commitment in their manifesto is clearly being implemented. Would the Secretary of State support the concept of subsidy-free onshore wind? If so, does she agree with the assessment of the Committee on Climate Change of what would constitute subsidy-free onshore wind?

Amber Rudd: That is a very interesting question. I said last time I was in the Chamber that we would look at that idea and we will continue to do so. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we have said that there will be no new subsidy and that such schemes must be supported by the local community. We are happy to engage with developers and have that discussion if they have a proposal.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Renewable energy is vital to the local economy in my constituency. It is encouraging that one of the big investors, DONG Energy, welcomed the announcement by my right hon. Friend yesterday. It is important that we develop an energy cluster on the Humber to reduce costs and maximise benefits. Will she assure me that she will do all she can to achieve that?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I received a message of support from DONG Energy, which is a big investor in offshore wind. The UK is rightly proud of its offshore wind sector. We have more offshore wind than the rest of the world put together. There is a lot of interest in that internationally and it has great export potential. We will continue to support it.

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I applaud the Secretary of State's announcement yesterday in her reset speech that coal will be phased out by 2025 on the grounds of its unacceptably high carbon emissions. In the same speech, she indicated that temporary subsidies to assist the deployment of renewables, which are the lowest-carbon alternative energy source, would come to an end, while permanent subsidies for the deployment of gas, which is a far higher carbon alternative, would be maintained. On reflection, does she find those positions at all contradictory?

Amber Rudd: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his new role. Our position is that subsidies are supposed to be temporary. That is why I set out a plan yesterday to reduce the subsidy for offshore wind. The industry is happy to engage with us on that basis. We will set caps with it and, I hope, deliver offshore wind with it at a lower price than has been achieved before. On the other subsidies that he mentioned, we are making sure that we deliver a balance. There has been woeful underinvestment in infrastructure over recent decades. Under Labour, no nuclear power station was commissioned, which was a disgrace. We will move forward with a secure supply of electricity.

Fuel Poverty: Energy Efficiency Schemes

6. **Tulip Siddiq** (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of her Department's spending on energy efficiency schemes in reducing fuel poverty. [902224]

18. **Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of her Department's spending on energy efficiency schemes in reducing fuel poverty. [902240]

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): From 2013 to the end of August this year, the energy company obligation had installed about 887,000 energy efficiency measures in more than 700,000 households on low incomes or in deprived areas. We are clear that the support should go to those in the greatest need.

Tulip Siddiq: I thank the Minister for her answer, but the huge drop in the installation of energy efficiency measures over recent years gives me no confidence that the Government are taking the scandal of fuel poverty seriously. Research by the Association for the Conservation of Energy has shown that the installation of energy efficiency measures dropped by a staggering 65% between 2012-13 and 2014-15. What steps is the Minister taking to reverse that shocking trend?

Andrea Leadsom: We are proud to have achieved more than 887,000 measures on energy efficiency. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said yesterday, we will redirect our ECO budget in the coming years towards those in greatest need and those who are suffering from the worst impacts of living in cold, damp or drafty homes.

Judith Cummins: With the withdrawal of Government funding for the green deal finance company, it is now even harder for overstretched families to afford energy efficiency schemes in their homes. Too often, poor quality housing stock leaves families in fuel poverty. What funding will the Minister introduce to help families to save money on their increasingly unaffordable energy bills?

Andrea Leadsom: The green deal plan was a small percentage of our measures, and it was closed to new entrants precisely because it did not have the take-up that we had hoped for. Some 96% of installed measures are delivered through ECO, and as I have explained, we have put in a bid to focus our ECO even more on the fuel poor, which is our top priority.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): Let us get to the crux of this issue. The Department's stated goal is for as many fuel-poor homes as is reasonably practicable to be rated at least at band C for energy efficiency by 2030. However, between 2010 and 2013 that was achieved for only 70,000 fuel-poor households, leaving 95% still to be improved. Does the Minister accept that at that rate of progress, her Department will miss its 2030 target by 100 years?

Andrea Leadsom: I do not agree with that. The key point is that an enormous number of homes do not currently reach the band C efficiency level, and we are determined to improve that as far as possible. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced yesterday that we will focus all our energy efficiency and fuel poverty budgets on the most needy. That is vital.

Paris Climate Change Conference

7. **Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): Whether she will support proposals for a global goal on adaptation at the Paris climate conference in December 2015. [902225]

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): The Government support the view that the Paris agreement should set out a long-term direction on adaptation for all countries. In 2014, only 16% of climate finance mobilised to developing countries supported adaptation, and it is clear that globally we must do more. That is why the Prime Minister has reaffirmed the UK's commitment to aim to spend 50% of our climate finance on adaptation.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: Many constituents have contacted me following a campaign by ActionAid about the effects of climate change in developing countries such as Bangladesh, where flooding particularly affects women and children. In Paris, will the Secretary of State support a specific, binding goal that ensures that the wealthiest countries in the world support developing countries in adapting to climate change?

Amber Rudd: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that the Government are committed to getting a deal in Paris. We are aware that that deal will require considerable financing, which is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced that we will increase our commitment to climate finance up to \$9 billion over this five-year spending period—a significant increase. We remain committed to making adaptation an important part of that, but we are not yet in a position to commit the rest of the world in terms of the final deal that will be reached.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The Paris conference of the parties aims to replicate the successful method of the UK Climate Change Act 2008—a long-term goal that is specified under a legally binding agreement that achieves stability through a series of five-year reviews. The Secretary of State has abandoned long-term targets and destroyed the stability of the investment framework, and last night her Department's emissions calculator showed that after her reset speech, the shortfall against the fourth carbon budget has increased by 54 million tonnes of CO₂, which is 10% away from the legally binding

fourth carbon budget. Does she now feel more shame showing her face in the city of Paris, or in the city of London?

Amber Rudd: I find the hon. Gentleman's question disappointing. The UK is rightly proud of our Climate Change Act, and of the targets and aims that we are setting for ourselves. We will provide leadership in Paris. The number of texts and notes that I received yesterday after creating that strong sign on coal was remarkable. I urge the hon. Gentleman to stop knocking the United Kingdom's negotiating position, and to start supporting us in leading and getting a global deal.

Government's Environmental Agenda

8. **Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): What contribution her Department is making to cross-departmental work on the Government's environmental agenda. [902226]

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): Ministerial colleagues in DEFRA lead the Government's environmental agenda overall. My Department leads work to cut carbon emissions, which is essential for protecting our environment for future generations. Working across Departments is essential to deliver our carbon commitments. Let me give two examples: we are cutting emissions, driving innovation and creating jobs through our joint work with the Department for Communities and Local Government on energy efficiency and with the Department for Transport on low emissions vehicles.

Jake Berry: To take my right hon. Friend away from the UK, Ascension Island is one of the last refuges for the global stock of large fish, including tuna, marlin and sailfish. With that in mind, will my right hon. Friend update me on progress in creating a marine conservation zone around Ascension Island and other British overseas territories?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for his important question. We are working with overseas territories on their current marine management arrangements to audit them and provide support in addressing gaps. In particular, we are working with the Ascension Island Government to balance their ambition for a sustainable fishery with the development of a marine protected area.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): The Secretary of State may know that Cambridge City Council had to cancel plans to put solar panels on 1,000 homes after her changes in policy. What discussions has she had with colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government ahead of her abrupt policy changes?

Amber Rudd: We always work across Government and ensure that everybody is consulted on major changes. The particular issue of solar on public houses will form part of the consultation, and I will be making further announcements in December.

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government agreed a city region deal this week for Merseyside without including

the tidal and barrage schemes that were part of the bid. It was said that the Department of Energy and Climate Change was pushing back against them. Is that true?

Amber Rudd: I am afraid I do not have a full answer to give the hon. Gentleman, but I am happy to write to him further when I have an answer.

Mr Speaker: Put it in the Library. We will all be grateful.

Nuclear Reactors

10. **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What steps she is taking to encourage the building of further new nuclear reactors. [902228]

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): My hon. Friend will be aware that the Government are committed to an expansion of new nuclear power, which is a vital part of our work to build a clean, affordable, safe and reliable energy system for the future. The industry is taking forward proposals to build six new nuclear power plants, providing 18 GW of low carbon power in the UK. We are in regular contact with it.

Stephen Metcalfe: Following the recent welcome announcement that China will be involved in the provision of new nuclear, will my right hon. Friend reassure the House and my constituents that all proper safety and security measures will be taken, and that a robust mechanism for monitoring such will be in place?

Andrea Leadsom: Yes, I can absolutely reassure my hon. Friend. Safety in our nuclear plants is of paramount importance. Any operator of a UK nuclear plant must meet the UK's stringent safety and security regulations, which are enforced by an independent regulator. They provide a whole range of controls, including safe and secure operation, consumer protection, security of UK supply and enforcement of contractual obligations.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I wish the Government would apply their horror of subsidies to the nuclear sector. The Secretary of State's response to the cross-party objection to the departmental minute on Hinkley fails to address concerns that rather than a £19 billion liability on the public purse, Hinkley may in reality mean an eye-watering £45 billion bill for householders and taxpayers. That is just for one new power station that will not boil a kettle for another decade. At the very least, does she agree there must be a full Commons debate on the issue and an independent examination of the costs before proceeding?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady can, of course, use the normal methods for encouraging a debate. There have been many already. Hinkley Point offers low carbon affordable energy that is highly cost-competitive with clean energy sources. The point is that it is base-load. The UK bill payer will not have to pay a penny until it is actually generating. That is very good value for the UK bill payer.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): First, I would like to congratulate the Secretary of State on her masterly speech yesterday.

Does the Minister agree that we need a mix of energy, including nuclear, which I am pleased to say we have in my area of Somerset, as well as solar and wind? It has to be a balance, it has to be at the best cost and it has to be about innovation, which will, in itself, create the sorts of jobs in the energy sector that Opposition Members are worried we are losing.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is exactly right. We need an energy mix, which is exactly what we are achieving and what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out in her speech yesterday. I was delighted to visit Hinkley Point last week and to see the enormous pride and excitement in the area about the prospective jobs and work in the supply chain and the huge investment in the area. It is really good news for the UK and our energy security.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Will the Minister remind the House how much the Government are spending on nuclear decommissioning and explain why it is the one sector to which market discipline does not seem to apply?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady will know that the UK has an enormous nuclear legacy dating back to the 1940s and '50s. A huge amount of work is being done at Sellafield and other sites to safely dispose of that nuclear waste. As she will know, the budget is extremely large—in the region of £3 billion—but that money is being spent to deal safely with this very long legacy. I can assure her, however, that new nuclear creates far less waste. We are planning a geological disposal facility to make sure that future taxpayers have nothing like that legacy to deal with.

Paris Climate Change Conference

11. **Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for International Development on preparations for the Paris climate conference in December 2015. [902230]

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): I have been working closely with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development to secure an ambitious global deal in Paris. Tackling climate change and promoting sustainable development are two sides of the same coin. We cannot achieve one without the other. We cannot end extreme poverty any other way. The global goals established earlier this year provide a clear framework for sustainable development, with full integration of climate and environment goals.

Imran Hussain: It is vital that we reach a binding agreement on tackling climate change in December, and I, too, welcome the Secretary of State's announcement about closing coal-fired power stations by 2025, as it sets a strong example to other countries. Will she go further, though, and state what percent cut in emissions by 2030 she is pushing for?

Amber Rudd: We are focused on Paris at the moment. We are working with our EU colleagues, other countries and like-minded allies to bring along other countries that might be more reluctant or more difficult to get across the line. With our EU colleagues, we have set targets, such as that for a 40% reduction by 2030, but at the moment our focus is on Paris.

Solar Energy: Schools

12. **Mr Graham Allen** (Nottingham North) (Lab): What steps her Department has taken to encourage schools to invest in solar energy; what discussions she has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Education on the effect of borrowing restrictions on investment by schools in solar energy; and if she will make a statement. [902231]

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): In April 2014, my Department published a leaflet encouraging schools to invest in solar PV, which was followed up with a letter to local authorities in November 2014. We encourage deployment through the financial incentive of the feed-in tariff, but discussions are always ongoing with other Departments on what more can be done to help schools invest in solar.

Mr Allen: Thousands of schools cannot make their contribution on renewables and save thousands of pounds each year because of the Chancellor's rules on borrowing to install solar. One school, Wilmslow High, wants to do this, and its local MP, a Mr George Osborne, has said:

"I am happy to support you wherever I can",

but he is awaiting a reply from the Department of Energy and Climate Change. Will the Department reply to the local MP so that he can make representations to himself as Chancellor and end these ridiculous rules?

Andrea Leadsom: I would like to apologise publicly to the local MP. I shall look into the matter today. Restrictions on school borrowing are necessary, however, to protect public sector accounts. School borrowing contributes to public sector net debt and borrowing—two important fiscal measurements that we must control in order to bring down the national deficit and retain economic confidence—which is why we have no plans to lift restrictions on borrowing.

Mr Speaker: I feel sure that the Minister will have looked into the matter by lunch time.

District Heating Sector

13. **Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the potential merits of statutory regulation of the district heating sector. [902232]

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): We do not believe that further statutory regulation is appropriate for the sector at this stage, but are keeping this under review. We welcome the voluntary consumer protection scheme, Heat Trust, which is launching next week. The scheme aims to provide customers with comparable protections to those available in statute to

gas and electricity customers. We believe that, when combined with metering and billing regulations, this represents a proportionate approach to the consumer challenges in the sector.

Matthew Pennycook: The vast majority of customers served by district heating networks, including thousands in my constituency, believe strongly that they do not offer a fair deal, and the industry-led solution, Heat Trust, will I think do little to allay fears in that regard or build consumer confidence. May I urge the Secretary of State to revisit the question of whether effective statutory regulation would give customers locked into these monopoly schemes a better deal?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. I am aware that heating networks do not have the same regulatory framework. Heat Trust is launching on 25 November, following development and consultation with consumer groups and Government. I see that he has a certain doubt about the success of Heat Trust, but we will work closely to monitor its impact and will assess, based on its record, whether further action is needed.

Solar Power: Feed-in Tariffs

14. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the effect of proposed changes to feed-in tariffs on solar power companies in the UK. [902233]

15. **Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): What assessment her Department has made of the effect of proposed changes to feed-in tariffs on the number of jobs in the solar power industry. [902234]

19. **Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the effect of proposed changes to feed-in tariffs on solar power companies in the UK. [902241]

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): During consultation on the proposed changes to the feed-in tariffs, we strongly encouraged all parts of the small-scale renewables sector to provide evidence on the likely impact. The actual impact on solar companies will, of course, depend on the options taken forward when the responses to the consultation have been considered.

Alex Cunningham: The Minister will be aware of the thousands of job losses on Teesside, with steel, construction and mining all shedding people. Even the Government are contributing to the misery, sacking hundreds of employees at Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. Does she really want to add thousands more from the solar, energy conservation and energy-intensive industries as a direct result of her policies?

Andrea Leadsom: We are huge supporters of the solar sector. The point is that there is a balance to be struck between the enormous success in deployment, which is exceeding our expectations, and the impact on the bill payer. We have to keep that balance. We have consulted on it and will issue our response in due course, but it is absolutely our intention to see the solar sector continue to thrive.

Michelle Donelan: A number of leading solar community projects and green energy companies are based in my constituency, including Good Energy, which supplies more than 50,000 UK consumers. People who work in the industry fully understand the need for it to be sustainable, but they feel that a drop of up to 87% overnight is more than the industry can cope with, in terms of local jobs and growth. Will the Minister look at what more can be done to support existing projects and for mechanisms to keep the solar industry alive until grid parity is reached?

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this very important matter for her constituency. I can absolutely assure her that we are looking at it carefully. I had a round table meeting with a number of solar firms and heard their views at first hand before the consultation closed. We are looking carefully at the more than 55,000 responses and will come forward with our policy response as soon as we can.

Ruth Cadbury: Virginia Fassnidge is one of my constituents who installed solar panels to cut her family's household bills and save carbon. Will the Minister explain to those who want to follow her example why they should, when the 98% cut to the feed-in tariff subsidy scheme no longer makes it attractive to consumers, risks the very viability of the domestic solar industry when it is about to become viable without subsidy and completely undermines the Secretary of State's solar revolution?

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. Obviously her constituent will be pleased to know that the subsidy from the bill payer that she has received will continue to be available to her—I think there has been some confusion about that point. For those who come later, the proposal in our consultation is for the return to investors to be in the region of about 4%, as opposed to the current level, which is significantly higher. We were required by the EU to look at the tariffs on a three-year basis and that is what we have done. We have put forward a proposal and we are looking carefully at the responses.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The Government's decisions have had a devastating impact on our manufacturing industry in the UK. That flies in the face of exactly what the Government say they want to achieve in creating an industrial balance within our economy. Just like the steel industry, the Government have been found wanting.

Andrea Leadsom: We have a big and growing energy sector. We are bringing forward policy proposals to develop new sources of energy, which will mean a whole raft of new jobs and new opportunities for people, but there is always a balance to be struck. What we cannot do is permanently subsidise at the expense of the bill payer; many issues have already been raised about fuel poverty. In the end, industries need to stand on their own two feet.

Topical Questions

T1. [902207] **Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con):** If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): Paris is a city that is currently in mourning, but in less than two weeks' time we will see the world gather there in solidarity to seek to achieve the first truly global deal on climate change. Yesterday I announced plans to close all unabated coal-fired power stations by 2025 and to restrict their use by 2023. This is a world-leading commitment to the environment and underlines our crystal-clear determination to cut carbon emissions as cost-effectively as possible. I stress that the UK's energy security comes first. As we tackle a legacy of under-investment and build a new system of energy infrastructure fit for the 21st century, we need to replace ageing polluting power stations with reliable, good value-for-money alternatives that help to reduce our emissions.

Nigel Huddleston: Ofgem estimates that the average household could save about £200 a year if they shopped around for their energy needs, but 62% of households have never switched, while 45% mistakenly believe that there is no benefit from doing so. My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani) raised the issue of online information access, but what else are the Government doing to encourage households to switch and save money?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for his important question. The more opportunities that we have to raise and draw attention to the opportunities for switching, the better. Switching can indeed save £200 and sometimes more per bill. My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and as I said, we have plans to reach out to people who are not online and to help the most vulnerable. We also had the recent Power to Switch campaign, which led to a significantly increased number of people switching.

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): I share the right hon. Lady's sadness at the recent events in Paris, which shocked the world. As world leaders gather in that same city in a few days' time to address the threat posed to us all by climate change, will she ensure that we use the opportunity to show real leadership and offer hope to people around the world that we, the international community, can come together to address the common threats to our shared security through shared international goals and by increasing our ambition every five years until the job is done?

Amber Rudd: I genuinely welcome the hon. Lady's question, and I am proud of the fact that we in the United Kingdom are united across the political divide in wanting to get an ambitious deal in Paris. I also share the hon. Lady's view that what we need is not just a deal, but a deal that has five-year reviews as part of it, so that whatever the final deal—I really hope we will get a deal in Paris—we have some way of coming back regularly in order to reflect on the actual emissions, their consequences and perhaps on new technology that might be available to help us all to reduce them.

Lisa Nandy: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer and particularly for the push she will give to five-year reviews. I also very much welcome the agreement that the G7 leaders reached earlier this year to phase out pollution from fossil fuels by the end of this century and to cut greenhouse gases by between 40% and 70% by 2050 from 2010 levels. Can the Secretary of State confirm that the British Government will continue their support

for the Climate Change Act 2008 and will accept the advice due to be given shortly by the independent Committee on Climate Change on what the next round of UK carbon targets—the so-called fifth carbon budget—should be?

Amber Rudd: I can reassure the hon. Lady that we are committed to the Climate Change Act and to working with the Committee on Climate Change to ensure that we stick to the commitments that are enshrined in law and deliver the low-carbon future that we all want.

T8. [902215] **David Rutley** (Macclesfield) (Con): Given the ongoing complex challenges in the world, particularly Russia's recent action in the Ukraine, can my right hon. Friend tell us what steps she is taking further to strengthen this country's national energy security?

Amber Rudd: There is a big, liquid global gas market and we are, of course, trying to bring on our own national gas through shale. I note my hon. Friend's concerns, and I am happy to say that we get most of our imported gas from Norway. He raises a good point, and we will keep the matter constantly under review.

T2. [902208] **Matthew Pennycook** (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): According to conversations that I have had with a number of energy suppliers, they have evidence suggesting that in-home displays are not used by most of the customers who are provided with them. Can the Minister explain why the Government remain wedded effectively to mandating the provision of IHDs for their smart meter roll-out, rather than allowing consumers to choose the engagement tool for managing their energy use that suits them best?

Amber Rudd: I am happy to reassure the hon. Gentleman that, although we have said that we need a smart meter with a visual display, we are looking into other ways of delivering that.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): Far and away the dominant zero-carbon technology, in the United Kingdom and globally, is nuclear power. I welcomed the earlier announcement that we were working on six new stations in the UK, but an emerging technology involving small modular reactors is causing a great deal of excitement, and could make a big difference. Does the Minister expect the UK to play a part in that?

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this issue. The UK gave up its ability to design and export nuclear reactors some years ago, and we are currently at the forefront of looking at new nuclear technology, including small modular reactors. I recently met representatives of the Nuclear Innovation and Research Advisory Board to discuss some of their exciting ideas, and, subject to the spending review, I think we shall be hearing more about them.

T3. [902209] **Anna Turley** (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): Community-led renewable energy schemes empower communities, tackle fuel poverty and provide jobs, so why is the Secretary of State sitting back and letting the Treasury do a U-turn on social investment tax relief, given that that will undermine new schemes? Does she

support community energy schemes, and, if so, will she update the House on her plans to support this important part of the co-operative sector?

Amber Rudd: I can reassure the hon. Lady. I do support community energy schemes, because I think that they can add tremendous value in demonstrating the advantages of renewable energy to local communities. We shall be thinking carefully about how we can support them in future, and I hope to report to the House in due course.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): I commend the Secretary of State for her Power to Switch campaign, but will she commit herself to working with her colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions, so that next time the winter fuel cheques are sent out, there will be more information about Power to Switch, together with clear details of how to switch on the telephone and on paper?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend has raised an important point. It would indeed be a good idea for us to work more closely with the DWP to ensure that more vulnerable people are told about the opportunities that they might be missing, and I shall take the matter up with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

T5. [902211] **Stuart Blair Donaldson** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP): As the Government move the UK Green Investment Bank into private ownership, will the Secretary of State give us a clear assurance that the Government will deliver the full £3.8 billion of capitalisation that was initially pledged to the bank, so that it can continue to invest meaningfully in our green economy?

Amber Rudd: We are rightly proud of the Green Investment Bank. It is the first bank to be set up by a Government in this way, and it has played a leading role in supporting renewable energy development. I am excited about the prospect of its moving out of public ownership, raising money, and going into, as it were, the public arena. I hope that it will then provide an opportunity for more investment. As for the hon. Gentleman's specific question, I shall have to come back to him with a detailed answer.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Earlier this month, the Government said that they would negotiate with the European Union about the 5% value-added tax on female sanitary products. Would my right hon. Friend be prepared to extend that discussion to the issue of the 5% VAT on fuel, which is an essential for most households?

Amber Rudd: I thank my hon. Friend for his suggestion, which has slightly surprised me. I shall have to come back to him with some further thoughts about it.

T6. [902212] **Roger Mullin** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Following the Secretary of State's notable speech yesterday, in which she stressed the importance of new gas-fired power stations, will she tell us what steps she is taking to assist the progress of the construction of the world's first full-scale gas carbon capture and storage project at Peterhead power station?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the CCS competition that is going ahead. I have had meetings with the association which promotes that area. As the hon. Gentleman will know, the spending review is coming up and decisions will be made then, but the United Kingdom has been a keen supporter of CCS here and in other countries, and we have spent a great deal of money on trying to explore the opportunities for the UK to extend the life of our fossil fuels.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): There is an application to explore for shale gas in the beautiful area of Ryedale in my constituency. Assuming the application and the exploration are successful, what assurances can the Minister offer that an expansion of the industry will not lead to an industrialisation of that beautiful area?

Andrea Leadsom: I can absolutely assure my hon. Friend that all onshore oil and gas projects, including shale gas projects, are subject to scrutiny through the planning system, which addresses impacts on residents such as traffic movements, noise and working hours, and that national planning guidance says that, in respect of minerals such as shale oil and gas, new developments should not just be appropriate for their location but take into account the effects of pollution, including the cumulative effects, on health, the natural environment or general amenity, and the potential sensitivity of the area. I am well aware of what a beautiful area he lives in and I assure him we are absolutely focused on that.

T7. [902213] **Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): Can I urge the Minister to look carefully at the impact that any spending reductions in the nuclear sector would have on our supply chain in West Cumbria? Ahead of the spending review, will she press the Chancellor on the need to support our local supply chain through the ongoing decommissioning at Sellafield, alongside the nuclear new build at Moorside?

Andrea Leadsom: I am delighted to tell the hon. Lady that there are huge opportunities for West Cumbria from new nuclear. I have visited Sellafield and the new plant at Moorside. There are enormous opportunities. People are already being recruited. It is believed that, across the UK, we will need to recruit about 8,000 people a year. There are lots of new apprenticeship opportunities. Having met local councillors in the area, I know that they are very excited and positive about the opportunity.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): At present, the National Grid pays out £1 billion a year in balancing charges, which is passed on to electricity users. Transmission charges are not fit for purpose. The Government have removed onshore renewable subsidies, and community energy schemes are under attack too. We have a regulation system that was designed 30 years ago. So instead of the rush for new nuclear and ad hoc ministerial announcements, is it not time the Government took a step back and had a proper strategy on energy policy?

Amber Rudd: That is exactly what I set out yesterday: a proper forward look at our energy policy. The Government are committed to delivering secure, clean and affordable energy not just in the next five years but over the next 10, 15 and 20 years. That is what a Government should do to get the best for businesses and consumers.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): Gas has always been acknowledged as a bridge to a decarbonised future but the announcements made by the Secretary of State yesterday will have a cumulative effect. Can she assure us that that bridge has not lengthened and raises the risk of a stranded fleet of new gas generators in 25 years, particularly given that some analysis suggests that the emissions shortfall against the fourth carbon budget has increased from 7% to 10%?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. He is right that there is a widening gap against the fourth carbon budget. I want to be clear that that is not to do with policy. The reason for that is to do with land use—something delightfully called LULUCF, or land use, land use change and forestry sector. I am aware of his views on gas and they are really the same as mine: it is indeed a low-carbon bridge but in future we hope that other sources will come forward.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The port of Immingham in my constituency depends heavily on the import of coal. Many jobs rely on that both in the port and on the rail network. What assessment has my right hon. Friend's Department made of the loss of jobs in those associated industries, with less coal coming in as a result of coal-fired power stations closing?

Amber Rudd: I reassure my hon. Friend that that is something we intend to do, but it will be subject to a consultation. We will have the opportunity to look at that issue, but we are talking about 10 years hence, so I hope that there will be plenty of opportunities to ensure that areas can adapt and benefit from other areas of industry that will emerge.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): If the Government are serious about meeting the targets on emission levels, instead of yesterday announcing the closure of the coal-fired power stations, would it not have been eminently sensible to come forward with a serious attempt at carbon capture and storage, which would enable us to burn the fossil fuels, coal and shale gas with near-zero emissions, providing secure, affordable energy for generations to come?

Andrea Leadsom: I agree with the hon. Gentleman in part, in that there is the opportunity for CCS to enable us to use fossil fuels for longer, but the reality is that the UK coal fleet is extremely old. All of those coal plants are due to come off in the next few years and we would not want to be building new coal-fired power stations now when there is the lower-carbon alternative of gas and the whole prospect of a clean low-carbon future.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Recent analysis shows that UK power could be almost 90% renewable by 2030, while electrifying 25% of all heating demand and putting around 12.7 million electric cars on the road, but that would require cutting demand for space heating by over 50%. That means much smaller bills, too. The Secretary of State has clearly been spending a lot of time with the Chancellor recently; can she tell us whether energy efficiency will be a Treasury infrastructure priority in the future?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. I am aware of the absolute importance of getting heat right and of the fact that we need new policies in order

to meet our targets and that heat is an important part of trying to reduce fuel poverty. I have proposals, and she is absolutely right that some of them are with the Chancellor. I hope to come back and make announcements in due course.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Is the Energy Secretary proud of the fact that at the beginning of December the last deep mine pit in Britain will close, under this Tory Government? Does she really believe that it makes a lot of sense to import 40 million tonnes of coal a year from countries we do not even trust, while at the same time getting rid of thousands of miners' jobs and those of other people in the area? It is a scandal.

Amber Rudd: I agree in part with the hon. Gentleman, in that I do not think it is right for us to be importing coal from abroad. I do not think it is right for coal to have a long-term future in this country, which is why I was pleased to announce yesterday that we have put a final date on coal sourced for electricity of 2025.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I am intrigued by the answer the Minister has just given on heat policy, because it is very hard to see how we could meet our heat renewables target without substantial increases in Government spending, yet surely we expect there to be reductions in the comprehensive spending review next week. Will the Minister promise that that target will be sacrosanct, and that any reduction in

funding will perhaps be met with a commensurate increase in regulation in order to make sure that we meet our 2020 targets?

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. He is right that regulation is another way to approach the issue; basically, we can do so through either some form of subsidy or some form of regulation. I apologise to him, because I am going to wait and see how the cards fall before fully answering that question.

Mr Speaker: Last but not least, Mr Clive Efford.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I am grateful, Mr Speaker.

The Minister said in earlier answers that she wants the renewable energy industry to be sustainable financially and commercially successful, but at the same time the Government have taken the subsidies away at a rate that has damaged the industry, and they have not applied that policy to nuclear. Surely she can see the damage being done and the inconsistency in the Government's approach.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will realise that there is a balance to be struck. We have seen enormous bill payer-led subsidies for onshore wind, solar and other clean carbon technologies, and there is a balance to be struck: the bill payer cannot be expected to foot the bill for an unlimited period. On nuclear, private investment is going into Hinckley C. The taxpayer will not be paying anything until that produces, and the cost per megawatt hour generated of electricity will be very competitive with present clean carbon costs.

Business of the House

10.33 am

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

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

MONDAY 23 NOVEMBER—Consideration of an allocation of time motion, followed by all stages of the Northern Ireland (Welfare Reform) Bill.

I also expect there to be a statement on the national security strategy and the strategic defence and security review.

TUESDAY 24 NOVEMBER—Opposition day (11th allotted day). There will be a debate on Trident, followed by a debate on HMRC office closures. Both debates will arise on a motion in the name of the Scottish National party, followed by a motion to approve a European document relating to restrictive measures against Iran.

WEDNESDAY 25 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Childcare Bill [*Lords*], and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will deliver his joint autumn statement and spending review.

THURSDAY 26 NOVEMBER—General debate on the final report of the Airports Commission. The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 27 NOVEMBER—The House will not be sitting. The provisional business for the week commencing 30 November will include:

MONDAY 30 NOVEMBER—Business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

TUESDAY 1 DECEMBER—Remaining stages of the Immigration Bill, followed by a debate on a motion relating to the High Speed Rail (London - West Midlands) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 2 DECEMBER—Opposition day (12th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 3 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Bill [*Lords*].

FRIDAY 4 DECEMBER—Private Members' Bills.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 26 November and 30 November will be:

THURSDAY 26 NOVEMBER—General debate on the north-east devolution deal.

MONDAY 30 NOVEMBER—Debate on an e-petition relating to a tax on sugary drinks.

Chris Bryant: Last night I was in Colchester, where Nick Alexander, the 36-year-old man who was killed while he was at work selling rock merchandise in the Bataclan concert hall, went to school and where he ran a popular club night. I know that all our hearts go out to his family and friends, as they do to so many in Paris, in Baghdad and in Beirut. Of course we remember the valour of the emergency services and of the members of the public who have become unintended heroes at these moments, but should we not also pay tribute to the journalists, who have often had to stare the brutal truth of murderous radicalism in the eye and bring it to our attention? As Emile Zola said:

“It is not I who am strong; it is reason, it is truth.”

I am sure that the whole House will also want to send its heartfelt sympathy to the families of the two people killed in the explosion at the Celsa steel factory in Cardiff yesterday.

May I ask the Leader of the House why he has still not given us any dates for next year's recesses? It would be particularly useful for all hon. Members to be able to start making plans for next year, and I can see no reason why we should be halfway through November before the Leader of the House provides us with that information.

The Leader of the House has provided us with a single day for all the remaining stages of the Immigration Bill, on 1 December, but the Government promised that they would publish the review by Stephen Shaw of the welfare of detainees in immigration removal centres before the Bill completed its passage. It must surely be right that we in this House should consider Mr Shaw's findings before signing the Bill off. Will the Leader of the House guarantee that the report will be published in plenty of time before 1 December?

Will the Leader of the House also allow time for a three-day debate on the autumn statement? I have asked this question before, and he will probably say no, but I am going to try again. Parliamentary scrutiny of Government spending is particularly shoddy. It is extremely cursory at the best of times. Billions of pounds are pushed through on the nod and amendments are allowed only if they are tabled by a Minister. The Government are now preparing the most aggressive assault on public services in this country since the second world war, yet the Leader of the House seems to think that a mere two-hour question-and-answer session will provide plenty of scrutiny for some of the most far-reaching measures our constituents will face during this Parliament.

The Government have already tried to be too clever by half, by pushing the tax credits cuts through in secondary legislation, so we will be going over the Chancellor's plans with a fine-toothed comb, not least because we have listened to the Prime Minister very closely this week and he keeps saying that the counter-terrorism budget will be protected. We are delighted by that, but even the Prime Minister has been lobbying the Thames Valley police force against local cuts to front-line services, and Robert Quick, the former head of counter-terrorism at the Metropolitan police, has said that planned cuts to the wider police budget

“will make Britain more vulnerable to terrorism.”

It is the first duty of Government to protect the people, so surely that single sentence should make the Government think twice.

In South Wales alone, we have lost 284 full-time police officers, and further cuts will lead to another 300 being lost. I am sure that every Member in the House could produce similar figures for their own local police force. At a time when the Secretary of State for Wales has pointed to the dangers of radicalisation there, and when Cardiff and Swansea regularly host major sporting events, would it not be a real dereliction of duty yet again to cut police budgets by more than the 5% that police forces have already agreed?

We also want to look at the Government's travel costs when we are looking at expenditure, in the light of the news today that they are planning to go ahead with “call me Dave airways”. I mention that because when the Leader of the House was shadow Transport Secretary,

he told the BBC, responding to the idea that a special jet should be set aside for the Prime Minister, then Mr Blair, that this was

“the wrong moment to be splashing out taxpayers’ money on funding the government to travel in style”.

What on earth has changed? Is it just that the Leader of the House has changed his job, and now that he has a ministerial car he has got used to it and wants everybody else to travel in style? Is it that, suddenly, there is lots more cash to be splashed around in government? Or is it that he has become something of a Liberal Democrat? We all know what the Lib Dems did in the last Government: they voted things through in Parliament and then went back to their constituencies and campaigned against them. That is exactly what he seems to do now. We never thought that he was a Liberal Democrat, but perhaps there always was one inside him.

May we also have a debate on Foreign Office funding for bilateral groups? The Franco-British Council was formed 43 years ago, but this August the Minister for Europe wrote to its secretary-general, Ann Kenrick, telling her that its grant will be cut from £100,000 a year by more than 80%. The council’s most recent seminar was organised by a Muslim school teacher, Samia Essabaa, who was in the Stade de France with pupils last Friday. It hopes that its next seminar will be on “Tackling Islamic radicalisation”. Surely this kind of work is worth the £100,000 a year that the council has been receiving and is not due for a cut—it is certainly worth more than a special jet for the Prime Minister.

On Syria, we in the Labour Party stand ready to listen, because everyone wants an end to the civil war, the defeat of ISIL, the end of the Assad regime and the safe return of the refugees. The Prime Minister said that he will respond to the Foreign Affairs Committee in the next few days. When does the Leader of the House expect this to be? Will he ensure that the House has time to digest that reply before any motion is put to it? May I also urge him to make provision for a two-day debate when it comes to any formal Government proposal? When the House was summoned back on the 28 August 2013, we had a seven-and-a-half-hour debate. That was exceptional because the day did not start with questions, yet even so there was a five-minute limit on speeches, which was reduced to three minutes after 8 pm. Surely, when we are debating such matters it is vital that hon. Members can make proper contributions, and we should have a two-day debate.

On Friday, Mr Speaker, as you know, the UK national Youth Parliament sat in this Chamber under your chairmanship. Last year’s Youth Parliament chose mental health as its campaign for the year, on the back of which the Youth Select Committee, helped by the House of Commons staff, published its report this week entitled “Young People’s Mental Health”. It is an excellent report, which argues that mental health is as important as physical health and says that more than half of all mental ill health starts before the age of 14. It also refers to the stigma of mental ill health as the greatest battle of all. Today is international men’s day, and it is a sad fact that suicide is still the biggest killer of men between the ages of 20 and 49 in England and Wales. Young gay men are six times more likely than their straight counterparts to take their own lives. Is it not incumbent on all of us to tackle the root causes of mental ill health, to protect the vulnerable and to end the stigma which is all too often attached to it?

Chris Grayling: I start by echoing the shadow Leader of the House’s words about the events in Paris and the tragic death of Nick Alexander. We should also extend our good wishes to those who have been wounded and traumatised, both British nationals and French. We wish a speedy recovery to all those who are still in hospital in Paris.

As a former journalist and somebody who has worked alongside some of the most heroic journalists of the past generation, I echo the shadow Leader of the House’s words about journalists, too. They go into some of the most dangerous situations in the world, and some pay with their lives. We always owe them a debt of gratitude for the information they provide and the light they shine on some of the most barbaric practices in the world.

Although we do not, and indeed should not, talk about the security of this House, I would like to say to Members that, in the wake of the Paris attacks, our security officials, the House of Commons Commission and all those involved in running this place are well aware of the challenges that we face, and always seek to take appropriate measures. I hope that hon. Members, and the staff who work here, are always reassured that those officials are doing everything they can on their behalf. We also owe a debt of gratitude to the armed police and to all the security staff who provide protection for this heart of our democracy.

I echo the words and condolences of the shadow Leader of the House following the tragic explosion in Cardiff. Our good wishes and sincere sympathies go out to the families of those involved.

The shadow Leader of the House has always been keen to focus on anniversaries. Will he, and the Scottish National party, join me in celebrating the 21st anniversary of another great Conservative social reform? He has talked about it recently, as has the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart). It is the 21st birthday of the national lottery, which has provided important support in the constituencies of the shadow Leader of the House, SNP Members and others. It makes a real difference to local communities, and I praise all of those who, over those 21 years, have been involved in developing the national lottery and supporting local projects, and securing lottery funding for important local causes.

On the recess dates, all I can say to the shadow Leader of the House is that, of course, we will provide those dates as soon as possible, but he will understand that it is incumbent on any Government—indeed on all Members of this House—to put securing the important business of this nation ahead of time off in our constituencies and on holidays. We will ensure that we can deliver the changes that this country needs, and then we will seek to deliver the dates of the recesses as soon as we practically can.

On the report on immigration removal centres, I will ensure that the hon. Gentleman’s concerns are drawn to the attention of the Home Secretary ahead of the Immigration Bill.

The hon. Gentleman asked for a three-day debate on the autumn statement. Let me remind him that he has an Opposition day coming up, and I have just announced further time for the Backbench Business Committee. There is no shortage of time available for opposition

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parties and for Members of this House to secure debates on topics of concern. We have given more time control to Members of this House outside the Government than any previous Government. It is of course open to the hon. Gentleman to debate any subject that he wishes.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the challenges of the spending review. He really should remember why we have to take those decisions. We are still sorting out the problems that we inherited from the years of Labour Government under Gordon Brown. The Opposition always conveniently forget that. We on the Government Benches might treat them more seriously if they had a sign at all of having an economic policy of their own. Frankly, I am completely confused about where they stand now. Is it the party leadership that controls economic policy, or is it the shadow Chancellor or those on the Back Benches? The messages that we get are so mixed that none of us has any idea at all.

The shadow Leader of the House talked about extra money for security, and I am grateful to members of the Labour party for giving their support to the additional funding that we have said we will provide for our security services. That is enormously important. He will have to wait for the details of the spending review. As regards policing, I simply remind him that we have had to make some difficult decisions about police funding over the past few years. Police forces up and down the country have responded admirably to that, and have delivered quality policing at a lower price. Crime has fallen, and is continuing to fall.

The shadow Leader of the House talked about today's announcement on Government transport. If we look at what was proposed back in the years of a Labour Government, we will find that they were going to spend £100 million on two brand-new aircraft. Even then, that would have been a travesty and a complete waste of public money. We are spending a small fraction of that, upgrading an existing aircraft to save money for the taxpayer. That is the difference between our two parties. They spend, spend, spend and we deliver value for the taxpayer.

The Prime Minister said yesterday that he will look at Foreign Office funding for bilateral groups, and I am sure that he will respond on that in due course. On Syria, he has promised to respond fully to the Foreign Affairs Committee, and he will do so in the next few days. It is a sign of how seriously he takes this matter that he is making a personal response to the Syrian situation. Of course, once that response is there and it has been considered by the House, we can decide how to take matters forward, but the hon. Gentleman will have to wait for that response.

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): As my right hon. Friend knows, Plymouth will be the centre of attention for the Mayflower celebrations in 2020. I remind him that this was when the British went to found the American colonies. I recently met my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. May we have a debate on those important celebrations and how they can boost tourism to the UK, and in particular to Plymouth and the south-west?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend continues to be an admirable champion not only for the city of Plymouth, but for its heritage. He has done more than any

representative of that city in recent years to promote it as an historic centre and I commend him on that. We have Culture, Media and Sport questions next week and I am sure he will use the opportunity to raise this again. I send all my good wishes to those in Plymouth who are preparing for this important anniversary, and I wish my hon. Friend well for his continued support for the heritage of the constituency and the city he represents.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. I associate myself with the remarks made and the condolences offered following the events in Paris last week and the events in Cardiff. I associate the Scottish National party with the comments about the staff of the House who work so hard to ensure that we continue to be safe and who do so in such a friendly, pleasant and accommodating way. Everyone in the House should recognise those attributes of the people who keep us safe every day.

I noticed a few ripples of excitement and anticipation ahead of the Scottish National party's debates next week. The Trident debate offers an opportunity for all parties in the House to clarify their position in advance of the critical decision that is going to be taken about Trident main gate. We know the Conservative position. The Conservatives love their nukes and they are quite happy to spend £167 billion on obscene weapons of mass destruction—a cold war weapon that cannot even start to defend us from the range of threats that we face. We know the Scottish National party position and our historic opposition to that, and we will suggest a number of ways in which £167 billion might be more usefully spent on social projects. Who knows, we might even find out what the Labour party thinks about Trident, although I am not holding out any great expectation of that. If I am right, I think Labour is both for and against, uncertain and unsure about Trident. When it comes to the vote next week, I think Labour Members might be for, against, maybe for and maybe for abstention. That roughly categorises the Labour position on Trident and we look forward to hearing from Labour Members next week.

When are we going to have the debate on Syria that is due? Yesterday, when I closed my eyes, I could swear that I heard the voice and the words of Tony Blair coming from the Prime Minister, without a care about UN resolutions—the position that the former Prime Minister took—and not caring less about public opinion. We saw how that worked out for the former Prime Minister. If we are going down the Blairite route towards further military action without UN authorisation, may we have some sort of statement and clarity from the Government?

I am pleased that we have a debate on Thursday next week on the Airports Commission. It might be an opportune time to bring up the little issue of the Prime Minister's plans for his own personal air travel—Air Force One, brought to you in association with Bullingdon airways and etonJet. It is an incredible vanity project when, the day before, the Chancellor will be standing at the Dispatch Box with his latest round of misery for those who are the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in our communities.

I know that the Leader of the House likes his anniversaries, as does the shadow Leader of the House. Yes, we welcome the 21 years of the national lottery. It is just a pity that the Government are cutting the Big Lottery Fund by some 40%, as was announced this week.

Here is another anniversary for them: it is one year since Nicola Sturgeon took over the helm of the Scottish National party, and what a year it has been. We have 56 out of the 59 MPs from Scotland. We are still north of 50% in opinion polls on the Holyrood elections next year, and we have personal satisfaction ratings in Scotland way beyond anything that has been seen by either of the main parties down here. So I am pretty certain the Leader of the House would like to pay tribute to the success of the First Minister and all that she has achieved in the past year.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman had more acclaim from his Back Benchers than the Leader of the Opposition had yesterday from his Back Benchers. On Trident, I do not understand either where Labour stands. It is utterly confusing. Indeed, we had the extraordinary position on yesterday's "Daily Politics" show where the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), when asked if he had confidence in his party leader, said, "I have confidence in Hilary Benn." That speaks volumes. I am not surprised: I am completely confused about what Labour stands for. The shadow Defence Secretary, the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), is saying that she supports Trident, but Labour appointed somebody who opposes Trident to co-chair its defence review with her. I therefore understand the hon. Gentleman's confusion. Perhaps next week we will discover a little more about what Labour's policy is.

I gently chide the hon. Gentleman about the contradictions in the debate subjects he has chosen for next week. For half the day, he will argue that we should pull a really vital national resource out of Scotland, costing thousands of jobs and leaving an important part of Scotland a wasteland, yet for the other half he will complain about our making necessary reductions in HMRC and worrying about that costing jobs in Scotland. I do not quite understand how he squares those two things. I think that our defence industry plays a really important part not only in the Scottish economy but in defending our nation. The SNP's position is utterly contradictory.

The hon. Gentleman asked about Syria. I simply say that he is going to have to wait for the Prime Minister's response. The Prime Minister has said that he will respond personally to the Foreign Affairs Committee. This is the first time he has made a personal response of this kind, and the House needs to wait to see that. We will address the issues once the House has had a chance to digest the report.

The hon. Gentleman made mention of the plane. The difference between us—not just between us and Labour but between us and the SNP—is that when we make a change of this kind it is designed to save money. This will reduce Government travel costs, and that is surely the right thing to do. *The Scotsman* reported last year that when Nicola Sturgeon was in charge of transport she never travelled by rail but always by chauffeur-driven car. I travelled to work this morning by train, and it was late, which was frustrating. I get the train each day, and perhaps the First Minister should have done the same.

The hon. Gentleman talks about Nicola Sturgeon's first anniversary and the achievements of the SNP over the past 12 months. We all recognise the successes it has had, but I think he slightly underplays his own contribution. It is a team effort, so he should give himself a bit of a pat on the back and not just Nicola Sturgeon.

Suella Fernandes (Fareham) (Con): St Francis special school in Fareham was broken into three times over the half term and vandalised again last weekend, causing over £15,000 of damage and forcing it to close. Will my right hon. Friend join me in appealing to people with more information to come forward to Fareham police—they will be treated anonymously—and in applauding the resilience of the headmaster, Steve Hollinghurst, and the many local residents who raised over £9,000 to help the school open this week?

Chris Grayling: This was a shocking incident. It is always absolutely dreadful when a community facility or a school is a target of crime, and it is inexcusable. Yet it is also a sign of the strength not only of the community that my hon. Friend represents but, when these things happen around the country, of other communities elsewhere, that when something like this happens people rally round and help fix the problem. We condemn unreservedly those who carry out such callous acts, but at the same time it is a tribute to the strength of community in this country that people respond in the way they do. I pay tribute to her also for her part in that.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Tomorrow is the second anniversary of Hull being granted UK city of culture status for 2017. The science museum receives £20 million-worth of taxpayers' money, but it has told Hull that it is not possible to move the Gypsy Moth airplane that Hull's Amy Johnson flew to Australia in 1930—the first woman to do so—to Hull for the Amy Johnson festival in 2016, leading into the 2017 celebrations. May we have a debate on the obligations on national arts organisations and museums to work with Hull leading up to city of culture 2017, and to ensure that Hull's history is actually displayed in Hull?

Chris Grayling: First, let me congratulate the city of Hull on its achievements. I had some sight of the city of culture year in Liverpool a few years ago, and thought that city did a fantastic job. I also saw the impetus that it can create within a city. I am sure that if Hull goes through the same process of preparation—and excitement, frankly—about the city of culture year, it will be a great boost to the city.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will be here next week. The hon. Lady will want to raise the issue again, so I will make sure that he is made aware of her comments today. She is absolutely right to say that I would hope and expect our great national museums and other institutions to play their part in supporting our regions as well as being centres of national excellence.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): Tomorrow, the Lancet commission on liver disease will produce a report highlighting the enormous impact and financial cost of that disease in this country. May we have a debate or a statement from a Minister from the Department of Health on what the Government propose to do to deal with this critical problem?

Chris Grayling: I pay tribute to all those involved in producing the report, which the Department of Health intends to take seriously and to study carefully. Given that there is widespread concern across the House about the issue, perhaps my hon. Friend could secure a debate

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either through the Backbench Business Committee or in Westminster Hall, in order to get a Health Minister to debate the issues closely.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I am grateful to the Leader of the House for the business statement. There will be a Backbench Business Committee debate on the Airports Commission next Thursday. I also thank him for giving notice of the business on 30 November, which has been allocated to the Backbench Business Committee. He can be assured that the Committee has an ample supply of applications and business to fill the time.

I thank the Leader of the House for reminding us of the 21st anniversary of the national lottery. My constituency of Gateshead has benefited greatly from the national lottery, through funding for the arts and other areas. It has given £100 million to projects such as the Sage Gateshead, the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art and the Gateshead millennium bridge, which have transformed the riverscape on the Gateshead side of the Tyne river.

I disagree with the Leader of the House about one thing, though. With or without Trident, I do not think that the area around Faslane could ever be described as being a wasteland. It is beautiful countryside.

Chris Grayling: There was never any doubt about the beauty of the countryside in western Scotland or, indeed, in Scotland as a whole. It is a fantastic part of this country where we would all wish to spend time. However, if such an important facility were lost to western Scotland, the impact on the local economy of emptying the site, which is an important part of that local economy, and letting it go to waste would be a tragedy. That is why I disagree with the Scottish nationalists about the economic impact on Scotland, quite apart from the defence impact on the nation as a whole. I am afraid that is one area where we will not be with the SNP.

I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments on the national lottery. We should also pay tribute to Sir John Major, whose idea it was and who made it a reality. Twenty-one years later, I think that is an achievement to be celebrated.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): May we please have a debate about the northern powerhouse? A ComRes survey reported this week that 44% of people in the north of England had never heard of it and that a further 20% had heard of it but knew nothing about it, so a debate would provide an opportunity at least to increase awareness.

Chris Grayling: That is a very good idea. Perhaps we could suggest it to the Backbench Business Committee. The national lottery is a great Conservative achievement from 21 years ago, and perhaps we could use a debate to celebrate a great Conservative achievement today. Finally we have a Government who are really determined to drive up economic activity in the north, compared with the last Labour Government, under whom the proportion of manufacturing industry in our economy fell by half and the north bore a disproportionate brunt of it.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): In this age of austerity, I am sure the Leader of the House is as astonished as I am that my local authority, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, which is run by a City Independents and

Conservative coalition, has reportedly just spent £500,000 on getting rid of its chief executive. May we have, as a matter of urgency, a debate in Government time on golden parachutes in the public sector?

Chris Grayling: Every local council is accountable to its local electors for the decisions it takes. None of us would ever wish to see local authorities spending money unnecessarily, but, of course, I have no idea about the nature of the contract and the circumstances behind that pay-off, so it would be wrong of me to comment on it.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): On Monday, my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Sir Roger Gale) said that he would like the Procedure Committee to make recommendations to enable this House to choose its own representatives to international organisations. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that the Government will not stand in the way of such a process? My hon. Friend asked that question on Monday, but did not receive a reply.

Chris Grayling: I have great respect for the Chair of the Procedure Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), and I would not dare to try to tell him what or what not to study. I have no doubt at all that if he chooses to look at this issue, he will do so. It is certainly not for me to intervene to tell him what he should or should not do.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): May I, too, put on the record my condolences to the victims of the explosion at the Celsa steelworks yesterday, in the neighbouring constituency to mine in Cardiff?

On China, may we have a debate about continuing Chinese abuses of human rights, particularly the case of Gui Haiming, who has disappeared along with three other employees of publishers Sage Communications in Hong Kong, which publishes books critical of the Chinese communist elite? Should not we in this country be doing more to raise such issues of human rights abuses by the Chinese regime, particularly when we are looking to develop our relationship with that country?

Chris Grayling: One of the things we were able to do during the recent visit was to raise concerns about human rights with the Chinese leadership. It remains the Government's view that we are more likely to be able to influence change by engagement than by disengagement with China. The Foreign Secretary will be in the Chamber for Foreign Office questions on Tuesday, and the hon. Gentleman will no doubt use that opportunity to raise the issue again. The Government will always raise concerns about human rights with other nations where it is necessary and appropriate to do so.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Some time ago, Harrow council decided to outsource the designation of disabled parking badges. The result has been that an increasing number of aged, infirm and extremely vulnerable individuals have had their applications for renewing their blue badges rejected with no recourse to an appeal. May we have a debate in Government time on the implementation of disabled parking so that we can explore its operation right across this country? There is nothing more infuriating than to see someone who is clearly not disabled park in a disabled bay, while at the same time disabled people cannot park and access shops or other facilities.

Chris Grayling: Another aspect of what my hon. Friend is talking about is that when we go into car parks, we very often see vast numbers of empty disabled spaces, while, as we all know, constituents who need blue badges are struggling to get them. This is really an area in which local authorities should apply common sense. There is no point in having large numbers of empty disabled spaces without people who could use them being able to access them. He is absolutely right, and he may wish to bring this issue before the House in the form of an Adjournment debate. I hope that simply raising it today will send a message to local authorities that we want them to be smart about this issue.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Earlier this week, the Prime Minister announced an extra £2 billion of funding for special forces. We only have 450 in our special forces. Apparently, the money is to be used to buy equipment—protection equipment, vehicles, including helicopters, and night fighting equipment. May we have a debate on whether this is new money or money diverted from the wider defence budget, and on whether or not it is time—given that the Prime Minister now has his own private army, by the sound of it—to widen and make more open parliamentary oversight of special forces?

Chris Grayling: I must say that I think the Prime Minister's "private army" is a pretty disparaging way to describe some of the most heroic people in our armed forces. We are providing the money necessary to enable an elite and brave group of people to defend this country against the appalling activities we have seen in France in recent days. I am proud that this is a Government who do the right thing in such areas. The hon. Lady will have plenty of time to question the Chancellor about his spending plans next week, but we will always do the right thing to try to protect our citizens.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Employees at Fairline in my constituency are understandably very worried by last week's announcement of job losses. Unfortunately, Fairline will not engage with me, the employees or the unions. May we have a debate on the responsibilities and obligations on companies such as Fairline to engage with employees and the communities affected, and to do what they can to ensure we can get the right support to the right people at the right time?

Chris Grayling: I always think that employers make a big mistake when they act as my hon. Friend suggests they have in his constituency. The fact that he has raised this issue today will be noticed outside. It does reputational damage to the companies concerned. I would encourage any employer to do the right thing by their employees and the communities in which they operate, even when they have to take difficult decisions. If they do not, they will pay the price in the end.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Age Sector Platform and the pensioners' parliament in Northern Ireland have passed various resolutions over the past few years, asking for the warm home discount scheme to be extended to Northern Ireland. So far, that has not happened. It would be an important measure in mitigating fuel poverty. Is it possible to have a debate on that proposal, which would impact on a large number of older people throughout Northern Ireland?

Chris Grayling: Coincidentally, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is sitting next to me in the Chamber and will have heard the hon. Lady's comments. I am sure she will take them away and digest them.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): May we have a debate on the national health service? I am proud to support a Government that are investing an additional £10 billion in the service in this Parliament, that are giving mental health parity with physical health and that introduced the cancer drugs fund. A debate would help us to expose the reality of Labour's rhetoric. Of course, in Wales, where it is in control, it is cutting the NHS.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The health service faces enormous challenges, such as the ageing population and keeping up with new solutions to health problems. That is why it is right and proper that we have committed to provide the £8 billion that Simon Stevens asked for over the course of this Parliament to help him deliver his plans for change in the health service and why it is right that we have committed to deliver more mental health funding. My hon. Friend is right that the contrast between health services in England and in Wales—one run by the Conservatives and one by Labour—is there for all to see. I hope that everyone in this country learns that lesson.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): The Leader of the House may be aware that the Trussell Trust, which runs 425 food banks in this country, put out its mid-year statistics yesterday for April to September 2015. North Enfield food bank gave 2,465 three-day emergency food supplies to people in crisis in Enfield, 990 of which were given to children. May we have an early debate in this House on the Government policies that are widening the gap significantly between rich and poor, and driving so many children into abject poverty?

Chris Grayling: First, let me pay tribute to all the volunteers who work in food banks around the country. Food banks are not unique to the United Kingdom and are used more extensively in countries such as Germany. They do good work in helping people to overcome crises in their lives. However, I say to the right hon. Lady that it is simply not the case that the gap between rich and poor is widening. Inequality is falling, unemployment is falling sharply and the number of children growing up in workless households has fallen sharply. This country is moving in the right direction, not the wrong one.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): We do not need a debate on what is the ugliest building in Britain because it is the bus station in the centre of Preston. It would therefore be helpful to have a debate on why Labour-controlled Lancashire County Council has spent £23 million restoring that concrete monstrosity, while proposing to shut libraries and museums in my Rossendale constituency.

Chris Grayling: I have visited the bus station in Preston and I know exactly what my hon. Friend means, although I suspect that such a competition would attract entries from around the House. When a local authority gets it wrong, as he suggests the Labour council in Lancashire has done, it will pay a price electorally. Our colleagues in Lancashire will highlight the failings of that authority and explain why it needs to change.

Mr Speaker: The Leader of the House clearly has a stimulating existence if he spends time visiting bus stations. Perhaps we should hear more about these matters.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): May I associate myself with the comments of right hon. and hon. Members about the tragic accident at Celsa in Cardiff yesterday? Last week, two teenagers received custodial sentences from a Cardiff youth court following an incident with a BB gun, despite the sale of such imitation weapons to under-18s being illegal. May we have a debate on the current law governing the possession and sale of imitation weapons, because it is clearly not working?

Chris Grayling: This is a serious issue because, as the hon. Lady knows, weapons that have been deactivated can be reactivated, and a weapon that has been sold as unusable can become usable. I am sure that the Home Secretary is taking that broader issue seriously, and I will ensure that the specific point raised is drawn to her attention. In the meantime, I hope that the police will seek to take action against the person who sold that weapon.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): Next week's business includes the Northern Ireland (Welfare Reform) Bill—I see that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is in the Chamber. Is the Leader of the House concerned that such legislation is coming through this House rather than the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly?

Chris Grayling: Let me take advantage of that question to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Northern Ireland Secretary who has worked tirelessly in recent weeks to try to find a solution to a complex and difficult problem. The Bill before the House on Monday is an outcome of those talks, and it has the support of all parties in Northern Ireland. I understand that a legislative consent motion for it passed through the Assembly yesterday, and I hope that Members across the House, and in the other place, will come together next week to enact the Bill speedily. When politics in Northern Ireland reaches a resolution and agreement, it is beholden on us all to ensure that we put that agreement in place as quickly as we can.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): Last Thursday, Boulby Potash announced that it would make 700 of its 1,000 miners redundant by 2018, including 350 redundancies with immediate effect. That comes off the back of announcements by Caparo, SSI, Johnson Matthey, and other redundancies that amass to about 5,000 private and public sector jobs that, in the past two months, have either gone or will soon go. To deal properly with that situation, may we have a debate or statement on the Government's review of carbon capture and storage programmes? Teesside is an excellent candidate for CCS, and we could create a new renaissance in industrial activity in the area and attract private investment directly to the Tees valley.

Chris Grayling: Any large-scale job loss in this country—indeed, any job loss—is unwelcome, and the Government will work with all those in Teesside and other areas who have been affected by recent developments. We will do everything possible to ease the immediate impact of

those job losses, and to secure appropriate investment to replace jobs that are lost. That will always be our priority. The Prime Minister said yesterday that CCS is being considered by the Department of Energy and Climate Change. We have just had questions to DECC, and if the hon. Gentleman did not have the opportunity to raise that issue with the Secretary of State, I will ensure that she is made aware of his concerns. She will no doubt bring forward further information about her plans in due course.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): May we have an urgent debate or statement on the junior doctors dispute, given that 98% of junior doctors who voted have voted overwhelmingly for a full strike? The turnout was 76%, which is satisfactory by anyone's standards. Is the Health Secretary's position tenable, given that he has clearly lost the confidence of our junior doctors?

Chris Grayling: I spoke to the Department of Health this morning and I reassure the hon. Lady that the Health Secretary will soon make a statement in the House. The House must be informed about what is happening, and more information will soon be provided.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): Will consideration be given to a debate on abated military pensions for those who left the armed forces before 1975? Many constituents have contacted me about that issue, and it affects more than 40,000 veterans across the UK.

Chris Grayling: By happy coincidence, questions to the Ministry of Defence take place next Monday. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman raises that issue directly with the Secretary of State, and I will ensure that he is made aware that the matter is likely to be raised.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): May I associate myself with the remarks made by my hon. Friends about the industrial accident in Cardiff? On the Friday before last, my private Member's Bill—the Off-patent Drugs Bill—was talked out by a Minister at the Dispatch Box, despite having support from expert opinion, public opinion, and across the House. Early this week a Minister from the Department of Health said that the Government share the ambitions of my Bill, so will the Leader of the House find Government time to debate the important issue of off-patent drugs, and also to consider the way that private Member's Bills are handled?

Chris Grayling: This issue has been debated and the Government's position was that legislation was not necessary. We share some of the hon. Gentleman's aspirations. Health Ministers will continue to look at the issues he raised in that debate. He will no doubt find other opportunities to pursue them, if he feels they are not being addressed.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' Welsh language customer service unit is currently located in Porthmadog, a town in Gwynedd where the majority of the population is Welsh speaking. It is therefore a very convenient place for the Welsh-speaking staff and the majority of people who are likely to use HMRC services through the medium of Welsh. The service is to be moved from Porthmadog

to Cardiff, which is four hours away on a good day in a car. May we have a debate on the impact of the proposed HMRC changes on Welsh-speaking jobs and services, and jobs as a whole, throughout Wales?

Chris Grayling: By happy coincidence, there is such a debate next Tuesday, as part of the Scottish National party Opposition day. The Government are well aware of the sensitivities in ensuring that we provide services for Welsh speakers. There is a need to ensure that HMRC operates in as an efficient way as possible. The hon. Lady would want us to deliver value for money for the taxpayers she represents but, as the restructuring takes place, HMRC will ensure it can continue to provide an appropriate Welsh language service for those in Wales who need it.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): This House was united in reaction to the dreadful events in Paris last week and in making clear that they had nothing to do with Muslim communities, such as the one that I represent. Does the Leader of the House therefore share my disgust at the appalling cartoon published in a national newspaper this week, which portrayed Muslim refugees as rats and featured crude racist stereotypes reminiscent of anti-Semitic bigotry that once faced Jewish refugees? Will he provide an opportunity for the House to make it clear that this kind of hatred should have no place in our national conversation?

Chris Grayling: I did not see the cartoon the hon. Lady mentions, but let me be absolutely clear that the events that took place in Paris were not representative of the Muslim community, either in France or anywhere else in the world. The vast, vast, vast majority of Muslim people are decent, God-fearing, law-abiding people who work hard for their families and do the right thing in their communities. None of us should ever have anything to do with a narrative that suggests otherwise. There is a tiny minority of people who come from Muslim countries who, in my view, besmirch the Muslim faith through an ideology that is among the most unpleasant we have ever experienced in the history of mankind. It should be resisted at all costs.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): For nearly two years, my constituent William Irving has been detained in Chennai, where he is undergoing a second trial for piracy despite the charge having previously been dropped. I wrote to the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the right hon. Member for East Devon (Mr Swire) on 22 October to request a meeting, and to the Foreign Secretary on 2 November, in relation to this case. Neither has yet responded, so may we have a statement in the House on whether the Government will commit to providing every assistance to Billy and his shipmates, and to ensuring a speedy turnaround of their passport applications to allow them to return home to their families as quickly as possible at the conclusion of their trial?

Chris Grayling: I know the hon. Lady is particularly concerned about this case. She has raised it with me before. The Foreign Secretary and the Minister are both here early next week for questions. I will make sure they are aware of her concern that she has not received a response. If they have not been able to respond by then, I hope she will be able to get a response from them then.

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): There is an epidemic of addiction to prescription drugs in my constituency and it has been brought to my attention that there is a black market in GP prescriptions. If that is happening in Wansbeck, it will be happening across the country in different constituencies. Will the Leader of the House make time for a debate to discuss this deeply disturbing development?

Chris Grayling: I was not aware of that problem, but I absolutely take on board the hon. Gentleman's point. It would be an extremely serious matter, not only for the people addicted in his community, but for the financing of the local health service, and we should not tolerate it for one moment. I will make the Health Secretary aware of his concerns, and if he was to write to him with more detail, I would ask the Health Secretary to look out for the letter and give it proper and immediate attention.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): May we have a debate about the rights of football supporters in the UK? It would allow us to pay tribute to Brian Lomax, the founder of Supporters Direct and the modern movement to establish supporters' trusts at football clubs in the UK, and who sadly passed away at the beginning of the month. He understood that football was more than just a business or entertainment; it is about emotion, loyalty and, most of all, our communities. He will be sorely missed.

Chris Grayling: I think the hon. Gentleman's words speak volumes. He is absolutely right to pay tribute to Brian Lomax and to remind us of the importance of football in communities up and down the country—not just the professional game, on which supporters' trusts are focused, but as a grass-roots sport that brings together people from different parts of our society. I pay tribute to Mr Lomax for the work he did during his life, and I send my condolences to his family on his sad death.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): If any of us object to the Leader of the House's business motion later today, we will lose the right to table amendments in the microwave legislative business next Monday—the same day as an important statement that many hon. Members will want to ask questions on. We are told that this sort of microwave, fast-track procedure is to be used only in emergencies or when there is a compelling exigency. What is the compelling emergency in this situation, other than the overdose of political Febreze to accompany the stepping down of the First Minister and the climb down by Sinn Féin on welfare reform?

Chris Grayling: Given that the Northern Ireland Secretary is about to make a statement, I had better let her give a detailed answer to that question. Suffice it to say that I want to ensure this measure has the smoothest possible passage through the House. I see that more Northern Ireland MPs have now joined us. A huge effort was made by all parties in Northern Ireland, and I pay tribute to all those involved in the talks. It was a real marathon. I said earlier that the Secretary of State did a fantastic job. Given the complexities and challenges in Northern Ireland politics, it is beholden on us here to do everything we can to facilitate the agreement reached, and that is what we will seek to do.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I am shocked that we have not yet heard that the Health Secretary will make a statement to the House. The Leader of the House indicated that he would, but it would not be good enough for him to do that tomorrow, hiding it away on a Friday, when many Members will be back in their constituencies. A statement would give him an opportunity to correct his assertion from the Dispatch Box that patients have to wait more than 14 hours to see a consultant at weekends. That has been disproved. The only people who now believe it are the Government. When are we getting this statement?

Chris Grayling: With respect, the result of the ballot was only announced a few minutes before the sitting. I have secured a commitment from the Department of Health that a Minister will make a statement shortly, and no doubt that will give the hon. Gentleman an opportunity to ask his questions.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Given the Government's concern about the performance of the unelected Lords, will the Leader of the House make a statement outlining what mechanisms are in place to allow an MP such as me to scrutinise the performance of the newly appointed business tsar, Baroness Mone of Mayfair? Does he agree that her voting for the tax credit cuts in the other place sends out the wrong signal to potential entrepreneurs?

Chris Grayling: I am afraid I do not agree that it was wrong for Conservatives in the other place to vote for the tax credit cuts. We stood on a manifesto commitment to make substantial cuts to welfare, and we are doing that as part of our plan to put this country's economy on a sound financial base.

Northern Ireland Political Agreement

11.29 am

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the agreement reached this week in the cross-party talks at Stormont, but first I would like to pay tribute to Peter Robinson, who announced this morning that he will soon be standing down as First Minister and leader of the Democratic Unionist party. Peter has been a central figure in Northern Ireland politics for over four decades. He has a long and distinguished record of public service in both this House and the Assembly, and he has championed the interests of Northern Ireland with unparalleled effectiveness, determination and dedication. He was key to the agreement reached this week and he can be rightly proud of his contribution. I am sure the whole House will join me in wishing him a long and happy retirement.

Last December, the Stormont House agreement was reached after 11 weeks of negotiations between the five largest Northern Ireland parties and the UK and Irish Governments. The agreement addressed some of the most difficult challenges facing Northern Ireland, including the finances of the devolved Executive, welfare, flags and parades, the legacy of the past, and reform of the Assembly to make devolution work better. All this was underpinned by a financial package from the UK Government that would give the Executive around £2 billion in extra spending power.

In the Government's view, the Stormont House agreement was, and remains, a good deal for Northern Ireland. By the summer, however, it was clear that implementation had stalled. There were strong differences of opinion within the Executive over the budget and the implementation of the welfare aspects of the agreement, and these were preventing other elements of the agreement from going ahead. We were facing a deadlock, which, left unresolved, would have made early Assembly elections more and more likely, with an ever-increasing risk that collapse of devolution would follow. After all that has been achieved in Northern Ireland over recent years, a return to direct rule from Westminster would have been a severe setback, and it is an outcome that I have been striving to avoid.

In August, a second issue arose to threaten the stability and survival of devolution. The suspected involvement of members of the Provisional IRA in a murder in Belfast raised the spectre of paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland and its malign and totally unacceptable impact on society. Faced with those circumstances, we concluded that it was necessary to convene a fresh round of cross-party talks with the five main Northern Ireland parties and the Irish Government on matters for which they have responsibility, observing the well-established three-strand approach.

Those talks began on 8 September and have run for 10 weeks. The objectives we set were twofold: first, to secure the implementation of the Stormont House agreement and, secondly, to deal with continued paramilitary activity. I believe that the document published on Tuesday entitled "A Fresh Start: The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan", makes real progress towards fulfilling both of those hugely important objectives. Crucially, it tackles the two issues that have posed the greatest threat to the stability and survival of devolution in Northern Ireland.

Let me turn first to the Stormont House agreement. The new agreement will help to give the Executive a stable and sustainable budget, assisted by further financial support of around £500 million from the UK Government. These funds are to help the Executive to tackle issues that are unique to Northern Ireland. They include support for the Executive's programme of removing so-called peace walls and £160 million to assist the Police Service of Northern Ireland in its crucial work to combat the threat from dissident republican groupings. The package also paves the way for completion of the devolution of corporation tax powers to the Northern Ireland Executive—something that could have a genuinely transformative effect on the Northern Ireland economy and on jobs and prosperity. The measures in the Stormont House agreement designed to address issues around flags and parades will now go ahead, and there is agreement on reforms to the Executive and Assembly to make devolution work better, including on the size of the Assembly, the number of Government Departments, use of the petition of concern and provision for an official opposition.

Secondly, the agreement takes Northern Ireland's leaders further than ever before on the issue of paramilitary activity. It strongly reaffirms the commitment to upholding the rule of law and makes it absolutely clear that in no circumstances will paramilitary activity ever be tolerated. The agreement places new shared obligations on Executive Ministers to work together towards ridding society of all paramilitary groups and activities, and challenging paramilitarism in all its forms. It commits all participants to a concerted and enhanced effort to combat organised and cross-border crime, which the UK Government will help to fund.

A key element of the Stormont House agreement on which we were unable to agree a way forward was the establishment of new bodies to deal with the legacy of the past. We did establish common ground between the parties on a range of significant questions about how to establish those important new structures, but sadly not enough to enable legislation to go forward as yet. The Government continue to support these provisions because of the pressing need to provide better outcomes for victims and survivors—the people who we must never forget have suffered more than anyone else as a result of the troubles. So it is crucial that we all now reflect on what needs to be done to achieve the wider consensus necessary to get the new legacy bodies set up.

I want to emphasise that, in very large part, the agreement published on Tuesday takes on board a wide range of points made by all five Northern Ireland parties during the 10 weeks of talks just concluded. As the overwhelming majority of issues were in the devolved areas, this agreement has rightly been driven by Northern Ireland's elected leaders, in particular by the First and Deputy First Ministers. I would like to reiterate my sincere thanks to them and to all the five Northern Ireland parties who worked with determination and commitment in the talks. Thanks also go to the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre and Preston North (Mr Wallace) and of course to Ministers Charlie Flanagan and Sean Sherlock from the Irish Government, who all devoted many long hours to this process and made an invaluable contribution to its successful outcome.

Implementation of this week's agreement is already under way. On Tuesday, the Executive voted to support it; yesterday, the Assembly passed an legislative consent motion

on welfare legislation at Westminster; and the Northern Ireland welfare reform Bill will be introduced to Parliament later today. I believe this package as a whole gives us the opportunity for a fresh start for devolution. It is a further stage in delivering the Government's manifesto commitment to implement the Stormont House agreement, and it is another step towards a brighter, more secure future for everyone in Northern Ireland. I commend this statement to the House.

11.37 am

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement and her usual courtesy in allowing me early sight of it. I join her in paying tribute to Peter Robinson, who has announced that he is to step down. His contribution to peace and progress in Northern Ireland has been immense. He has taken tough decisions and tried to reach out to all communities. Northern Ireland is a better place in no small part thanks to his immense work. I join the Secretary of State, as I know all Members would, in wishing him well for the future.

I begin by complimenting all those who have contributed to this document, including the UK and the Irish Governments. It is a document that, despite some obvious challenges and indeed omissions, once again offers Northern Ireland a way forward. It is one more stepping stone towards the brighter, better future that the people of Northern Ireland want and deserve.

Does the Secretary of State agree that it is the implementation of the agreement that is crucial and that the people of Northern Ireland do not want to be faced in a year or two with another crisis? This really has to be a fresh start. Is she, like me, confident that the measures contained in the agreement really offer a way forward in a number of areas? In particular, we welcome the commitment to bring an end to paramilitarism. Paramilitary activity has to end, and the proposal for a new strategy to bring this about, overseen by a panel, is critical. Is the Secretary of State, like me and many people I meet in Northern Ireland, worried about these groups and their particular attraction to some young people. Apparent easy money, lack of career opportunities, educational under-achievement and indeed a false belief that membership of such groups can provide status are all aspects that need to be tackled so that many of these young people can grow up in relative peace. Will the Secretary of State use her position to ensure that countering the attraction of these groups for young people is one of the strategic priorities, as I believe it should be?

In relation to the establishment of the joint agency task force, will the Secretary of State say more about how cross-border co-operation will work, what resources there will be for the PSNI, and, crucially, whether she expects the number of prosecutions to increase? I welcome her confirmation that work will be undertaken in respect of flags and parades. Does she agree that that work is both urgent and crucial?

Does the Secretary of State share my disappointment that it has not been possible to reach an agreement on legacy issues and the past? Will she say more about what the issues were, and how she believes they can be resolved? How, for example, will the clash between national security considerations and disclosure be resolved? Victims and survivors must clearly be a key part of any agreed process. I understand that dealing with the past is incredibly difficult, given the competing narratives

[Vernon Coaker]

and contested versions of events, but a comprehensive approach is critical to continuing progress in Northern Ireland.

The problem with the search for truth and justice is that they often seem to be unattainable possibilities, but is it not the case that the people of Northern Ireland and their politicians have arrived at compromises that were apparently impossible, and have built consensus where none seemed likely?

Will the Secretary of State ensure that further efforts are made to deal with the past? What plans has she to meet victims and victims' groups, and discuss a way forward? Given that no agreement has been reached on the issue, will funds be provided for the PSNI so that it can continue its legacy work?

The House has been asked to legislate on welfare reform. We will not oppose those measures, but a programme for jobs and growth is also needed in Northern Ireland, as it is in the whole of the UK. What measures in the agreement, over and above the devolution of corporation tax, will provide such a programme, while also improving the infrastructure?

As I said at the beginning, I see this agreement as a stepping stone towards a shared future. Of course there are frustrations and disagreements—of course there is disappointment at the inability to reach agreement on legacy issues—but could not the alternative have been a situation in which the devolution settlement itself was at risk with a return to direct rule—both those outcomes are unthinkable?

Whatever people may consider to be the agreement's imperfections or disappointments, there is another breathing space: there is another opportunity for Northern Ireland to move forward, combat criminality, banish paramilitarism, tackle sectarianism, and establish a Government that is stable financially and politically. That opportunity must be grasped, outstanding issues must be resolved, and a fresh crisis in a year or two must be avoided.

Mrs Villiers: Experience leads me to agree with the hon. Gentleman that implementation is key, and that reaching an agreement is just the start of a broader process. However, I warmly thank him for his support for this agreement and the Stormont House agreement. I also agree with him that a strategy to end paramilitarism in Northern Ireland must include programmes for young people to ensure that they are not drawn into activity of this kind. We had some constructive discussions about that during the talks, and I am sure that it will form part of the strategy foreseen in the agreement.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the task force, the surge in criminal activity, and the cross-border work. That work will be based on structures that already exist, but it will involve renewed vigour and activity, and there will be £25 million of additional funding to support action against paramilitarism. The UK Government are determined to do all that we can to work with the devolved bodies, the Minister of Justice and, of course, the Irish Government and the relevant agencies there. The PSNI and the Garda are working together, which is crucial. They do tremendously effective work now, and I am sure that the existing levels of co-operation will rise still further in the future. I agree with the

hon. Gentleman that progress on matters relating to flags and parades is urgently needed. One of the aspects of the agreement that I welcome most is the fact that it allows that progress to be made.

I share the hon. Gentleman's disappointment that we were unable to reach a conclusion on the legacy issue. However, we did make progress on, for example, the role of the implementation and reconciliation group and its relationship with the other legacy bodies, and on a number of aspects relating to how the Historical Investigations Unit will work and the devolution of responsibility between the HIU and its director. I think that we made significant improvements to how proposed draft clauses might work by clarifying the role of the Department of Justice. We had many discussions on national security. We did not manage to find a solution to that to which everyone could sign up, but I am sure that the shadow Secretary of State will agree it is crucial that we ensure that we do nothing to jeopardise national security.

I agree that an important way forward from now on is to meet victims groups, and I will be doing that soon. I also hope that I will be able to meet the victims commissioner soon to discuss the best way forward because we need to find a way to get these bodies set up.

I welcome the shadow Secretary of State's indication that he will not be opposing welfare reform. He is right to state that it is crucial that we do all we can to promote jobs and prosperity in Northern Ireland. A crucial way to do that is to ensure that the Executive have sound public finances. There have been many illustrations in recent years of the hugely negative effects Governments face if they cannot make their budgets add up, so getting the Executive's budget on a sustainable basis and ensuring that it is delivering effective government for Northern Ireland is a crucial way to deliver the prosperity agenda, which is so important for Northern Ireland's successful future.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on her achievement in bringing the parties to an agreement. I know that she has put an enormous amount of time, effort and indeed patience into the negotiations. In her statement, she referred to the importance of ensuring that young people do not get drawn into paramilitary activity. Does she agree that one way in which we can try to help on that is through improving and increasing integrated education? I understand that some funds were made available in the Stormont House agreement for those purposes and that there are projects waiting to start. Does she think that with this agreement that funding will now be available for those projects?

Mrs Villiers: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. He is right that integrated education is a crucial means to address sectarian division in Northern Ireland, as is shared education. There are funds available in the £2 billion Stormont House agreement package, which will now be released. We are contributing to a £60 million programme to promote confidence-building measures to see the interface barriers, or so-called peace walls, taken down. That is another way to bring communities together, which is a key part of ensuring that paramilitary groups disband once and for all and are no longer part of Northern Ireland's present day.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): May I associate myself and my party with the Secretary of State's remarks about Peter Robinson and his four decades of service?

I congratulate the Secretary of State, the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland parties on coming to this agreement. It should be hailed a success. It would have been easy for any politician to have stumbled during this.

The additional funding in recognition of the particular problems in Northern Ireland, a legacy of the troubles, is welcome and the welfare provisions equally so. The bedroom tax will not be applied, nor will some sanctions. I wonder whether after today's proceedings the Secretary of State might set out the differences between the two welfare systems, in written form, to allow us a better understanding.

Part of the funding for the welfare package, if I have understood correctly, will come from savings made through tightening up on error and fraud. Given the role that welfare reforms played in creating the recent difficulties, is there an alternative plan if those savings are not realised? I say, in passing, that the inclusion of a sunset clause in the Bill is welcome as a sign that the UK Government do not intend to continue to exercise control over the welfare system.

I note the substantial commitments made by the Irish Government in this agreement and their desire to improve links to, and economic development in, the north. I welcome those commitments and their commitments to assisting in ending paramilitary activity. That commitment on all sides is particularly welcome and interesting. I wonder whether the Government are in a position to explain what they see as being the scale of paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland and whether it is mainly a criminal undertaking now? The signs, though, from this agreement are good and I offer the support of my party in helping to make it work.

Mrs Villiers: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for her support for the agreement. As the Leader of the House said, it is crucial that we see support in all parts of the House for this agreement, which will signal a way forward for the devolved institutions.

The hon. Lady kindly mentioned the Irish Government. I share her sentiment that Minister Flanagan and the Irish Government have played a very important role. Indeed the process was also strongly supported by the US Government, with Senator Gary Hart playing a constructive role throughout, which was much welcomed.

The hon. Lady asked about the differences in the welfare system. The proposal in this agreement, reflecting the Stormont castle agreement back in December, is that the system applicable in GB will apply, but benefits will be topped up by the Northern Ireland Executive drawing on funds from the block grant. Under this agreement, rather than write that all in advance, a fund has been agreed and a panel will be set up to decide how to allocate those funds, but one of the areas to which those funds will be devoted relates to the social sector size criteria.

The hon. Lady asked about the programme for making savings in error and fraud in welfare. I believe that that could save significant amounts of money and the Northern Ireland Executive believe that it will save very substantial amounts of money. The agreement makes it clear that

half of any savings resulting from this can be shared by the Northern Ireland Executive and used for whatever purposes they deem appropriate.

The sunset clause is an important part of the legislation that we will consider next week. These are exceptional circumstances; we must urgently take action to enable the Northern Ireland Executive's finances to be put on a sustainable basis, but there is no justification for the powers to be extended into the future. The key challenge comes in the next year or so, and that is why the sunset clause has been inserted.

In relation to the hon. Lady's question on the scale of paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland, I direct her to the assessment we published a month or so ago making it clear that, very unfortunately, members of paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland are extensively involved in a range of criminal activities, such as drug dealing, money laundering and in some cases murder as well.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): May I add my thanks to Peter Robinson? I met him first in 1970, when he was an aspiring politician and I was aspiring to be a halfway decent infantry officer. I liked him then. He is honest, he is straight, he knows how to talk to soldiers, and he is in no small part responsible for the decent situation we now have in Northern Ireland. I thank him, with all my colleagues, for what he has done in his work.

Mrs Villiers: I am delighted to associate myself with those comments. Peter has done a huge amount of work for the good of Northern Ireland. He has achieved many things in his long career in public life, and Northern Ireland is the better place for his input into public life and politics there over four decades.

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): May I, on behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends, thank the Secretary of State, the shadow Secretary of State and those other Members who have paid tribute to Peter Robinson today? There is no doubt that, as far as we are concerned, words are not adequate to convey the thank you that we as a party—and everyone who values progress in Northern Ireland—owe to him for the work he has done not just recently, but over a lifetime of dedicated service to Northern Ireland. When one thinks back over the years to the dark days when politics was a dangerous occupation—it remains so for some—we owe an enormous debt of gratitude for the sacrifices he and his family have made to make progress in Northern Ireland. We thank him sincerely for all he has done.

Today's agreement is, of course, another tribute to the work Peter and others have done to try to move Northern Ireland forward. There will, of course, be snipers—there will be those who will want to downgrade this agreement—but the reality is that without this agreement, devolution would fail. We would be back to direct rule, which is, effectively, as far as Unionists are concerned, joint rule with Dublin. That is a far less appealing vista. What we have instead is an agreement that will provide a fresh start, allow us to move forward and put the budget on a sustainable footing.

Does the Secretary of State agree that we will now have the best welfare system in the United Kingdom? Help will go to the people who will be affected by the working tax credit cuts. That is something that those who voted against or sniped at the welfare changes need to bear in mind.

[Mr Nigel Dodds]

On paramilitaries, we are determined that a blind eye will never be turned to violence or to the actions of the paramilitaries. On the legacy of the past, I share the right hon. Lady's disappointment that an agreement could not be reached, but it is right that we should never allow a hierarchy of victims to be created and that we should not allow those who were so-called victims of the state to be elevated above the victims of the paramilitaries. She is right to hold the line, along with us, in protecting national security. I want to thank everyone involved for the work that has been done to achieve this milestone agreement.

Mrs Villiers: I should like once again to pay tribute to the work of the right hon. Gentleman and his party on achieving this agreement. He is absolutely right—as was the shadow Secretary of State—to say that if this process had failed, we would have been staring direct rule in the face, and I would have had to head off and write a programme for Government. We would have had to prepare for office. As the right hon. Gentleman said, there are always parts of these agreements in which one would have liked to go further and difficult compromises that have to be made, but the crucial point is that this agreement will secure the continued operation of devolution. Without it, there would have been a real danger of suspension, collapse and a return to direct rule. I believe that this can be a fresh start.

On the right hon. Gentleman's question about welfare, he is right to suggest that at the end of this process, Northern Ireland will have the most generous welfare system in the United Kingdom. Indeed, it will be one of the most generous in the world because, for all the reforms that have taken place, this country retains a generous welfare system across the board, and rightly so. It is crucial that we get this agreement implemented and ensure that it sticks, and I will be working with the right hon. Gentleman and with all the five Northern Ireland parties to do my best to ensure that that happens.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): Northern Ireland is a long way from Essex, but I am sure that everyone is very pleased that that important part of the UK can have the fresh start that it deserves. Does the Secretary of State agree that this agreement will provide Northern Ireland with a safer, more secure future and put an even greater distance between the past and the present, which will benefit the whole of the UK?

Mrs Villiers: I believe that strongly. This agreement will pave the way for a safer, more secure future. Returning for a moment to the previous question, it is important that we strive to find a way to resolve our differences on the legacy bodies. We must ensure that when the bodies are set up, they are entirely fair, proportionate and balanced and that they do not focus disproportionately on just a handful of cases in which the state was involved. This Government will do all that we need to do to protect our national security; we will not compromise on that in any circumstances.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Will the Secretary of State accept that, while many of us have misgivings over parts of the agreement, including over what is not in it, that does not in any way detract from our support for its positive aspects, which we have long advocated, and

which we advocated in the negotiations, including the whole-community approach to paramilitaries and the signing up by all parties to a uniform position on eradicating paramilitarism from our society? She said at the talks, as she has said publicly and consistently, that there would be no agreement on the past without an agreement on welfare reform—that that was the hard message for Sinn Féin and the Social Democratic and Labour party. However, we have now apparently ended up with an agreement on welfare reform but with no agreement on the past. People want to know how that came about. Would she consider publishing clauses on the past, on a without-prejudice basis, and committing them for pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint Committee of both Houses, so that they could be the subject not of some sort of private abeyance to be sorted out between herself and Sinn Féin but of proper consideration by Members of both Houses here and by the public in Northern Ireland, particularly the victims?

Mrs Villiers: On the way forward on the institutions dealing with the past, we will certainly give consideration to the proposals the hon. Gentleman puts forward. I think we all recognised that it was difficult to reach the conclusions we needed to get to within a structure containing just the parties. We need to reflect on whether we can have a wider, more inclusive process. Of course we will give consideration to whether we can publish a further draft of the Bill in the future, but we have not made a conclusive decision on this.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the linkages between the past and welfare reform. To the end, I was arguing to keep legacy in, and I wish we had been able to do so; even if we could not agree on all the issues relating to legacy, I had hoped that we would be able at least to agree on a fair selection of areas where consensus had been achieved. I could not get everyone to sign up to that, but I will continue to strive to find a way to get these legacy bodies set up, as that is crucial for victims and survivors. Lastly, I pay tribute to the work that his party did in the talks process, particularly on the legacy matters, but also on paramilitaries. The Social Democratic and Labour party's call for a whole-community approach to ending paramilitarism will resonate in this House and across Northern Ireland.

Nigel Mills (Amber Valley) (Con): In welcoming this deal, may I ask the Secretary of State to say a little more about what sounds like £500 million of new funding for Northern Ireland outlined in her statement? Will she go a bit further by saying that if there are any further disputes between parties in Northern Ireland, they will not be fixed by more money from Westminster?

Mrs Villiers: In these extremely difficult days for the public finances, we thought very carefully about what additional support we were able to provide on top of the Stormont House agreement package, but we did feel that a case had been made credibly and strongly to us that Northern Ireland does face unique challenges in the United Kingdom and that therefore there was a case for additional support, on top of the favourable conditions in relation to the block grant. That breaks down roughly as: £160 million of additional security funding for the PSNI to help it counter dissident republican terrorists and paramilitary groups; £25 million for tackling paramilitary activity and strategy; £3 million for a verification body in relation to paramilitary activity;

£60 million for programmes to build confidence and see inter-faith barriers coming down; crucially, as a result of the legislative consent motion passed by the Assembly last night, the savings foregone payments—sometimes referred to as welfare penalties—will stop, and that means that a further £40 million will be added to the block grant for the next two years; and we also have £125 million to support a programme to eliminate fraud and error, which we have already discussed. The Executive believe that that will yield substantial savings, half of which they are allowed to retain, and that that is likely to take the total value of the package to well over half a billion pounds.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): May I associate myself with what those who have spoken have said about the contribution made by Peter Robinson, who has announced his retirement from active politics? I have engaged in Northern Ireland affairs throughout my time in this House, but particularly between 2001 and 2010, when our service overlapped. We did not always agree when we had matters to deal with, but there was no doubting at any point that Peter Robinson was a man who was staunch in support of his community and his party. On behalf of my colleagues, I send him and Iris our very best wishes for a long retirement.

May I also add my congratulations to the Secretary of State on an agreement for which there must be a broad welcome, given the context of it? I should, however, say that it is regrettable that significant areas remain outstanding, and I agree with her in respect of the legacy issues she listed. Will she assure us that the budget for dealing with these legacy issues will not be taken from the current operational budget of the Department of Justice? What discussions has she had with the Minister of Justice on that so far?

Mrs Villiers: I keep in regular touch with the Northern Ireland Minister for Justice on all these matters. Of course it is crucial that we all work together to try to ensure that the policing and criminal justice system is as properly resourced as possible. That is one reason why additional security funding was provided in the last spending review. We have now announced further additional security funding for this forthcoming spending review period.

I should also point out that the legacy funding provided in the £2 billion package of the Stormont House agreement amounts to £150 million. It was a priority to try to relieve the pressure on the PSNI so that it could devote its resources to policing the present rather than the past. Naturally, that £150 million package is delayed for the moment pending the establishment of those legacy bodies. The money is still there on the table, and it is another reason why we should get on and try to find an agreement to set up those bodies, so that that funding can be used. As the right hon. Gentleman said, it is a matter of regret that we have not yet been able to reach consensus on how we establish those bodies, but we will continue to work on that with his party and others to try to find a way forward.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on her patience and diligence in delivering this much needed package. I also wish to pass on my appreciation to Peter Robinson as he takes a

well-deserved retirement. I met him at university many years ago, and he has been in public life ever since. What a remarkable job he has done.

In her statement, my right hon. Friend referred to the devolution of corporation tax. Will she clarify when that will happen and whether it is contingent on any other measures that will need to be implemented?

Mrs Villiers: The Government's position is that we will give the final go ahead for the devolution of corporation tax once the conditions on financial sustainability in the Stormont House agreement are met. We have already passed the legislation to enable us to do that. We just need commencement of that legislation to enable the transfer of power to take place. The agreement published this week sets out the aim of the Northern Ireland Executive to deliver a reduced rate of corporation tax operating from April 2018. I know that we are all working on that and hoping that that target date will be met.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): I thank the Secretary of State for bringing forward her statement today. May I, too, pass on some words to Peter Robinson to wish him well in his retirement and in future years?

In her statement, the Secretary of State suggested that the involvement of members of the Provisional IRA in a murder in Belfast led to the conclusion that it was necessary to convene a fresh round of cross-party talks. How concerned is she now that all those involved in the discussions, including Her Majesty's Government, the Irish Government, the Democratic Unionist party, the Social Democratic and Labour party, the Ulster Unionist party, the Alliance party and others, all accept that the IRA is still in place, but Sinn Féin does not?

Mrs Villiers: The crucial issue is that all participants in the talks process are absolutely clear that there is no justification whatever for paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland, that they must all disband, and that for that to happen we need not just a surge in criminal justice activity, but a broad approach that embraces the whole community in working for the day when those organisations are consigned to Northern Ireland's past rather than its present.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): May I associate myself with the tributes that have been paid to Peter Robinson and with the remarks that have been made about the hard work of the Secretary of State, her Department and her officials in securing this agreement? One positive aspect of that agreement are the reforms of the Assembly, particularly the creation of, and provision for, an Official Opposition. Does she agree that that is a very important part of the normalisation of Northern Ireland politics?

Mrs Villiers: Indeed. It is something for which the Conservatives have been campaigning for many years, particularly during the tenure of my predecessor as Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson). It is a big step forward that there will be more formal provision for an Opposition. I thank my hon. Friend for his kind comments about the officials of the Northern Ireland Office, all of whom have worked tremendously hard during this talks process and the previous one.

Mr Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): I echo the comments that have been made from all parts of the House in relation to the retirement of my party leader, Peter Robinson. I add my personal tribute to the contribution he has made over many years to the politics and the people of Northern Ireland. I thank the Secretary of State for the hard work that she and her team put in during these talks, and commend her for the progress that has been made. I welcome the constructive tone of the comments from the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan). We now need to build on the progress that has been made and work towards delivering for the innocent victims and those who have suffered so much. Let us look at ways in which we can find an agreement to implement the legacy elements. What we cannot do, especially at this time, with our national security threatened by terrorism, is to compromise the work of the security services who are here to protect every single citizen of this country.

Mrs Villiers: These national security questions are very difficult. We reflected hard on whether we could stretch ourselves to find a way through on this, but we have not been able to so far. The right hon. Gentleman is right: we cannot take risks with our national security. There is documentation that could be disclosed in Northern Ireland which would give support, knowledge and expertise to terrorists, not just in Northern Ireland but around the world, so I am always aware of that being a hugely important part of my role. The role of a Government—our first duty—is to safeguard the security of our citizens; sadly, events over the past fortnight or so have demonstrated how important that duty is.

John Glen (Salisbury) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for the hard work that she has put in over many weeks and months this year, and I thank the team that work with her, advising her so diligently. I welcome the investment in policing, but can she say a little more about what steps the Executive will be taking to reform the public sector and ensure a more sustainable financial approach into the future?

Mrs Villiers: The Executive have already embarked on a very significant reform, funded by a voluntary exit scheme, which will see the Northern Ireland civil service contract considerably. These are difficult decisions, but I believe that with reform in the coming months and years, the Executive will be able to release more funds for crucial front-line services, and I very much welcome the announcement of significant additional funding for healthcare that the Executive announced today.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I begin by congratulating Peter Robinson on his retirement and on the hard work that he has put in since the agreement. I congratulate the Secretary of State, too, on her hard work, and my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State on his sensible comments. All parties involved in the agreement have shown how important the Northern Ireland situation and this deal in particular are to the House and to the security of the wider UK. Does the Secretary of State agree that there is no alternative to the deal? In order to avoid direct rule, the deal was crucial for the peace process in Northern Ireland to continue. Does she agree that by avoiding direct rule, she has provided the largest and most significant step in controlling, monitoring and dealing with any potential future paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Villiers: I think I can agree with all that. Devolved power-sharing government requires two crucial things, the first of which is the ability of parties to work together. The paramilitary question was having a toxic impact on working relationships. Another crucial thing for any Government, devolved or not, is a workable budget. They must be able to live within their means. This agreement today sets a path to addressing both of those. As has been said, there are parts that we would all have liked to see added to the agreement and there are compromises in it. These stages in Northern Ireland's process forward are never without their imperfections, but this is a good step forward for Northern Ireland. Without it, I am convinced that we would be headed steadily and surely towards suspension and direct rule, which would be bad for Northern Ireland. We have worked hard to try to avoid that and will continue to do so.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I, too, commend my right hon. Friend for the Stormont House agreement that all parties have worked so diligently to effect. I am particularly pleased to note that the issue of flags will be progressed. Is there a timetable for this in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Villiers: There is a timetable for the commission to report on flags. I believe the plan is for it to report within 18 months but, if my hon. Friend will forgive me, I cannot remember the exact date. It is another reminder that with the Stormont House agreement and the fresh start agreement in place, we need to get on with implementing them. That is why I welcome the fact that the legislative consent motion was passed yesterday and the Bill will be introduced to Parliament within minutes and debated. The debate on the welfare legislation will take place early next week.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I, too, thank the Secretary of State for her statement and for the very kind tribute that she paid to our party leader. I echo the thanks and gratitude to the Secretary of State and her team, for I know the very long hours that she personally has put into dealing with the situation in Northern Ireland. There will, of course, be some nay-sayers in Northern Ireland about this deal, but will the Secretary of State go as far as to say that this is by far the very best welfare deal that anyone in the United Kingdom could have? We know that there will be some people who hate the deal so much that they will be on their knees tonight in Northern Ireland praying that Scotland comes up with a slightly better deal so that they do not have to welcome it, but over 105,000 low-paid families in Northern Ireland will today be grateful that their tax credits will not be cut in the way that they would have been under another deal or under direct rule.

On national security, will the Secretary of State confirm that there is no change whatever to the national security portfolio and arrangements? Although there is £160 million available to assist the police in dealing with the dissident and Irish terror threat, if ISIS uses our border as a soft way into the United Kingdom, can the right hon. Lady confirm that additional resources will come from the national budget to assist with that?

Mrs Villiers: I can confirm that if the welfare legislation goes ahead and the Executive proceed with the top-ups proposed under the agreement, Northern Ireland will have the most generous welfare system in the UK. I can

also confirm that we are not proposing changes on national security. It continues to be a tier 1 priority for us. We recognise the lethal threat posed by dissident republican terrorists. Thankfully, they seldom succeed in their aims to harm, but there is no doubt that that activity is regular and that these groups have both lethal intent and lethal capacity, and it is only by the efforts of the police and their security partners that we do not see dissident republicans succeeding in more of their evil plans.

The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the concerns about ISIL being a factor in Northern Ireland, just as it is everywhere else in this country and beyond. Of course, we as a Government are absolutely focused on our efforts to keep people safe both from the DR threat and from the ISIL threat, and that includes work on cross-border crime and doing all we can to ensure that neither ISIL nor anybody else is able to exploit our border with the Republic of Ireland for criminal or terrorist purposes.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): I associate myself with the good wishes to Mr Peter Robinson on his retirement. I thank the Secretary of State for her statement today and for all her hard work that led up to it. I find that in general there is widespread support in my constituency for the welfare changes we have introduced since 2010, based on the principles of helping those who are trying to find work and making work pay, while still controlling the cost of welfare. Does my right hon. Friend agree that these welfare reforms will be just as welcome in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Villiers: I warmly agree with my hon. Friend. The reforms we have introduced into the welfare system in Great Britain give us a better system that has the rewarding of work at its heart and becomes more affordable for the taxpayers who fund it. That is another reason why I welcome the fact that that system will, I hope, apply in Northern Ireland as it does elsewhere.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all hon. Members who have kindly offered me their thanks and congratulations in relation to my role in the process that was recently completed.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement and join others in wishing Peter Robinson well in his retirement. We have differed politically on many occasions, but notwithstanding that, wish him well.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that she has ensured that next week's comprehensive spending review supports and sustains the financial provisions of the mark 2 Stormont House agreement? Does she acknowledge that any modest financial gains contained in that agreement could be wiped out next week with one stroke of the Chancellor's pen? Will she confirm the nature of the sunset clause in relation to the decision-making power in the Bill?

Mrs Villiers: The sunset clause brings to an end the decision-making power by the end of next year. I can confirm that the £500 million package on offer is confirmed; it will not be withdrawn by the spending review. As for

the rest of the spending review, I am afraid that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on that at this time, and that the hon. Lady, like the rest of us, will need to wait for the Chancellor's autumn statement.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I add my congratulations to the Secretary of State and to all those involved in achieving a satisfactory outcome to these difficult talks. Will she give additional details on what efforts will be made to tackle organised crime and cross-border criminality?

Mrs Villiers: We have already heard about the proposed cross-border taskforce. A key aspect is to build on the work of the organised crime taskforce in Northern Ireland and the cross-border work that is going on—for example, in relation to fuel smuggling—in order to bring fresh impetus and capacity to that in providing support for things such as forensic accounting to pursue the proceeds of crime. A crucial step forward is for the PSNI and the Garda Síochána to be able to share more equipment and facilities. That will enhance their effectiveness and their ability to co-operate, and policing resources can go further when they are shared, in part, between the two police services.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con) *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Finally, with thanks for his patience in waiting to the end, I call Tom Pursglove.

Tom Pursglove: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I, too, pay tribute to the Secretary of State for all her efforts in securing this agreement, and also for keeping this House updated as matters have progressed. Cross-border policing is a challenge, and that has been alluded to. What more work can be done to make sure that forces across England, Wales and Scotland work with forces in Northern Ireland and southern Ireland to help solve this problem and to help feed intelligence up the chain to try to tackle these crimes where they happen?

Mrs Villiers: There are extensive co-operation agreements that ensure that police services in Great Britain can share information with the PSNI, and I am sure there is always scope to build on those.

I thank my hon. Friend for his kind comments. It has certainly been a long 10 weeks with very many meetings—a pretty gruelling process—but I am very conscious that while I have been engaged in cross-party talks for only a couple of years, there are many fine men and women in Northern Ireland who have been engaged in this kind of process for about 25 years. We need to pay tribute to their determination and all that they have achieved in transforming life in Northern Ireland. They are rightly an example held up throughout the world of how bitter division can be overcome, and how people who were once bitter enemies can find a way to work together for the good of the whole community.

BILL PRESENTED**NORTHERN IRELAND (WELFARE REFORM) BILL**

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Secretary Theresa Villiers, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Secretary Iain Duncan Smith, Priti Patel and Mr Ben Wallace, presented a Bill to make provision in connection with social security and child support maintenance in Northern Ireland; to make provision in connection with arrangements under section 1 of the Employment and Training Act (Northern Ireland) 1950; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 99) with explanatory notes (Bill 99-EN).

Paris Climate Change Conference

12.24 pm

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes the Pope's Encyclical, entitled *Laudato Si'*, Our Common Home, on climate change and international justice which is an important contribution to discussions on this vital subject; further notes that the 2015 climate change conference will be held in Paris between 30 November and 11 December 2015; and calls on the Government to recognise the significant support for a successful outcome to the conference which should commit to take further steps to tackle climate change effectively in the UK and around the world before 2020.

I should like to begin by thanking the Backbench Business Committee for allowing us the opportunity to debate this important issue in the main Chamber today.

Pope Francis published his encyclical letter, "*Laudato Si'*, On Care for Our Common Home", six months ago. In it, he says that he wishes

"to address every person living on this planet"

about the "urgent challenge" of "global environmental deterioration". Following his namesake, St Francis, he writes that

"concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace"

are "inseparable". It is an astonishing and exceptionally rich document drawing on the experience of the Church around the world, scientists, philosophers, and civic groups. He calls for

"a new and universal solidarity"

in which

"All of us can co-operate".

His main theme is the

"relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet".

He makes a particular appeal to politicians, saying that many of us

"seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems"

when there is

"an urgent need to develop"

new "policies". He calls on us to show "courage" and change

"established structures of power which today govern societies".

This is why I and other hon. Members applied for the debate.

In looking at what is happening to the planet, the Pope contrasts the acceleration of change with the naturally slow pace of biological evolution. He is particularly critical of the "throwaway" society, saying that instead we need

"to adopt a circular model of production".

He makes this important observation:

"The climate is a common good".

For those who have not been keeping up with papal politics, things have moved on since Urban VIII put Galileo under arrest. Pope Francis embraces the work of independent scientific research and the benefits of technology to medicine, engineering, and communications. He points to the "very solid scientific consensus" on global warming and to our role in it through

"the intensive use of fossil fuels"

and "deforestation".

In considering the “biodiverse lungs of our planet...the Amazon and the Congo”, the Pope is not afraid to challenge proposals that he says “only serve the economic interests of transnational corporations”. One of the worst things is that the cost of this violent “destruction”, as he calls it, is borne mainly by the poor. He draws attention to the increase in the number of migrants. We know that one reason for the huge increase in the number of people coming across the Mediterranean is the desertification of sub-Saharan Africa. We would be misleading our constituents if we pretended that we could tackle this without tackling the underlying causes.

The encyclical warns of the dangers of the developing situation whereby knowledge, resources and power are in the hands of a small number of people. As Oxfam says, the richest 85 families own as much as the poorest 3.5 billion. The Pope writes,

“a minority believes that it has the right to consume in a way which can never be universalized”.

He says:

“Inequity...compels us to consider an ethics of international relations.”

So he calls for:

“The establishment of a legal framework which can...ensure the protection of ecosystems...otherwise...power structures based on”

technical fixes “may overwhelm our politics”, our freedom and our justice. Put simply, the world system is unsustainable.

The Pope is very clear that we need a change of heart, and naturally enough he draws on the creation story, asserting that nature is not solely a source of profit and gain, and:

“Whether believers or not, we are agreed...that the earth is...a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone.”

An important consequence of that is that we must have equal concern for future generations, and another is that private property is always subject to a social mortgage. The Pope says:

“Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth. The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet’s capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world. The effects of the present imbalance can only be reduced by our decisive action, here and now.”

What is the Pope’s positive agenda for change? First, he wants us to understand the world as a whole and to see that strategies to tackle the environment need to incorporate economic and social change. Individuals can and do change their behaviour in worthwhile ways, from turning down the heating to sorting the rubbish, but they can also press for change through consumer boycotts, involvement in campaign groups and pressurising politicians. This morning I was particularly glad to meet people from the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, who have come to support us in this debate.

The Pope is very keen to encourage ecological education that goes beyond facts, to challenge our culture. Action can be taken at local and national level. He points to the co-operatives established to provide renewable energy projects and to help small-scale farmers. In his description of the changes in cities, we see clearly his Latin American perspective, with calls to improve housing, public transport

and neighbourhood planning. All those things happen in some places some of the time, but for the planet to survive they need to happen everywhere all of the time. In an interdependent world, none of that will be enough without international action, which is why holding this debate before Ministers go to Paris is so important. Global consensus is essential and technologies based on fossil fuels need to be replaced, but the international community has not reached adequate agreement about responsibility for paying for that transition.

Looking at recent history, the Pope points out that, although the 1992 Rio summit set out goals and actions, it was

“poorly implemented, due to the lack of suitable mechanisms for oversight, periodic review and penalties in cases of non-compliance...Reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility”

from those who are most

“powerful and pollute the most.”

International negotiations will not make significant progress while positions taken by countries place national interest above the global common good. It is important that internationalisation of environment costs do not penalise the poor. As the Bolivian bishops have said, the countries that have benefited most have a greater responsibility.

What is needed is global regulatory norms and enforceable international agreements, and that means institutional reform at the international level—

“an agreement on systems of governance for the whole range of so-called ‘global commons’.”

The Paris conference is a real opportunity to move things on.

In her letter to the Chair of the Energy and Climate Change Committee, the Secretary of State wrote that

“UK priorities include seeking to agree a five yearly cycle of review that would provide the opportunity to reflect on progress and increase ambition...capitalising on the falling cost of low carbon technology. This will be important as we do not expect the cumulative commitments contained in countries’ INDCs to be enough to put us on track to meet the...2 °C goal. We are also building support for legally binding rules to help ensure transparency and accountability so that there can be confidence that the action committed to is being taken.”

That has been the British Government’s position for some time, but I honestly do not think it is strong enough. First, instead of saying what we must do to keep the global temperature rise to 2 °C and then sharing out the burden, it allows a bottom-up approach that is inadequate and necessitates more difficult and costly action later—or, of course, the possibility of failure.

Secondly, I am not clear what “legally binding” means when there seem to be no penalties. It is time we got tough with those who flout the rules. In other arenas, international bodies levy fines, penalties and sanctions. Why does that not happen in this area? Let me give just one example. We issued sanctions against Russia for its actions in Ukraine, but Canada left the Kyoto protocol to avoid penalties and we have taken no action against it for that.

Let us be clear: people in the deserts of Africa and those affected by the floods of Bangladesh are already dying as a result of climate change. If we are to be serious, we should make other international organisations, such as the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund, subordinate to what is agreed in the United Nations framework convention on climate change and co-operate substantively with it.

[Helen Goodman]

When I was preparing for this debate, I asked my researcher to find the Government's latest published position. Imagine my surprise when she produced a White Paper on which there was a picture of the happy, smiling face of the former Lib Dem Secretary of State, Ed Davey. The document includes a quote from the current Secretary of State:

"The move to a green economy offers a great opportunity but to be fully realised it requires world leaders to provide certainty, clarity and confidence. The UK is a global leader in developing cost effective policies and innovative technologies".

I cannot square that with the Government's actions since May. They have removed the climate change levy exemption; removed the subsidy for onshore wind; restructured vehicle excise duty; ended the zero-carbon homes commitment; cut the support for solar; and yesterday they committed to a further dash for gas. None of that looks like a Government doing their best to decarbonise. The Pope is asking us to be prepared to make sacrifices in the interests of the common good, but the Government's changes are so drastic that they will damage our own economic interests.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): The hon. Lady is making an interesting speech. She has listed a number of points and I share some of her concerns, but on dash for gas, yesterday's announcement was about getting rid of coal-fired power stations and all their pollutants and replacing them with gas. No journey to 2050, however ambitious, will not involve interim measures, such as replacing coal with gas. If she wants to give a balanced speech that takes everyone with her, she should acknowledge that.

Helen Goodman: Of course, it is true that coal-fired power stations will eventually cease to be effective and that they would have to be closed anyway, and it is good that the Secretary of State has formalised that commitment. However, by investing in new gas-fired power stations, we are committing, not just for now, but for 30 years, to a reliance on imported gas. That is problematic, partly because it does not improve energy security and partly because it will not result in decarbonisation.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Is my hon. Friend aware that, of the 10 coal-fired power stations that are still in operation, three were due to close next year in any event and that all but two of the others were likely to close by 2023? Therefore, by saying that there will be no unabated coal by 2025, the Secretary of State has spun an extension of coal-fired power stations into an ending of unabated coal. That is a neat political trick, but it is not exactly where we want to be.

Helen Goodman: My hon. Friend is extremely well informed. I was not aware of those points.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): Had Opposition Members invested in energy infrastructure when they were in power, going for gas right now would not be urgent. Indeed, had they even thought about investing in renewables, we would not be in the situation we are today. This Government are taking all that on board and trying to sort it out for the taxpayer by providing energy from a mix of energies.

Helen Goodman: I admire the hon. Lady for the energy she shows in this debate, but we have heard people in the sector say there is a problem—I will give a couple more examples—because 30,000 jobs are now being lost in small-scale solar and wind, which is very significant.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): I want to go back to the point about gas and coal because it really is not good enough to leave it where we have. If the world did what we have done and removed coal from the system, it would be equivalent to increasing the current amount of renewables in the world by a factor of five. To pretend that that does not matter is to mislead us all.

Helen Goodman: It is good to remove coal—there is no contention about that—but it would be better to replace it with more solar and more wind. That is the simple proposition I am making.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for taking this frenzy of interventions. One thing she has not so far said—she must forgive me if I am not completely au fait with His Holiness's utterances on this subject—is whether he mentions investment in technology. Surely the lesson of the history of humanity is that science has broadly solved pretty much all our problems when they have presented themselves to us.

Some significant technologies are a little starved of Government investment across the world. I have a particular enthusiasm for the fuel cell and the hydrogen economy that will, I hope, replace the carbon economy in my lifetime as one that is less damaging to the planet. Does she agree that perhaps one thing we should do at the Paris summit is to agree—much as we have on dementia, for instance—that global action on investment in technology and science can solve these problems as much as behavioural change can, not least with the hydrogen economy at the forefront of global considerations, as many countries are now realising?

Helen Goodman: The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point. Of course we need new technologies. One of the problems at the moment is that people trying to invest in new technologies—for example, big battery storage technologies—cannot get funding. They cannot even get them funded by the UK Green Investment Bank. I do not think it is very helpful to privatise the Green Investment Bank when that is the case, or to change the policy framework, which means that we will lose the clarity, simplicity and confidence that industry needs in order its investment over the medium term. We cannot just switch this on and off like the lights; we need to think about it decades ahead.

Kit Malthouse: I am sorry to repeat myself, but that was broadly my point. I was trying to make the point about the Paris conference that, as much as the hon. Lady says the emphasis should be on an agreement about behavioural change by business and industry, there should be a global agreement on investment in exactly the technologies that she says are starved of money. That might mean the Government having to make up for a market failure by investing in them to a certain extent. Nevertheless, as she says, given that we need a decadal view—out to when my grandchildren

will be born—such investment needs to put in now. It may be that that has to be paid for out of the global public purse.

Helen Goodman: The hon. Gentleman is right that we need to have intelligent investment in technology, but I want to draw him back to paying a little attention to the Pope's encyclical. An over-reliance and an over-optimism about technical fixes when we do not know whether they will actually work has encouraged us to consume too much and to be too destructive. We need to keep such things in the balance as we develop policy.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making a powerful speech. She is talking a lot about the papal encyclical—rightly so, since the motion is about it—but will she also pay tribute to things such as the declaration launched in August by Islamic leaders from 20 countries, which similarly urges Governments to take ambitious action in this area? This is not a monopoly of one faith community or another; all faith communities are coming together to make such a demand.

Helen Goodman: The hon. Lady is of course right.

The White Paper included a section on the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises. I am afraid that it was greeted with a hollow laugh by people such as George Smith from my constituency. He is an electrician—I have had a ride in his solar PV-powered van—who has spent thousands of pounds training people, but is now concerned that he may have to sack those very people.

Many of us were incredulous about the Government achieving their renewables targets. In the Treasury Committee, I asked the Chancellor whether he was a climate change denier. He responded:

“I am not sure I accept that phrase as a general term in British politics”.

Now we know why: the leaked letter from the Secretary of State to her colleagues says that there will be a 50 TWh shortfall in the delivery of renewable energy targets in 2020, which is a shortfall of 25%. She notes:

“Publicly we are clear that the UK continues to make progress”.

She also notes:

“The absence of a credible plan to meet the target carries the risk of successful judicial review, and...on-going fines imposed by the EU Court of Justice”.

Instead of going back to the Chancellor and saying, “We must think again,” she says that

“we need to reflect...on the emerging strategy once the outcome of the Spending Review is known.”

Strategies do not emerge; they are planned. Fulfilling our part in avoiding global warming over 2° C should be the Secretary of State's absolute priority.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Does that not show that Britain's climate change policy is being run not by the Department of Energy and Climate Change, but by the Treasury?

Helen Goodman: That is also my suspicion.

The Secretary of State now proposes to buy renewables from other countries. That is not a way to support British industry. It will not maximise the EU contribution to the global deal. It is not consistent with the argument

put to this House by Ministers for abolishing the climate change levy, which was that too much money went abroad.

I am very grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for giving us the opportunity to discuss this important issue. The Paris conference is absolutely vital to our making progress. I urge the Secretary of State to reflect seriously on her responsibilities and to work for the best possible deal in Paris.

12.48 pm

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman). She asked me to sign her motion, and I was happy to do so. I do not know why she thought I might be interested in the Pope's encyclical, but here I am. I hope the House will forgive me if I concentrate entirely on the encyclical, on which I have some expertise; I have absolutely no scientific expertise on other climate change subjects about which other hon. Members will want to speak. I will, if they are interested, try in a few minutes to put the encyclical in context.

I have tried to read the whole encyclical. Like all Vatican documents it is very subtle, very profound and very long—the best part of 200 pages—but the part on climate change is relatively short. Since the papacy's unhappy experience with Galileo, which the hon. Lady mentioned, the modern papacy tends to endorse scientific consensus, but the detailed part on climate change is quite limited. The encyclical is really a very long prose poem that concentrates on and affirms the Pope's belief in the interdependence of man, nature and God.

It is important that we do not try to weaponise papal encyclicals for one side of the argument or the other. The words that come from the Vatican are seldom very useful in that context. To give an example on another subject, I was in the Vatican last week to meet Cardinal Baldisseri, who has been leading the synod on the family. Journalists always try to pigeonhole such debates inside the Vatican as controversial, saying that there are traditionalists and modernisers. That is the way of politicians. The Vatican moves in a rather more sedate manner. The long document on the family does not take a confrontational viewpoint on all the matters that have worried us in this House over recent years. Again, it is a long prose poem in favour of traditional marriage and the family. We must therefore be careful about how we read the document we are discussing.

The encyclical is primarily saying that mankind is much more than mind or body; there is a deeper soul. As mankind is about the soul and its connection with a universal God and a universal nature, we must recognise that we are part of nature and respect nature. That is where the Pope comes from when discussing climate change.

I do not want to weary people too much and will not read out the whole encyclical, but I will read a couple of paragraphs to give a flavour of it. It is very beautifully written and it informs the debate in a general way. In paragraph 65, the Pope says:

“Without repeating the entire theology of creation, we can ask what the great biblical narratives say about the relationship of human beings with the world. In the first creation account in the Book of Genesis, God's plan includes creating humanity. After the creation of man and woman, ‘God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good’... The Bible teaches that every man and woman is created out of love and made in God's image and likeness”.

[*Sir Edward Leigh*]

That informs the Pope's view on climate change and the other debates that we, as politicians, are interested in. Unsurprisingly, he is always much more interested in the God-centric point of view.

In paragraph 67, the Pope states:

"The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to 'till and keep' the garden of the world... 'Tilling' refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while 'keeping' means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations."

I am sure that the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) would not disagree with any of those remarks. They are very beautifully put. I hope that the House will forgive me for having referred to those couple of paragraphs.

It is important, whether one is on the right or the left, not to say that the Pope has come down on one side of the argument. When the Pope went to see Congress, all the Republicans stood up and cheered when he proclaimed the right to life and his opposition to abortion. They were still clapping and cheering when, almost in the same breath, he talked about the rights of migrants and his opposition to the death penalty. They were left on their feet, clapping for something they did not agree with.

Caroline Lucas: Will the hon. Gentleman give way, as he has named me?

Sir Edward Leigh: Of course.

Caroline Lucas: The hon. Gentleman is making an interesting speech. He says that the Pope does not come down on one side or the other. Will he clarify, however, that the Pope is saying very clearly that we need to tackle climate change? We might have an argument about the best way to do it, but he is saying that. He also has a strong economic critique. I can quote him too:

"Since the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products, people can easily get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending."

That is pretty strong language.

Sir Edward Leigh: I am happy to accept that. I do not want to weary the House by referring to the paragraph, but the Pope does endorse action on climate change. That is a relatively small part of the encyclical and it must not be seen in the context of the political debate. The hon. Member for Bishop Auckland was right to mention conferences and what is going on in Paris, but I do not think that the Pope is concentrating on that. What he is concentrating on, fundamentally, is the theme that we are part of nature. The debate around climate change relates to his profound belief that we are part of nature and connected to nature, and that we are abusing the world. Because we are abusing the world, we are abusing ourselves. I think that that is what he is trying to say, and that is what I am trying to explain to the House in my very inadequate way.

Helen Goodman: The hon. Gentleman has obviously thought deeply about these matters and has given more of the theology than I did. However, the Pope does talk about the need for more effective international action and he does decry what we politicians have done up to now.

Sir Edward Leigh: I am happy to accept that the Pope talks about more international action, but he is careful not to be too specific. In one paragraph, he is quite critical of carbon credits. He gives a general thesis and acknowledges the problem, then he leaves it to us—the Secretary of State, the Minister and the Opposition parties—to come up with solutions.

The most important theme of the encyclical comes out in the very first paragraph. It relates to our common home. This is where I hope I can take Opposition Members with me. The Pope states:

"'Laudato si', mi' Signore'—'Praise be to you, my Lord'. In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. 'Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs'."

When one reads through this long encyclical, that sort of language is repeated again and again.

The Pope is repeating the philosophy of the 20th century philosopher, Professor Charles De Koninck, who understood that the person, the individual, could not be neglected. He differed from the personalists because he knew that the person had to be integrated within a vision of the common good. In the encyclical, the Pope constantly concentrates on our common good and our common nature: the good of the individual, the good of the family, the good of the village, town, province and country, and the good of the whole world. People—you and I—have to be understood, De Koninck argued and the Pope now argues, in the context of our place in the universe as a whole. That is one thing that the Pope is trying to do with the encyclical. Like De Koninck, the Pope understands the truth expressed by St Thomas Aquinas that the greatest perfection of the created person is the good of the universe.

The Anglican academic, Professor Jacobs, wrote a moving reflection on the encyclical, in which he pointed out that Francis does not use the word "planet" or even "environment", but uses the word "home". He constantly concentrates on our common home. Professor Jacobs writes:

"All the economic questions he explores later in the encyclical are therefore grounded in the etymology of 'economy': the governance of the oikos, the household. Such domestic language is a powerful means of fighting the abstracting effects of any attempt to 'think globally.' Francis seems to be saying that if you want to act globally, you should think locally: think of the earth as your home, one you share with others to whom you are accountable."

"Laudato Si'" is distinctly not merely an encyclical about climate change. While the papacy has always been a patron and promoter of modern science and learning, specific scientific matters are outside its teaching authority. Rather, this is an encyclical about the fundamental crisis of humanity that is at the foundations of our modern world. Ecological aspects are a symptom of that crisis, not the root of it, and there are no simple solutions.

Professor Thomas Hibbs, who was formerly of Boston college, an institution of the Pope's own Jesuit order, has written:

"The most audacious claim in the encyclical is not the affirmation of the reality of climate change, but the insistence that to have a coherent and effective environmental philosophy requires both an anthropology and a cosmology."

He writes that “*Laudato Si*”

“seeks nothing less than the re-imagining of the place of human persons in the entirety of the created cosmos. Francis discerns beneath the contemporary ecological crisis a crisis of the human person, who is now lost in the cosmos, increasingly alienated from self, others, nature, and God.”

I apologise for trying to explain the encyclical, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have done it as best I could. It is a most beautiful document and I recommend that hon. Members read it in its entirety.

12.59 pm

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh). He spoke with huge eloquence, and I do not propose to compete with him on the papal encyclical. I have read it, but he informed the House about it brilliantly. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) on securing this incredibly important debate.

I will not spend time talking about the important encyclical because I want to mention what I believe we need out of the Paris summit, what we are likely to get out of it, and what should happen after it. Before I do so, it might be helpful—particularly for the Secretary of State, who is in her place—if I shared briefly a reflection on the Copenhagen summit of six years ago that I took part in, and I will offer one tip in particular.

I wish to relate an experience that was told by my lead official, the brilliant Pete Betts, who I believe still works with the Secretary of State. In the dying hours of the conference he rang me—I had not slept for 36 hours and was about to go to bed—to say that the deal was about to collapse. That was obviously a global problem, but it was also a particular problem for me because it followed a period when world leaders, including Gordon Brown, had come to town and made a heroic effort to salvage something from the wreckage of Copenhagen. Gordon had departed with the immortal words to me, “Make sure it doesn’t go wrong now,” and I had foolishly said, “I’m sure it’s all going to be fine, Gordon. Don’t worry about it.” When Pete rang me to say that the deal was about to collapse, part of me was obviously thinking about the world and the future of the planet, but I was also thinking, “What will Gordon say when I tell him the whole thing has collapsed?” I suggest to the Secretary of State that lowering prime ministerial expectations when the current Prime Minister leaves the summit—as I think he is due to do—is probably a good idea.

Let me return to the process of the Paris summit. We need an agreement that is as close as possible to what the science tells us is necessary. We should all be worried about what the science is telling us, because compared with six years ago it is even clearer. A good assessment produced by the Met Office earlier this month stated that 2015 is set to be the hottest year on record—yet another record. Some of that may be related to El Niño, but all the experts tell us that the underlying warming is a result of human-induced climate change. We are now at 1 °C of warming, which is half way to 2 °C. Importantly, global warming is not some theoretical idea—sometimes we speak as though it is—because it is happening now and the changes are already being witnessed.

Another study produced by the US Government’s National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration this month found, among other things, that devastating

floods in Indonesia in 2014, the 2013 Argentine heatwave, and tropical cyclones in Hawaii were all linked to human-induced climate change. The science is clear, dangerous, and should make us deeply concerned: climate change is real and it is happening now.

That takes me to what we are likely to get out of Paris, as opposed to what we need. I believe that we will get a 2° commitment, as at Copenhagen, but I am afraid not a 2° deal—the Secretary of State has acknowledged that. The UN says that on the best case scenario for Paris, current commitments made by countries for 2030 mean that we will be half way between “business as usual” emissions—that means no action—and where we should be to have a fighting chance of a 2° deal. As the UN has made clear, on the basis of submitted plans, we are heading for something like a 3° deal.

If the world ends up in 2100 with 3 °C warming, that would be catastrophic. It would mean temperatures that are higher than at any time in the last 3 million years, with dramatic effects of intense heatwaves, flooding, and millions—or hundreds of millions—of climate refugees. Does that mean that we should dismiss the likely Paris agreement? In my view, we should not. If the Secretary of State, her colleagues, and world leaders pull off an agreement in Paris, new ground will have been broken. It will be the first agreement to get anywhere even in the vague neighbourhood of 2°, the first to oblige all major emitters to take action to reduce emissions, and the first—we hope—to comprehensively stand up \$100 billion of climate finance for mitigation and adaptation for the developing world. Those would be signal achievements—behind the science but ahead of where we have been.

However, just as we should not dismiss that progress, we should also be clear about what a dangerous position we will be in. If that is the agreement, the judgment on Paris will be that it has been a success, but that it can only be a staging post. Importantly, just as what happened after Copenhagen perhaps made it seem less of a disaster than it seemed at the time, what happens after Paris will determine whether the summit has turned out to be a decisive moment.

Since the ambition will be insufficient at Paris, our focus should be on raising that ambition afterwards. I think of that in two parts: ambition before 2030, and ambition after. Before 2030—my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland mentioned this—we need a ratchet mechanism to ensure that the Paris agreement is the beginning of what is required. That must mean a tough, five-year review mechanism, so that countries renew and improve their pledges. My colleague in another place, Baroness Worthington, said that the agreement might ultimately come to be seen as a global equivalent of our five-year carbon budgets, and that is the right way to think about it. The hope—I think it is not a forlorn hope—must be that as technology develops and as confidence is built, countries will move further and faster.

Graham Stuart: I agree with most of the speech by the right hon. Gentleman. Providing certainty, and ratcheting and tightening up a deal in Paris over time, send a signal to the investment market. That means that we will get investment in innovation, research and development and the supply chain, which is a prerequisite of driving down costs. Only by that level of commitment will we get the acceleration of a cost curve downwards,

[Graham Stuart]

which is the way that we will deliver for the planet while also protecting the consumer. That is why we need certainty and those kinds of framework.

Edward Miliband: The hon. Gentleman's point is important and well made, and it takes me to what I was about to say. This is not just about hoping that we can make that kind of progress with technology and so on; by setting the right framework we make it more likely that such progress will be made, and that the constructive, imaginative, and inventive side of humankind will defeat our destructive side.

Barry Gardiner: My right hon. Friend is making an incredibly powerful and important speech with his immense knowledge in this area. Does he share my concern that the word coming out of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is that the numbers of officials who are engaged on climate diplomacy will be cut around the globe, just as the case is being made that we need to proselytise even more in that area with our fellow nations?

Edward Miliband: I think that the FCO and every Department must be concerned with these matters, and I am sure that the Secretary of State, who is a champion on these issues, will argue for that. I know from my experience that that sometimes feels a bit lonely in government, but in our case we had support across the Government from the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister.

In response to the point from the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), ensuring progress means that we must keep on track here at home. Next Thursday there is an important moment when the Energy and Climate Change Committee publishes its recommendations for the fifth carbon budget, and I hope the Government will support that.

Let me move on to the period after 2030. Every excess tonne of carbon that we emit between now and 2030 means that we will have to do more later—we must be clear about that. The easiest way to think about it is that we have a finite carbon budget, which has been helpfully estimated by the UN to be about 1,000 gigatonnes—a round number. Once that is used up, we can emit no more if we are to avoid dangerous warming. Frighteningly, the UN tells us that on current pledges to 2030, 75% of that total carbon budget will be used up by 2030. That suggests the scale of the task facing us, particularly if we do not improve the pledges between now and 2030. The crucial point, whether we do that or not, is that the world will at some point have to reach zero emissions. I commend the Government and the Secretary of State for signing up to the G7 pledge, made recently, that the world will have to get to zero emissions sometime in the second half of this century.

It is striking that increasing numbers of business leaders—this again relates to the point made by the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness—are putting their energies and thinking into the so-called net zero commitment. Ratan Tata, Paul Polman of Unilever, Richard Branson of Virgin and many others from the so-called B-team of business leaders, recently sent a letter to all those attending Paris calling for the adoption

of the long-term goal of zero emissions. They are right: the long-term goal is an essential part of a successful Paris agreement.

What does zero emissions mean? It means a 100% clean energy system. It means the right decisions about infrastructure. It also means—this is where the inventors and engineers will be incredibly important—technological advance on how to capture carbon, reforestation and a whole range of other matters. Increasingly, the question of when and how we get to zero emissions will become our focus and energy after Paris. It will need to become the benchmark for the decisions we make in the years ahead.

Finally, we will also have to continue to work on the all-important question of a fair and equitable approach. The reality that all of us in the House have to face is that industrialised countries have grown in a high carbon way and we are now saying to poorer countries that they have to grow in a low carbon way. That is an unprecedented challenge of equity. It makes it all the more important that rich countries cut their emissions to allow space for poorer countries to develop. It also means, and I commend the Government on this, that it is right to be leading on development aid around climate change. That will enable countries to leapfrog the high carbon path and go to a low carbon path.

Those are the ways in which I think Paris must lay the ground for future ambition, and a future ambition that is fairly shared.

Graham Stuart: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we have to ensure there is engagement and understanding on this issue in Parliaments across the world? That is why today's debate, and others like it, are so important. I refer the House to my declaration of interests. I will be chairing a GLOBE International two-day conference at the Assemblée Nationale on 4 and 5 December. About 250 legislators from around the world will be talking about the role of national Parliaments in setting the law, scrutinising government and making sure that international promises are turned into domestic reality.

Edward Miliband: Let me take the opportunity to congratulate the hon. Gentleman on the role he plays in GLOBE International, which is an incredibly important organisation. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) has also played a very important role in that organisation. By bringing legislators together, it plays a crucial role in building support for tackling climate change.

I want to end by making two observations. My first observation is about the process of what we might call summitry. Many people thought Copenhagen was a failure—I referred to it at the beginning of my speech—and that it did not achieve what we wanted. It certainly did not meet people's expectations. The reality, however, is that it laid the groundwork for some of what we are seeing in Paris: a 2° commitment, the \$100 billion of climate finance and the whole notion of bottom-up pledges.

Trying to get countries to sign up to these issues is such a knotty problem that we will not get all the way the first, second or even third time. We just have to move things forward and make progress. The negotiations in Paris look like an elite-level exercise and people will

often ask what the point is of all those leaders gathering together. I believe, however, that it is a forcing mechanism. I do not think we would have seen the progress from a lot of countries around the world if there had not been a moment when countries came together. World leaders know they will be judged on whether they are doing something or just ignoring the problem. We will not get everything we want from Paris, but that does not mean we should be discouraged. In fact, we should redouble our efforts at home and around the world.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many people will look to Paris as a first test of whether the very worthy spirit of the sustainable development goals are truly the working ethic of international action? As this is the first generation that can eradicate extreme poverty and possibly the last generation that can address climate change, people want to see that ethic at Paris and to see it proven afterwards.

Edward Miliband: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is an incredibly important year, with the sustainable development goals and the Paris talks. He makes the point very well.

My second and final observation—we have already had a bit of to and fro on policy questions—is on cross-party consensus. It is worth making the point that we came together, as political parties, to pass the Climate Change Act in 2008. It is hard to remember this—I checked back and even I was surprised—but the Act passed by 463 votes to three. That is an extraordinary achievement. The Prime Minister and I have had our differences over the years, but I have to say that, as Leader of the Opposition, he did indeed break new ground by putting this front and centre. The extraordinary consensus that was built sent a message about the commitment of the parties across this House. That was important in Britain. It was also—I do not think this is British arrogance—important around the world, too, as it sent an international message. Since 2008, we have seen the Climate Change Act emulated in many countries. Parties across this House should be proud of what we achieved together.

The point, to which I referred earlier, that I would perhaps mostly direct towards the Secretary of State is that it is hard being the biggest fighter for tackling climate change in government. There are many competing pressures, but I know she is totally a believer on these issues. I think that part of her role, if I may suggest this, is to find ways of maintaining and strengthening that consensus. This is not just in relation to the policies, but for the idea that somehow a good economy and a good environment are not in contradiction, but that the two go together. The CBI has made huge advances on this issue.

There will, of course, be disagreements. There is, however, a basic set of assumptions: the science on climate change is real; we know that, as human beings, we are responsible for it; and we are conscious—this is crucial—that we have in our hands the ingenuity to tackle the problem and deal with it. Whatever party we are from, we care about our responsibilities to hold the planet in trust for future generations. Whatever party we are from, we know we will be held to account for the actions we take or do not take now. Whatever party we are from—this relates to what the hon. Member for

Foyle said in his intervention—our children will either see us as the last generation not to get climate change or the first generation to get it. That is why I believe we cannot afford to fail. I will be supporting the Secretary of State in getting the best possible agreement out of Paris.

1.17 pm

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), who made an excellent speech. I regret to tell the House that I am the first speaker this afternoon who has not read the encyclical, but I shall be speaking specifically about the Paris agreement: what the objectives are; whether we appear to be on track to meet them, and, given that we are not, where the problem is; what structural issues in my view we need to address, which are similar to, but not the same as, the ones we have just heard; and what all that means for UK policy.

The objective of the Paris summit is the 2° limit. In objective terms, that means either 1,000 gigatonnes of carbon, or something like 550 parts per million of carbon. In truth, there are a lot of probabilities around that: we could meet the targets and still have more than a 2° increase; we could fail to meet them and get less. Nevertheless, those are the numbers we are dealing with. The right hon. Member for Doncaster North made the point that on current progress we will have reached 75% by 2030. A figure I prefer to use is that by 2036 it will have all gone: by 2036, our business-as-usual scenario will be finished.

Are we on track or not? A couple of Members have mentioned the intended nationally determined contributions. However, about only 80% of all participants in Paris have delivered them. The first problem with the INDCs—this is an indicator of the issues the Secretary of State will have to face—is that we could not even agree a common benchmark or starting point for the INDCs. The Europeans prefer 1990 and the Americans prefer 2005. We both have our own reasons: they make us look better.

It is not surprising, given that we could not agree a benchmark or common template, that the INDCs, 80% of which are now in, are all over the place. The right hon. Member for Doncaster North said they implied a 3° outcome. I find this surprising. A report by the secretariat of the United Nations framework convention on climate change mentioned 2.73°. This is an optimistic analysis—that is unusual as these guys are usually over-pessimistic—because it assumes we will continue on broadly the same trajectory after the initial INDC period. That will be hard, however, because there are low-hanging fruit and it will be easier to make progress on the first things. The other key points are that we need five-year reviews and that only the EU and China have put in place policies reflecting their INDCs, suggesting that regulating the process might be harder than we think.

Where is the problem? It is not the UK. The Climate Change Act mandates an 80% reduction in emissions over 60 years: a rate of 1.33% a year, which is significantly higher than the EU INDC in Paris. I would like a Front-Bench spokesperson to contradict me if I am wrong, because it is an important point. The Act commits

[David Mowat]

the UK to an emissions target 33% higher than the EU INDC submission, of which we are part. That is an extraordinary statistic. With our policies—the carbon budgets and everything that goes with them—we have imposed on ourselves requirements more stringent than those set by the EU as a whole, let alone individual member states. I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman that other countries have passed climate change Acts. If only they had! We expected they would—we thought we were taking a worldwide position—but it has not happened to anything like the extent we hoped it would. I note that neither Front-Bench team has intervened, so I think I am right.

The INDC we submitted to Paris requires a 40% emissions reduction by 2030, which is significantly less than we are legally obliged to achieve in the UK. How are some of our European partners getting on? There is a database called the Emissions Database for Global Atmospheric Research—EDGAR—and it is a rattling good yarn. It details carbon emissions by country, capita and unit of GDP for every year up to 2013. Since 1990, Austria, a wealthy European country, has increased its emissions by 20%, while we have reduced ours by 20%, in accordance with the Climate Change Act. That is the same country, by the way, that is suing us for building nuclear power stations. Holland and Belgium are flat. Germany has reduced its emissions, but, in spite of being a leader on renewables, its emissions are 30% higher than ours per capita. That is because it is going heavily for coal, and what makes the difference on emissions is not how many renewables a country has, but how much coal it does not have. We need to examine that. That is a slightly pessimistic analysis of the INDCs—I know we are going to negotiate—but I wanted to make the point that the European submission to Paris is 33% lower than what this Parliament has already mandated for this country. I wonder why that is.

What is causing this apparent possibility of failure? There is actually one piece of good news from the last few years. I am pleasantly surprised that we appear to have broken the link between GDP and energy intensity. The only caveat is the issue that dare not speak its name: embedded carbon. If we have broken the link only by importing carbon in the form of embedded carbon, we will have undermined much of what we are doing.

A bigger issue concerns an error that was made before and at Copenhagen and by the EU, and one that we are still making—I heard it in DECC questions again today: we have tended to overemphasise renewables targets and underemphasise decarbonisation, yet for too long we have used those words interchangeably. I am in favour of renewables, but because all the EU targets were for renewables, not decarbonisation, we placed a false emphasis on certain technologies. In particular, we did not develop nuclear power and carbon capture and storage as quickly as we should have. That error is still being made. This morning, I received a document from Friends of the Earth in preparation for this debate. It cannot bring itself to use the words “nuclear power” in this context. I can only conclude that although they care about climate change, they do not care enough to countenance the dominant technology that is by far the best chance the world has.

Caroline Lucas: Those of us who are deeply sceptical about nuclear power are not sceptical for ideological reasons. Nuclear is slow and deeply expensive. We need to reduce our emissions quickly, but the next nuclear power stations will not be on grid for at least another 10 years. It is an issue of speed and cost, as well as ideology.

David Mowat: As an advocate of nuclear power, I accept we have not solved the waste issue, but it is one that the human race is capable of solving, whereas I am not certain that climate change is. And I do not agree with the hon. Lady's point about cost.

Returning to the coal and gas debate, another issue is that we confuse post-2030 emissions pathways with the cumulative impact. The gigatonne target is a cumulative one. The effect of carbon and burning coal is cumulative. It is not just about post-2030 pathways or saying that gas has to be an interim energy source. In an intervention earlier, I made the point that were we able to replace all the coal in the world with gas—just like that—it would have the same effect as a fivefold increase in the level of renewable energy. We all ought to think about that statistic. This is not just about renewables. Of course they are vital, but we have to use other technologies, such as nuclear and CCS. The Copenhagen analysis and the EU's approach have focused too heavily on renewables and not enough on decarbonisation, so I am pleased we appear to be fixing that now.

In that regard, I would make one final point. I have mentioned Austria and—to an extent—Germany as countries that are doing badly, but one country in Europe is a shining example: France has the lowest emissions, the lowest emissions pathway and the lowest level of emissions per capita and GDP, and that is because it is 80% nuclear. There is an emperor's new clothes element to this. I wish we could be where France is.

What does all this mean for the UK? We have our Climate Change Act, and next Thursday we will get the next ratchet of that. We have to be careful that we do not act unilaterally—I have bought into all this stuff—and do not take a worldwide leadership position for a world that does not wish to or will not be led. That is why Paris is so important and why, for me, it is so disappointing that the EU submission to Paris is so unambitious vis-à-vis our Climate Change Act. The issues of fuel poverty will not be resolved by having the highest electricity prices in the world. I mentioned earlier in DECC questions that a number of EU leaders had sent the Secretary of State texts congratulating her on her announcement yesterday about removing coal from the system and replacing it with gas. I would just say that texts are no substitute for action by some of those countries. I am sure she will be telling them that in Paris, and I wish her luck.

1.30 pm

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Climate change is the biggest challenge that any of us or any future generations will face. It is absolutely right that the House should be given the opportunity to debate this important issue, particularly with Paris just a couple of weeks away. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for giving us time to debate this subject. I shall confine my remarks almost entirely to the domestic issues and the Government's policy on renewable energy and its

impact on Britain's CO₂ reduction targets, but also on jobs more widely and the UK's reputation going into the Paris conference.

As we have already heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman), thanks to the information we received via a leaked letter from the Energy Secretary, we now know that Britain is likely to miss our 2020 target of 15% of energy production from renewables by some margin, in all likelihood reaching just 11%. That compares to Germany, which already produces 31% of its energy from renewables. As we have also heard, the cheapest renewable energy by far is onshore wind. It is so cost-effective that it is no longer needs any subsidy, but as we have also heard, it has been virtually stopped in its tracks in England by the Government's planning changes.

Now the Government are proposing to abandon support for solar almost completely, in spite of the growing scientific and political consensus around the world that it holds the secret to our future carbon-free energy needs. The proposed cut in solar feed-in tariffs by a staggering 87% from 1 January will devastate our fledgling solar industry and make meeting the legally binding target of 15% by 2020 far more difficult. At the same time, the Government are announcing huge subsidies for nuclear, gas and highly polluting diesel generators. How can that make sense?

We now face a situation in which in a couple of years' time, renewables could be the only sector not to receive any subsidy. There is also the impact on jobs, our economy and our science base. Our solar industry alone provides 35,000 jobs, including nearly 4,000 in the south-west of England. We face losing 27,000 of those jobs nationally, including more than 3,000 in the south-west, if the proposal goes ahead unaltered. That figure is similar to—indeed, higher than—the job losses recently announced in the steel industry, but these jobs have a far lower profile because they are at small companies, they are scattered all over the country and they do not have a loud enough political voice. The irony is that by 2020 our solar industry could be operating subsidy-free. Indeed, the sector itself acknowledges the common sense in reducing the feed-in tariff, but it believes it should be done in a tapered way, not with a cliff edge, as is currently proposed. As my hon. Friend said, jobs are already being lost because of the uncertainty. We had the announcement of another 35 job losses in Exeter this week alone.

I would like to say a little about the situation facing hundreds of community renewable energy projects up and down the country in the light of recent announcements of changes to the way in which tax relief is administered. As hon. Members will remember, that was announced without any consultation on Third Reading of the Finance Act 2015 at the end of October and is to take effect at the end of this month—just one month's notice. This, I am afraid, is a disgrace. Those renewable energy schemes at community level get off the ground as the result of the blood, sweat and tears—often over years—of thousands of ordinary, civic-minded citizens, who have now had the rug pulled from under them.

My community energy project in Exeter has been working tirelessly for more than two years preparing its share offer, but it had to rush it out this week, before it was really ready, in order to beat the loss of tax relief at the end of the month. The project has, heroically,

managed to raise more than a quarter of the funds it needs, but raising the rest will be much more difficult without the tax reliefs, which have suddenly been taken away. Community Energy England estimates that £127 million of current investment and £242 million of potential future investment is at risk from the decision. When the Secretary of State responds, I would like to know whether she or her fellow Minister were consulted on the change, and if not, why not? If they were, why did they agree to it? I understand that the community energy sector feels so angry and betrayed by the decision that it is considering taking legal action, and I am sure there are many people in this House and outside who would support that.

The Secretary of State asserted earlier in departmental questions that she believed that Britain under the current Government had maintained its leadership role and its international reputation on climate change, but in that case why has Ernst & Young dropped the United Kingdom from the top 10 countries for renewable energy attractiveness? Why did the UN chief environment scientist, Jacquie McGlade, say recently on the BBC that it was “disappointing... when we see countries such as the United Kingdom that have really been in the lead in terms of getting their renewable energy up and going—we see subsidies being withdrawn and the fossil fuel industry being enhanced”?

She went on to say that she thought Britain was sending a worrying signal in the run-up to Paris by shifting away from clean energy just when the rest of the world was rushing towards it.

David Mowat: I made the point earlier that one of the issues we face is that we confuse decarbonisation with renewables, and I think many of the right hon. Gentleman's remarks are along those lines. He talked earlier about Germany, which has 34% renewables but very high emissions because it is building coal-powered stations. The Government's position is to reduce carbon, but not just by using renewables.

Mr Bradshaw: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman: it is not an either/or. What he says about Germany is absolutely right and is due in large part to the, in my view, unusually foolish policy decision by the Merkel Government to withdraw from nuclear. Germany is paying a high price for that, and it is a very good lesson to those of us who advocate an anti-nuclear policy.

Caroline Lucas: I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman's analysis. Real analysis of what has happened in Germany shows that the reason why coal has come up and taken that space is the lowering of the price, not least because of the dash for gas in the US which has resulted in a low price for coal. That is what has undercut the situation in Germany, not the fact that it has had to get rid of nuclear.

Mr Bradshaw: I am not going to have a ping-pong about it, but I am sure there is a price driver as well. The simple fact is that Germany needed that coal because it had abandoned nuclear energy so suddenly.

When the Secretary of State responds at the end of this debate, I want her to explain to the House and the British public why the Government have adopted the approach they have on renewables since the election. I want an honest assessment from her, given what I have said, of how she feels that has impacted on Britain's reputation internationally and on our leadership role.

[Mr Bradshaw]

I would also like a clearer explanation than we have heard so far from the Government of how they intend to close the gap between our legally binding 2020 target and the current trajectory.

I remember climate change summits not that long ago when Britain was a world leader. The commitment, hard work and leadership of Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, John Prescott and my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) delivered real and vital progress globally and at home. Even the current Prime Minister felt the need for a while at least to pay lip service to this agenda, but I am afraid that since 2010, and particularly since this year's election, the Conservatives appear to have stopped even pretending to take climate change seriously. They are doing real damage to our renewable energy industry, and I believe they are damaging Britain's reputation in the process.

I hope we will see more progress and a more positive approach in the run-up to Paris, and I hope that the Secretary of State and her colleagues can persuade the rest of their colleagues in government to take this—the biggest challenge both in Britain and globally—far more seriously than they are.

1.40 pm

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I too welcome this cross-party debate. It is essential that we work together not just nationally, but internationally, as so many of my colleagues have said. Climate change is bigger than the internal political debate. It was my work over many years as a television environment correspondent that really put climate change on my radar, which is why I wanted to speak in today's debate. It showed me that tackling this issue is pivotal to the future of the planet.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) on securing this debate, but we should also be praising the Pope for focusing on this issue in his encyclicals. It is the Pope who has raised the issue climate change and its inextricable links to poverty, as mentioned earlier, and it has put that issue right at the top of the agenda—and amen to that. As a good convent girl, although not a Catholic, I know that when the Pope speaks, we listen.

Speaking as a member of the Environmental Audit Committee, I am heartened that the Pope has made the direct link between climate change and the sustainability of the planet. If we do not tackle climate change, the biodiversity of our environment will be in jeopardy, and if we do not look after our land, our soil and our water for the long term, not the short term, we will not be able to feed the population. There will be increased famine and floods, our natural world will be decimated, and we will head for environmental disaster. There is no beating about the bush on this.

By setting a new set of sustainable development goals running until 2030, I am pleased to say that the UN has recognised that we must act in this area. I am also pleased that we have a 25-year environment strategy right here in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in which climate change is firmly embodied. I shall press to ensure that we have a firm strategy for putting that into place. Lord Krebs, chairman of the Climate Change Committee, specifically highlighted that recently in a sustainability conference. I am confident that our Government are taking this on board.

Just yesterday, as mentioned earlier, the Secretary of State said that we are committed to delivering our climate change commitment and that we are the greenest Government ever, so she must stick by it. She echoed the past words of the Prime Minister, who has said the same thing not long ago in Prime Minister's Question Time. He said that climate change was the "greatest danger" we have ever faced. I believe he is a great leader, as my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) said, and we need him to champion the cause.

The Climate Change Act 2008 gave us the tools to become a low carbon economy. No other country has commitments to match those Climate Change Act commitments, and we also have the independent Committee on Climate Change, which must keep holding our feet to the fire to ensure that we remain committed to cutting by 40% our 1990 levels of carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 and to have reduced the six greenhouse gases by 80% by 2050.

As a new Conservative MP, tackling climate change is a personal priority for me. It may seem strange, but in Taunton Deane, there is a great appetite for this. I was approached by an incredible number of people who raised the issue of climate change during my electoral campaign. They included groups such as Transition Taunton, Transition Athelney, the Quantock Eco group, and wildlife groups such as the Somerset wildlife trust—I declare an interest as a trustee—as well as farmers who had to combat flooding. They all came to me, some travelling to London, to urge me to press our Government to ensure that we keep to our climate change commitments. That is another reason why I am speaking today.

We have heard that Governments have agreed to limit global warming to 2 °C, which means that greenhouse gas emissions will have to fall by 80% to 95% by 2050. The statistics were eloquently put by my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South. We need in Paris a clear global climate deal that sets out how each country is going to achieve that. But it is not all about what goes on internationally. We have to lead by example at home, as there is an indissoluble link between our methods of energy production and emissions. I think everybody is quite clear about that. Cutting emissions relies on transferring to a low carbon economy.

Yesterday's announcement by the Energy Secretary to phase out all our coal-fired power stations by 2023 means that we are leading the way in this area, and we are one of the very first countries to make that commitment to phase out fossil fuels. It is a great message with which to head to Paris. As the Secretary of State said earlier, many people are talking about it. Coal is the most polluting way to generate power, and it still produces 30% of our energy. Coal plants are the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the world, and this is one of the main reasons why we are facing the challenge of climate change. Running one large coal plant full time as far ahead as 2030 would provide only 3% of our electricity, yet it would use up 50% of the UK's emissions targets, so it makes absolute sense to get rid of coal-fired energy.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I completely agree with my hon. Friend and with the Secretary of State's statement yesterday. I understand that Indonesia is planning to build coal-fired power plants equivalent to about two thirds of the entire UK grid capacity. While it is great that we are doing this, we are a very small

player. That is why Paris is so important. We can lead by example, but we need the rest of the world to follow. Otherwise it is literally fiddling while Indonesia burns.

Rebecca Pow: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I am coming on to talk a little more about the international context. He is absolutely right, but that is not a reason for us not acting. We still have to do everything we can to set the example, and then we need to go along and hopefully encourage others to join the team.

Caroline Lucas: I agree with much of what the hon. Lady is saying. Does she agree that it is not just about setting an example, but about recognising historic responsibility? If we are looking at the cumulative emissions of CO₂ in the atmosphere, the UK is one hell of a lot more responsible than Indonesia.

Rebecca Pow: I am not going to disagree with that, but it is again no reason for not doing something. That is historic, and we did not have all the science at that time. We do have the science now, which is why we are going to move forward.

David Mowat: The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) is quite right that the UK is more responsible than Indonesia, but that is why it is disappointing that Germany is building brand-new coal-fired power stations, as is the case in Holland. The point about Indonesia is right; it does not apply to Germany. While we are on the subject of coal, we need to understand that the world is still increasing its use of coal in absolute terms at a faster rate than its use of renewables.

Rebecca Pow: I thank my hon. Friend for that valuable intervention. While we are talking about the best kinds of energy that we should use, it is of course important to mention nuclear energy, which is another crucial part of our clean energy strategy. I mention it in particular because Hinkley C is on my doorstep and it will have a massive knock-on effect on Taunton Deane. It is the first new nuclear power station that we have built for 20 years. This is low carbon energy, and it will provide 7% of our energy requirements and keep the lights on for 6 million homes. It is so important as the baseload of non-fossil fuel energy.

The right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw), who is almost a parliamentary neighbour, was talking about jobs lost in the renewables sector, but 25,000 jobs should be created with the development of Hinkley C, and 5,000 of them are going to be in Somerset. Hinkley C will spawn a raft of low carbon technologies, which are already starting up. That is very positive and heartening, and we should raise the flag, because this is the direction in which we should be going. Moreover, this power station is largely fuelled by private investment, which we must encourage, because we cannot keep demanding that the state supply everything. It is a model for the way forward, and I have high hopes that it will be used as a model for other nuclear power stations built in this country.

We have made progress on renewables, although things are changing slightly at the moment. It is welcome that 16% of our energy comes from renewables, and that £42 billion has been invested in renewable energy so far. Yes, the tariffs are changing, but the Secretary of State is considering what to do about solar companies that are in that “in-between” phase. We are continuing to

encourage the use of offshore wind, which is a valuable addition to our energy supplies. However, in developing what I would describe as a new model for energy production in the UK, we must ensure that it does not damage the environment. As I said earlier, it must be sustainable. It must also be affordable, involving the lowest possible cost to the taxpayer. We must meet the Government’s fuel poverty targets, and we must do so at a time when the country is still in debt. The Pope was at pains to point out that energy costs must not penalise the poor and the vulnerable.

Given that we are getting hot under the collar, this is an appropriate moment at which to mention heat. A third of our emissions in the UK result from the inefficient use and waste of heat. I have spoken to the Secretary of State about the issue, and she assures me that the Department will look into it. It is a difficult issue to deal with, and it is expensive, but it is essential that we tackle it at a later stage. Decarbonising heat from buildings will definitely help us to close the carbon gap. Local authorities could work with low carbon roadmaps. The development of zero-carbon homes—which we should encourage when it is possible—and of more localised heating systems, such as district heating systems, will also help us to cut our emissions and secure higher energy efficiency, lower carbon emissions and less climate-warming.

Steve Brine: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way a second time. She is being very generous.

During the last Parliament, I served on the Bill Committee that considered what became the Energy Act 2011, which created the green deal. Like many other Members on both sides of the House, I am disappointed that the green deal is not continuing, although it would have been crazy to continue with something that was not working and was not delivering as we wanted it to. I hope my hon. Friend agrees that the issue of existing housing stock and its emissions is still critical, and that we need to reinvent the green deal in a new form in order to address it.

Rebecca Pow: I too was concerned about the green deal, but it clearly was not working. It was so complicated that there was no take-up. I know that lessons will be learnt, and I think that eventually we will come up with some sort of plan to make houses more efficient. The builders are certainly not averse to that.

As we have just heard, the UK is responsible for only 1.5% of the world’s carbon emissions, whereas China, for example, produces 26%. This is a global issue, and I am pleased that the Prime Minister has announced the provision of £5.8 billion of aid to help developing countries to tackle climate change through the international climate change fund between 2016 and 2021. I am also pleased that we are contributing £720 million to the green climate fund.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Rebecca Pow: I will, although I am about to finish.

Mr MacNeil: The lady is very honourable, and very generous; too generous, perhaps. As she says, the UK is responsible for only 1.5% of global emissions while

[Mr MacNeil]

China is responsible for 26%, but China's emissions percentage reflects its percentage of the world's population. Per head, the UK's emissions are far higher.

Rebecca Pow: That is a good point, although China's population is already falling, and we hope that it will continue to fall. We have to advise other countries, which is why Paris is so important. We must set the trend, and explain why it is important for others to buy into this.

David Mowat: It is interesting to note that China's emissions per capita are the same as ours this year. I know that that does not detract from the point about embedded carbon, but it is interesting none the less.

Rebecca Pow: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention.

Trees have been mentioned only briefly, but I am a great tree person, and I must speak up for them. We must encourage partnerships to reduce deforestation. We need to work with countries such as Brazil to stop the cutting down of rain forests, which is the single largest contributor to the release of carbon. Reducing cutting will have an enormous impact on climate change, and will also maintain our biodiversity—and placing a value on the benefits of biodiversity is part and parcel of the climate change debate. In that context, I am pleased that the Government are now talking about the importance of nature capital. Maintaining tree cover, whether it is done in Brazil or elsewhere in the world—including here, on the Somerset levels—will reduce flooding and soil erosion, aid soil maintenance, and give us cleaner water.

The Pope has called for increased action. We should bear in mind that not everything can be achieved in a stuffy room in Paris; a lot can be done there, but we in the House can do a lot as well.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Rebecca Pow: I will not, because I am about to end my speech.

I urge you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to join me and play your part in cutting emissions by running your washing machine on a very low heat. I do that, and the washing is still clean. You can also reduce your wash time, and you can turn down the heating or not put it on at all: my husband hardly ever lets me turn ours on. You can also use public transport, and grow your own food. Look after your soil!

Those are all things that we can do at home, but Paris is important in the long term. It is essential that the Government work to get the very best that they can out of it, and that we continue to lead by example.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I do not want to impose a time limit as such, but if Members speak for no more than 10 minutes, everyone will have an equal amount of time.

1.57 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow). She stressed the importance of combining the twin goals of tackling climate change and poverty globally, and I could not agree with her more. We must show a way forward that is about hope and optimism, and about making it clear that tackling climate change need not lead to impoverishment. Something that our country and other developed countries can contribute to—and, in a sense, we may be a bit jealous in this regard—is the ability of many countries to leapfrog over where we are to a cleaner and greener future. We can enrich the lives of communities and villages and children who live without light, which affects everything that they do in their daily lives.

If we do not challenge climate change, we will not tackle the potential for conflict in the world. The impact of climate change on our food production and water supplies is a starting point for more conflicts. Those who own the means of food production, and have access to and control of water supplies, can be a force for bad as well as good in the communities around the world in which they live.

Robert Flello (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is kicking off what will clearly be a fantastic speech. The present appalling situation in which people are fleeing Syria could occur again, through devastation caused by climate change or, as she says, because people simply want access to drinking water.

Caroline Flint: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Part of the challenge for all of us is the need to demonstrate, through discussions not just in the House but in our communities and with our partners around the world, that events happening thousands of miles away can have a knock-on effect here in way or another. I believe we have already seen in our own country some of the impacts of climate change. I think the public know that. That is why I thought it was important when my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), as leader of the Labour party, when we had those terrible floods here, said that we should look at tackling climate change as a national security issue. That important point was well made then and it has as much relevance today.

Clive Lewis: The National Academy of Sciences in the United States recently described climate change as a “threat multiplier”, particularly in the context of the middle east, where war, drought and hotter weather will mean a greater chance of increased pressure on water supplies, food and agriculture. That will have an impact on the potential for war and civil war in that area. My right hon. Friend raises an important point.

Caroline Flint: It is an important point. We should all be mindful of that. We should ensure that we do not approach this with an island mentality and that we recognise how those links should lead us to step up even more and paint the portrait of what is happening. We have to speak in pictures. Words, stats and learned prose have their place, but we have to draw a picture of what could happen if we do not step up and make some serious changes.

Mr MacNeil: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Caroline Flint: I am going to make a bit of progress because I have been forewarned by Mr Deputy Speaker, who said that we should try to limit our time.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) and the Backbench Business Committee for securing this debate. I was happy to sponsor it. I would also like to mention some people from my constituency. I recently received a copy of a CAFOD petition organised by Gillian McCallum, a constituent, on behalf of two parishes in Don Valley, Christ the King Church Rossington, and Holy Family, Finningley. It called on the Prime Minister to show leadership on climate change. I know they will be pleased that the House is taking note of the Pope's encyclical today.

I was also delighted to welcome students from McAuley school, a Catholic school in my constituency, when they were here for the love of climate coalition event in June and talked about how important the issue was to them. Last year, I was at that school and met some people from Peru, who vividly talked about the impacts of climate change on their communities and livelihoods. Speaking to those bright young pupils about climate change—all of us have probably spoken to such pupils in our constituencies—provided a vivid reminder of the fact that, although we are seeing the effects of climate change already, it is their generation and their children and beyond who will have to live with the consequences if we do not get this right now.

I also pay tribute to the city of Paris, which has been defiant in the face of the brutal murders there last weekend, and I commend its decision to go ahead with holding the Paris conference in a few weeks.

As shadow Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, I led a debate on the road to Paris on the first Opposition day of this Parliament. I did so because the Paris conference means that this year is a vital year for climate change, but also because I wanted to voice the concerns of many that a Conservative majority Government might lead to the consensus on climate change formed in 2008 becoming less secure. In that debate, I asked for a number of reassurances about the Government's approach in this vital year.

It is important to the success of Paris that the agreement includes a review every five years, so that ambition can be ramped up as progress is made, and that includes robust and consistent reporting mechanisms so that every country can have confidence others are playing by the rules. I was pleased to see the Secretary of State commit to that as part of the UK's demands. However, with weeks to go, this debate gives us the chance to look at what else has happened since that June debate.

We now have 140 intended nationally determined contributions submitted by countries that will be attending the talks. Although we know those submissions do not achieve the crucial target of keeping us under 2° of warming, significant progress has been made. The bilateral agreement between the US and China is one important step that would not have taken place without the process we have. When we think of the many years fighting for climate action, and the long road from Kyoto, we know this is no small step.

For the US, Obama has signalled the intention to ramp up investment in renewables, alongside a role for nuclear and carbon capture and storage, and to prioritise energy efficiency to cut bills as well as emissions. China has pledged up to 1,000 GW of new clean capacity by 2030. However, we have a long way to go, as the opposition of India and Saudi Arabia to a review mechanism in the G20 communiqué last week shows. But the momentum being generated is important in and of itself. If the direction of travel is right, 2° can be kept within touching distance. Not only that but we can reduce the atmospheric pollutants that kill people here and in the developing world, a point made recently by the eminent Lord Stern, as well as by the Pope.

The hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) made an important point. He is right: the EU submission is lower in terms of its ambition on targets than our own enshrined in the Climate Change Act 2008, but that is why we need leadership. I would still like to see the EU raise its ambition but it does have in its submission the line, "at least" a 40% reduction in emissions by 2030, so there is still scope for the Prime Minister to press the point home that we can do better than that and we can do more. I am not ashamed, and I am not suggesting the hon. Gentleman is, that we are leading from the front. We should tackle those individual countries that talk the talk but do not walk the walk and point out when there are inconsistencies in the way they are delivering their energy supply and reducing their emissions as a result.

However, the Prime Minister's leadership has to be backed by leadership at home. I was concerned when the Secretary of State said that the UK should cease to play a leadership role and move "in step" with the rest of the world. As we have heard, since the election, a number of policy changes are affecting our ability to meet climate change targets and to create that important investment and those important jobs. We have seen the two cheapest forms of renewables undermined, onshore wind and solar. We have seen the green deal axed. I will make no bones about it: I thought the green deal was never a good deal anyway and we tried to effect some changes in the previous Parliament, but the fact is that it has been axed and there has been nothing to replace it.

The ECO—energy company obligation—has not served the needs of those most affected by fuel poverty. As a result of changes to the structure of that scheme, 400,000 fewer homes have been insulated. The zero carbon homes plan has been scrapped, an issue I feel close to as a former Housing Minister. When we set the target on that, in some ways, for the construction sector, it was not about the target date; it just galvanised the sector to think differently about how construction could play a part in ensuring that we have more energy-efficient homes that reduce emissions as well. Renewables have been forced to pay the climate change levy and the contracts for difference auction has been delayed.

The news from Government that a date has been set for phasing out unabated coal generation is welcome, as we know coal is the biggest emitter and the dirtiest pollutant. However, it is ironic to say the least that the Drax power station, which relies on coal to create its electricity, has been so undermined in recent times in its efforts to move to renewables and its support as an important partner for CCS. I urge the Government: please do not give up on CCS. We need it for industrial

[Caroline Flint]

processes such as steel production as well as for electricity generation. Also, there is huge potential for the by-products from that process to create a market that could be good for our economy as well. It seems that that is an important area in which we can lead and not just follow others.

Nuclear is important, too. The hon. Member for Warrington South and I agree on that, but again let us look at the history. Part of the reason that this country and Parliament decided to look at nuclear again was that we wanted to commit to more ambitious climate change goals. I am proud that the last Labour Government took a very difficult decision on that. I remind the House that the Prime Minister said that it should be a last resort and the Liberal Democrats were against it, full stop. So I will not take any lectures about how slow the process has been. It has been difficult. We need to know now what the Government are going to do to ensure that that can play a part in decarbonising our generation.

The last six months have been disappointing, and the policy framework and certainty just are not there. His Holiness said:

“Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years.”

None of us can dispute that. He then expressed a shared love of our planet, saying

“The entire material universe...the soil, water, mountains, everything is, as it were, a caress of God.”

He also said:

“Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home... Truly, much can be done”.

His words speak to those of faith and of no faith. What they all share is an optimism that humankind, with the knowledge we have today, can save our planet. I stand with those people. I hope the Government will stand with them too.

2.9 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I, too, congratulate the sponsors of the motion, and in particular the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) on her substantial contribution.

It is clear we all agree today that climate change is the biggest challenge facing the planet and its people. It exacerbates the existing challenges of poverty, conflict, disease, resource depletion and population displacement and it increases the risk of greater insecurity around the world, reversing the progress made to a more peaceful and just world. The opportunity in Paris in a couple of weeks should not be overlooked, and in the light of the dreadful atrocities of last week, that opportunity is even more important. By the end of this year the city should not be remembered only as a target of terror, but as the cradle of a climate deal that cares for our communities and our “common home”, which, as we have heard, is how Pope Francis describes the planet in his encyclical on the planet Earth.

I thank the Members from various different parties who signed the early-day motion I tabled recognising and welcoming the encyclical when it was published. That was an extremely prophetic call from the Pope. I enjoyed the slightly theological exchanges between the

hon. Members for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) and for Bishop Auckland. Catholic social teaching is not usually either/or, and I have something to say about the messages the Church has produced going back over 150 years, as well as more recently—the Pope’s immediate predecessor Benedict XVI should be given credit for the work he did on the environment and this year we mark five years since his visit to the UK. Catholic social teaching does not prescribe specific courses of action; it outlines a direction of travel and broad principles, and it is then for decision makers, including all of us here today, to make judgments on the right course of action.

It is right to describe much of what Pope Francis has said as a prophetic document, in particular in paragraph 49 where he says that

“a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.”

That is the challenge before us today.

I also recognise the comments of the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) that many religious leaders, and indeed secular leaders, of good will are behind this call. What the encyclical represents—at least if we come from that perspective—is the pinnacle of a global consensus that now is the time for action. That was ratified, as it were, at the UN back in September when the sustainable development goals were agreed by every single member state.

Robert Ffello: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if we leave it much longer, we will have gone past the time for action?

Patrick Grady: I do agree: the window of opportunity is closing, which is why the need for action is all the more urgent. That is perhaps why the SDGs, unlike the millennium development goals, particularly emphasise in goal 13 the need for urgent action on climate change. We have heard a lot about energy as well, and goal 7 commits the global community to providing

“access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.”

That is a huge and significant challenge and some of our exchanges on how best to do that have been very important.

Scotland, of course, is committed to playing its part as a good global citizen. It has some of the most ambitious targets for carbon emission reduction in the world, and, despite challenges, it remains on course to meet them. It is worth noting that the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 was passed unanimously by the Scottish Parliament—there were not the three votes against that we heard about here.

Under the current and former First Ministers, the Scottish Government have also championed the concept of climate justice in their approach to climate change. Climate justice recognises that the poor and vulnerable at home and overseas are often affected first and hardest by climate change, yet have done little or nothing to cause the problem. If we adopt that justice principle, we have to take a human rights-based approach to the heart of decisions on sustainable and equitable global development, and it reinforces the strong economic case for a swift transition to a low-carbon economy that can still deliver jobs, investment and trade.

There is a particularly innovative approach through the Scottish Government's climate justice fund, and I declare an interest here as before the election I worked for the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, which received grants from that fund. That employment gave me the opportunity to see at first hand the impact of climate justice funding, which is helping communities in rural Malawi overcome the effects of climate change through irrigation and sustainable agriculture projects.

Importantly, the climate justice fund is additional to the Scottish Government's international development fund. It recognises that tackling the impact of climate change means going beyond traditional aid flows and structures. It would be useful to hear from the Minister what discussions she has had with the Scottish Government about this model and whether the UK Government are prepared to learn any lessons from it. This is particularly relevant given research from CAFOD which shows that the vast majority of UK Government support—43% of their total funding for energy projects overseas—is still going to fossil fuels

One reason the Scottish Government are able to be so ambitious is the widespread and unambiguous public support for action on these issues. At the climate lobby here at Westminster in June, many of the SNP MPs—43 of our 56 MPs—were lobbied by constituents. They had travelled—by sustainable and low-carbon methods, I am assured—all the way from Scotland to speak to us about the need for urgent action. I look forward to joining many thousands of others at Scotland's climate rally a week on Saturday in Edinburgh, which will also send a powerful message to world leaders attending the talks in Paris.

Public support for political action also represents an appetite for deeper and more sustainable changes in our daily lives. People will make lower carbon choices if they are given the opportunity to do so. In my own city and constituency, we have seen a great uptake in cycling since the introduction of a bike-hire scheme, for example, but Governments have a role to play in promoting lifestyle change. Again, therefore, it would be interesting to hear the UK Government's views on this matter.

I said to the Prime Minister during his statement on Tuesday that his attendance in Paris would be an act of leadership and solidarity, and I welcome the previous confirmation from Ministers that Scottish Government Ministers, and, I believe, representatives from the other devolved Administrations, have been invited to attend as part of the UK delegation and will be present in Paris as well. It is important that Heads of State and Government take part in the conference and do not simply leave negotiations to Ministers or officials. That will be not just an act of defiance in the face of terrorism, but a clear signal of what global priorities can, should, and must be: collective action to tackle climate change, which will otherwise remain the biggest threat to peace, security and the sustainability of our common home.

2.17 pm

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) on taking a lead in securing this important debate. It could not be more timely, not only because of the Paris climate talks that are due to start in 10 days' time, but because just last week the World Meteorological Organisation warned that global average

temperatures are set to rise by 1°C above pre-industrial levels for the first time. As the WMO's secretary general, Michel Jarraud, put it,

“We are moving into uncharted territory at a frightening speed...The laws of physics are non-negotiable.”

While that is the crucial context for the Paris climate talks, the challenge of climate change is about much more than degrees Celsius and parts per million. That is why the Pope's encyclical matters. It forces us to confront the reality that our response to climate change goes to the heart of who we are, and the values that guide our decisions collectively and as individuals.

Similarly, I welcome the leadership that other religious figures and organisations have played. I referenced the Islamic leaders' initiative earlier, and I also want to pay tribute to the many innovative initiatives in my own constituency, especially that of the Brighthelm church, the first church in the UK to divest by pulling its funds and investments out of fossil fuels.

The case for the Government to adopt a scientifically literate and cross-governmental approach to climate change is coming from many directions—faith groups, business, civil society and, most recently, from the Governor of the Bank of England. It is increasingly clear that there is a strong economic reason to accelerate the transition to a cleaner, greener energy future. Back in September, Mark Carney issued a blunt warning to the fossil fuel industry that investors face what he called “potentially huge” losses from climate change action that could make vast reserves of oil, coal and gas “literally unburnable”. That is because, to remain under the 2° threshold, we as a global population must burn no more than 886 billion tonnes of carbon between the years 2000 and 2049, according to the International Energy Agency.

The global oil and gas companies have declared the existence of 2.8 trillion tonnes of carbon reserves, and their shares are valued as though those reserves were burnable, but the Carbon Tracker Initiative has warned investors that

“they need to understand that 60-80% of coal, oil and gas reserves of listed firms are unburnable”.

That is because, if we burn them, the atmosphere will warm to a catastrophic degree. The threat of ending up with assets stranded by tougher rules to curb climate change could affect the nearly 20% of FTSE 100 companies in the natural resources and extraction industries. As Mark Carney has said:

“Once climate change becomes a defining issue for financial stability, it may already be too late”.

Within the investor community, the early adopters have already begun a substantial movement to divest from fossil fuels, a movement representing \$2.6 trillion in assets under management. The world's largest institutional investors, including the Norwegian Sovereign Wealth and Rockefeller Brother funds, have all expressed their concern about carbon-related investment risk, and they are already adjusting their portfolios accordingly by moving out of fossil fuel holdings.

I believe that Parliament should be taking a lead on this too. That is why I am engaged in an ongoing and, frankly, very lengthy correspondence with our own parliamentary pension fund managers. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us today that she will use her good offices to make them look at this more seriously

[Caroline Lucas]

and with more urgency because, to be frank, I have seen nothing to suggest that they are treating this with any urgency at all.

Divestment also models more broadly the kind of commitments we should expect to be taken by Governments, yet on the challenge of redirecting finance—both public subsidies and private capital—away from fossil fuels and into low carbon energy, our own Government's policy too often involves doing exactly the opposite. We have seen the ending of subsidies for onshore wind, the slashing of solar subsidies, the awarding of tax breaks for fracking and for offshore oil and gas drilling, the application of the climate change levy to renewables, the ditching of zero carbon homes, the removal of community energy tax breaks and the funnelling of export credits into hydrocarbon projects abroad—the list goes on and on—yet not a penny is being put into the new public infrastructure fund for energy efficiency. Then yesterday, the go-ahead was given for a whole new dash for gas.

The Secretary of State has been treating us to a masterclass in cognitive dissonance. She continually speaks of competitiveness being at the heart of our energy system, yet her Government have committed to subsidising outrageously expensive nuclear power stations while slashing support for solar and wind, which are more popular, cheaper and faster to deploy.

Robert Ffello: On the basis of that list—that litany of failures—that the hon. Lady has just read out, can she imagine one of the attendees at COP21 saying to us, “Hang on a second. Who are you in the UK to preach to us, given that this is what you have done”?

Caroline Lucas: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to suggest that international leadership has to depend on domestic action at home; otherwise, it has absolutely no credibility. That is where I fear that this Secretary of State is letting us down.

Mr MacNeil: The hon. Lady is putting forward some very good arguments. There is an underlying assumption that going green and acting to reduce carbon emissions come at a cost. However, I want to put on record that I recommend Amory Lovins' TED talk—a well-spent 27 minutes and 10 seconds—entitled “A 40-year plan for energy”. It underpins some of her arguments and shows that we will not necessarily lose out financially by adopting green policies. On the contrary, it demonstrates that we could gain financially and that they could provide a boost to our economy.

Caroline Lucas: Indeed we will benefit economically. We will create hundreds of thousands of jobs, because the green economy is far more labour intensive than the fossil fuel economy that it will replace. That will help us out of our economic difficulties, rather than being a distraction from them.

At the risk of being a little more controversial, I want to say a few words about nuclear power—as though we have not already—and in particular about the issue of baseload power. There is plenty of evidence that those who think that we need nuclear for baseload power are peddling myths based on last-century thinking on energy

systems. None other than Steve Holliday, the chief executive officer of National Grid, said recently that the idea that we need large power stations for baseload power was “outdated”. He also said:

“From a consumer's point of view, the solar on the rooftop is going to be the baseload. Centralised power stations will be increasingly used to provide peak demand”.

He also said that energy markets

“are clearly moving towards much more distributed production and towards microgrids”.

Let us take an example from international best practice. The Kombikraftwerk project in Germany shows how a 100% renewables system can be made to work, using variable technologies such as wind and solar backed up by dispatchable ones such as hydro, biogas or biomass—in the UK we could add tidal—and reinforced by a variety of storage methods, with demand-side measures reducing overall demand and flattening peaks.

It is not just in Germany that that can happen. Recently, a study for Greenpeace set out a similar scenario for the UK. It showed that it is possible for the UK's power system to be nearly 90% renewably delivered by 2030, while electrifying 25% of all heating demand and putting 12.7 million electric cars on the road. However, that is achievable only if we cut demand for space heating by 57% in the next 15 years. That is doable, but it is a major challenge, which again underlines the need for the Chancellor to make energy efficiency a top infrastructure investment priority in the spending review later this month.

These are the kind of positive measures that would make a real difference to reducing emissions while creating jobs and lowering fuel bills. Let me highlight a few more that would enable us to look back on the Paris COP in a positive light. First, as others have said, we must raise ambition before, not just after, 2020. We already know that the INDC—intended nationally determined contributions—pledges will not be sufficient to keep temperatures to below 2°, never mind the 1.5° demanded by more vulnerable nations and many campaigners. That means that Paris must produce a framework to ensure that commitments are rapidly strengthened, with ratchet mechanisms for countries to scale up their national plans every few years, starting straight away.

Does the Secretary of State accept that an honest analysis of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's budgets for a “likely” chance of not exceeding 2 °C, accompanied by even weak allowances for equity, would require the EU to deliver at least an 80% reduction in emissions from its energy system by 2030, with full decarbonisation afterwards? That figure is roughly in line with a recent civil society review, highlighted by Oxfam and others, which found that national pledges add up to barely half the emissions reductions needed. Global ambition therefore needs to at least double by 2030.

Secondly, we need a long-term goal to phase out fossil fuels and phase in 100% renewable energy by 2050 at the latest. Countries such as the UK, which are rich financially as well as in bountiful renewable energy resources, should get there faster. It is a scandal that the Government are taking the UK in precisely the opposite direction, with the slashing of support for renewables, a reckless dash for gas, and increasing subsidies for fossil fuels.

Thirdly, Greens are calling for the Paris protocol to establish adequate and predictable international climate finance for adaptation and mitigation in developing countries, as well as a functioning mechanism to address loss and damage. We could find that money from the revenues from market-based instruments to reduce global aviation and shipping emissions.

Fourthly, we need to kick the fossil fuel industry out of the negotiations. Governments have been meeting for more than 20 years, yet greenhouse gas emissions have not decreased and the climate keeps changing. The forces of inertia and obstruction prevail, and the fossil fuel giants and the politicians who do their bidding are responsible. That is why I am calling for the fossil fuel lobby to be kicked out of the UN climate negotiations.

Finally, we need to maintain human rights at the heart of our work to tackle the climate crisis. The respect, protection and promotion of human rights are prerequisites for effective global climate action. And, very finally, I want to highlight another imperative for ambitious outcomes at Paris—namely, our collective security. The reality of climate change as a threat to national security is something we hear more often from the military than from politicians. For example, just four months ago, the US Defence Department sent a report to Congress warning specifically of growing instability as a result of climate change.

More specifically, a major peer-reviewed study in March made a link between climate change and the Syrian civil war. Here in the UK, last year's Ministry of Defence report, "Global Strategic Trends—Out to 2045", warned that if global temperatures continued to rise, the consequent droughts and food shortages could trigger widespread social unrest—[*Interruption.*] The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr Lilley) says that that is absurd. I suggest that he reads retired navy Rear-Admiral David Titley's report, which puts forward the theory that the droughts in Syria are likely to be caused by accelerating climate change, which has led to more people leaving rural areas and coming into the cities, adding to social unrest. These things are being said by serious people.

In conclusion, for months and years to come, thinking back to "Paris 2015" will bore a terrible, painful hole in people's hearts and minds. For the sake of our individual and collective security, we should work hard to ensure that Paris 2015 is remembered for the climate talks as well.

2.29 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) on securing this debate. In my experience, if we ask most people what they want politicians to do, we find that they want us to work together to tackle the really big challenges, and that is quite hard in this place, as any newly elected Member soon comes to appreciate. However, there was one moment a few years ago when this place really did come together; as my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) pointed out, the Climate Change Act 2008 was supported by almost everyone in this House, and rightly so. It was a groundbreaking piece of legislation, setting out the structure we need to tackle one of the key problems of our age. The Climate Change Committee, by setting out the carbon budgets—we anticipate the next one soon—creates the framework within which investors and innovators can operate with some certainty,

and without which we would not be able to make progress. It is a model of how a modern competitive economy can operate, with markets regulated in the interests of the common good. It is good for citizens, good for the environment and good for business; this is the model of how a modern economy looks to many of us in the Labour party.

How disappointing, then, that even with this excellent model, recent actions by the Government have taken us backwards. Their erratic U-turn on renewable subsidies; the selling off of the Green Investment Bank; the green deal disaster and binning of the decade-long zero-carbon homes plan have left the green energy sector infuriated and non-plussed, and left investors nervous. We are already lagging behind Germany, India, Japan, China and the United States in green investment, and cutting our commitment to renewable energy is hardly likely to improve matters.

Yet, what an opportunity we have. There is huge interest in these issues in Cambridge, and I commend to the Secretary of State the Cambridge climate message, which is supported by an impressive array of local organisations. They are clear that they want COP21 to be a success, not a cop-out. Cambridge and the wider East Anglian region is at the forefront of the clean-tech revolution, with more than 1,000 businesses already active in the sector, ranging from product development specialists to multinational enterprises with global reach. Some 10% of the UK total of low carbon and environmental goods and services companies are in the region, which means that the per capita concentration of companies is twice the national average. That emerging cluster is supported by a network of world-class universities and research centres, a highly skilled workforce and some of the world's leading technical consultancies. Growth there can be built upon to bring about a halo effect for similar success outside our region, but it depends upon attracting investors. At the moment, these investors are scratching their heads and closing their wallets when faced with the Government's constantly shifting policies on green energy.

I recently met people from Cambridge Cleantech, a highly effective members organisation supporting the growth of clean-tech companies in the greater Cambridge area, with the clear ambition to further develop Cambridge as a leading clean-tech centre in Europe. To fulfil that ambition they need to see better-defined, more stable Government policies that influence confidence in clean-tech investment.

Mr Lilley: Subsidies.

Daniel Zeichner: Not subsidies. One of the outstanding local projects, Cambridge Retrofit, is a network of public and private sector organisations working together to bring at-scale retrofits to the building stock of the Cambridge community.

Mr Lilley: Is the hon. Gentleman giving us the welcome news that these developments can take place without subsidy?

Daniel Zeichner: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. What we know is that when the private and public sectors work together effectively, we get a market that works. The problem in the current situation is that without investor certainty, the market does not work.

[Daniel Zeichner]

Let me return to talking about Cambridge Retrofit, which I commend to the right hon. Gentleman. Led by Professor Doug Crawford-Brown at the Cambridge Centre for Climate Change Mitigation Research, it is helping the UK to meet its CO₂ emission reduction targets, while helping the community reduce energy bills and supporting local businesses. When completed, the project will make a massive 20% to 30% reduction in carbon emissions in the Cambridge area. This shows that it can be done; it is about political will and political leadership, and that is what we need in the run-up to Paris.

We need—in fact, the wider world needs—to hear from this Government a clear assurance that they intend to prioritise innovation and reinstate long-term policies that will demonstrate their confidence in clean, green energy and technology. Attracting investment to this sector will help us deliver on our national energy, economic and environmental ambitions, and help the UK meet its international obligations and achieve a just transition. This House has shown before that it can rise to the challenge to come together to meet the great challenges of our age. My question is: can the Government?

2.34 pm

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): I add my thanks to the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) and the Backbench Business Committee for allowing this debate to happen, in incredibly timeous circumstances. The debate has been very enlightening and well-conducted. The importance of the COP21 meeting should not be understated. The Prime Minister said on Tuesday that he was confident that a deal would be struck; the issue was whether we got a good deal or not. I wish to talk a little about what that good deal should look like.

As we have heard, the UN has analysed the INDCs submitted by 90% of the countries on Earth, suggesting that if they are met, we will get down to a 2.7° increase in temperatures. That represents huge progress from the 4° to 5° that we would have with no change, but it is still not enough. An increase of 2° C is the Rubicon that we must strive not to cross, as the impact on life on this planet if we get things wrong almost does not bear thinking about. As we have heard from a number of hon. Members, the impact will be harshest on the poor. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) has said, those who have contributed least to global warming stand to lose by far the most. As one of the planet's earliest industrialised nations, and as a major producer and exploiter of carbon dioxide in terms of fossil fuels, we have a moral responsibility here.

One really encouraging sign, which has been touched on in this debate, is that there has been a decoupling of growth and carbon emissions. According to the International Energy Agency, at the global level we have 3% growth, with flatlined emissions. From the UK perspective, we are talking about 2.8% growth, with an 8.4% reduction. The comments about not offshoring are pertinent, but if we are having 3% growth globally with no increase, the suggestion is that it is possible to achieve growth and prosperity, which is required, but without the detrimental effects on our planet and the ensuing impact on populations—and then the knock-on effect on our economic prosperity.

What do we require? The commitments to seeking five-yearly reviews are fundamental. Whatever deal we get cannot be seen as enough in and of itself; it will have to be reviewed and improved upon, which will require concerted effort from Governments across the Earth. We also need the commitment to finding the money that is required—\$100 billion has been suggested in order for us to feed in the required changes. That money needs at least in part—we hope it will be a considerable part—to be new money, because if it is a redistribution of existing aid, we will not meet the dual aims. We have heard about the sustainable development goals, which are fundamental. These things go hand in hand, and we cannot be seen to be taking money from sustainable development, in terms of some aspects of eradicating poverty, and putting it into climate change. There must be a combination of moneys and a concerted effort to ensure that we do this.

The action we will take in Paris, the words we will use and the power that we will exert—the soft power, in the form of diplomatic pressure on the rest of the world to take a lead—must be backed with action at home. The Secretary of State's announcement yesterday on coal can be welcomed by most of us. I do not think that commitment should be understated—it is hugely important—but it should not be overstated either. It needs to be taken in consideration with some of the other things the Government have been doing, which we have heard about and which are damaging to our attempts to meet our climate change commitments. Mention has been made of the changes on onshore wind and solar, the removal of the climate change levy from green energy production, the scrapping of the commitment to zero-carbon homes—in England and Wales, I assume—and the decision to privatise the Green Investment Bank. That headline of scrapping coal will be the thing that many in the world will see, and it does provide a certain legitimacy to the Secretary of State and to the UK Government in arguing for change, but let us hope that people do not scrape too far beneath the service, because if they analyse this Government's action in depth, they will find that the world-class rhetoric is not borne out by action here.

As we have heard, the change on coal and its replacement with gas can make a significant contribution, but it will also lock in change, potentially for 30, 40 or 50 years. I have this ask of the Secretary of State: when we are looking at that new generation of gas-fired power stations, can we consider how we can use them, or at least make them ready to be adapted, should CCS be commercially deployable? If they are built ready to adapt to that technology, it will mitigate the amount of carbon that we cannot afford to have released.

I hope that in the autumn statement and the comprehensive spending review next week, the commitment to the funding of CCS is still there. That is essential, and we back the go-ahead of both Peterhead and White Rose. I agree with the Climate Change Committee's assessment that we need at least another two projects coming out of this Parliament. That is probably the easiest way to adapt to a low carbon economy, but it requires support. Being at the forefront of that technology could allow us to benefit financially as well as ecologically.

I support the calls for a reconsideration of the policies around renewable energy. Again, we need to look at the economic case. I come back to the IEA, which has suggested that, in the coming years, 60% of all money

that is spent on energy infrastructure will be on renewables. That is hugely important. The Secretary of State is very keen on offshore wind, and she will know that we have the potential to become a world leader in that area. We also need to see what more can be done with solar energy and onshore wind. I welcome her suggestion this morning that there is an open mind to the possibility of subsidy-free onshore wind, and a willingness to engage with the industry to make that happen.

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North about Scotland's climate change legislation. We are on track to meet our agenda. It is ambitious—moderately more so than the UK agenda as a whole. We are uniquely placed to contribute to the UK's carbon reduction and to take more than a fair share of global reductions.

Mr Lilley: Subsidies!

Callum McCaig: The right hon. Gentleman mentions subsidies from a sedentary position. In her speech yesterday, the Secretary of State acknowledged that no form of new generation will be built without subsidies. That is the reality of the energy climate in which we work today. Whether we like it or not, subsidies are required. If we take in carbon costs, the area that is most likely to be developed without subsidy is onshore wind, which, ironically, is the one that has been ruled out.

I welcome the fact that Scotland will be able to play its part in the UK delegation. Our story, as part of the UK story, is compelling, and I look forward to the UK, with Scotland playing a leading role, taking this matter forward, showing true global leadership and ensuring that we get a deal that is worth its name.

2.43 pm

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) and the Backbench Business Committee for not only initiating this debate, but putting on the parliamentary agenda an issue that will be the defining test of our generation of politicians and people.

In just a few days' time, the world will meet in Paris, which has, in recent days, been the site of so much distress and despair. The attacks that took place at the weekend were acts of hatred, designed to divide us, crush people's hopes and destroy lives. At the landmark summit, the UK will have the opportunity to show real leadership, to give hope to people around the world and to take real action, collective action, on one of the most pressing issues of our times.

This is urgent. For years, Governments around the world have agreed that temperature rises should be limited to no more than 2°. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) said, this month we have learned that the world is already half way to that critical threshold.

Last year, scientists at NASA said that global temperatures have risen to their highest recorded level. With the exception of 1998, the 10 warmest years on record have all been since the turn of the century. Humanity's greatest scientific minds have warned us time and again that the warming trend is now unmistakable, and that climate change is no longer a distant threat; it is already happening.

We are running out of time. This is a direct threat to our national security. Global warming is already worsening extreme weather, putting at risk homes and livelihoods across our islands from worse and more frequent flood events. After the most intense period of rainfall in the record books caused Britain's worst-ever floods last winter, the head of the Met Office warned that

“all the available evidence suggests there is a link to climate change.”

Climate change is a threat to our broader economic prosperity and to the families and businesses that depend on a growing economy. New research for Aviva Investors found that if temperature rises of up to 5° of warming occurred, it could result in \$7 trillion of losses, which is more than the total market capitalisation of the London Stock Exchange. As the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) reminded us some moments ago, the Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, has said:

“Climate change will threaten financial resilience and longer term prosperity”.

He warned:

“Once climate change becomes a defining issue for financial stability, it may already be too late.”

Climate change is also a threat to public health. A major commission by British doctors, published in *The Lancet* earlier this year and backed by the World Health Organisation, found that rising temperatures constituted a threat to people's wellbeing because of heatwaves, the spread of infectious diseases and crop failures.

Launching the commission's findings, Hugh Montgomery from University College London told reporters:

“Climate change is a medical emergency. It demands an emergency response.”

This is an issue of social justice. All of us have a duty to protect some of the poorest people in the world, and here at home, from threats to their security. That is why I do not believe that we or anyone else can afford to turn our back on the issue.

Pope Francis was right when he called action on climate change

“a matter of justice...a question of solidarity.”

He said:

“It is the poorest who suffer the worst consequences.”

When world leaders meet in Paris for UN talks to try to finalise a new global agreement, it is imperative that the outcome keeps the goal of climate safety within reach. Nobody expects that the Paris summit will completely solve the carbon problem, but it is a moment when we will stand at a crossroads. We have a real chance to establish a pathway to the ultimate goal of a global economy that does not rely on destroying the world's rainforests and burning highly polluting fuels, and that seizes on the opportunities presented by modern clean energy technologies.

The Government should know that they have our full support in the UN talks to strive for an agreement that includes ambitious climate plans from all countries towards the ultimate goal of a completely carbon-free global economy in the second half to the century. It was encouraging to see the Prime Minister and other G7 leaders back this target when they met in June. I hope this will now become a truly international commitment when Governments meet in Paris in a few days' time.

[Lisa Nandy]

As the cost of clean technologies continues to fall, the Paris accord must include an important commitment to strengthen national plans every five years towards achieving this global long-term goal. I had an exchange this morning with the Secretary of State and I was pleased to hear her express her support for this.

We should start from where we are. Some climate change impacts are inevitable as a consequence of the carbon pollution that is already in the atmosphere, so I welcome the Government's commitment to direct substantial aid towards the poorest and most vulnerable communities. As my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) knows and reminds me so often, we must take steps to adapt to worsening extreme weather and rising seas through the hurricane-proofing of schools and the building of sea walls.

The UK goes to the Paris summit with a proud history of action on climate change. It was Tony Blair who put the issue on the agenda of the United Nations Security Council and the G7. It was my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North and his brother who passed into law the world's first-ever Climate Change Act. It was Gordon Brown who took action in Copenhagen to win agreement from other world leaders to set up the UN's global climate fund to help the poorest countries in the world to protect their citizens from the impact of stronger hurricanes and rising seas.

I am proud that we doubled renewable energy generation and put in the work to make sure that the UK was a global leader across a range of clean energy technologies. I am proud of the jobs and the opportunities for young people that those projects have created across the length and breadth of Britain, including in my own constituency. Two thirds of the renewable projects that came online in the past five years started under the Labour Government. But as we were told by my right hon. Friends the Members for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) and for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), who did so much to keep this on the agenda in the previous Parliament, we cannot ignore the fact that the legacy of the UK's leadership at home and abroad is now at risk.

We cannot make progress towards climate change safety while we are unravelling all the policies at home that will help us shift towards a low carbon economy. Let us consider what they are. Solar energy support has been cut by almost 90%. The only nuclear power station on stream has been delayed yet again—delayed twice under this Government; delayed yet again. Energy efficiency programmes are being cut in real terms. Carbon capture and storage projects have not been delivered. Onshore wind farms are being blocked, as the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig) said, even where they enjoy local support. The green investment bank is being sold off without a proper mandate to invest in new green clean energy.

The Energy Secretary was right yesterday when she said that ageing coal-fired power stations would be closed within the next decade and should be replaced with more modern technologies, but new cleaner power stations are not being built at the rate required to replace them and to secure our energy supplies. I will take no lessons from Government Members about Labour's record on this. We delivered a record number of gas power stations. The nuclear projects that the Secretary

of State is working on were initiated under Tony Blair. They have twice been delayed on this Government's watch. When this Government came to power, they inherited a 16% power surplus. It is now down to 5% and National Grid is having to use emergency measures to safeguard our energy supply.

The Government do not appear to have any kind of plan to ensure a just transition that protects the communities that are dependent on those industries for their livelihoods and to ensure that the workforce remain in good, skilled jobs. Only yesterday the Secretary of State acknowledged the role that coal miners have played in this country, doing dangerous and difficult work that changed lives here and boosted our national prosperity. As we move into the future, the skills, the patriotism and the work ethic of people in coalfield communities ought to be our greatest national asset, but where is the industrial strategy that will safeguard jobs and skills in those communities and help us build a new, clean energy system?

The present chaotic, contradictory approach to energy policy has been criticised by the CBI and by Ernst and Young for causing serious confusion. It puts off investment that we badly need for our energy security, and it sends a hugely damaging signal at a time when Britain must harness the momentum that exists internationally to get a deal to tackle the threat posed by climate change. This will be the defining test of our generation. It is a test that we cannot afford to fail. It is right that the Secretary of State has come to respond to the debate herself. I applaud her for doing so. She will have heard what hon. Members said today. She will have heard the words of Pope Francis. I urge her to change course, and if she does so, she will have our full and guaranteed support.

2.53 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): I thank the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) and the Backbench Business Committee for calling this important debate at this crucial time as we enter the climate negotiations in Paris. I thank all those who participated in it. It has been truly inspiring and interesting on account of the many different points of view expressed.

The hon. Lady spoke clearly about the Pope's encyclical and underlined His Holiness's points about how it is incumbent on all politicians to limit the increase in climate change in order to protect the poorest of the world, who are already the worst affected by dangerous climate change. She spoke also about the imperative of legally binding agreement—that is our aim—and moved on to comment about sanctions. However, the situation is more delicate than that. Her emphasis on sanctions, the legally binding aspect and the outcomes thereafter misses the point about the intended nationally determined contributions—the INDCs. We are tantalisingly close, I believe, to a successful outcome in Paris. We now have countries involved in these debates and conversations in reaching for an agreement in Paris who were not participating 10 or 15 years ago, but we have to tread very carefully in relation to what is perceived as national sovereignty. I take her advice in terms of wanting this to be legally binding, but I urge her not to make the perfect the enemy of the good.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) gave us a helpful run-down on the Pope's central theme about man, nature and God.

He suggested that we do not “weaponise” what the Pope said. Perhaps Labour Members might remember that as we debate this important issue. I am grateful for his eloquent summary of the encyclical.

I can tell the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) that the same people with whom he was in discussions at Copenhagen are still on the circuit, and they remember him fondly and with respect, I am happy to say—although mentioning Copenhagen at the Paris negotiations is like mentioning Voldemort to small children. I share his view that what happens after Paris is key. As he will know, we are ambitious to get a deal in Paris, but what is really key is the nature of the reviews and how binding they are going forward. He will also be aware of how difficult it is to get certain countries to commit, and how delicate it is, as we approach Paris, to try to keep everybody in the tent and yet to have an ambitious deal. The world sought to build on progress in Copenhagen, though the high expectations were not met. The Copenhagen accord did result in a number of countries pledging to reduce emissions by 2020, but we have moved on. Climate change is almost universally recognised as a serious threat to global prosperity, security and wellbeing, and more and more countries are taking action in response.

My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) is right that the UK’s ambition is one of the toughest in the world. He made the important point that nuclear power is a critical part of our low carbon future, and he reminded us that achieving our reduction in emissions is not all about new renewables but also about low emissions at least cost. Innovation is important, and progress in low carbon energy and storage is driving down the costs of climate action. The cost of low carbon technology is falling sharply. Solar costs have fallen by 80% since 2008, and wind turbine costs have fallen by 27% since 2009. I would say to the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) that that is why we are reviewing the costs and reducing subsidies, and it is right to do so. We now have 8 GW of solar—I would not describe it as a “fledgling” industry—and I hope that we will have much, much more as we go ahead.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) spoke well about her contribution and experience as an environmental commentator. I am grateful for her comments and her involvement in this debate.

The right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) made the key point that we can have emissions reductions and grow our economy. I agree. We are seeing the uncoupling of growth and emissions. This year’s PricewaterhouseCoopers low carbon economy index shows for the first time that while global GDP grew by 3.3% in 2014, energy carbon dioxide emissions rose by only 0.5%. The UK is at the forefront of this development, cutting our emissions by 8.4% last year against a backdrop of a growing economy. The UK is already benefiting from the transition to a low carbon economy. In 2013, the UK’s annual turnover in this sector was £122 billion, equivalent to twice that of the auto manufacturing industry and food and drinks industry.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) highlighted the importance of climate justice, and asked particularly about climate finance. This is a critical area

for a deal in Paris. The pledge is to demonstrate that the developed world can mobilise \$100 billion a year by 2020 to help developing countries. The UK continues to play a leading role in that, and it is right that the Prime Minister was able to increase our pledge in order to support it.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) shared her regular view that we are making insufficient progress, but I agree with her on the implications of climate change for the wider economy, as set out by Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of England.

The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) is a new Member of Parliament, but nevertheless he has learned the skill of calling for unity but then attacking Government policy. I urge him to look at the full statement I made yesterday, which set out a full energy policy, and I hope he will see the pattern in it.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig) made some interesting comments and we agree with him that it is possible to have both growth and a reduction in carbon emissions. I was also delighted to hear his support for our policies on offshore wind.

The final speaker was the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy). I am delighted to say that we welcome her commitment towards, and share her feeling of urgency for, what we are trying to achieve, but it is disappointing that the Opposition choose to weaponise our differences in focus, because we should be taking a cross-party approach. However, I will glide over that and simply agree with her that we are united as a country and as a House in wanting an ambitious, legally binding deal in Paris, with regular reviews and a long-term goal. Paris will not be the end but the moment when the world changes direction and kick-starts a revolution to a new kind of growth and development.

3.1 pm

Helen Goodman: I am grateful to all hon. Members who have contributed to this excellent and worthwhile debate on a very important issue. Over the next few weeks, many people will have their eyes on Paris, hoping and praying for a good agreement. I will give the last words to Pope Francis, who asks

“that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.”

He says:

“Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good...
and care for this world in which we live...
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future”.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes the Pope’s Encyclical, entitled *Laudato Si’*, Our Common Home, on climate change and international justice which is an important contribution to discussions on this vital subject; further notes that the 2015 climate change conference will be held in Paris between 30 November and 11 December 2015; and calls on the Government to recognise the significant support for a successful outcome to the conference which should commit to take further steps to tackle climate change effectively in the UK and around the world before 2020.

New Cancer Strategy

3.2 pm

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House notes the findings of the independent cancer taskforce published in July 2015; and calls on the Government to publish an action plan on implementing the new cancer strategy.

I want to begin by thanking the Backbench Business Committee for granting this timely debate. I also thank fellow officers of the all-party group on cancer, some of whom are going to participate in this debate, and the officers of the other cancer-specific all-party groups, who joined me in applying for this debate. This therefore represents a coming together of all the cancer-related APPGs. Although we all want to raise specific issues, we are all agreed on the importance of debating the new cancer strategy delivered by the cancer taskforce.

I hope you will not mind, Mr Deputy Speaker, if I mention the fact that on 8 December the all-party group on cancer will hold our annual Britain Against Cancer conference in Central hall. It is the largest gathering in the country of the cancer community, and I warmly invite all Members to join us on the day. My thanks would not be complete if I did not also thank the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer), who is sitting on the Front Bench, having stepped into the shoes of the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), who has responsibility for cancer. Unfortunately, she cannot be with us today, but she is a good friend of the cancer community. To help my hon. Friend on the Front Bench, I sent him an advance copy of my speech. He may not be able to answer all of my questions from the Dispatch Box, but I look forward to receiving his written responses to those that he cannot answer today.

Perhaps we need to remind ourselves of the challenge. There are currently 2.5 million people living with cancer in the UK, and by the end of next year it is expected that 1,000 people will be diagnosed with cancer every day. Macmillan Cancer Support has suggested that in a few years' time, one in two people will have been affected by cancer.

The challenge of delivering world-class cancer outcomes for all patients is growing ever greater. Hospital admissions for cancer in England have gone up by 100,000 a year compared with five years ago. For 17 months, the NHS has missed the target for cancer patients to receive their first treatment within 62 days of an urgent referral. Our outcomes continue to lag behind our European counterparts. Research has shown that the one-year cancer survival rate in the UK is about 13 percentage points behind the best in Europe, which is about 81%. That may not sound like a big figure, but it means that in the region of 10,000 lives a year are lost needlessly, in large part because the cancer was diagnosed too late.

That is the backdrop against which the cancer taskforce delivered its recommendations for a new five-year cancer strategy in July—something that the whole cancer community welcomed. Like others who are campaigning for improvements in cancer services, I was disappointed that the cancer taskforce report ended up being a report to the NHS and its arm's length bodies, rather than a report of the NHS and its arm's length bodies. That was

not the original intention. However, that should not detract from the excellent work that went into it. Our congratulations should go to Mr Harpal Kumar for his efforts and hard work in preparing the strategy.

The recommendations of the strategy are based on evidence and advice from organisations across the cancer community, including the all-party parliamentary group on cancer. It covers the whole cancer pathway from early diagnosis to care after treatment and at the end of life. It aims to deliver a radical improvement in cancer outcomes by 2020.

Since its publication, the strategy has been welcomed by the Government, the health sector, the charities and the cancer-related all-party groups in this place. Attention must now turn to the implementation of the taskforce's report. I congratulate Ministers on pre-empting the spending review in at least two ways by committing the Government to two of the key recommendations in the strategy. First, there is a commitment to ensure that all patients receive a definitive diagnosis within four weeks of their referral from a GP. Secondly, there is a commitment to ensure that all patients are offered a recovery package by 2020 and to develop a new metric on quality of life.

However, the taskforce has been clear that the recommendations set out in the strategy will deliver a step change in outcomes only if implemented as a whole. It is therefore important that there is urgency in implementing the remainder of the strategy. If he can, will the Minister outline today when he expects to publish the implementation plan and what degree of consultation he envisages before its publication? What assurances can he give that Ministers will ensure that the implementation plan contains clear deadlines and earmarked resources for implementing the strategy's recommendations?

May I touch briefly on the importance of earlier diagnosis, which is one of the key priorities identified in the strategy? That point is of particular interest to the all-party parliamentary group on cancer and the other cancer-related all-party groups. As some Members will be aware, the all-party parliamentary group on cancer campaigned tirelessly on improving early diagnosis—what we call “cancer's magic key”. The logic behind our campaign is exceedingly simple: the evidence shows that people who are diagnosed earlier are more likely to survive for over one year and, therefore, to survive cancer generally.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend and all the cancer APPGs on securing this important debate. Early diagnosis is absolutely key, as he rightly points out. Regrettably, my mother died of acute myeloid leukaemia in 2012. She was diagnosed on the day before her death. We really do need to bear down on this issue. Will my hon. Friend pay tribute to charities such as Bloodwise that do such important work in highlighting this area of cancer?

Mr Baron: I will do so by all means. Let me express my heartfelt sympathies to my hon. Friend as regards his mother. He is absolutely right that charities such as Bloodwise, as well as many others across the charitable sector, realise the importance of earlier diagnosis. I will give him one statistic that directly answers his question. I spoke at an event about bowel cancer yesterday. The statistics quite clearly show that 90% of people diagnosed in the early stages of bowel cancer survive for more

than 10 years, but that figure drops to just 5% if they are diagnosed at a later stage. That is the difference that earlier diagnosis can make.

The logic behind focusing on earlier diagnosis is very simple. We have found over a number of years that the NHS is as good as any other healthcare system at getting patients from the one-year point after diagnosis to the five-year point, but is poor at getting them to the one-year point in the first place. That suggests that it is not good at detecting cancer. We lose the vast majority of those 10,000 lives in the early phase—up to one year—and then it is simply not possible to catch up. We therefore need to do more on earlier diagnosis.

Getting the NHS to focus on the one-year figures will encourage initiatives on the frontline to promote earlier diagnosis. By putting the one-year figures up in lights, we can ensure that the local NHS realises that it is being monitored. It will therefore be up to the local NHS to introduce and adapt a range of initiatives that suit the local population best, whether they are elderly people, black and minority ethnic populations or whatever. The initiatives range from everything from encouraging better screening uptakes to encouraging better awareness campaigns when it comes to education, better diagnostics in primary care and better GP referral rates, all or any of which could be approved locally to drive up earlier diagnosis.

I suggest that earlier diagnosis, as well as being better for patients, can also save the NHS money. Incisive Health and Cancer Research UK published a report last year that set out the cost savings of diagnosing a patient early. One example is in colon cancer. Stage 1 treatment costs about £3,300, while stage 4 treatment costs £12,500, which is a notable difference. If we look at the range of cancers and the number of cancer patients involved, we can see that we could save hundreds of millions of pounds if we raised our game and diagnosed cancer early.

The all-party group on cancer and the wider cancer community, including the Cancer Campaigning Group, have worked collaboratively with the Government and NHS England—I congratulate the Government most heartily on listening to our concerns—and have campaigned together to get the one-year figures into the DNA of the NHS. We have managed to get them into the NHS outcomes framework and the commissioning outcomes framework.

Last year, our efforts culminated in a successful campaign to ensure that a one-year cancer survival rate indicator is included in the delivery dashboard of the clinical commissioning group assurance framework from this April. For the moment, that is the primary mechanism by which CCGs are held to account. Many CCGs have told us that it is the primary tool they use for determining priorities at local level. With the one-year figures now up in lights in the top tier of NHS accountability, commissioners will be encouraged to take action in their local area to improve earlier diagnosis and ultimately to improve cancer survival rates.

Many people may think, “Job done. We’ve managed to get the one-year rate into the DNA of the NHS. We’ve managed to get it on the radar screen of CCGs. Is there anything else we should be doing except following through on those initiatives?” However, many of us are concerned that the recently proposed changes to the accountability system in place for CCGs may undermine

this work. A few weeks ago, the Secretary of State announced a new scorecard for measuring the performance of CCGs, which will involve each CCG being awarded an Ofsted-style rating with effect from next April. Although the all-party group on cancer approves in principle the improvement of accountability, we strongly advocate, on behalf of the cancer community as a whole, that the use of the one-year figures to drive earlier diagnosis at local level is not lost throughout this process. Will the Minister outline in further detail the Government’s plan to implement a CCG scorecard and the process by which the metrics relating to cancer will be determined? Will he confirm that the focus on one-year survival rates will not be diluted?

Let me mention the reforms suggested in the cancer strategy for the patient pathway. With a growing number of people surviving cancer, it is particularly important that we make improvements throughout the whole cancer pathway, and there are two key parts to that. First, all too often patients report being treated as a set of symptoms rather than as a person, and certain groups of patients—namely older people, ethnic minorities and those with rarer cancers—report a poor patient experience. Secondly, many cancer patients lack the necessary support to get on with their lives once treatment has ended.

The all-party group on cancer welcomes the increased focus on patient experience across the NHS, but we must do more to ensure that we have the right data to drive improvement at local level. Although the cancer patient experience survey is a useful tool, too often the data are difficult to access and not widely used. The cancer strategy recommends the creation of a new metric to measure the patient experience across the whole pathway. Will the Minister set out how the Government plan to implement the strategy’s recommendation on a new patient experience metric, and say how they will ensure that data are used effectively to drive improvement at local level? Will he confirm that there will be sufficient resources for the new metric and the cancer patient experience survey?

We welcome the Government’s commitment to ensuring that all patients have access to a recovery package following their treatment, but if we are fully to address that challenge, it is vital that the NHS understands where it is working well and where improvements are needed. As such, it is vital that the strategy for the development of a new quality of life metric is taken forward as a priority. Will the Minister ensure that the Government’s commitment to take forward that recommendation for the cancer strategy to develop a quality of life metric is backed up with clear plans for funding and implementation?

In the few minutes that remain, let me address a couple of key issues including rarer cancers and the cancer drugs fund. It is an interesting fact that the combined number of rarer cancers—those less common than breast, lung, prostate and bowel cancer—outnumber the sum total of those more common cancers. Services for people with rarer cancers are no less important, and we must ensure that people with rarer cancers get access to the right level of specialist expertise, irrespective of where they live. The taskforce recommendation for the creation of highly specialised multi-disciplinary teams for rarer cancers is particularly welcome. Will the Minister assure the House that that will happen, and that MDTs will be supported by technology so that they can deliver specialist care without inconveniencing patients?

[Mr Baron]

Research efforts into rarer cancers must be redoubled. The Government are leading the world in their investment in genomics, most notably through their 100,000 genomes project, which is sequencing the genomes of those with cancer and rare diseases in general. It is good that the project has so far fully sequenced the genomes of 5,000 patients, but will the Minister update the House on progress with cancer patients? May I suggest that, once complete, Genomics England should independently carry that research forward for the benefit of the NHS and patients, given its excellent track record?

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Is the hon. Gentleman as worried as I am that companies that are investing in finding drugs for rarer cancers are, because of their nature, small in number, and they should not be put off investing in research to find cures for those cancers because they feel that the Government—whatever party is in power—will perhaps pull the plug or concentrate only on the more common cancers?

Mr Baron: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point, and one hopes that there is proper dialogue with all the parties concerned to ensure that what he describes does not happen. The approach to science must be collaborative. Nobody has a monopoly on good ideas, but I suggest that the Government should be congratulated on their ground-breaking 100,000 genomes project, as long as it does not freeze out research in the private sector. I hope that there is dialogue to ensure that that will not happen. If there is not, that issue needs to be raised with the relevant bodies in this place.

On the cancer drugs fund, people living with cancer need the best treatment available. We can all agree to that. Approximately 72,000 cancer patients have benefited from the fund. That testifies to the Government's commitment to do just that. We recognise, however, that reform is needed over the longer term. We need a longer term solution to the cancer drugs fund. The Government apparently also believe that reform is essential. Recent NHS England board papers indicated a continuing overspend on the cancer drugs fund, underlining the fact that a long-term solution is needed now.

When reforms are introduced, it will be important that the spirit of the CDF—that patients are able to gain access to the treatments their doctors recommend—is maintained at a cost that is affordable to the NHS. There have been reports about NHS England refusing to discuss some offers of cost reduction with drug companies due to the rules under which the CDF operates. That needs to be addressed urgently if the overspend is to be tackled. I very much welcome—I am sure everybody else in the House does, too—the news that the CDF consultation opened today, at, I think, 1 o'clock this afternoon. I recommend, as I am sure others do, that all relevant parties participate in this very important consultation. Will the Minister provide assurances that the NHS will be supported in demanding the best possible deal from the drug companies, because that will be an important element of the process?

I want to finish by speaking about the importance of leadership and accountability, both at national and local level. The all-party group on cancer strongly welcomes both the strategy's recommendation to introduce cancer

alliances to drive improvement at a local level, and for the National Cancer Advisory Board to provide accountability at a national level. The National Cancer Advisory Board, in particular, will be important in ensuring accountability for the strategy, and that momentum and focus is retained. It is vital that this body is set up as a priority, so we can monitor progress and implementation from the beginning and set up the right structures to ensure strong accountability. Will the Minister set out how the Government plan to monitor the delivery of the cancer strategy recommendations and to measure their success?

I thank the Minister once again for responding to the debate. I know this is not his usual brief and I would be very happy for him to write to me after the debate if he does not have the answers to all the questions at his fingertips. As ever, there are a number of areas I have not had the chance to cover. Time simply has not allowed it, but I hope they will be covered by other colleagues speaking in this afternoon's debate.

I want to finish by emphasising the opportunity presented by the new cancer strategy. By implementing its recommendations in full, and by retaining the focus on the one-year survival rates as a means of driving forward and promoting earlier diagnosis, we have the potential to deliver world class outcomes across the entire cancer pathway: to dramatically improve our cancer survival rates, to deliver care tailored to the patient and to ensure that patients are supported. But action must be taken now. Doing nothing is not an option. The challenge, as I highlighted at the beginning, is huge, but in the cancer strategy we have a clear plan for how to make it work. I urge the Government to take action now, to fulfil our manifesto commitment to implement the strategy in full, and to deliver the care, treatment and world class outcomes cancer patients deserve.

3.23 pm

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): I should start by saying that I am, with the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes), the joint-chair of the all-party group on stem cell transplantation.

I want to raise a few brief points in respect of the care of blood cancer patients who have had transplants and the ongoing care they receive. It is fair to say that at present the level of support can be described as patchy at best. There is a considerable lack of understanding of some of the issues that transplant patients face.

Anthony Nolan estimates that, by 2020, there will be 16,000 people in the UK living with the long-term effects of a stem cell transplant, and they will have a higher risk of secondary cancers, infections, particularly in the early stages, infertility and problems with muscles and joints. Then there is an area not touched on much: the psychological effects of both the diagnosis of blood cancer and a transplant. Graft-versus-host disease will affect the majority of patients in the early post-transplant period, but it can persist for many years. Some element of the disease is not necessarily a bad thing, because it shows the transplant is working, but if it gets out of hand, it can cause organ failure and a host of other problems that can, and do, kill patients. In the longer term, the effects can be as minor as skin irritation, but, if in the gut, they can lead to more complicated problems, resulting in the patient's having to go back into hospital.

As I said, the flare-ups can occur not only in the first few years, but many years down the line, yet a survey of 27 transplant centres in the UK found that while they all provided support for a year post-transplant, only half followed up after five years. Importantly, only 28% offered mental health support. This problem affects not only cancer patients, but a whole host of healthcare issues: we address the physical side of an illness, but then the patient walks out the door without our addressing their mental health needs or asking how they are coping with the diagnosis and other ongoing problems.

Some years ago, I spoke in the Chamber about my son's experience of having a stem cell transplant. We had to look for support and counselling. Children, particularly younger children, will have questions such as, "Why has this happened to me?" and "Why can't I run like I used to?", but we had to ask for that support. It was not necessarily there in the first place or as part of an overall package, as one might have expected.

I said in the Chamber that I was particularly concerned about the lack of support for children going back to school. I believe there are still no national guidelines for how schools should deal not only with returning pupils, but with other, particularly younger, children. How might they feel about seeing a child they have not seen for a while? The last time they saw them they looked like them, but now they might be on steroids or have no hair—a particular issue for girls, although it is not great for anybody. I was concerned about the poor provision and the lack of guidelines. Some schools do it very well, but some show very little understanding. CLIC Sargent has done a lot of work in this area, but we need to do more. We have to look beyond cancer. Cancer is what people are treated for, but there is a host of other issues around it. We need to look at the whole, rather than just the illness itself, and at how we support people after that illness.

We define the transplant period as 30 days prior to and 100 days after the transplant, but this assumes that all patients need the same support and have the same outcomes. It takes very little account of some of the late effects that patients will experience. No patient is the same or will have exactly the same demands, yet there is this idea that we can set an arbitrary period of 100 days, as though at the end of it we can say, "Well, everyone's fine. We don't need to give them the same level of support." However, patients go to their local area and then we are back with this postcode lottery, where some get very good support but some get very little, particularly if people are not exactly sure where they should go to receive support.

I do not think that is particularly fair, so I would like—and I know Anthony Nolan would like—a system that looks a lot further than 100 days and instead looks for support for a five-year period at least. Clearly there will be different requirements within that. Hopefully, some patients will not need a great deal of support, whereas others may need a lot of ongoing support. We need the flexibility to respond to that, rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach.

We need to do more on ongoing support, and we should not forget either that stem cell transplants are now evolving—they are a lot more common than they were—and it is not just blood cancers we are looking at. Through the work of the all-party group on stem cell transplantation, I know that this is an area that offers

us a great opportunity. Equally, we cannot ignore the fact that 50% of transplant patients die within the first two years, so there is a lot of work we need to do—generally, it is not the transplant that kills them, but some of the associated problems and immunity issues.

Finally, let me say to the Minister that we need to look more broadly at how we support transplant patients, get beyond this arbitrary figure of 100 days, and support people with the physical illness but also, very importantly, with adjusting to some of the psychological issues that can arise.

3.32 pm

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): I must start by offering my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron)—who is smiling next to me—who I have watched over the years toiling in this Chamber in the cause of cancer patients. He has done so, if I may say so, very effectively, and not just on cancer outcomes—he focused today on one-year outcomes—but on the provision of specialist drugs for patients. He has maintained a relentless pressure on the Government and it has been a joy to serve with him as a junior vice-chairman on the all-party group on cancer.

I hope today to bring to bear some of my experience in the House, which on Tuesday Mr Speaker generously described as 28 years of experience. He might have said 28 years of pursuing an holistic, patient-centred agenda that broadens choice in the health service. If we look at the cancer outcomes report, "Achieving World-Class Cancer Outcomes: A Strategy for England 2015-2020", we find that the key themes are integrated pathways, holistic support for patients and a patient-centred service—"Patients should feel empowered".

The agenda we find in that report is not a new one in the House. I have referred to my long involvement in this side of parliamentary life—I have been chair of the all-party group on integrated healthcare since it was formed and before that I was chair of the all-party parliamentary group for alternative and complementary medicine, so it covers pretty much the whole of my time in the House. If we look back at the meetings of that group, we see that they offer some instruction. The first message to get across to the House is that there is no need to recreate the wheel. If we look back, as I did, at the meetings of the all-party group on integrated healthcare—I discovered that I chaired more than 100 of them over the best part of the last 30 years—we find that there has always been a strong base of holistic and personalised care, which has been developed in certain hospitals and care institutions in this country.

I looked up the information about the 2001 exhibition that we put on in the Upper Waiting Hall for providers of complementary medicine. It was to highlight particularly good practice in the integrated healthcare awards of 1999. The winner was Charing Cross cancer services for offering a multidisciplinary approach to specialist cancer and palliative care services, which integrates complementary therapies, massage, aromatherapy, reflexology and art therapy for patients receiving treatment for cancer.

If we go forward two years, in March 2003, Caroline Hoffman, a nurse consultant in cancer care rehabilitation at the Royal Marsden and editor of *Complementary Therapies in Nursing and Midwifery*, spoke about her experiences at the Marsden hospital. Chris Perrin,

[David Tredinnick]

a registered general nurse who uses complementary therapies in his work, also spoke. In May that year, the then Member representing Salford, Hazel Blears, launched new national guidelines for the use of complementary therapies for long-term or chronic illness. She was then the parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, and these were new national guidelines for use in hospitals, hospices, primary care, cancer support centres and self-help groups. The document was called “National Guidelines for Complementary Therapies in Supportive and Palliative Care”.

If I blow the dust off this document, I see that it could well have been integrated into the cancer proposals that we have before us now. It looked very closely at the possible options to expand patient choice in holistic care—the very things that the new report calls on. It is worth quoting—I see my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay is looking at me intently—Professor Mike Richards, who was the National Cancer Director at the time. He said:

“A substantial number of cancer patients choose to receive complementary therapies alongside their mainstream cancer treatment. Individual patients frequently report that the use of a complementary therapy has helped them.”

He went on to say that there was

“broad agreement, however, that patients should have ready access to reliable information about complementary therapies and complementary therapy services”,

and finished by saying:

“The guidelines will usefully complement the forthcoming NICE guidelines on supportive and palliative care.”

Would that those NICE guidelines had been implemented then—all those years ago! I live in hope, particularly under the guidance of my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay and the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Ben Gummer), that we will make more progress. In March 2011, Professor Karol Sikora, the medical director of Cancer Partnership UK and Sosie Kassab, director of cancer services at the Royal London Hospital for Integrated Medicine came to give evidence to us.

The message is that a lot of the work that this report calls for has already been done. A lot of effort has already been put in. It is instructive in going through the Macmillan contribution to the 2015 to 2020 proposals to note that it points out:

“More than one in three of cancer patients use complementary therapies and many report finding them helpful.”

Macmillan’s own “Cancer and Complementary Therapies” booklet says it would

“like to see more high-quality research into complementary therapies”.

We have been calling for that for many years. Some evidence is very good; some is not so good—but there is a lot of evidence that patients are content with these services.

Having sat through so many Budget debates, I am not normally a great one for statistics, which I know can send colleagues to sleep, but my second statistic, apart from the one that a third of all cancer patients use complementary therapies, is that one third of the incremental annual cost of cancer care—this can be seen in the small print on page 76 of this lengthy report—is for living “with and beyond cancer”. Once patients have had chemotherapy

and radiotherapy, it is often to the holistic and alternative world that they turn. It is there that we find a Gruyère cheese landscape. Many of these services are not available throughout the country, and that is something that we must address.

A number of contributions are worth quoting, but I will quote one about acupuncture. “We are Macmillan Cancer Support” says:

“Some studies show acupuncture has helped reduce sickness in people who have had surgery or chemotherapy... acupuncture may help in treating other problems such as breathlessness and a dry mouth.”

In the last Parliament I served as vice-chairman of the herbal working group, under Professor David Walker. We reported on the last day of the Parliament. The Prime Minister generously wrote me a letter, which I received this morning, saying that the Government would respond before the House rose for Christmas. Herbal medicine is part of the two-pronged Chinese approach to treatment. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will respond positively by recommending either statutory regulation—for which many have asked—or voluntary regulation.

As I have said, the landscape of treatment available in this country is very patchy. Let us now look elsewhere in the world. The Prime Minister said that he had been to a football match at Wembley with the Indian Prime Minister, Mr Modi, and I believe that that was also mentioned by the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), my Leicestershire colleague. Prime Minister Modi is quite a supporter of complementary medicine, and India now has a Department of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Meditation and Homeopathy. It has a Ministry—it used to be a Department—that draws all those complementary services together. In February 2012, when Prime Minister Modi was Chief Minister, he said that

“homeopathic medicines are affordable and free from side effects”, and that

“homeopaths should create awareness...among the people”

of an easy method of treatment. He added:

“There should not be a question of conflict between allopathy, Ayurveda and homeopathy”.

All three systems of treatment had some very good things in them, he said.

It was therefore with some surprise that I saw a headline in—I think—*The Daily Telegraph* last week: “Prescribing homeopathy on the NHS may be banned”. Given its widespread use in the various complementary centres in the country, I wondered what on earth Ministers were thinking of. The doctors who practise homeopathy have been regulated by Act of Parliament since 1950. Ministers have been encouraging complementary therapists to become accredited by the Professional Standards Authority, and 2,000 members of the Society of Homeopaths have just achieved that accreditation.

What could be behind what I see as a kind of madness? The answer is that a tiny lobby group is trying to stop the use of £100,000 of Government money for homeopathic prescriptions every year. When we look into who those people are, we find that they are closely aligned with the medical establishment, and have been using legal challenges to try to stop health authorities and clinical commissioning groups using these treatments. I think that that is quite

wrong. During Health questions this week, I pointed out that, according to Clinical Evidence, a review published by *The BMJ*,

“only 11% of the 3,000 treatments looked at in clinical trials”
in the UK

“proved to be beneficial, with 50% being of unknown effectiveness.”—[*Official Report*, 17 November 2015; Vol. 602, c. 507.]

If *The BMJ* says that, why are the Government considering picking on the homeopaths? I suggest to the Minister that these people are at best foolish and at worst wicked, because they know that they are trying to remove a very valid medical system from the health service.

In support of what I am saying, in 2001 Professor Edzard Ernst, in a published overview of exemplary studies and available systematic reviews of complementary therapies in palliative care, which is included in the 2003 report “National Guidelines” I mentioned earlier, says:

“Several clinical trials suggested that homeopathy also may benefit patients suffering from cancer. For instance, a recent double-blind RCT included 66 women undergoing radiotherapy after breast cancer surgery. In addition to conventional treatment, they received either a homeopathic mixture (belladonna 7CH, X-ray 15CH, i.e. two homeopathic remedies in high dilutions) or a placebo daily for 8 weeks. The results suggested that the homeopathic mixture was superior to placebo in minimizing the dermatologic adverse effects of radiotherapy.”

If we look at the hospitals where these support therapies are offered, we see that one not far from here offers aromatherapy, homeopathy, massage, reflexology and shiatsu. This is not some tiny clinic buried in a remote part of the capital. This is Barts Health, which is the largest NHS trust in the country. It has 15,000 employees and a £1.25 billion budget.

One of the issues that my hon. Friend the Minister is going to have to address is how we get more properly regulated practitioners into the health service. If we are going to provide the cancer support that this report argues for—the holistic support, the patient-centred support—and if we are going to listen to what patients want, we need to get a greater number of professionals deployed in the health service. He and his colleagues need to look at the Professional Standards Authority, a Government organisation that has 63,000 practitioners on 17 accredited registers covering 25 occupations. The Society of Homeopaths is one of its most recent additions: it now oversees the society’s regulation. However, there are many other groups there. It is important that we do not ignore that valuable resource. One third of the costs of the whole cancer budget is going on care after treatment. We can reduce that bill by using these people. I know the field of homeopathy very well. With acute conditions, if conventional medicine and homeopathic medicine are used, one reduces the acute drugs bill and with chronic conditions one tends to increase patient satisfaction, so it is a win-win situation.

I am not going to speak for much longer as I know other colleagues wish to contribute, but I want to raise the Cancer Act 1939 with the Minister. When his colleague appeared in a Committee Room not long ago, I got the distinct impression that that was not something the Department had looked at very recently. It says—this is important when it comes to trying to get patient-centred health care and broadening the scope of treatments for cancer care:

“No person shall take any part in the publication of any advertisement—

(a) containing an offer to treat any person for cancer, or to prescribe any remedy therefor, or to give any advice in connection with the treatment thereof.”

That means that it is illegal to advertise or promote any medicine, diets, therapies or treatments as cures for cancer. Well, most of the treatments that I have discussed and referred to today are not claiming to cure. They are claiming to help and to increase the quality of life of those who have the disease. The Advertising Standards Authority and other bodies have been very sharp with anyone who is suggesting that they can assist patients in the provision of therapies that will improve their quality of life.

There are many examples of good support services across the country. I am not going to mention them all, but I do want to mention Coping with Cancer in Leicestershire and Rutland, an independent local charity that provides practical and emotional support to anyone affected by cancer. It offers counselling, complementary therapies, befriending and drop-in centres.

We heard today on the news that in China there is now a superbug that defeats all antibiotics. The last resort antibiotic has no power, and I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that we have to go back to the future. I served on the Science and Technology Committee for most of the last Parliament when we looked at antimicrobial resistance, and I was on the Health Committee for the whole of the last Parliament when we looked at this issue. If we have not got the antibiotics and nothing is coming through the pipeline despite the efforts of those the Front Bench, we will have to go back to the future, as medicine is going back to the dark ages, as a commentator said this morning on Radio 4. That means we will have to look more at natural remedies. We will have to listen to people who have used acupuncture for thousands of years and know their way around herbal medicine.

I will end on the following note. I have served with many Secretaries of State in this House. One of them once called me the hon. Member for Holland and Barrett which I took as a great compliment as its headquarters are in my constituency. I am sure it helped me in the 1997 general election, which was not the easiest for those on my side of the House. I would like to quote the former right hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras, Frank Dobson. He said when he was Health Secretary:

“I believe that what works is what counts and what counts is what works. With so many threats to our health we can’t afford to ignore anything that works and is safe.”

I agree. Where patients are gaining benefits, those services should be available.

3.52 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bosworth (David Tredinnick), who painted a very broad canvas of things for us to think carefully about as we take this strategy forward. May I also begin by praising the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) for his leadership in this area and for the way in which Members across the House have worked together in this important field?

It is worth saying from the outset that a large part of the challenges we face are the challenges of success. Success in tackling many cancers has led to a right and proper rise in expectations. It is therefore important to pay tribute to all who work in this field—clinicians,

[*Nic Dakin*]

patient groups, charities and a host of other people and organisations—for the outstanding work they do. However, the cost and challenge of treating cancer will continue to rise rapidly during this Parliament. The “Five Year Forward View” projections indicate that expenditure on cancer services will need to grow by about 9% a year, reaching £13 billion by 2020. This growth is between two and three times the rate of other health spend.

The commitment for everyone to have access to the recovery package by 2020 and the development of a quality of life metric by 2017 are welcome, but clear plans need to be put in place for these to happen. It is vital that there are commitments, both in terms of funding and resource, to deliver the full living with and beyond cancer programme, cancer alliances and a workforce review.

A national cancer advisory board, as recommended in the strategy, needs to be set up urgently to hold all the arm’s length bodies to account on delivering the recommendations laid out in the strategy. It is vital that this board is fully independent, with an independent chair. The Government must also fund and implement the recommendations set out in the independent review on choice in end-of-life care to ensure that there is choice and quality in that care.

Such investment in the national choice offer should result in a significant increase in out-of-hospital care, including through district nurses, allied health professionals, pharmacists, social care services and specialist palliative care teams, to ensure that every dying person has access to round-the-clock care seven days a week. That investment should also result in greater co-ordination between services to improve the quality of end-of-life care and to support carers and families; more empowered patients and carers who are able to exercise greater choice in their place of death; a reduction in hospital admissions for people at the very end of their lives; and the use of the latest technologies to support end-of-life care.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on pancreatic cancer, I strongly welcome the cancer strategy, and in particular the recommendations relating to improving early diagnosis and improving patient care and end-of-life care. I am concerned, however, that despite recognising the existence of a group of cancers with high incidence but low survival rates—highlighted as group 3 in the strategy—the strategy fails to acknowledge the need for specific actions to tackle the problems unique to that group.

Pancreatic cancer is the fifth most common cause of cancer death in the UK, and it is a clear example of an unmet need in cancer care. On average, one person is diagnosed with pancreatic cancer every hour, yet its five-year survival rate has remained virtually unchanged over the past 20 years and remains shockingly low at around 4%. That is the worst survival rate of the 21 most common cancers.

The hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay rightly welcomed the fact that the strategy recognises the need to improve early diagnosis by reforming the referral system. Improving early diagnosis is the key to improving survival rates. Only 80% of pancreatic cancer patients are currently diagnosed at a stage where surgery—the only real hope of a cure—is still an option, and only 10% go on to receive that life-saving surgery. Ensuring that more patients are diagnosed earlier, while surgery is still a viable option, is therefore essential to improving

the appalling survival rates faced by pancreatic cancer patients. That is also an issue for other cancers, such as blood cancers. At present, 50% of acute myeloid leukaemia diagnoses, 37% of myeloma diagnoses and 35% of chronic myeloid leukaemia diagnoses are happening in emergency settings. I echo the comments of the hon. Member for Crawley (Henry Smith) on the excellent work being done by Bloodwise in this area.

The recommendation of a four-week diagnosis target is welcome, and I am pleased that the Department of Health has committed to looking at adopting that recommendation by 2020. I also welcome recommendation 21, which calls on NHS England to pilot the implementation of multi-diagnostic centres as a priority. Such centres would allow patients presenting with vague symptoms, such as abdominal pain, to have multiple tests on the same day, preventing the need for them to present at their GP surgery repeatedly before being diagnosed, thus speeding up their diagnosis. That could be especially significant for pancreatic cancer patients, who report having to visit their GP on multiple occasions before being referred for tests. A UK-wide survey carried out by Pancreatic Cancer UK found that 23% of pancreatic cancer patients had to visit their GP seven or more times before they received a diagnosis. The introduction of multi-diagnostic centres would therefore be a big leap forward.

The call for GPs to have direct access to investigative tests by the end of 2015 is also very welcome. None the less, it is important to ensure that GP surgeries have the imaging capacity—in terms of equipment and of staff training—to carry out investigative tests such as CT scans. Will the Minister tell us what assessment the Department of Health has made of GP practices’ current imaging capacity and the capacity that would be needed to ensure that all GPs were able to carry out investigative tests?

The measures in the strategy to improve patient experience are to be warmly welcomed. National cancer patient experience surveys show that the pancreatic cancer patient experience continues to fall short of expected standards, especially in the lack of appropriate information about their diagnosis, about treatment options and about what to expect following discharge from hospital. Access to a clinical nurse specialist is a key factor in improving the patient experience, but it is also essential to ensure that clinical nurse specialists have the resources needed to provide a good quality service. In a survey of these specialists carried out by Pancreatic Cancer UK in 2015, only 28.36% of respondents said they felt they were able to spend as much time with their patients as necessary and had enough resources to provide a good quality service.

The need for more clinical research into cancer is also highlighted by the new cancer strategy, and I strongly support this recommendation, as the kind of change needed to make any significant impact on survival rates will be achieved only through research: research that will aid earlier diagnosis and screening; research that will result in more and better treatments; and research that, we hope, will offer opportunity for a cure. Despite accounting for 5% of cancer deaths, pancreatic cancer received only 1.4% of the National Cancer Research Institute partners’ research spend in 2014. Although that is an increase on the 2013 research spend, pancreatic cancer research funding continues to lag behind many other areas of cancer research.

The strategy also makes reference to the need for “a sustainable solution for access to new cancer drugs”. That has exercised the minds and thoughts of Members from across this House, as well as plenty of people outside it who know a lot more about the matter. It is only a fleeting reference in the strategy, yet access to drugs is one of the most important issues for pancreatic cancer patients. In particular, pancreatic cancer patients face a persistent lack of access to treatments, making access to new drugs especially important. That is demonstrated most starkly by the removal of the life-extending drug Abraxane from the cancer drugs fund list recently. The CDF decision is compounded because the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has also reviewed and rejected Abraxane for use on the NHS, on the grounds of it not being cost-effective enough. In a way, that is not surprising, as between 2007 and the end of 2013 NICE recommended only 31% of cancer drugs for use on the NHS. That is why the setting up of the CDF is to be commended, as it is to compensate for this bias by NICE against cancer drugs. The NICE scoring system is even less flexible than the CDF one. Again, it is not fair to judge a new treatment for a disease with such poor survival rates and very few treatment options on the same criteria as other treatments for other cancers and other conditions. We need more imagination and more flexibility if we are to make the strides forward that need to be made.

There is ever such a lot to welcome within the strategy, but it could have gone further, by including measures to deal with group 3 cancers. Despite identifying cancers with high incidence but low survival rates, the strategy has not yet set out any measures aimed at tackling that precise problem. Greater awareness of the symptoms of these cancers, which can be non-specific, alongside more research into diagnosing and treatments, and the creation of a fair and flexible drugs appraisal scheme remain essential. I hope that in taking the work of this strategy forward, the people involved will endeavour to put those things in place.

4.3 pm

Rebecca Harris (Castle Point) (Con): I, too, begin by thanking the Backbench Business Committee for scheduling this very important debate and my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) for his endeavours. A great deal has happened since we last had the chance to debate cancer, and I am pleased to be able to discuss the Independent Cancer Taskforce’s report on a cancer strategy for England, which is a major step in the right direction for all those affected by cancer.

As chair of the all-party group on brain tumours, I particularly welcome the focus of the report on early diagnosis. A target for 95% of patients to be diagnosed within four weeks of being referred by a GP by 2020, which has recently been implemented by the Government, is absolutely crucial for improving cancer outcomes for patients, especially those with brain tumours. Currently, 58% of brain tumours are diagnosed in accident and emergency, which unfortunately is far too late for many. That has contributed to brain tumours being the biggest cancer killer of children and adults under 40. Patients diagnosed with brain tumours have a five-year survival rate of just 19.8% compared with cancer as a whole, whereby 50% of patients can expect to survive for at least 10 years. Cancer survival rates doubled between 1970 and 2010, while, shockingly, brain tumour survival rates increased by a mere 7.5%.

The current poor level of early diagnosis and a general lack of awareness of brain tumours contribute to the stories of far too many people. The Green family from my constituency had a son, Danny, who was a normal, happy, energetic 10-year-old who suddenly suffered a dizzy spell after playing football one afternoon. It was eventually confirmed by his local hospital that he was suffering from a brain tumour. Tragically, despite having an operation to remove the tumour, chemotherapy and radiotherapy, Danny lost his fight for survival in July 2012. He died from pneumonia.

Although the Greens believed that something was really seriously wrong with their child, they found that when they initially took him to hospital, doctors dismissed his symptoms as nothing more than a migraine. It was only when his condition deteriorated and he collapsed in A&E that he was sent for a CAT scan and an MRI scan. Brain tumours are relatively rare, but as Danny’s mother, Lisa, says:

“They are not rare enough when it’s your relative.”

That is why the family would like to see patients with possible brain tumours sent for MRI scans much sooner than they currently are.

I very much welcome the new cancer strategy, but I have a number of concerns, including the lack of a clear, ambitious commitment to improve research. That lack of commitment impacts on the cures and treatments of the future for cancers with low survival rates, such as brain tumours. Those cancers of “unmet need” will not see the boost in survival rates that the more common cancers will, because early diagnosis and prevention alone do not affect the effectiveness of treatment to a significant extent. For example, there are no lifestyle factors that are proven to increase the likelihood of getting a brain tumour, which means that a focus on prevention will do nothing to stop the incidence of the disease, which, for whatever reason, is rising. There should be a stated priority to increase research and to find new curative and palliative treatments for rarer cancers.

The two excellent charities that I work with as part of the all-party group, Brain Tumour Research and the Brain Tumour Charity, have both issued their own response to the new strategy. They, along with the two charities in my constituency, the Danny Green Fund and the Indee Rose Trust—the Indee Rose Trust is also tragically named after a little girl who lost her life at the age of three, five months after being diagnosed with a brain tumour—do exceptional work in raising awareness of brain tumours and of the importance of early diagnosis. They also increase the amount of funding for research and improving treatments.

For the strategy to be effective for people with brain tumours and to allay the concerns that I have raised, we need to focus on a few particular areas. First, we need to streamline the process of repurposing drugs. The repurposing of drugs and compounds to tackle brain tumours could open up new treatment options for patients. Repurposing refers to a process whereby a drug or a compound that has previously been used to tackle a certain illness, for example depression, is examined and studied to see whether it can be used to tackle another illness, such as brain tumours. There is solid evidence that treatments can be developed through repurposing that are safe and effective, and that add years to the lives of patients with terminal cancers.

[Rebecca Harris]

The Government can help to streamline that process by reducing the regulation and red tape on scientists along with incentivising pharmaceutical companies to release compounds for research. The research and trials that will be sparked could result in huge strides being made in the field and in ground-breaking treatments for patients.

Secondly, we need a national register of all site-specific research to track all research work, grants and results. Currently, there is not a great deal of transparency in the research field. There is no clear idea of what research is being funded and what results are being achieved. That leads to confusion, duplication of work and a system that prioritises research in more common cancers rather than in diseases such as brain tumours. A national register will make research more transparent, reduce duplication and allow greater variation in the type and scope of research.

Thirdly, we need an innovation fund for research into rare and rarer cancers. Grant applications to existing research funding bodies require evidence of previous research—pilot work as well as published results. That results in something of a catch-22 situation. Applications must be deemed low risk in nature and as having a high likelihood of success before a grant is awarded. That means that there has to be a pre-existing bank of evidence. Novel research, particularly relating to brain tumours, suffers as a consequence of a lack of existing research. This ring-fenced fund should be set aside for areas of new research on rarer cancers and diseases. There should be a lower threshold for grants to be awarded in new projects, or in existing schemes such as the 100,000 genomes project. This stimulus will create a new wave of research that previously would not have been possible, widening our knowledge of cancer and creating the treatments we need.

Finally, we would like the Government to devote an absolute amount to brain tumour research. Brain tumours represent 1% of cancers diagnosed, yet 3% of cancer death. Within the innovation fund a consistent or growing absolute figure should be devoted by the Government to brain cancer research. Some 16,000 people are diagnosed with a brain tumour every year, and those affected are disproportionately children and young adults, who may have young children themselves. I hope that the Minister will commit to implementing and funding the new cancer strategy so that those 16,000 people, and indeed the tens of thousands more diagnosed with other forms of cancer, get access as quickly as possible to the treatment and the funding for research that they need to give them the best chance of survival.

4.10 pm

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): I am vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary groups on cancer and on breast cancer. I welcome the strategy and the hard work of those who have put it together. Looking at a situation with a fresh pair of eyes is always beneficial, for all the reasons that my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) pointed out.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) and the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) highlighted one of the problems: there are more than 200 types of cancer, which makes it highly complex

to deal with unless we have an overarching strategy. That goes not only for the cancers and their different forms, but for how we approach the use of drugs, research into them, and so on.

The new cancer strategy has the ability to be transformational, inspiring us to lead the world or at least to match those who are ahead of us. That is where we should be in patient outcomes. For me there are positives, but in order to achieve these things we need full implementation and adequate funding. There are some key asks—the national ambition for early diagnosis is probably one of the principal ones. As individuals we can help in diagnosis by presenting early enough. Some 20% to 40% of people find out that they have cancer only when they present at accident and emergency, and by then it is usually too late, so early diagnosis is key. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay referred to the figures for bowel cancer. Some cancers have much better outcomes if diagnosed early. That gives people a better quality of life and a better journey through the cancer path.

The strategy asks for a definite diagnosis within four weeks of referral, to be achieved by 2020. Ensuring that CCGs are held to account for improving one-year survival rates is crucial to drive early diagnosis. How will we hold the CCGs to account and make sure that rates are improving from June 2016? Linked to this is the way in which we improve cancer commissioning, as we have heard. The current picture is fragmented and confused.

Accountability, responsibility and transparency are needed, and with modern advances in medicines and diagnostics flexibility is hugely important, as is communication. Currently no one body or person at local, regional or national level holds responsibility, and this does not aid clarity in the system. Clinicians and patients are liable to fall foul of duplication or fall through the gaps, wasting precious time and resources, which neither the NHS nor the patient on the receiving end can afford.

The creation of cancer alliances can support the commissioning process and ensure that the strategy is delivered. Living with and beyond cancer is a growing challenge. There will be 3 million of us by 2020 and 4 million by 2030. Speaking from personal experience, I know that being a cancer patient is at times a bit of a challenge. Being medicalised is no fun, as I know, but both the new five-year guidelines on living with and beyond cancer and the new quality of life metric that has been spoken about are vital to drive service improvements. As the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) said, sometimes it is the not-so-obvious things that people need help with. His child needed help in comfortably settling back in at school and ensuring that those around him understood the journey, too.

Scan anxiety sits heavily on people who are being tested to see whether they have cancer. The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) did a lot of work in that area before she came to this place. It puts a great deal of pressure not only on the individual but on their family.

Under the strategy, those living with secondary cancer have emerged as a very distinct group. For example, 36,000 women are living with secondary breast cancer, and to date their needs have been neglected. The ambition of the strategy is to focus on the long-term quality of life, including for those who “are living with an advanced and incurable form of the disease”.

This highlights the importance of multi-disciplinary teams in planning the care of all cancer patients.

The NHS is changing and adapting. Ensuring that the organisation has the right skills in the right places is the key to delivery not only of our cancer strategy but of many of the ambitions we hold. The strategy asks for everyone to have access to clinical nurse specialists, and I would wholeheartedly support that. Today, as I stand here, I would like to say a huge thank you to our nursing profession—a highly skilled group of people. I know from constituents and others that their professionalism, care, and, at times, very “no nonsense” approach has been as important as anything else in the recovery process.

If the aims of the strategy are to be achieved, working smarter and doing things differently may well be the key. Nurse consultants are now becoming a feature in the profession, and workforce planning will be crucial. The strategy focuses on the needs of older people and those from the black and minority ethnic community, who are often much more reticent about going to seek help. We know that we are living in an ageing society. The upside is that we are living longer; the downside is that there are more health challenges. In 1949, at the start of the health service, 50% of our population died before they were 60. Thankfully, that is not the case nowadays, but the strategy highlights the need to focus on treatment for older people—another sign of the changes in our NHS.

The cancer strategy is to be applauded in calling for a national action plan to address obesity. That is welcome, but there are individual responsibilities too. Obesity is a known causal risk factor in breast cancer and many other cancers. There is good evidence to show that five 30-minute bits of exercise a week, like a brisk walk, would help not only with obesity but with the likelihood of the disease recurring. There is plenty for people to do in this regard.

I would like to mention drug innovation and the cancer drugs fund. How will the cancer strategy's recommendations on NICE guidelines on the use of bisphosphonates be taken forward? I would really appreciate understanding a little more about how we are going to use off-patent drugs and drugs that have been shown to have a secondary purpose beneficial to cancer patients. I would like to see communication between clinicians, pharmaceutical companies and others so that we can ensure, along with the accelerated access review and the cancer drugs fund, that we are getting to patients, in a timely fashion, the drugs they need and deserve.

Finally, I ask that the right accountability structures are in place, and that the national cancer advisory board ensures that what needs to be done is being done to secure optimum patient outcomes for all.

4.19 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), particularly as she ended by referring to off-patent drugs. She spoke powerfully on Second Reading of the Off-patent Drugs Bill, which was promoted by the hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) only a couple of weeks ago. This debate draws on many points made in previous debates, including that Second Reading debate and Westminster Hall debates. There have been debates about the cancer drugs fund, specific cancers and, recently, secondary breast cancer.

I am an officer of a number of all-party groups, including that on cancer, which is so ably led by the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron), who secured this debate. We have also heard from colleagues who are members of other all-party groups, including the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), who is on the all-party group on pancreatic cancer, and the hon. Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), who is doing so much to raise awareness and to promote action on and understanding of brain tumours.

I welcome the fact that the Backbench Business Committee has afforded us this opportunity to join up what might otherwise appear to be disparate work. The APPGs are not rivals—their efforts are entirely complementary. The cancer strategy is a benchmark document and this debate gives us an important opportunity to consider how we can marshal parliamentary effort and will behind it. We need Ministers in the Department of Health and elsewhere to know that we are not taking it for granted and that, just because we have had unmet need for a long time, that should not continue to be the case. I would like to hear a Minister tell us that their portfolio means that they see themselves as the Minister for meeting unmet need. If they set that target and seek to make that change and turnaround, they will have many backing vocalists from the different all-party groups.

Other hon. Members have said that there may be some issues with aspects of the cancer strategy, but it clearly lays down some important standards, not least on a recurring message that the APPGs get from the evidence we receive, namely the question of early diagnosis.

Mr Baron: The hon. Gentleman is a good friend of the all-party group on cancer. He will already know this, but it is worth putting it on the record that the separate all-party groups on cancer are endeavouring to get their act together and to speak with one voice where there is a common interest—and there are many when it comes to cancer.

Mark Durkan: I fully recognise that point. That was what I was trying to say when I said that the APPGs are not rivals. This debate allows us to bring together their work and their common message, and to acknowledge the work of the hon. Gentleman and the chairmen of the other APPGs. In that regard, I should also mention the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson). She cannot be here this afternoon, but she has done so much on the all-party groups on ovarian cancer and on breast cancer.

Early diagnosis is a common theme and the issue is not just about making sure that there is more access to diagnosis. The hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds has mentioned how many people end up being diagnosed in A&E, which is not what should happen. Although certain cancers raise more sensitive and technical questions than others, there needs to be more awareness among GPs, and diagnostic tools are also key. However, this is about not just ensuring earlier diagnosis with better use of diagnostic tools, but ensuring much clearer referral pathways. The cancer strategy sets a target of making sure that, by 2020, 90% of people are diagnosed within a month to see whether or not they have cancer. That is a very good working standard.

All the APPGs, particularly the all-party group on cancer, have strongly suggested that the indicator of one-year survival rates would be a very good test of our

[Mark Durkan]

ambitions and efforts and of the actions of health authorities. That working standard needs to be adopted, because it would help us to monitor and manage our progress.

I am conscious of the fact that I speak as a Member from Northern Ireland, whereas the cancer strategy and much of this effort relate to England. However, as everybody knows, in a lot of these areas we are talking about predictive policy. When we set frameworks or national strategies on particular diseases or illnesses for the NHS in England, they can extend, through policy airspace principles, to the devolved areas. That is one reason why I have no hesitation in joining in the work of the APPGs here—it helps to advance understanding at home.

Of course, that was not the case with the cancer drugs fund. We do not have a Northern Ireland version of that, which has led to the frustration that was identified by the late Una Crudden, who suffered from ovarian cancer. Many of the drugs that were available in England under the cancer drugs fund had been the subject of clinical trials in the excellent centre in Belfast, yet they were not available to patients in Belfast.

The success of the cancer drugs fund has shown its limitations, which is confounding us in thinking about how to develop and replace it. When considering the future of the cancer drugs fund and what will succeed it, I ask him to think not just about doing something for England and then seeing whether the devolved Administrations can match it or do better, but about the possibility of a UK-wide funding pool for some of the newer drugs and for some innovations in research and diagnosis, such as molecular diagnostic testing, which comes under the cancer drugs fund. Perhaps this is a conversation that we need to have with the Chancellor in the context of his announcement next week and what will happen beyond that. I am saying not that it should all be funded by London, but that there could be a pool of money to which the devolved areas contribute, with common standards and bands. It might be that certain groups of patients would then be covered by further arrangements made at the devolved level.

The more commonality and consistency we can bring to funding, the better. It would make it so much better for the many good cancer charities and policy advocacy groups that work with cancer patients, which have to busk around the different Administrations to see who has what bit of money. That also creates a lot of confusion at the parliamentary level. It is hard for us to join up our efforts and marshal our arguments when we are dealing with different structures and systems. The more commonality we can create in funding, particularly in the area of innovation, the better.

Perhaps there should be a UK-wide effort, or perhaps it should go beyond the UK. The British-Irish Council includes all eight Administrations on these islands, including the south of Ireland. Perhaps there should be a common effort at that level, given some of the clinical networks that will be involved. When we consider the rarer cancers that will not be treated in some of the other places, perhaps a more united effort would help to take the thinking forward. A lot of the ingredients in the cancer strategy for England might best be brought forward as part of a combined strategic effort on cancer across these islands.

4.28 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) on securing this incredibly important debate along with the hon. Members for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) and for Bosworth (David Tredinnick). I welcome the considered way in which he set out the issues in his opening speech. He raised a series of important questions for the Minister on earlier diagnosis, the measurement of the performance of CCGs, patient experience metrics and the cancer drugs fund. Those are all important issues that are set out in the strategy. I echo his tribute to the various all-party parliamentary groups on cancer. They do an extremely good job of highlighting these issues in Parliament and we all welcome the contribution they make.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) for raising the important issue of blood cancer. His family experience highlights the lack of support, particularly for children, during the period beyond cancer. The strategy tries to begin to address that issue. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) for his speech, as well as for his work as chair of the all-party group on pancreatic cancer. He quite rightly pointed out the very poor survival rates for pancreatic cancer and the difficulty of getting referrals for diagnosis from GPs.

I echo the comments made by the hon. Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris). She raised important issues regarding the repurposing of drugs, particularly for the treatment of brain tumours. The hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) also made valid points about how the various groups should not be seen as rivals. Indeed, they should be united behind this one strategy, the full force of which has been expressed today.

I also echo the comments made by the hon. Member for Bury St Edmunds. She pointed out that, with more than 200 different types of cancer, an overriding strategy is needed. She reminded us of the shocking statistic that about 20% of diagnoses take place in accident and emergency, which really highlights the challenge we face in making correct diagnoses. She also highlighted the policy gap in relation to off-patent drugs, which we recently discussed in the Chamber.

All Members speak on this matter from experience, which is sometimes of a very personal nature. It is the personal experience of many of those who have contributed to the strategy that we are debating that makes the document so powerful. We know that one in five people who are diagnosed with cancer feel they are treated as a set of symptoms, rather than recognised as a person. We clearly need to change that. The very moving speeches today help us to remember that behind every statistic there is a person with a family and friends.

The Opposition welcome the recommendations of the independent cancer taskforce, many of which build on proposals that the Labour party set out before the election. We hope that the strategy will be implemented in full. It has the potential to deliver improved outcomes for patients, while also delivering better value to the taxpayer. However, as several hon. Members have said, we will realise such benefits only if the recommendations are delivered in full, with front-loaded investment. I hope that the Minister will confirm that the funding required to deliver the strategy will be included in the

comprehensive spending review next week. He may be under instructions not to pre-empt the Chancellor's big day, in which case we hope that the mood of the House can be conveyed to the right hon. Gentleman.

There have been some positive developments on cancer drugs and screening in recent years, but our progress on cancer care has stalled to some extent. The target to treat at least 85% of cancer patients within 62 days of being urgently referred by their GP for suspected cancer has been missed in successive quarters across England for almost two years. Of the 21,629 patients who waited more than 62 days in 2014-15, 42% waited between two weeks and one month after the target date and about a quarter waited for even longer. As Cancer Research UK has pointed out, this is not just a missed target; patients are being failed when they have to wait too long for treatment.

Another concern is that, despite progress in improving some cancer survival rates over the past decade, we still lag behind the best-performing countries. As several hon. Members have mentioned, it has been estimated that up to 10,000 deaths each year in England can be attributed to lower survival rates compared with those in the best-performing countries. As hon. Members have repeatedly pointed out, diagnosis of cancer at a later stage is generally agreed to be the single most important reason for the lower survival rates in England, so it is vital that we do better not only on early diagnosis, but on prevention and awareness.

With a total of 95 recommendations, the strategy will need consistent political and financial support if it is to be implemented in full. We welcome the possibility of a national cancer advisory board, which, as the report states, would allow a mirror to be held up to the NHS on progress in implementing the strategy. No doubt the precise make-up of such a body would be a matter of detail, but we are keen to ensure that there is an independent chair, as has been mentioned, and that patients' voices are heard on that body.

With so many individual recommendations in the report, it is impossible to do them all justice in the time available. For those unable to read the entire report, I suggest that the principles set out on page 16 are a very helpful overview of the core aims of the strategy. I do not propose to go through all 95 recommendations—we certainly do not have time to do so—but I want to talk about one or two areas.

I want to speak about the quality of life after treatment and about end-of-life care. One of the most compelling and difficult debates in which I have been involved during my short time in the House was that on the Assisted Dying (No. 2) Bill. One message that came through loud and clear in the debate was that there are massive differences in the quality of palliative care available. Evidence consistently shows that far more people diagnosed with a terminal illness would prefer to die in their own home than currently get the chance. That is not an easy conversation to have, but we must get better at it.

I was pleased that the report acknowledges the clear link between cancer and poor mental health. Around 10% of patients with cancer will develop serious depression, and around half of all patients have some unmet need six months after treatment has concluded. Proposals to improve detection of mental health issues and to integrate better the various treatments are to be welcomed, and will hopefully lead to better patient outcomes.

However, the strategy goes well beyond that and, as we have heard, it recognises that support for patients post-treatment in terms of lifestyle, finances and work must be hugely improved. Secondary cancer is also a huge problem, and we must ensure that care after cancer is just as good as treatment of it. I am glad that the Secretary of State has committed to the development of a quality of life metric. Improvements to the system must ensure that how well people are living is just as important as how long they live for.

Too many people are left to fend for themselves in a complicated, bureaucratic maze, while having to cope with unmet physical, emotional and financial needs—my hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside set out starkly some of the challenges that individual patients have to deal with. Nobody should have to go without help after suffering the hardship of cancer treatment, and we hope it will be possible to ensure that everybody with cancer has access to a recovery package by 2020.

In the short term, steps can be taken to make life easier. Macmillan Cancer Support has calculated that the financial impact of a cancer diagnosis makes someone on average £575 a month worse off. That is why proposals in the Welfare Reform and Work Bill to take away £30 a week in unemployment support allowance from those with cancer who are placed in the work-related activity group seem at odds with what is set out in the strategy. We need joined-up thinking not just across the health service, but across the Government and the whole of society. The report estimates that by 2030 the number of people in work who will be affected by cancer is set to increase by 1 million, and although there is statutory protection under the Equality Act 2010, in reality someone is 1.4 times more likely to be unemployed if they have cancer.

The greater role that wider society can play is set out clearly in the report, which calls for

“a radical upgrade in prevention and public health.”

If we are to make this strategy work, we must consider forming a new tobacco control strategy, and a national obesity strategy that goes beyond the responsibility deal, which is largely limited to reducing the prevalence of obesity in children. The strategy is right to include an ambition to reduce the prevalence of overall adult smoking to less than 13% by 2020. It is not difficult to imagine that current measures will do much to make that happen, and I am pleased that the report includes a recommendation that the NHS should work with the Government to deliver and implement a new tobacco control strategy within the next 12 months.

This is a matter of equality. We all know about the diverse life expectancy figures in different parts of the country, and about how a difference of just a few miles can mean huge gaps in life expectancy. There would be around 20,000 fewer deaths per year across all cancers if socioeconomically deprived groups had the same incidence rates as the least deprived. Smoking plays a large part in that, and more than half of the inequity in overall life expectancy between different social classes can be at least partially attributed to higher smoking rates among the less well-off.

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) deserves praise for her marathon effort to ban smoking in cars with children, and such measures will further deter smoking and encourage people to give

[Justin Madders]

up. However, even before that strategy has found its feet, it has been undermined by another huge cut to the public health grant for local councils, which will almost certainly mean that smoking cessation services are slashed.

If we are to take the Government seriously on public health, and if this strategy is to work, it must be supported fully. In-year cuts to public health funds go wholly against the strategy, and are contrary to any strategy that seeks a sustainable health service moving forward. As many experts have said, these cuts will end up costing more than they save. They are a political choice, and we should send a strong message to the Chancellor that they should not go ahead.

The introduction of the cancer drugs fund has been a positive development, and it delivered important benefits to patients over the course of the last Parliament, which we welcome. However, 19 treatments were cut from the cancer drugs fund at the beginning of the year, and another 18 went this month. Charities estimate that more than 5,500 patients a year will now be denied access to these life-extending treatments. Will the Minister tell the House whether he supports the removal of those treatments, and, crucially, what support will now be given to the thousands of patients who will miss out on the drugs in the future? I appreciate that this is not an easy situation, but it seems particularly cruel to give people hope and then to take it away.

I want to mention the need for renewed focus on treatments other than drugs. Before the election, Labour promised to create a new cancer treatment fund to look at all treatments available. Surgery and radiotherapy are responsible for nine in 10 cases where cancer is cured. The taskforce concluded that in a number of areas access to treatments such as radiotherapy are not at the level they should be. About half of all radiotherapy machines are reaching the end of their useful lives. We need to upgrade them so we can deliver safer care. We should also enable the more widespread use of modern radiotherapy techniques. Some 38% of cancer patients in England currently have radiotherapy as part of their treatment, but evidence from abroad suggests that this should be closer to 50%. We need to understand why there is this difference and to work towards correcting it.

I have touched on only a few parts of the strategy, and I hope there is a recognition that there are wider challenges beyond the strategy itself. Where the Government are clearly working towards the aims of the cancer strategy, they will have our support. I would therefore like to ask the Minister what steps the Department will be taking to ensure that comprehensive implementation plans are laid out for the strategy as a whole by 31 March 2016.

Many Members will have lost someone close to them as a result of cancer. We owe it to everyone affected by this terrible disease to implement and support in full the recommendations set out in the strategy, so we can take further steps towards finally beating cancer.

4.41 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer): It is a great pleasure to respond to the excellent speeches that have formed this interesting and remarkably well-informed debate. I echo the thanks given by the shadow Minister and others to my hon. Friends the Members for Basildon and Billericay

(Mr Baron), for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) and for Bosworth (David Tredinnick) for securing the debate in such a timely manner. I do not think that even they would have anticipated it coinciding with today's launch of the consultation.

The debate touches on the lives not only of everyone in this House but of everyone in the country. The frustrating regularity of cancer diagnosis—in the past week, two of my friends have had a cancer diagnosis confirmed—is shared by Members and by people watching this debate across the country. That is why this is such an important and salient issue for all our constituents. I am therefore very grateful to hon. Members for both speaking on this matter and for bringing it to the attention of the House.

At the start of my speech, it is worth reflecting that we are able to speak about this issue from a position of celebrating the success of the past few years. There have been quantum leaps in the treatment, diagnosis and survival rates of cancer. More than half of people receiving a cancer diagnosis now live 10 years or more, a remarkable statistic that would scarcely have been believed 20 or 30 years ago. The fact that we are able to speak frankly about this at all, with the very personal speeches hon. Members have given today, marks the end of the dangerous taboo surrounding talking about cancer. Happily, we are now able to replicate that fight in relation to mental health and end-of-life care. The work done by cancer charities over many years, to talk about cancer and to make it a live issue in the public imagination, is now reflected in other important areas of care.

Mr Baron: The Minister is absolutely right to say that we have made great strides, and the Government are to be congratulated on playing their full part in that, but may I gently remind him that as we have made great strides, other countries have made great strides? The debate is largely about the fact that we are still well behind European averages on survival rates. The first year survival rate in this country is 69%, whereas in Sweden it is 81%. That apparently small difference accounts for about 10,000 lives a year in this country being needlessly lost because we diagnose too late. I am sure the Minister will agree that there is still a lot to improve on.

Ben Gummer: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. I was not trying to offer mere bromides. Indeed, I was about to say that although we perform well in many clinical areas, we perform badly on cancer compared to other countries. We have made significant progress over the past few years, but we are still not where we should be: at the top of the pack. There are many reasons for that, some of which we understand and some of which we do not, but it behoves us all to do something about it, which is why the taskforce was set up. In that regard, I add my thanks to Harpal Kumar and the many people who contributed to the taskforce's conclusions.

I am speaking to an expert audience here—I am conscious that almost everyone who has spoken has considerably greater expertise in this area than I do—so I will not rehearse the history of the taskforce or its recommendations. Importantly, there is now a consensus about what needs to happen. Various things have to happen if we are to deliver on the aims of the taskforce.

Mark Tami: Does the Minister agree we should be talking about people living with cancer and the associated issues? A lot of people talk about “a cure” as if everything goes back to how it was before the diagnosis.

Ben Gummer: We should indeed. I found the hon. Gentleman’s remarks extremely interesting; I learned a lot from them.

I want to answer hon. Members’ questions as well as I can, although I am conscious of answering them on behalf of the public health Minister, who has responsibility for cancer and has considerable expertise in this area. She is sorry she cannot be here. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) asked some salient questions. The first was: when will the taskforce conclusions be implemented? He will know that the new national director for cancer has just been appointed, and I met her yesterday. As he knows, she is an immensely impressive woman, having run one of the foremost cancer institutes in the world, and she is aware that one of her initial tasks is rapidly to set out an implementation plan. In doing that, I know she will want to speak to the all-party group on cancer as soon as she develops her plans in order to keep its members abreast of developments and to hear their views about the pace of implementation. I will ensure that officials write to Members with any further details about implementation.

My hon. Friend asked about the CCG scorecards. I understand the nervousness—I detected it in his voice—about the complex measurements and the dashboard being translated into apparently simple measurements in the scorecard. I want to give him some reassurance. The scorecards used for hospitals are immensely complex and have behind them a huge amount of data that is then distilled into simple scorings, the point of which is to provide clear accountability and transparency to patients and people living in CCG areas, who, at the moment, have no grip, because we do not give them any, on how well a CCG is performing. The expert panel looking at the operation of the scorecards will be out for consultation next month and will report back before the scorecards are put in place in April. I know it will listen carefully to his comments about one-year survival rates and the detail of how the scorecards are put together, but I am clear that the oncological experts on the panel will not want to undermine the work done on the various metrics and the dashboard.

My hon. Friend spoke with eloquence about genomics. It is of course true that the reason we are able to make increasingly rapid progress is that cancer is a genetic disease, and genetics and genomics are the great new frontier in medical innovation. In a sense, therefore, dealing with cancer and drugs for cancer will be the tip of the spear when it comes to developing all new drugs in the decades ahead. It is very exciting, but presents massive challenges to funded healthcare systems around the world. It is in trying to find a way of affording the new drugs that are coming online, but also releasing the unique possibilities that the NHS offers, that we think we are in such a strong position to offer opportunities both to those wanting to research cancer from an academic point of view and to those businesses and companies doing so in order to develop drugs.

The point of saying that is that the cancer drugs fund, which many Members referred to in their speeches, will necessarily have to change in response to the significant

changes of the last few years. To the shadow Minister’s point about the cancer drugs fund, I would gently say that it was an innovation personally promoted by the Prime Minister in 2010. He has made a personal commitment to it, so all Members should take solace from the fact that he will be watching carefully how the fund develops. It has risen from a few hundred million pounds to over £1.2 billion. That demonstrates a commitment that was not present before the cancer drugs fund was invented. Its size is such that it now makes up a considerable part of the overall drugs spending of the NHS.

I hope hon. Members will take comfort from the fact that the consultation announced today by NHS England aims to build on the success of the cancer drugs fund, to incorporate the new structures that need to come about as a result of the significant changes in genomic research over the last five years and to align the general research, licensing and funding of drugs through NICE with the principles of the cancer drugs fund, so that we have a far more integrated system in future. I would encourage all hon. Members present to contribute to the consultation on the cancer drugs fund and thereby help to inform the second stage of its existence, when that comes about—I imagine at some point next year.

David Tredinnick: I may be pre-empting what my hon. Friend is about to say, but on the point about widening the scope of drugs, which he has alluded to, will he take note of the remarks about broadening the scope of patient choice and the range of therapies available, and perhaps using Professional Standards Authority-regulated professionals rather more?

Ben Gummer: I will, and I was about to move on to my hon. Friend’s remarks. He made a similar point—that great progress had been made but there was still much to be done. He spoke with eloquence and detail about complementary treatments, in which I have absolutely no expertise—I shall have to disappoint him on that. I know that he has written to me about the regulation of herbal medicines. I have today spoken to the Minister for Life Sciences, and I know that my hon. Friend will be receiving a full response about the various issues he has raised.

In response to my hon. Friend’s points about complementary treatments, I would say that it is very important when spending taxpayers’ money on cancer treatments that there is a solid evidence base for what we do. However, his point is well made—that the entire person needs to be taken into account when considering treatment. That can also involve people living with cancer, not just the treatment of it.

It was very nice to hear the hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) speak. It was also good to hear him speak from a personal point of view—it was good of him to share his sorrow regarding his son. On the stem cell transplantation issue that he raised, I can tell him that the recovery package as part of the taskforce’s recommendations that the Government have already moved on will apply to blood cancer patients who have undergone stem cell transplantation. The Government are very supportive of the work by the Anthony Nolan trust and other charities, but I will make sure that the hon. Gentleman gets a fuller response on the specific issues that he raised, so he can be satisfied that we have taken into account the particular difficulties and challenges facing those who have undergone stem cell transplantation.

[Ben Gummer]

It was a great pleasure to hear from the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin). I have a particular affection for him, not only because he helped me on the way through King's Cross the other day, but because he spoke just before me in my maiden speech—we made ours at the same time. This is a good point at which to reflect that the Member who spoke after me was the former right hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton, who is much missed in this place.

The hon. Member for Scunthorpe brought to our attention the issue of rare cancers—specifically pancreatic and blood cancers. I would like to reassure him about research. He will know that Cancer Research UK has looked specifically at the rare cancers and has prioritised work in the areas where it feels additional research funding and effort need to go, which include blood and pancreatic cancers—and, indeed, brain cancers, which my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) mentioned. The hon. Member for Scunthorpe also raised the issue of GP imaging capacity, and I would like to reassure him that, as part of the ACE programme—Accelerate, Co-ordinate, Evaluate—by NHS England, imaging will be expanded within primary care. I hope that I will be able to write to him with further details.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point for her fascinating speech and for bringing to our attention the very sad story of her constituent Danny Green. Her point about a national register for off-label drugs was well made, and I know it is an issue that the Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), is looking at actively. My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point made a point about research. She will be aware that it is always difficult to try to divvy up research funding, but I will make sure that her point is reflected back to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) made some very good points about joined-up care. It is certainly the case that we need to see such care across the NHS.

The hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) spoke about the cancer drugs fund, and made an interesting point about a UK-wide set of arrangements. I shall certainly pass on his comments to the Minister responsible for cancer. He also spoke about molecular diagnostics, and I would like to reassure him that, in England at least, we will significantly roll out molecular diagnostics as a result of our acceptance of the principles of the taskforce recommendations.

Finally, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), the shadow Minister, rightly

made some points about public health strategy. It is, of course, difficult to make sure that we balance the books, while keeping to our manifesto pledges. His points about tobacco and obesity were well made, and I know that the Government will be coming forward with obesity plans in short order.

With no more time available to me, I would like to thank Members for their full, excellent and expert contributions to this fascinating debate. I hope that the Government have shown the kind of progress and commitment to this important area that they are so keen to see.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): That leaves one minute for John Baron to conclude the debate.

4.59 pm

Mr Baron: That is very kind and generous, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would like to thank all who contributed today—it proves how much expertise has been brought to bear in such a well-informed debate from all sides. I would like to thank the Minister once again for stepping into the cancer Minister's shoes and for answering our questions. I am sure he will want to answer some further questions in writing. I would like to thank him, too, for taking on board the importance that the whole cancer community attaches to the one-year cancer survival rates as a means of promoting earlier diagnosis. I thank him for that.

I leave the Minister and the House with just one thought. There are not many areas of Government policy that could save 10,000 lives a year if we raised our game on earlier diagnosis. We need a policy that will match the best internationally. We have that capability in our hands: let us hope that we seize the opportunity.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes the findings of the independent cancer taskforce published in July 2015; and calls on the Government to publish an action plan on implementing the new cancer strategy.

Business without Debate

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, in respect of the Northern Ireland (Welfare Reform) Bill, notices of Amendments, new Clauses and new Schedules to be moved in Committee may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.—(Jackie Doyle-Price.)

Mesothelioma Compensation (Military Veterans)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Jackie Doyle-Price.*)

5 pm

David Mackintosh (Northampton South) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me an opportunity to speak about mesothelioma compensation for military veterans. I am pleased that it follows such an important debate on the wider cancer strategy. I also thank the members of the public who have taken the time to come and watch our proceedings from the Gallery, and who signed the petition. It is encouraging to see such strong public support for change, and I am glad that I have the chance today to bring this issue further into the spotlight. I pay tribute to other Members who have raised the issue, including my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), who has done so much work on it in the past.

Before I speak about the specific case of my constituent and the problems he faces, let me explain what we are talking about today. Most people who are suffering as a result of exposure to asbestos have been compensated thanks to the Mesothelioma Act 2014, which was passed during the last Parliament and which allows those who were diagnosed with mesothelioma on or after 25 July 2012 to apply for compensation. However, when Parliament reviewed the Act in July 2013, Lord James of Blackheath noted that although civilians suffering from mesothelioma would benefit from it, naval personnel with asbestos-related illnesses would be left behind in terms of financial reparations.

Given its association with asbestos, mesothelioma usually affects individuals who have worked in professions such as carpentry or construction, but it has also afflicted a large number of veterans, particularly naval personnel who worked as engineers in the boiler rooms of ships, and it is on that specific aspect that I intend to focus.

Service personnel and veterans are unable to sue for injuries and illnesses sustained before the introduction of the Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Act 1987. The only avenue of redress open to veterans with mesothelioma is the war pension scheme, which awards regular payments for life. It is difficult for the scheme to accommodate serious long-term illnesses, as it cannot award large lump sums to those recently diagnosed with terminal conditions. As a result, although service-related mesothelioma attracts a 100% war disablement pension, veterans who are single, divorced or widowed stand to receive considerably less compensation than their civilian counterparts.

For example, whereas a 63-year-old civilian claimant would be awarded about £180,000 in compensation under the Government's diffuse mesothelioma scheme, a veteran of the same age who lived for one year would receive just £32,000 under the war pension scheme. In fact, many veterans would receive even less. That is at odds with the armed forces covenant, which states that members of our armed forces community should experience no disadvantage as a result of their service, and it is an unfortunate anomaly in the system. I am sure other Members will agree with me when I say that I do not believe the House intended to cause such discrimination

against military veterans, but that is the situation that confronts us today. I certainly commend the Government for all their work on the armed forces covenant.

Michael Ellis (Northampton North) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour on securing the debate. Does he agree that military veterans are among the very best in our society, and that, far from being prejudiced in any way by their military service, they should be rewarded? When an ailment has resulted from their service, should not the Government do everything they can to ensure that they are adequately compensated?

David Mackintosh: I thank my hon. Friend and neighbour for raising that point. I do agree. I will talk later about my constituent. I think that Members will agree that he served our country admirably and went over and above that was asked of him.

I was talking about the armed forces covenant. I congratulate the Government on everything that has been done so far. Clearly, there is more to do. The covenant has enshrined two underlying principles in law. Members of the armed forces community should face

“no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services”

and

“special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given the most such as the injured or the bereaved”.

As leader of Northampton Borough Council, I signed the Northampton armed forces community covenant in 2013 further to embed those commitments in my local community. I am pleased that that has been taken up by so many other local authorities around the country.

I move on now to the case of my constituent Mr Fred Minall, a veteran who is affected by this. He first raised the issue with me when he was diagnosed a few months ago. Mr Minall is a naval veteran who is suffering from mesothelioma as a result of exposure he received while on active duty between 1957 and 1965 with the Royal Navy. When Fred came to see me to tell me about the problems he was facing, I was very moved. I was also shocked that an anomaly in the system had put him in this position, and concerned that there may be many other veterans such as Fred who are suffering from mesothelioma but who are not receiving the support available to other sufferers outside the military.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend have any idea how many naval veterans in total may have mesothelioma now? How many people are we talking about?

David Mackintosh: I am grateful to my hon. and gallant Friend for raising that matter. I will talk about that later, but the Royal British Legion estimates that about 2,500 British naval veterans will be affected.

Mr Minall was not able to make it to the Chamber today to watch the debate, as he is undergoing chemotherapy. I know that he is watching at home and that he is pleased that we are able to debate this subject in greater detail and ensure that the issue, which affects a lot of people around the country, receives the attention it deserves. Fred has asked me to say on his behalf:

“Mesothelioma sufferers have little time left, and so we entrust Parliament to make a wise and fair decision, backdating any awards agreed today to the same date as if discrimination had

[David Mackintosh]

been avoided in the 1987 Act. Why should these brave men and women endure discrimination, just when they learn they will die, due to events so long ago, during their dedicated service to Queen and Country? They should be aided and rewarded, not penalised.”

It is hard to disagree.

Mesothelioma is an extremely aggressive form of terminal cancer that is usually caused by exposure to asbestos and affects the pleura of the lungs. The disease can take decades to materialise but, once diagnosed, most sufferers die within one or two years. According to research from the Royal British Legion, with which I have been working closely on the issue over the past months, it is projected that just over 2,500 British naval veterans are likely to die from mesothelioma between 2013 and 2047. There is currently no cure for mesothelioma, which means that it is even more crucial that we are able to help our constituents by doing all we can now.

What can the Government do to help constituents such as Fred overcome the hardship they face? The Royal British Legion has suggested that the Government should offer military veterans the choice between receiving a lump sum compensation payment that is comparable to the sums awarded under the diffuse mesothelioma payment scheme and a traditional war disablement pension. Veterans with mesothelioma should be allowed to choose the form that their compensation takes. We recognise that, for veterans who live for some time, or have a spouse or partner, that should be their choice. The traditional war disablement pension may work out more generous than the lump sums awarded by the diffuse mesothelioma payment scheme. I have already mentioned the armed forces covenant principle that those who are bereaved should, where appropriate, be eligible for special consideration. As such, I would not wish any changes in policy to come at the expense of that arrangement.

We should place great importance on the health and well-being of our veterans and I believe wholeheartedly that they should be treated fairly. I am pleased to hear that the Government are committed to ensuring that those who serve in the armed forces and their families, regular or reserve, past and present, are treated with dignity and receive the care and support they deserve, but this is an anomaly that we need to look at.

I am pleased that the armed forces covenant is enshrined in law so that our forces' families face no disadvantage compared with other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. I look forward to hearing the views of hon. Members from across the House, and also to hearing the update my hon. and gallant Friend the Minister is able to provide to me, my constituent and other hon. Members' constituents who are unfortunate enough to find themselves in this most difficult situation.

5.3 pm

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh), and I thank him for allowing me to speak in this debate, which he secured, as this is an issue that causes me great concern, as it clearly does him. I completely agree that the case of Mr Minall perfectly illustrates the need for us to have this debate, and to have it now; unfortunately, people such as his constituent do not have the time for us to waste.

I must also applaud the Royal British Legion, whose campaign in this area calling on the Government to find fairer ways of compensating veterans suffering from this devastating condition, has been very effective. Like the hon. Gentleman, I am aware of many positive developments in the way in which veterans are dealt with across the UK. There have been a number of debates in recent months in this House where this has been usefully discussed.

In Scotland we have a newly appointed veterans commissioner, effective local veterans champions such as those the hon. Gentleman mentioned, innovative housing projects and links with many excellent charities. However, in the UK context, it is none the less true that the issue of mesothelioma represents a gap in our approach to veterans, and one that I sincerely hope we can address.

The hon. Gentleman has already told us what a terrible disease mesothelioma is. There are few things more difficult to deal with for sufferers and their families than the kind of body-blow that a diagnosis of mesothelioma brings. Rectifying this unfair treatment will not make anyone suffering from this disease any better, but it might improve their quality of life during the time they have left, and it might mean that they and their families have significantly less financial anxiety than they may at present.

It is perfectly reasonable to expect anyone in this situation to feel disappointed, because they are being treated less well than their civilian counterparts. That is no way to support our service personnel, and I do hope that we can hear some positive words from the Minister on that.

It is clear that thousands of people who served in the armed services prior to 1987 have been exposed to asbestos while under military orders and have subsequently been diagnosed with mesothelioma. They are suffering from this disease because of the job they did in our armed forces, but clearly at present they are not entitled to the full compensation that others are.

We have heard that around 2,500 ex-service personnel are affected in this way, and every one of them has served this country and has the right to expect to be compensated fairly. Veterans lose out very significantly when compared with civilians in the same position. These civilians may be eligible for up to £180,000 in compensation, but the ex-service personnel may be eligible for only £31,000.

In 2008 the Labour Government published the Command Paper “The Nation’s commitment: cross-government support to our armed forces, their families and veterans”. It stated:

“The essential starting point is that those who serve must not be disadvantaged by virtue of what they do.”

More recently Prime Minister David Cameron has said:

“Our Armed Forces Bill will ensure Parliament holds the Government to account on the central principle of the covenant that military personnel will not suffer any disadvantage as a result of their work”—

and, of course, they should not be disadvantaged. It is not right morally, and it is not fair, but clearly some ex-service personnel are being disadvantaged. This is a breach of the military covenant that we hear so many fine words about.

The military covenant commits the Government to removing this disadvantage. This situation is most certainly a disadvantage at a most difficult time in people's lives. We need to deal with it, and do so quickly. Let us back up our words with action. The Royal British Legion summarises the situation perfectly when it says it is "unfair and has to change".

As the hon. Member for Northampton South told us, in 2014 the Government set up a scheme to pay compensation to civilians, which is very welcome. However, like the hon. Gentleman, I would like to note that a word of caution about the issue of veterans was already being stated when the Mesothelioma Act was being reviewed in July 2013, but so far that issue has not been resolved. It is our duty to deal with this now, before more ex-service personnel have their final months blighted by financial worry and inequity.

I also note that the independent medical expert group for the new armed forces compensation scheme expresses the view that the war pension scheme is unable properly to recognise the impact of asbestos-related cancer. As we have heard, the Royal British Legion suggests that veterans diagnosed with mesothelioma should be able to choose between receiving a traditional war disablement pension and a lump-sum compensation payment broadly similar to that awarded under the new Government scheme. That would quite reasonably allow ex-service personnel to take account of their particular health and family situation and decide which route was the more appropriate.

The Royal British Legion is clearly not a lone voice in this regard. It has support among Members on both sides of the House, as evidenced by a recent early-day motion, and from Seafarers UK, the Royal Navy & Royal Marines Charity, Poppyscotland and many other organisations. I note that, at a meeting of the Central Advisory Committee on Pensions and Compensation in June this year, the Minister committed to looking at this issue and said that he understood the urgency involved. I am pleased about that, because it is an acknowledgement of the importance of the issue. However, having read a transcript of a debate in this place in February—some 10 months ago—I note that a commitment was also made at that time to look into this matter urgently. It was also noted in that debate that nothing had happened following a previous commitment to deal urgently with the matter five months before that. I therefore have some anxiety about how urgently this is being dealt with, and I hope that the Minister will be able to allay my concerns.

Veterans who develop mesothelioma from working with asbestos while in the Navy can be left tens of thousands of pounds worse off than their civilian counterparts. This is unfair; it is a clear breach of the military covenant and a completely unacceptable way to treat terminally ill veterans. I agree with the Minister that the matter should be dealt with urgently, and I hope that we will hear something today about positive progress and about how we can move this forward.

5.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster): I start, of course, by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (David Mackintosh) on securing this debate to discuss

compensation for our military veterans who have been diagnosed with mesothelioma. I recognise that mesothelioma is a devastating disease that changes the lives not only of the people who are diagnosed but of those who care about them—their families and loved ones. I recognise that this is an important subject to hon. Members across the House and that it is something we all feel strongly about, as evidenced by the correspondence I have received, as well as by the recent letter from the Defence Committee and the early-day motion that some hon. Members have signed. This is also a subject that is close to the hearts of our constituents.

I would like to pay tribute to all those who have taken the time to contribute to the discussions on this subject, some of whom I have engaged with, including the Royal British Legion. I welcome the statement read out by my hon. Friend concerning his constituent, Mr Fred Minall, who I understand has been diagnosed with mesothelioma as a result of his service in the Royal Navy during the 1950s and '60s. This was something I was very sorry to learn of. Let me reassure all hon. Members that I recognise the need to act swiftly and that I am extremely sympathetic to this cause. I can assure them that I am minded to find a solution, and have been working with my officials to do so, and crucially to do so quickly.

I would like to pay tribute to all our armed forces—those still serving and those who have served. This is particularly relevant at this time of year, as we remember their commitment and sacrifice in serving this country. We owe them all a debt of profound gratitude. This Government and I, as Minister for Veterans, are committed to doing all we can to honour that debt of gratitude. That is why we have put the armed forces covenant, which represents the moral obligation we owe to those who serve or have served, at the heart of our national life and enshrined its principles in law.

Our commitment to doing the very best we can for our veterans is genuine and unswerving. However, it is a commitment that we need to frame within the context of fairness and reality. Mesothelioma is a cancer caused by exposure to asbestos, and 40 years or more can often pass before it manifests itself and an individual is diagnosed, tragically with a short life expectancy thereafter. That is why it is so important to ensure that we get the support right for those who are affected by the disease.

Bob Stewart: Will the Minister give me his reassurance that modern-day sailors are not threatened when they are working in boiler rooms today? We have some pretty old ships, and they might still have asbestos on them.

Mark Lancaster: Indeed, and I will move on in a moment to the action that the Royal Navy has taken. If my hon. Friend will bear with me, I will come to that shortly.

In the light of what I was describing, I want to explain the support that is currently in place for our armed forces veterans who are diagnosed with mesothelioma. Asbestos was identified as causing mesothelioma in the 1960s. At that time, certain types of service in the Royal Navy were identified as particularly increasing the risk of exposure for armed forces personnel. When this was identified the Ministry of Defence started to address the matter quickly. By the early 1960s, the Royal Navy had already introduced new insulation materials on ships and on shore, as well as providing respiratory

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protection for those personnel who were most highly exposed. That was extended to all personnel who were classified as “at risk” in the following years, and by 1973 the risk of asbestos exposure for members of the Royal Navy was very low. It was not until 1987, however, that the Control of Asbestos at Work Regulations were introduced by legislation. As I have indicated, most of the cases of exposure to asbestos were between the 1950s and the 1970s. Under current arrangements, those armed forces veterans who are diagnosed with mesothelioma are able to claim compensation under the war pensions scheme—this applies to service before 6 April 2005.

The war pensions scheme allows an individual to claim the maximum war disablement pension, supplementary allowances and, in many cases, automatic entitlement by an eligible dependant to a war widow’s or widower’s pension. The Mesothelioma Act 2014 enabled the establishment of the diffuse mesothelioma payment scheme. This pays a one-off lump sum to an individual who is diagnosed. That legislation is aimed at those individuals where there is no existing employer to sue. As an enduring employer, the Ministry of Defence has provided for veterans who are diagnosed for a significant period before this through the war pensions scheme. Under the war pensions scheme, claims are settled quickly, so that the early payment of compensation can begin and claimants can be assured that their dependants will be provided for after their death.

It is important, however, that we consider how veterans are treated under the Act. The matter for consideration here is whether the current arrangements for veterans continue to meet the needs for which they were designed. I would again like to thank the Royal British Legion and those who have contributed to the discussion on compensation for veterans who are diagnosed with mesothelioma in light of the Act—I welcome their engagement. I acknowledge the argument they are making that the Ministry of Defence should offer veterans with mesothelioma the option of a lump sum in compensation which is broadly comparable to that awarded under the Act. During the last Central Advisory Committee on Pensions and Compensation meeting in June, to which the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) referred, ex-service organisations were updated on our consideration of this issue. Let me outline what steps we have taken so far.

Ministry of Defence Ministers commissioned advice from the Independent Medical Expert Group to look at mesothelioma and the awards paid through the war pensions scheme. I want to take a moment to explain some of the observations of the group. It advised that mesothelioma is unique in some respects and considered how awards were made under the war pensions scheme. The group commented that the regular income stream structure of the war pensions scheme addressed the needs of those whose civilian employability was compromised. It observed that the very poor prognosis for the majority of individuals diagnosed with mesothelioma meant that this structure offered only limited benefit in life to the sufferer—I realise that that is a crucial point. However, unlike industrial injuries disablement benefit, the war pensions scheme maintains support to eligible dependants after the pensioner’s death through payments of tax-free dependants’ benefits. While this generosity has been acknowledged, I recognise that the Royal British Legion has raised the position of single, widowed or divorced claimants, and although I am unable to offer a final solution to the House today, I can confirm to hon. Members that I am reviewing the provision that is currently available. I intend to make an announcement regarding the matter of lump sum payments very shortly.

As hon. Members will recognise, this is a complex matter that has required detailed consideration, and close consultation and engagement with colleagues across Whitehall. However, I hope to be in a position to make an announcement as soon as possible. To that end, I hope to update the charities at the forthcoming central advisory committee meeting next month.

In conclusion, I wish to again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South for calling for this debate on what I recognise is an emotive subject. Let me emphasise again that we place great importance on the health and wellbeing of our veterans and are absolutely committed to treating them fairly. As my officials continue to consider the details of this complex matter, I intend to remain fully engaged, but please rest assured that I am dedicated to bringing this matter to a swift conclusion.

Question put and agreed to.

5.25 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 19 November 2015

[MIKE GAPES *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Male Suicide and International Men's Day

1.30 pm

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of male suicide and International Men's Day.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I thank colleagues throughout the House for supporting the debate and the Backbench Business Committee for finding the time to hold it. I also thank the many people who have been in touch with me to tell their stories or put forward their organisations' point of view. I am grateful to all of them for taking the time to do that.

I said in my maiden speech that I would campaign hard against the blight of political correctness that is doing so much damage to our country. Ten years have passed, and I am still here fighting that battle. The number of ludicrous cases of political correctness has reduced, but the more entrenched ones are still well and truly thriving. One of the main areas where we see the pernicious effects of political correctness is the treatment of men and women. I heard about International Men's Day and decided it was only right, given that we have a debate each year on International Women's Day, to appeal for time to be given for a debate to commemorate the day, in the interests of gender parity.

The aims of International Men's Day are admirable. They are:

"To promote positive male role models; not just movie stars and sports men but everyday, working class men who are living decent, honest lives... To celebrate men's positive contributions to society, community, family, marriage, child care, and to the environment... To focus on men's health and wellbeing; social, emotional, physical and spiritual... To highlight discrimination against men; in areas of social services, social attitudes and expectations, and law... To improve gender relations and promote gender equality... To create a safer, better world; where people can be safe and grow to reach their full potential."

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I commend my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. He has outlined the importance of International Men's Day. Does he share my disappointment that this debate is being held in the second Chamber, Westminster Hall, rather than on the Floor of the House of Commons?

Philip Davies: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for coming to the debate and making that point. I would have preferred the debate to be in the main Chamber, especially given that the International Women's Day debate is held there, but I am grateful that we have the opportunity to raise these issues, which we have never done before, so it would be churlish of me to be too critical.

I want today to be the day when we in this House start to deal with some of the forgotten men's issues and realise why the political correctness that underpins issues relating to the differing treatment of the sexes can be damaging to men. It might sound odd for someone leading the debate on International Men's Day to say this, but in many respects, I would rather we did not have to be here having this debate, because when we think about it, in so many ways, considering men and women separately as if they live their lives in complete isolation from one another is ridiculous. Neither group is isolated. Both sexes have mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, uncles and aunts, grandmothers and grandfathers, sons and daughters, husbands and wives, boyfriends and girlfriends. Every woman has related male parties and therefore a vested interest in men's issues.

The problem is that virtually everything we do and debate in the House seems to start from the premise that everything is biased against women and that something must be done about it. There is never an appreciation that men's issues can be just as important and that men can be just as badly treated as women in certain areas.

The hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) supported my request for a debate, and I know he is sorry that he unfortunately cannot be here today. Had he been here, he no doubt would have shared the fact that last year, Belfast City Council hosted its first event to mark International Men's Day. I understand that the event was held in Belfast castle and opened by the First Minister and the Lord Mayor of Belfast at the time, Nichola Mallon, following a proposal by Alderman Ruth Patterson. It seems our Ulster friends appreciate that there are some specifically male issues that should be addressed, with both sexes involved.

I want to be very clear: I do not believe there is actually an issue between men and women. Often, problems are stirred up by those who might be described as militant feminists and the politically correct males who sometimes pander to them. Members do not just need to take my word for it. Before the Equal Opportunities Commission was merged into the Equality and Human Rights Commission, it conducted research that found women had very clear views on these matters. Its findings included the following conclusion:

"There was little support for the idea that women, as a group, are unequal in society today."

Presumably, that went down like a lead balloon in an organisation dedicated to fighting for women's interests and rights, so it was pretty much swept under the carpet.

One of the most depressing things to happen recently was the introduction of the Select Committee on Women and Equalities. After everything else, in 2015 we have a separate Committee to deal with women's issues, on top of the Women's Minister, Women's Question Time and the many strategies in this country that only deal with women.

For the record, I could not care less if every MP in this House were female or if every member of my staff were female, as long as they were there on merit. To assume that men cannot adequately represent women is a nonsense, just as it is to say that only women can represent other women. As a man, I can say quite clearly that Margaret Thatcher represented my views very nicely indeed, but I am not sure she would be a

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pin-up for many of the politically correct, left-leaning women who are obsessed with having more women in Parliament today.

It seems to me that we have an “equality, but only when it suits” agenda in Parliament that often applies just to women. The drive for women to have so-called equality on all things that suit the politically correct agenda but not on the things that do not is a great concern. For example, we hear plenty about increasing the number of women on company boards and increasing female representation in Parliament, but there is a deafening silence when it comes to increasing the number of men who have custody of their children or who have careers as midwives. In fact, there generally seems to be a deafening silence on all the benefits women have compared with men.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Would my hon. Friend add to that list the deafening silence about the shortage of male teachers in primary schools, who are important male role models?

Philip Davies: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; we hear very little about that. If there were a shortage of female primary school teachers, I suspect we would hear a great deal more about it.

The fight for equality on all things that suit women has ended up in a situation where we are quick to point out that women need special protections and treatment in certain areas but need greater equality in others. Let me give the example of prison uniforms. Men in prison have to wear a prison uniform; women in prison do not. How, I have asked on many occasions, can that possibly be fair? Where is the equality in that? I will come on to the treatment of men and women in our justice system later, but that is clearly an issue. What is the explanation? I am told that it is because women are different. As I have said, it is a question of equality, but only when it suits.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I may not agree with everything he has said until now, but one thing I very much agree with him on is the constant obsession with gender equality. Does he agree that some of the people who have the worst life outcomes, particularly in our areas, are working-class men, who suffer some of the worst health issues and have some of the poorest life chances? Simply replacing a middle-class, privately educated man with a middle-class, privately educated woman does very little to increase diversity and opportunity for working-class lads.

Philip Davies: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. Increasingly, working-class boys are some of those who are doing the worst at school and need the most help. I certainly agree with him about political representation. I have often said that replacing Rupert from Kensington and Chelsea with Jemima from Kensington and Chelsea does not do much for diversity in the House of Commons, but that is perhaps a debate for another day.

Of course, some people believe that only men can be sexist. Frances Crook of the Howard League for Penal Reform, for example, tweeted the following a few years ago:

“Sexism is not about choosing between two genders, it’s about historic & current oppression by men. Only men can be sexist.”

That view is not uncommon, but it is, I believe, misguided. If it is not okay for a man to be sexist, it cannot be okay for a woman to be sexist. A good example of that is positive discrimination, which is portrayed as a great thing that can rebalance things for oppressed females, yet it is just discrimination. Whether we put the word “positive” in front of it or not, it is still discrimination. In my opinion, there is absolutely nothing positive about positive discrimination, and it certainly has nothing to do with equality.

Just a few months ago, a publishing house declared that it would not accept any male authors for a year to redress some perceived discrimination against female authors. I never quite understood that, because as far as I can see, there are plenty of published female authors, but leaving that aside, people commended the publishers for their stance. Imagine if another publisher had said that it was not going to publish female authors—there would have been an outcry. Thankfully, when I put a complaint to the Equality and Human Rights Commission about that, it agreed with me that it would be unlawful. However, it is interesting to note the number of people whose minds that clearly did not cross; because it was in favour of women, they thought it was fine.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I was very grateful to see the motion on the Order Paper to do with male suicide and male mental health, which is why I and some of my colleagues came along today. I disagree with some of the points that my hon. Friend has been making about the broader equality agenda, but could we perhaps move on to the conversation about male mental health, on which there are important things to be said?

Philip Davies: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. If she had been a little more patient, I was just coming on to male suicide. I was setting the context for the debate, which, as she will see if she looks at the Order Paper, is also about International Men’s Day and is not just limited to male suicide. I am now coming on to the issue of male suicide, but I am glad to have been able to set the scene, and I am sorry that pointing out that men are sometimes badly treated in the world is so discomfoting for her to have to listen to. However, that is part of the problem we have in this House.

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that gender politics needs to be more collaborative in style and that we should not antagonise either sex in order to achieve equality? Real equality is not achieved by causing upset or offence to either men or women.

Philip Davies: I very much agree. I hope that this will be part of a move towards a day when men’s issues are treated in this House as being as important as female issues. If that is what my hon. Friend is saying, I am all for it, and I hope that this debate helps us move towards that.

The motion that we are debating today, as my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) pointed out, specifically mentions male suicide. I want to deal with that subject in particular, as suicide is desperately sad and it is clear that more men than

women take their own life each year. In fact, the figures show that around three quarters of all people who commit suicide are men. I would like to place on record the fact that although men are more likely than women to commit suicide, those left behind grieving will be of both sexes and often children.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Can I point out to everyone in the room, please, that no one in this country has committed suicide since 1961, when suicide was no longer a crime? People “commit” murder, burglary or arson, but they do not “commit” suicide. They take their own life, but they do not “commit” suicide—“commit” is a word that relates to a crime, and suicide is not a crime.

Philip Davies: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for picking me up again. The terminology may be important to some people, but if I am going to be chastised for using the word that, as far as I can see, is used by every member of the public whenever they discuss this issue, I do apologise. But let us not get bogged down in politically correct terminology. I would much prefer that we dealt with the issue that I am trying to raise.

Lucy Allan: As somebody who has had a family member commit suicide, I am perfectly happy with the use of that term, and I do think it is political correctness to use some other terminology to make it more acceptable to others.

Philip Davies: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for that. Let us hope—

Mrs Moon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Philip Davies: As long as we are going to get on to a serious debate about the issue, I will give way to the hon. Lady. I know that she knows a lot about this issue, and if she wants to make a sensible point, I am very happy to give way to her.

Mrs Moon: I only ever make sensible points on the issue of suicide, on which I spend a considerable amount of my time.

I can tell the hon. Gentleman that for many families who have been blighted by suicide, the word “commit” is deeply offensive and causes great distress, because it is part of a feeling of alienation and criminality that enters their family. It is an issue of great sensitivity for them. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman is rolling his eyes, but that is the reality.

Philip Davies: The hon. Lady has made her point. I would prefer that we actually dealt with trying to prevent people from taking their own life, or committing suicide, or whatever term anybody wants to use. The end result is the same and that is perhaps the thing we ought to concentrate on the most, rather than focus on what we call it, which does not necessarily help anybody who is a victim of it.

According to the Office for National Statistics, the number of female suicide victims declined from 10.9 per thousand in 1982 to 5.1 per thousand in 2013, whereas male suicide rates in the UK were much higher and were

virtually the same in 2013 as they were in 1982—19 per thousand in 2013 and 20.6 per thousand in 1982. Those statistics sound bad enough, but it is nothing compared to the reality of suicide: according to the House of Commons Library, what that means is that in 2012, more than 4,500 men felt they had no choice but to take their own life. Given that there was an increase in suicides in 2013, the figure for that year is nearly 5,000 men.

In fact, over the last 30 years, according to ONS figures supplied by the House of Commons Library, more than 130,000 men have taken their own life. That is a staggering number: it is a staggering number of people who have needlessly died, and a staggering number of families left behind—parents, spouses, children, friends and colleagues—all of whom have been left grieving and suffering.

Andrew Percy: In our county of Yorkshire, 81% of the deaths from suicide in 2013 were men. To take my hon. Friend back to my earlier point, does he not agree that we have to do more to intervene early, particularly for young men from the poorest social backgrounds, who are the most at risk because of unemployment, low self-esteem caused by low educational outcomes, or the social conditions in which they live? Again, that is a particular group of our society to whom the services are not necessarily best placed to respond, but for whom we need to do better as a nation by intervening earlier.

Philip Davies: I am sure that my hon. Friend is right and that most people would agree with him. In fact, in the time allocated to this debate, statistically at least one man will have taken his own life, which means that yet another life will have been ended prematurely and another family will have been left devastated.

According to the Campaign Against Living Miserably, which is supported by many individual charities and which I would like to thank for its help with today's debate, a YouGov poll this month that surveyed 2,000 men found that

“42 per cent...had considered suicide, with...41 per cent...never talking to anyone about their problems.”

In addition:

“49 per cent...of those who didn't seek help ‘didn't want people to worry about me’. A third...felt ashamed, nearly four in 10...did not want to make a fuss and...43 per cent...didn't want to talk about their feelings.”

According to various sources, including the Government's suicide prevention strategy for England, the suicide rate is highest among males aged 30 to 59. It has fluctuated in recent years between 30 and 44, but it is currently those who are aged 45 to 59 who have the highest suicide rate.

We might ask why these men feel that they have to end their lives in such numbers. There is the obvious issue of mental health problems; not wanting to ask for help could mean that those go untreated in some men. I was sent a briefing by the Royal College of Psychiatrists, which said:

“Three quarters of all people who end their own life are not in contact with mental health services and men who are suffering from depression are much less likely than women to look for formal help from mental health professionals.”

There are also clearly other things that are likely to affect men more than women—for example, being in debt or being a war veteran. The Samaritans point to evidence that suicidal behaviour comes about as a result of a complex interaction of a number of factors. In the case

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of men, financial worries play a big part—so unemployment and redundancy can be a trigger—and also the influence of a historical culture of masculinity.

In some cases, men might feel—usually mistakenly—that they are a burden on others or that people would be better off if they were dead. The fact that men still see themselves as the providers in many cases means that financial hardship is very significant, and in their mind reduces their contribution to the family unit. Someone in debt might think that their family would be better off if they were not there. Even putting aside the enormous emotional loss to those left behind, the financial gain may not be as the person intended, as taking their life could invalidate their life insurance.

Helen Whately: A minute ago, my hon. Friend mentioned the importance of mental health care for men and of men accessing it. It is well known that men may well go to an accident and emergency department to seek care when they have mental health needs and often A and E is the only place that is available in the middle of the night, but although some hospitals have good care in the form of psychiatric liaison teams, many hospitals do not have good psychiatric liaison services. Those services are known to be very helpful. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister supports such services and that some funding is going towards them, but can we make certain that that funding ensures that there are good psychiatric liaison services in all hospitals and transparency about the level of those services, so that we can ensure that they are effective?

Philip Davies: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I am sure that we all hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will deal with that point when he makes his contribution to the debate.

Shockingly, 56.1% of men who commit suicide do so by hanging themselves. I cannot imagine the horror of finding someone who has hanged themselves. Add to that the fact that that person is a loved one and it is even more tragic. Then, there are all the questions that inevitably arise following a suicide from the person's loved ones. Why? Why did I not know there was something wrong? Why did they not talk to me? Why did they leave me? What could I have done to prevent this from happening? The guilt and sense of loss that those left behind must feel after someone has killed themselves should be reason enough to want to do something, never mind the absolute waste of life of the individual concerned. Suicides account for more deaths than road traffic accidents, so one would expect the Government to be trying to tackle this issue.

Sometimes this place is also about sending out signals or messages, and the message that I want to go out loud and clear today to anyone contemplating suicide is: you are not alone. There is nothing whatever weak or wrong in seeking help, and there are plenty of people out there who can help you, so please talk to someone—confidentially and anonymously if you prefer, but please talk to someone. Suicide is never the right option.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists says:

“We also need to work towards building a society where people should not be afraid to seek help for fear of being stigmatised and where the media agree to responsible reporting of suicide.”

I could not agree more. It says that it is also important that information on depression and how men can get support is available in what might be traditionally considered male settings, such as football stadiums, barbers or pubs. Again, that seems like a very good idea.

Suicide, especially in the numbers that we see for men, is a huge, tragic problem, and we need to work together to achieve change. One thing that leads men to contemplate suicide is the breakdown of a relationship, especially if children are involved. It is clear that the courts are more likely to place children with the mother than with the father. This is a massive area where men face very different treatment from women. We underestimate the effect on fathers of having to battle to see their children and facing the inevitable likelihood that they will come off worse simply because of their gender.

I am certainly not saying that all cases are like that. Many, many reasonable mothers allow the father as much access to the children as possible, and we should always recognise that, but life is not always that simple in every relationship. Some women do use their children as a stick to beat the father with—perhaps because they are bitter about the failed relationship, because of financial reasons, or because they have moved on and it is easier for them if their new partner takes on the role of father to their children. Women can fail to put the father on the birth certificate, limiting his rights, or lie to him about whether he is even the father. Short of a child-swapping disaster in hospital, women know for sure that their babies are their own, but fathers can never know 100% that that is the case without a formal DNA test. Many are sure because of their trust in their partner, but plenty will be unsure because of their partner's behaviour, or because they have been deliberately tricked.

I have received numerous messages on the subject of fathers and their children. Unfortunately, we do not have time to go through them all, but I will read out one or two that contain the points that many people have made and that link the serious issues of fathers not having access to their children to the issue of suicide. One person said:

“Dear Mr Davies,

A number of local fathers have been in touch with...our MP, as I have over the years, about the way fathers are routinely excluded from their children's lives or treated very differently from mothers.”

This was from a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone), and the person said that they were delighted that my hon. Friend had helped us to secure this debate. They continued:

“It's been proved time and again that children benefit from parenting by both their parents after separation but it is all too easy for false allegations to be made in an attempt to exclude fathers. There are rarely any repercussions and it can be many months before broken relationships with children can be mended—if ever.

Sadly, I know a number of men who have been driven to suicide as a result of their experience. Many fathers I meet at the local meeting I chair have mental health problems associated with separation and the difficulties they have experienced. And that's aside from other members of their families including of course grandfathers, of whom my husband is one.

I do hope something positive comes from the debate on Thursday”.

That is from Jenny Cuttriss, chair of the Families Need Fathers branch in Kettering.

Messages from other people on the subject include one saying:

“I have spent the last 4 years going through the Family Courts trying to maintain a decent relationship with my children. Over and over again my ex has been emotionally abusing my daughter and alienating me from her life... She has also maliciously claimed DV”—

domestic violence—

“and taken out a Non-Molestation order against me to try and stop me...having contact or being involved in my daughter’s life in retaliation to me getting my ex’s mother arrested for assault as she attacked me inside a court building.”

I had been aware of the stories about men’s chances when it comes to custody of their children for some time, so last February I asked the Ministry of Justice

“in what proportion of all cases heard in family courts where both the mother and father sought custody of their children the residence order was awarded to (a) the mother, (b) the father and (c) jointly”.

The answer from the then Minister was:

“The information...does not record details of the orders...such as which...parties were awarded the order. The information requested can only be obtained...at disproportionate cost.”—[*Official Report*, 24 February 2014; Vol. 576, c. 261W.]

However, from everything that I have heard, including from those who actually do the adjudicating in family courts, it seems that it takes something out of the ordinary for men to be awarded custody of their children, and it seems that the Ministry of Justice cannot say otherwise. The Equality Act 2010 does not seem to apply in this area.

If people think men have life easy, they need to think again when it comes to families. Women have an awful lot of control, and there is an inbuilt bias towards them when it comes to the very important job of raising children. It does not look as though that is going to change anytime soon, yet as someone wrote in a message to me,

“I really believe that if this system worked against women the way it works against men there would be hell on about it! Whenever there is any discussion of gender inequality the focus is solely on women being disadvantaged...and never about these inequities or those that you yourself raise or the many other areas where men are disadvantaged.

The fact that women usually take responsibility for childcare is often cited as an obstacle to women’s progression in their careers and...under representation in senior roles and I believe society’s perceptions and family law appear to be perpetuating this issue. Perhaps more equality in family law and wider society could prove a win-win for both sexes?”

That seemed to me a very good point.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for securing this important debate, but I feel that the evidence that he has just presented is anecdotal; there is no concrete evidence. He has given us just individual cases, and I am concerned that this discussion is straying down a slightly misogynistic route.

Philip Davies: I am sorry that the hon. Lady feels like that. Again, it is part of the politically correct culture that we have in this place that the moment anybody raises anything that affects men, people are accused of being misogynists. That is part of the problem; the hon. Lady is part of the reason why these issues never get debated. It is raised to try to deter anybody from ever

raising their head above the parapet. Many people in her constituency are affected by these issues. Perhaps she ought to go and consult some of her constituents about the problems they face in these areas. She might learn that it is right to raise these issues in Parliament. It is not misogynistic to raise the issues faced by some fathers in her constituency who are having trouble getting custody of or access to their children. If she does not think that that is a problem, she needs to get out more, frankly.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Philip Davies: I will.

Mike Gapes (in the Chair): Order. I say to hon. Members: please can we conduct this debate in a civil manner, without it degenerating into an argument of that kind? I ask all Members, please, can we get back to the subject of the debate?

Mr Walker wanted to intervene.

Mr Robin Walker: I did; thank you, Mr Gapes. My hon. Friend has never been afraid to put his head above the parapet. We may not all agree with every point that he makes, but he is raising important issues about family breakdown and suicide. Does he agree that reforms to create equal parental leave are important in fostering men’s role in the family? It is vital that the Government continue to pursue such initiatives as the family test to ensure that we take every opportunity to avoid the causes of family breakdown, which is a great problem for men as well as women.

Philip Davies: I agree with my hon. Friend that we need to do more to make sure that we have genuine equality, and not the “equality when it suits” agenda. We need to do as much as we can to help families stay together, wherever possible.

I will move on to talk about violence. In this House, we always seem to be hearing about strategies for combating violence against women and girls—in fact, there have been debates in the House on that very subject—so people might be forgiven for thinking that there is a special problem of violence against women and girls, and that it does not apply to men and boys. Some might think that far more women and girls than men and boys must be victims of violence, but the reality does not always match people’s concerns. It is a fact that in this country, men are much more likely than women to be victims of violent crime. The most recent biennial statistics from the Ministry of Justice on the representation of females and males in the criminal justice system confirmed that 1.4% of women interviewed in the crime survey reported being a victim of a violent crime, compared with 2.3% of men.

It is not just when it comes to violence generally that men do worse than women. Women accounted for around 30% of recorded homicide victims between 2006-07 and 2012-13, while men were the victims in the remaining 70% of cases. The picture emerging is that men and boys are far more likely than women and girls to be victims of violence and murder, but there is little or no mention of men and boys in our debates and

[Philip Davies]

strategies relating to females. I asked the Secretary of State for Education in Parliament last November

“what her policy is on educating children about violence against men and boys.”

I also asked

“what her policy is on educating boys about domestic violence against men and boys.”

The reply from the Minister for Schools was:

“Education has an important role to play in encouraging young people to build healthy relationships, and to identify those relationships which are unhealthy. Pupils may be taught about violence against men and boys in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education.”

I will just leave that there for people to reflect on.

There has been a lot of talk about the female victims of domestic violence. Figures from the Office for National Statistics show that 8.5% of women were victims of domestic violence in 2013-14, but so were 4.5% of men. That is equivalent to 1.4 million female victims and about 700,000 male victims of domestic violence. That figure refers not to partner abuse, but to all abuse in a domestic setting, including among families. When we look at the figures for partner abuse, we see that 5.9% of women and 2.9% of men report being victims. It is quite clear that around one in three victims is a man.

Andrew Percy: I wanted to make a speech, but I cannot because I have constituents visiting. My hon. Friend makes an important point about domestic violence towards men, but the fact remains that most domestic violence is towards women. Does he agree that although we should tackle domestic violence against men, International Men's Day is the perfect opportunity for men to stand up as part of the white ribbon campaign, for which I am pleased to be an ambassador, and say that we will never remain silent when other men commit violence against women? Although both issues are important, International Men's Day offers a particular opportunity for men to take a stand against other men who commit violence against women.

Philip Davies: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. All such violence is unacceptable, whether the perpetrator is male or female, and whether their victim is male or female. That is my point 100%. We should criticise them all equally.

There is evidence of under-reporting among male victims of domestic violence. In the crime survey for England and Wales, victims of partner abuse in the previous 12 months were asked who they had spoken to about the abuse that they experienced. A third of victims told someone in an official position about the abuse, but nearly twice as many women as men did. Perhaps more significantly, women were nearly three times more likely than men to tell the police. Despite what we might think from the focus on male perpetrators of domestic violence, there are also many female perpetrators. When anyone says “domestic violence”, the first thing that springs to most people's minds—including mine—is a poor woman being attacked by a bullying man. The figures show that it is much more complex than that, however, and that stereotypical image needs to be smashed if we are to tackle the problem as a whole.

Something else that needs to change is the reaction to violence against males, certainly when it comes to female-on-male violence. Some see it as almost a laughing matter, but nobody would laugh or turn a blind eye if a female was the victim. Anecdotal evidence suggests that male victims are treated differently from female victims by the police and other agencies. Considering the sheer numbers involved, male victims are given hardly any resources in comparison with female victims. Resources should be available to both male and female victims of domestic violence.

Issues such as the lack of places of refuge and the lack of support for men need to be addressed. The ManKind initiative, which works with men suffering from domestic violence or domestic abuse, says that it will run out of funding in January. It needs people to back it now so that it can provide the emotional support and practical information that male victims need. There are moving stories on its website from men who have suffered domestic violence. Although there seem to be more female victims of domestic abuse, each male victim is also a person, not a statistic, and it is only right and fair that help should be there for victims of both sexes.

I have gone on longer than I thought I would because I have taken so many interventions. The final issue I want to raise is sentencing, and how men are treated differently from women in our criminal justice system. I had a debate here in Westminster Hall three years ago, at which I had plenty of statistical evidence to show that women were treated more leniently than men, but that did not seem to be accepted at the time. Since then, progress has been made, because that fact is now broadly accepted. For far too long, those who peddled myths were able to get away with it because people simply repeated their mantra without question. Perhaps someone would like to try to explain why women should be treated favourably in the criminal justice system, but at least it is accepted that that is the case.

Since that debate, I have amassed much more evidence on the subject. I will not go through it all now, otherwise we would be here all day, but I want to put some of the key facts on the record. About 5% of the prison population at any time in recent history has been female, and the other 95% has been male, yet so much consternation, time and effort have been expended on the very small number of women in prison. For every category of offence, men are more likely than women to be sent to prison. That is a fact. I will give an example to illustrate that: 45% of men sentenced for an offence of violence against the person will be given a custodial sentence, compared with just 23% of women. Of those with 15 or more previous convictions, 39% of men but only 29% of women are sent to immediate custody. In Crown courts, which deal with the most serious offences, probation recommends immediate custody in 24% of cases for male offenders, and just 11% of cases for female offenders.

The average sentence length for an indictable offence is 17.7 months for men and 11.6 months for women. Men serve, on average, 52% of their prison sentence; women serve 46%. The average length of time that men spend in a prison cell each day is 14.1 hours, but that figure is 11.5 hours for women. The list is endless. I have spoken about domestic violence and have an additional fact on that subject: 3,750 male sentenced prisoners were victims of domestic violence, compared with 1,323 female prisoners.

There has been a rise in publicity surrounding female paedophiles. In a few high-profile cases recently, the sentences given to women were much more lenient than those that would be given to men. Just the other week, a babysitter who had sex with an 11-year-old boy escaped jail. There is no way on this planet that a male who had sex with an 11-year-old girl would have avoided prison—a point that the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children made about the case. There is no chance of that happening at all, and yet that was the sentence handed down.

The facts and figures that I have set out show that there are certainly questions to be answered about how men are treated in the justice system, compared with women. It seems that there is clear discrimination against men. If outcomes are all-important, what do people have to say about that? What will be done to deal with that balance? Well, the Under-Secretary of State for Women, Equalities and Family Justice has made an announcement. She has said that she wants fewer women in prison—not fewer people or fewer men. Yes, hon. Members heard me right: just fewer women. The Conservative manifesto read:

“We will improve the treatment of women offenders, exploring how new technology may enable more women...to serve their sentence in the community.”

Now, I am not somebody who supports prisoners, but where on earth is the equality in that? How does that fit in with the Equality Act 2010?

Lucy Allan: Does my hon. Friend therefore consider it desirable to have more women in the prison population, to achieve equality?

Philip Davies: Yes, I would like to see more people in prison, but that is a debate for another day. I would certainly like women who commit serious offences sent to prison in the way that men who commit serious offences are. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to make that point very clear.

Where is the equality in the current sentencing regime? It is just like the example I gave of female prisoners not having to wear a uniform. Somehow, the fact that hardly any women are in prison in the first place seems to be a problem, because it just is—because they are women. If there is to be true equality, this cannot be allowed to continue. We should be gender-blind when it comes to sentencing, if that is what the equality agenda is all about. If women commit serious crimes that are enough to warrant prison sentences, they should serve them in prison. We need to stop pussyfooting around when it comes to female offenders. A judge in my local Crown court recently said to a female offender:

“I have every sympathy for your children but the biggest burden they labour under is that their mother is a drunken thug”, before rightly sending her to prison. I could not have put it better myself.

There are so many other areas where men are being discriminated against, or are suffering more than women. Unfortunately, I cannot go through them all now. If they are not raised by other Members today, I hope we will have similar debates in the future, so that I can highlight the further problems faced by men. Some of the issues that I do not have time to get to include: male circumcision and its effects on some men; the fact that men suffer from anorexia and bulimia, too; the health

effects of men not seeking help early enough to prevent their conditions from getting worse; the fact that men tend to live shorter lives than women; and the fact that boys underachieve in school.

To conclude, this debate is a fantastic opportunity to deal with the issues that affect men. This Parliament should not be hijacked by those who constantly want to perpetuate myths about men and women that are simply not accurate. Some people cannot see common sense for the blur of their rose-tinted, politically correct glasses.

I hope the message goes out around the country that politicians are not all blind. I also hope that many of the men who contacted me today to say that they have never felt that anybody has reflected the problems that they face feel reassured that they have a voice in Parliament on all issues that affect them, just as much as everybody else has. For a parliamentary democracy to work, everybody in the country has to feel that somebody is speaking up for them. Today, lots of people feel that their voice, at last, is being heard.

2.13 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I am here to speak as the chair of the all-party group on suicide and self-harm prevention. I have spent a considerable amount of time examining the subject and raising its profile within Parliament.

Language does matter—being accurate about suicide and its legal status is incredibly important. If we continue to use the word “commit”, we continue to isolate families who have been bereaved by suicide and make those who take their own lives appear in a different class among those who have died. We continue to criminalise their actions, rather than examine what we can do and what responsibilities we can take to prevent further suicides.

I have talked to and worked with many families and individuals who have been bereaved by suicide, and all of them describe the same response—the isolation that they feel. Usually when a family suffers a bereavement, friends and neighbours are around them offering emotional and practical support. Someone with a family member who takes their own life is often isolated. People do not know what to say or do. Often the family are under police investigation because when there is such a death, the police’s first step is to look at whether that death is, in fact, a murder.

Many families have described to me the absolute shock of being investigated as though they were responsible for the death and may have murdered someone. People do not tend to cross police tape lines where the death has taken place, so they do not go to see the family. Often the police then leave because they have satisfied themselves that it is suicide, but they do not come back and explain to the family, “You are no longer under investigation, and by the way, this is where you might actually get some help and support.” One of the most important things that families need in those first few hours is to know, “What do I do? How do I deal with this?” They need to know how to respond to something that has left them shocked and asking, “Why? Why didn’t I notice? What could I have done to stop this? What did I miss?”

Lucy Allan: I thank the hon. Lady for her very important remarks. She is now three minutes into her speech and she has not mentioned International Men's Day. Is she going to mention male suicide and International Men's Day?

Mrs Moon: As I explained at the beginning of my speech, I am speaking on behalf of the all-party group on suicide and self-harm prevention. I will continue to do so.

We have to look at how we support families, including families of men who die by suicide—I concede that men are three times more likely to die by suicide than women. How do we support families and communities? For those who wish to understand how we can support those families, I recommend the excellent work of Sharon Macdonald at the University of Manchester.

We also have to look at what we are doing on suicide prevention planning in the UK. The all-party group looked at the Government's suicide prevention plan prior to its implementation and then again following the reorganisation of health in the UK. The result was quite shocking, because the new prevention plan, which was very good in many respects and set out good guidelines, did not require local authorities and health authorities to report back to the Department of Health. We had no overall picture of what was happening across the country, so the all-party group went out and surveyed to find out what was going on.

We found that 30% of local authorities did no suicide audit work at all, so they did not know what was happening. They did not know how many men or women were taking their own life locally. Also, 30% of local authorities did not have a suicide prevention action plan; they were doing nothing to prevent the suicide of men or women across their local authority area. More worryingly, 40% of local authorities did not have a multi-agency suicide prevention group.

It is very important that we recognise that suicide is not the responsibility of one Department. It is not simply the responsibility of the Department of Health. In fact, the most active department in dealing with suicide is often the police. They are involved when people make unsuccessful early attempts. It is more likely that the police will know of someone who is about to take their life or who has been at risk in the past than any other agency.

Most suicides have never been anywhere near our mental health services, and it is important that we know what is happening locally. We need to ensure that local authorities' multi-agency suicide prevention groups are made up of all agencies, including the local authority, the health agencies, the police and the third sector organisations that are often doing critical work on the ground—I cannot say enough about the fantastic support that we all receive every day from the Samaritans in our constituencies who spend their time tirelessly working with people who are very fragile and at high risk of suicide. Groups such as CALM, which the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) said has given him so much help ahead of today's debate, are doing similar work. Those third sector organisations are made up of volunteers, many of whom have been affected by suicide and wish to move services forward so that further deaths can be averted.

It is vital that coroners engage with all their partners to prevent future deaths and to ensure that we are aware of where clusters may be beginning to develop, whether they are clusters within an age group, within an occupational group or within a school or factory. Social contagion is a big risk, and it is another example of why words matter. I have seen newspaper stories saying things such as, "Well, it's just what we do around here." If we give permission for suicide to be an acceptable way of dealing with the problems and difficulties of life, there is a risk of social contagion, with other people thinking, "That person was like me. If they can take their own life, I can, too." That is a huge risk that we need to address. Social contagion is a great risk in closed institutions such as prisons, schools or factories, so we need to be aware of the importance of emotional education and language when people are faced with suicide.

I dread to say it, but the one point on which I agree with the hon. Gentleman is that the emotional education that we give to young men in this country is very poor. No matter how modern and how diverse a society we become, we still seem to educate our children to feel that they have to man up and be strong, and that they cannot talk about emotions. Some organisations, particularly sports organisations, have done fantastic work on suicide prevention.

I also stress the importance of longitudinal research on suicide and self-harm prevention. In the past I was fortunate to work with excellent Health Ministers, the former right hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, Paul Burstow, and the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), who were both very supportive of suicide prevention work. If we are to have longitudinal studies of suicide and self-harm, the researchers dedicated to those subjects need to know that they will have the money to continue and pursue their work so that we have a clear idea of the numbers of deaths and whether those numbers are increasing or decreasing.

Other Members want to speak, so I will make a final comment. The all-party group on suicide and self-harm prevention, in association with the all-party group on mental health, will be having a meeting in February, which I hope the Minister will attend. A psychiatrist from my constituency will be coming up to talk about mental health triaging so that people at risk of mental health crisis can go to any agency, including their social worker or general practitioner, and receive help, advice and support through the triaging system, so that no one leaves being told that there is an appointment in six months' time. We need to be on top of this. People are dying unnecessarily.

2.24 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) on securing this important debate. He never fails to challenge the status quo, and he never fails to speak without fear or favour, for which I commend him, but International Men's Day is also about promoting gender equality—that is one of its stated objectives. Striving for equality is not a competition between men and women. Women face discrimination on a daily basis—that is not a myth. He does not do his case much good by attempting to belittle that discrimination.

The number of men who are currently sitting as MPs is greater than the number of women who have ever been elected as Members of Parliament—that is a shocking fact. It is a great privilege to follow the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), who has done more than anyone else to press for change on suicide, which affects more men than women. I thank the Samaritans and CALM for their excellent briefings, which they sent to us all. If we had had more women like her, and others, in this place over the past 100 years, perhaps more of the issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley would have been better debated and more fully addressed, because such issues are often picked up by women Members of Parliament.

International Men's Day is not about pitching men against women; it is about the health of men and boys, the promotion of gender equality, positive male role models and men's contribution to family life and their children's lives. I have the privilege of living in a three-generation family, and women are in the minority, but we have fantastic support from the male members of our family to achieve the most that we can as women. Gender stereotypes are good for no one, and International Men's Day should be an opportunity to address those stereotypes.

Suicides are a tragic waste of life, and it is important that we have strong policies to address suicide. Ahead of today's debate I considered the driving force behind those suicides. The hon. Member for Bridgend touched on some of the issues that she has dealt with, and I am particularly interested in her comments about the expectations that we put on male members of our families and communities. I am also concerned about the impact of relationship breakdown and loneliness, which can be felt strongly by men, particularly as they get older. I will focus on that and on how we might start to address some of the problems that men have in trying to play a full role in all aspects of their community and in all aspects of life, as my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley mentioned.

Too many fathers lose contact with their children after an adult relationship breaks down, and too many fathers still find it difficult to play a full role in their children's lives even if their adult relationship is still intact. When there is domestic violence or there are concerns about a child's welfare, it is clearly right that a parent's role in their children's lives might be curtailed. However, there is clear evidence that, in day-to-day life, we could be doing far more to support the role of fathers in their children's lives and to challenge the continuing gender stereotyping that it is in some way unacceptable for men to take up a more active role in their children's lives. That stereotype exists despite the considerable improvements that this Government, and the coalition Government before them, have made in introducing support so that we can all have a more balanced approach to life, particularly through parental leave and flexible working. The fact is that men still find it difficult to access such policies.

Parental leave is a particular case in point. In the UK, it is felt there is an attitude of frowning on men taking up parental leave, and 41% of men have said that that is one of the biggest barriers to their taking up their legitimate and legal entitlement to it. I would be interested to hear the Minister's comments on that, because it is not just a problem faced by the UK. In the Czech Republic, where parental leave legislation is the same for men and

women, men still take up a fraction of their entitlement. The Scandinavian countries are often held up as paragons of virtues when it comes to family policy, but Finland has less than 9% uptake of parental leave by fathers. This is probably a Europe-wide problem—indeed, perhaps a global phenomenon.

How can we ensure that men have access to parental leave, which can give them an important role in their children's lives in the early days? There is undeniable evidence from countries that encourage parental leave, such as Germany, that if a father has an active role in a child's life before the age of five, it can encourage, support and nurture a stronger lifelong relationship between them. That is important, and we need to understand it. We have the policy in place; how do we make it work for men?

I applaud the Government for the work that they have done to ensure that the opportunity to request flexible working is now open to everybody, yet dads are twice as likely to have their requests for flexible working rejected by employers. Just under one fifth of fathers applying for flexible working are turned down. However, men are also less likely to apply for flexible working in the first place, with just 17% of fathers requesting flexible working compared with 28% of mothers.

Yes, women still face all sorts of impediments to their progress in the workplace, but men face barriers too, perhaps due to inflexibility within Government structures or expectations that men should be the main breadwinner. We must address such issues to ensure not only that men can play a full role in their sons' and daughters' lives but that women too can make the progress they need to.

One main protected characteristic under the Equalities Act 2010 is gender, regardless of sex. I point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley that the first report by my Committee, the Women and Equalities Committee, was on transgender, an issue that affects men and women, and on the inadequacies of policies and processes in that area. We must ensure that gender is never used as the basis for discrimination. International Men's Day does not dilute the issues that women face, including discrimination and gender-based violence. It is an opportunity to challenge all gender stereotypes, which are not good for any of us, and to support men to speak out, as women often speak out, on behalf not only of women but of men.

2.33 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gapes. I was not going to speak in this debate, but I felt moved to do so by events that have occurred in York over the last few days. It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), who raised many issues, and my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), who has expertise in the subject. I thank the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) for securing this debate, which is important, although I do not concur with many of the comments that he made. I like to think that we debate based on evidence; anecdotal comments often do not add to debate. However, it is an important debate, so I thank him for securing it.

It is important that we recognise the needs of men and the challenges they face in our communities. Just last week, I had the pleasure of meeting with a group of

[*Rachael Maskell*]

men and Age UK to highlight the problem of isolation for men in later life and to consider establishing a men's shed—a safe place where men can gather to discuss issues—in York. A countrywide project has been successful, giving men a space to talk about the challenges they face, particularly health challenges, of which mental health is obviously one.

I rose to speak in this debate because there has been a big debate in York about International Men's Day and whether we should recognise it. In fact, as has unfortunately reached national headlines, the university was going ahead with a programme for today but has withdrawn from engagement with the process. I say that with regret; the decision comes on the back of a petition from 200 students saying that they did not think the day should be recognised. The university is committed to equality and to progressing the equality agenda, and two male students lost their lives just before I took office, so I think it is important that the university speaks out on the issues and the services available.

What has not been reflected in this debate is the necessity of recognising separately the importance of raising women's issues. I am not saying that men's issues and women's issues are mutually exclusive, just that it is important to recognise ongoing women's issues, because there is huge inequality across our society. However, I recognise that there are some areas of inequality for men, which is why this debate is important.

Suicide rates across our country are far too high. One person taking their own life is too many, and the fact that in 2013 6,233 people felt that they could not carry on living—a 4% rise on the previous year—means that we have much work to do. As I was researching for this debate, I found, shockingly, that the male suicide rate in my own city, York, is the fourth highest in England, behind Darlington, County Durham and Calderdale. That is worrying. Those places are in the north-east and Yorkshire, so there is a geographical issue to address as well, and behind that we might want to consider some of the causes of suicide, because unless we face up to the challenges as other people are and use this place to address the causes of suicide, we will never change those shocking statistics.

Suicide in York has risen to its highest level: 22 people lost their life in 2013. Even since I have taken office, people have taken their life. Looking at the causes, we know that the last few years have been particularly challenging for many in terms of personal debt, austerity and unemployment, which can have an impact on why people feel that they can no longer go on. We know that people are struggling with mental health challenges and facing changes, whether a loss of or reduction in benefits or other factors, that result in serious life changes or financial challenges to their family.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): I am interested by that suggestion. All sorts of things have been examined relatively recently, but can the hon. Lady explain why the suicide rate is less likely to decrease for men than for women?

Rachael Maskell: That is why the research to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend referred is so important. There are so many causes of suicide that we need to understand. If we look at Greece and the

impact of the recession there, we see that male suicide rates have increased tenfold. It is a serious issue. Some serious research has been done, but more needs to be done about the shape of our economy and the impact it has on personal life and the challenges that people face as a result.

In addition to those very difficult statistics, with which we all wrestle, one thing that I want to highlight is the services available to support people with mental health challenges. We know that those services are currently overwhelmed by demand. I look at York Mind—a fantastic organisation with great leadership. In just the last three years, demand for its services has doubled, from 650 people three years ago to 1,300 this year. We are seeing increasing demands on not-for-profit organisations, which always find it a challenge to know where their next pennies or their next resources are coming from. If we are going to take a strategic approach, we need to ensure that the infrastructure bodies are well resourced to deal with the issues, but of course it is always important to get upstream and address the causes.

In York, we have been faced with another challenge, which is the closure of Bootham Park hospital. It was our mental health hospital in York, but it was closed because of the suicide risk the old building, which was constructed in the 18th century, presented, which had not been addressed. To reduce the risk to individuals the hospital was closed, but that created a new risk because people are scattered perhaps more than 50 miles away from the services they need. Some of them have to go as far away as Harrogate to reach a place of safety; having a crisis in the back of an ambulance is not appropriate at all. It is really important that facilities are in the right place, so that people can access them at their time of need.

One of the consequences of the closure of Bootham Park hospital is that there has been an investment in the street triage team. That is why I very much concur with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend. The street triage team is there at the scene, at the earliest possible point of intervention. None the less, overall risk has increased because there are no facilities locally for somebody then to go to. The insecurity that that causes individuals is a real concern.

Lead clinicians who were working at Bootham Park hospital have highlighted the risk factors of closure, and that is why my continual plea is that we look at the infrastructure and the interrelationship between the not-for-profit organisations, the health service and the other agencies when we are addressing the issues associated with suicide, because we have a responsibility—I would say an obligation—to ensure that those organisations are working seamlessly together. If we have not got those things right, it is also our responsibility if someone is pushed to the point of taking their life.

2.42 pm

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): I start this afternoon by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) on securing this historic debate. This is the first time ever that International Men's Day has been marked by a debate in this Parliament. I also thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), as well as the hon. Members for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) and for York Central (Rachael Maskell), for bringing their individual perspectives to this debate.

Under the International Men's Day heading, the debate gives us an opportunity to consider a range of issues that particularly affect men, but in my opinion none is more worrying than male suicide, so I will restrict my remarks today to that issue. The subject is all too often swept under the carpet. It was said at the outset of this debate that one of the problems facing us today is underachievement by white working-class boys from the north of England. Well, as a white working-class lad from the north of England, I am very proud to take part in this debate. Indeed, as a member of the Backbench Business Committee, I was pleased to play a very small part in granting this debate.

I listened with interest to the comments about why the debate is being held here in Westminster Hall rather than on the Floor of the House. However, as right hon. and hon. Members will be aware from the Order Paper, two debates have been scheduled for the Floor of the House this afternoon, one on the forthcoming Paris conference on climate change and the other on the new cancer strategy. It was felt that those debates needed to take place on the Floor of the House. Personally, I would have liked to see this debate take place on the Floor of the House as well, but we are where we are. It was also felt that we should try to hold this debate on International Men's Day itself if at all possible, which is what we have achieved today.

As I say, I will try to restrict my remarks to the subject of male suicide. It is a subject that no one really wants to talk about.

Mrs Moon: To illustrate how important this debate is, let me tell the House that the first piece of evidence from professionals that the all-party group on suicide and self-harm prevention took was from a suicide prevention worker in London, who was also a mental health worker, and he said, "If I call a meeting to discuss mental health problems, I can fill a room. If I call a meeting to discuss suicide, I am there on my own." That says everything. I thank everyone who is here today to take part in this debate for generating the conversation that is so vital.

Mr Nuttall: I am very grateful for that intervention, because that vignette highlights a lot of the problems. The mere fact that we are holding this debate—it may not be in the main Chamber, but it is here in Westminster Hall—and are able to discuss the subject will hopefully generate some wider debate outside Parliament. It might make it just that little bit easier for the debate to take place in wider society.

As I was saying, I approached the debate today with some trepidation, because, as has just been amply demonstrated by the hon. Lady, who is chair of the all-party group on suicide and self-harm prevention, many organisations and people seem to be looking at this problem—governmental bodies, other public sector bodies, charities in the independent sector and academics—and all have greater experience than I have, but I have looked at it with fresh eyes. Part of the reason why I am here today is that I am staggered by the intransigence of the problem. Clearly, there are many people looking at it, but the reality is that the number of male suicides has remained pretty stubborn over decades. This is not a party political point. It does not matter whether there was a Conservative Government under Mrs Thatcher or a Labour Government under Mr Blair; the numbers

for male suicide have stayed pretty much the same. That made me think that there is something serious going on here that is wider than just the typical argument about party politics.

I pay tribute to the charity CALM—the Campaign Against Living Miserably—because it has provided some helpful briefing and figures for this afternoon's debate. CALM says that in 2014 more than three quarters—76%—of suicides were men. That is 4,623 deaths. It is worth repeating that suicide is the biggest single killer of men under the age of 45. For deaths registered in 2013, the last year for which the Office for National Statistics has figures, my own region—the north-west of England, in which my constituency is situated—had a male suicide rate of 21.2. That is the second highest rate in the country, second only to the north-east. The experts will be aware that the rates are invariably quoted in the statistics as a rate per 100,000 of population, so that is 21 people out of every 100,000. As always with these statistics, there is a host of caveats and technical details that could be explored, but I do not think we should let the minutiae obscure the big picture, which is that while the suicide rate in the north-west among men was 21.2, the rate among females was 6.3. A rate of 21 against a rate of 6 is a big difference indeed.

Liz McInnes: I thank the hon. Gentleman for talking so sensitively about this issue. I, too, am greatly concerned about male suicide, and that is why I came to this debate. He speaks very knowledgeably about the rates of male suicide, but is he aware that young gay men are six times more likely to take their own life than their straight male counterparts?

Mr Nuttall: I have heard that statistic twice today, the first time in the Chamber, when the shadow Leader of the House made that point. I do not know whether the statistic is correct, but I am prepared to accept what the hon. Lady and the shadow Leader of the House say. I am sure that of those more than 4,000 deaths, some were gay men and some were young gay men. That may well be one of the contributing factors.

The charity CALM has set out four areas where it thinks action should be taken. First, and quite understandably, it states that there is a need for timely and accurate information. That could be applied to many things across Government. It always amazes me how long it takes for what, on the face of it, are fairly simply statistics to be collated and reach the public domain. Secondly, and again understandably, CALM says that we need to understand the reasons why people take their own life, because there is a strong element of contagion, which the hon. Member for Bridgend mentioned. Thirdly, CALM wants all local authorities to develop and implement a suicide prevention plan, and says that those that do not should be named. Fourthly, it states that if national and local suicide prevention plans are to be effective, there must be some accountability—there is no point having a plan unless something is done if that plan is not adhered to.

It is worth noting that in its own way, CALM has tried to give the issue some publicity through social media and the #BiggerIssues campaign, which is an advertising campaign to draw attention to the fact that as a society we tend to pay an inordinate amount of attention to perhaps relatively trivial topics, such as the

[*Mr Nuttall*]

weather and the sort of coffee we are drinking, rather than to male suicide, which is a real problem in society. The campaign has created digital posters featuring the hashtag #BiggerIssues, which were posted across the UK. Those posters changed every two hours to reflect the fact that every two hours, a man takes his own life. The campaign was run in association with the men's grooming brand Lynx, and I think we should pay tribute to whoever it was who took that brave decision to link a men's grooming product with the campaign. Others perhaps looked at it and thought, "The issue is a bit too touchy for us. We'll leave that one alone." Whoever was involved at Lynx, we should publicly thank them for being able to associate their brand with that particular campaign.

I was surprised to find that this phenomenon is not unique to this country. Right across the world and in almost every country, there is the same stark difference in the suicide rates. Lithuania, Russia, Japan, Hungary, Finland—almost everywhere we look, the picture is the same: male suicides considerably outnumber female suicides. Apparently that is not the case in China. I am not an academic; I have not spent time looking into this, but it seems to me there may be something in the fact that in one country, China, it is the other way around that may in years to come offer a solution to the problem.

We are a Parliament with different political parties, and for our own reasons we try to make party political points. When I have previously raised this issue, people immediately say, "Of course, it's all the Government's fault. The fact that there are lots of men committing suicide is all your Government's fault, because you are making cuts to public services and you are cutting the NHS"—which is not true; more money is being spent on the NHS than ever before, so that argument immediately falls. Those arguments are easy to make. It is simple to throw out that it is all the Conservatives' fault, but as I will demonstrate, the statistics—the facts—from the Office for National Statistics simply do not bear out that argument.

In the 1980s, under the Conservatives, the number of male suicides each year was somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000. It did vary a little bit—it got down as low as 4,066 in 1982 and it went up to 4,370 in 1987—but every year it was between 4,000 and 5,000. Between 1997 and 2010, under the Labour Government, the number of male suicides was somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000. Again, it varied—some years it was down, and some years it was up—but every year it was somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000. What is noticeable is that the gap between male and female suicide rates has been increasing steadily in almost every single year since 1981. At the start of this range of statistics, the male rate was a bit less than double the female rate—about 1.78 male suicides for every female suicide, I think.

Mrs Moon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Nuttall: I certainly will, but I will come back to my point, because I have not quite finished it.

Mrs Moon: This gets terribly technical. If I can explain, suicide is recorded under an international definition. To get the statistics, researchers are often required to go

into coroners' records and read individual narrative verdicts. The records therefore are slightly skewed; they are indicative, rather than totally accurate, because there is a difference between a clear suicide verdict that says that a death was a suicide and a narrative verdict that would need to mention intent. We have a problem with the accuracy of our recording. I thought it was important to clarify that.

Mr Nuttall: I am grateful for that. I think I mentioned that there is a host of caveats and technical details. I spent some time looking at the statistics and working out how they had been arrived at. As the hon. Lady rightly says, there are a number of difficult issues for researchers that could skew the figures, but whatever difficulties there might be, they apply equally to males and females and would not affect the overall point that I am making here which is that at the beginning of the 1980s, the difference was about double, and today it is about treble. It has gone from a ratio of about 2:1 to about 3:1 today. I do not think this change can simply be put down to Government policy. It was happening under a Conservative Government and continued to happen for 13 years under Labour Governments.

[*ANDREW ROSINDELL in the Chair*]

Public Health England, which produces a raft of figures on this subject, states:

"Suicide often comes at the end point of a complex history of risk factors and distressing events."

With other right hon. and hon. Members this afternoon, I pay tribute to the Samaritans, which is perhaps the best known charity in this field for its work in trying to help and to prevent men and women who are feeling depressed from taking their own life. In its review of 2012, the Samaritans found that men from working-class backgrounds were at a higher risk of suicide. The Samaritans stated that suicidal behaviour results from a complex interaction of numerous factors, including bereavement, divorce, unemployment and the historical culture of masculinity. It is a huge and complex subject. Many people will be grateful that we have highlighted some of the issues involved.

I hope that people who are feeling depressed—there are often many reasons and not just one—feel that they can tell someone about their worries. One thing we can all agree on, from whichever political viewpoint we approach the subject, is that suicide—taking one's own life—is never the right answer. I hope the debate today will help break down the stigma that prevents many men from seeking the help they need.

3.2 pm

Amanda Solloway (Derby North) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) for securing this important debate, especially as it is on International Men's Day. We should have a proper discussion about the issues and how they affect so many people in the UK. It is right to talk about male suicide rates and domestic abuse among boys and men. They are key issues that have a massive effect on our society. We simply cannot afford to ignore them.

I want to focus on male suicide. I have spoken many times about my personal experience of male suicide. The loss of my cousin, who tragically took his life at the

age of 36, has had a profound effect on my family, giving us first-hand experience of the heartbreak that such an event can bring. The signs were there. He was trying to get help, but it just did not happen quickly enough. Sadly, his case is not unique.

In the UK, 13 men take their life each day. The male suicide rate across the world is at a 14-year high, and the use of antidepressants has increased five times since 1991. Having spoken to my right hon. Friend the Minister about these issues several times, I know how committed he is to the cause. We have made inroads towards helping people get the support they need, but I am sure all Members will agree that we need to do more.

Ending the stigma surrounding mental health issues has to be a priority for each gender, but society tells men that it is okay not to show their emotions, and we really need to change that to enable the male population at all ages to talk about their issues. We need to show that that is a strength and not a weakness. From the age of about nine or 10, boys are told to “man up”, be strong, and keep their feelings to themselves. They are told they can bottle things up, which they do, because they are scared of the banter. That is why suicide is the biggest killer of men under 50, and why 40% of men between the age of 18 and 45 have thought about suicide.

Organisations such as the Samaritans do great work to help people suffering from depression, but men need to feel they can contact them in the first place by first admitting that they have a problem. Of course, warning signs can and should be seen long before the thought of suicide arises. By the time young men consider suicide, the damage has often already been done. We need to tackle the issue in schools and colleges, at work and at home, and in sports clubs and pubs up and down the country. We need to speak directly to schools, children and parents. We need to be honest and say that it is okay for boys of any age to talk about their feelings, and we need to do it now. That is why this debate is so important today.

When society tells men not to talk about their issues, we should lead the way and tell them that it is all right to talk about them. I say this to colleagues: when you are down the pub tonight, ask a mate how he is doing—how he is really doing. When your son comes home from school and says he is fine, consider what that really means. If a friend is acting out of character, that could be an early warning sign of depression. This is serious. They might not tell you, but it will matter that you have asked. Tiny steps will make a difference. We know that we need to talk about this issue more, so I welcome this debate. The more we can talk about this and make sure that mental health is treated with the same importance as physical health, the better.

Issues such as male suicide rates and male domestic abuse are so important. I wanted to focus on male suicides, but we all have a responsibility to keep these issues high on the agenda, and we must work together to look out for our male population.

3.7 pm

Dr Paul Monaghan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Rosindell, for the opportunity to consider the important issue of suicide, particularly male suicide. I represent the Scottish National party in this debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for Shipley

(Philip Davies) on winning this debate, although I must admit that I found many of his remarks unrelated to its title.

I am certain that the lives of all of us here—men and women—will have been touched by a suicide in our family, circle of friends or wider social network; mine certainly has. The reasons why people are driven to take their lives are, of course, both complex and intensely personal. However, depression, alcohol and drug misuse, unemployment, family and relationship problems including divorce, social isolation, wealth inequality, social disadvantage and low self-esteem are identified as key triggers for male suicide. Sadly, those with severe mental illness remain at the highest risk of suicide, and, among them, those who refuse or are declined medical treatment are at a higher risk still and are particularly vulnerable.

In addition to health issues, social and economic factors influence people to take their life. I have alluded to wealth inequality; we know that men in mid-life from low-income backgrounds are consistently identified as the highest-risk group. In England, Northern Ireland and Scotland, the male suicide rate is approximately 3.5 times higher than the female rate; in Wales, it is approximately 4.5 times higher.

In September 2012, the UK Government published a report entitled “Suicide prevention strategy for England”, which identified the factors influencing increases in suicide rates in England. The report made it clear that periods of unemployment and severe economic problems adversely affect the mental health of the population and can be associated with higher rates of suicide. The report was followed up in 2014, when a study again found an association between those areas of England worst affected by unemployment and those with an increased prevalence of suicide. Between 2008 and 2010, there were approximately 800 more suicides among men, and 155 more among women, than might have been expected based on an analysis of historical trends.

Like me, my colleagues in the Scottish Government are deeply concerned about suicide rates, and they have put in place a suicide prevention strategy clearly setting out the actions they are taking further to reduce suicide in Scotland. The statistics on suicide in Scotland indicate a downward trend, even in male suicide rates, so the strategy is achieving outcomes that run counter to the general trend in the UK as a whole.

The Scottish Government strategy has five key themes: responding to people in distress; talking about suicide; improving NHS Scotland’s response to suicide; further developing the evidence base; and supporting a broad programme of change and improvement. In developing those themes, the Scottish Government have acknowledged that activities with a broader focus can effectively contribute to reducing overall suicide rates. That broader focus includes building personal resilience, and promoting mental and emotional wellbeing in schools and among the general population; working to reduce inequality, discrimination and stigma; promoting high-quality early years services; and working to eradicate poverty. All of that work is undertaken in the context of enhanced vigilance in respect of improving mental health, supporting people who experience mental illness and, of course, preventing suicide.

The Scottish Government’s original suicide prevention target was to reduce the suicide rate by 20% by 2013. Since 2002, when the target was originally set as part

[Dr Paul Monaghan]

of the “Choose Life” strategy and action plan, we have seen an 18% reduction in the suicide rate. Between 2009 and 2012, Scotland saw the lowest number of suicides since the early 1990s. That reduction came at a time when many other jurisdictions were mapping increases.

Nevertheless, some trends are comparable with those in the UK as a whole. Taking probable suicide figures for 2011 and 2012 together, we find that almost three quarters of those who died in Scotland were male. That gender imbalance has been broadly consistent for much of the last 10 years. However, the major element in the 18% reduction in the suicide rate since 2000 has been the reduction in male suicides.

The Scottish Government’s suicide prevention strategy has now established a revised target, with the aim of reducing the suicide rate by a further 10% by 2020. That mirrors the global target established by the World Health Organisation. The strategy focuses on suicide prevention activities in communities and public services to enable people to live longer, healthier lives, which is one of the Scottish Government’s national outcomes. The strategy makes manifest the determined commitment of the Government of my country to continue the downward trend in the suicide rate, and to make progress towards meeting the WHO target.

International Men’s Day focuses on life issues, including the suicide rate, violence against men and boys, education and parenting. Those involved in International Men’s Day have stated:

“When 13 a men a day in the UK are dying from suicide, it is essential that everyone in positions of power, trust and influence does everything they can to help men talk about the issues that affect them.”

International Men’s Day supports the campaign for improved outcomes led by the Campaign Against Living Miserably, which also seeks to raise awareness of male suicide. CALM aims to encourage people to talk about male suicide in the hope that that will decrease the number of male deaths attributable to suicide across the UK. To the campaign’s great credit, its helpline receives more than 5,000 calls per month from individuals seeking advice and support. Some 80% of those calls are from men. The campaign has stated:

“It’s our belief that all of us at one time or another, regardless of gender, will hit a crisis and we could all do with specialist help when things go wrong.”

Those are wise words.

CALM has released a parliamentary briefing highlighting the adverse impact of the UK Government’s work capability assessments on suicide rates. It notes that each suicide costs an estimated £1.7 million, in addition, of course, to the much more obvious catastrophic emotional and social impact of a life being lost.

The *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* recently found that suicide was associated with the UK Government’s work capability assessment programme. The research found that for every additional 10,000 people subjected to work capability assessments, there was an association with an additional six suicides, 2,700 cases of reported mental health problems and an additional 7,020 prescriptions for antidepressants. That adds up to an additional 590 suicides, 279,000 cases of mental

health problems and 725,000 additional prescriptions for antidepressants, based on current claim levels. Those figures are for England alone. The researchers noted:

“Our study provides evidence that the policy in England of reassessing the eligibility of benefit recipients using the WCA may have unintended...consequences for population mental health”.

Some 590 suicides at £1.7 million comes to more than £1 billion. We must, of course, add to that figure the cost of treating and supporting almost 300,000 people struggling with mental health problems, and of providing almost 750,000 prescriptions for antidepressants. Again, those figures are for England alone. Significant as the financial costs are, however, they fade into insignificance when compared with the human cost of lives lost, opportunities wasted and families destroyed by suicide.

It seems clear, therefore, that alongside health and economic and social status, UK Government policy directly contributes to the prevalence of suicide and imposes enormous financial pressures on public services already struggling to cope with significant budget cuts. Work capability assessments and the Work programme are having a significant negative effect on mental health. Reports repeatedly highlight the “heart-sink” felt when people receive a request from authorities to apply for jobs they are unlikely to win or hear anything back about. They also highlight the fact that the stressful targets enforced by jobcentres contribute to a lack of self-worth. Work capability assessments exacerbate feelings of failure and are increasingly cited as significant factors in individuals’ decisions to attempt suicide. When individuals are already vulnerable, likely to be suffering from low self-esteem, and experiencing chronic stress relating to the need to provide for their family, work capability assessments contribute nothing positive.

It is clear that more men than women take their life. Nevertheless, austerity and its mental health impacts are felt just as strongly by women and by those left behind in society. I suggest that the Minister take up the challenge of tackling the socioeconomic inequalities in society, and recognise that social exclusion is a significant risk indicator of suicide. I would like the UK Government to pay attention to the needs of boys, teenagers and young men to prevent vulnerability in later years. Perhaps more straightforwardly, I would like them to scrap the work capability assessment, which is proving far too costly, in terms of the human life and finance wasted.

Suicide must not be thought of as an issue that solely affects men, just because the number of deaths is higher among them. Any campaign targeting suicide must focus on the entire population.

3.19 pm

Lucy Allan (Telford) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan) for his thoughtful comments. I suggest that he, too, strayed somewhat off the topic in talking about the work capability assessment, because today we are talking about International Men’s Day as well as male suicide. I particularly want to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), who adopted a measured and helpful tone. The issue is sensitive, and it is helpful to address it in a calm and measured way, as the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) also did.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) for securing the debate. He worked hard to do that, and International Men's Day is a day when we should celebrate male role models and their contribution to society and family. It is also an opportunity for us to work towards improving gender relations. I do not agree with many things that my hon. Friend said. In particular, I do not agree with him on what he described as an obsession with increasing the number of women in Parliament. In fact, I consider that a noble cause, and I am passionate about it. Nor do I agree that equality means putting more women in prison. We may have to differ on that one.

Mr Nuttall: I am sure that my hon. Friend is capable of speaking for himself, but I think he said that he wanted to be sure that more women who were convicted of serious offences went to prison.

Lucy Allan: I am sure that my hon. Friend is correct, and I apologise if I misunderstood the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley.

I declare an interest because, like many of those present, I have many men in my life. I have a partner, a father, a son and brothers. It is the supportive men in all our lives who enable us to do what we do, and to be the best we can be at it. I wanted to take part in the debate because I believe that I should speak for all the people whom I represent. We have 191 women in Parliament, representing men and women. It is right that we should talk about issues that affect the people we represent. Too often we polarise the gender debate to depict men as aggressors and women as victims. Many women who, like me, have a passion for gender equality and who identify as feminists feel deeply uncomfortable about the increasingly negative caricatures and gender stereotyping of men. My son said to me, "I don't like feminists, mum." I said, "Oh, why's that?" "Well, they don't like men, do they?"

It is wrong to blame today's men for the patriarchal society of yesterday. It does not enhance equality for women to antagonise and create hostility towards men. We should all bring up our boys and girls to believe in equality for all; but certainly we should not bring up our boys to be ashamed of their sex. For me equality is not about forcing men to wear a white ribbon. My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), who has left the Chamber, mentioned that campaign, which is wonderful, but men do not need to be shamed about the violence of other men towards women, and to demonstrate their shame with a badge. Nor is equality about forcing an elder statesman of this House—a man from a different era—to say the word "tampon" in the Chamber. Equality is always about having the same chances in life, and that is what today should be about.

I spent last Friday evening on patrol in Telford with police. We were talking about violence against men. We had just attended a domestic violence incident and I asked about the incidence of domestic violence against men. I was told that it is rarely reported and that the police are fully aware that the figures skew reality, particularly in relation to those under 30. There are many reasons why men under 30 would never admit to their girlfriend having smacked them or given them a shove; we do not talk about it. Today is an opportunity to focus on all the issues that adversely affect the life chances of men and boys and their ability to be the best

that they can be. The cause of extraordinarily high rates of male suicide is simply that men feel unable to vocalise their emotions. They bury them. Should society, or indeed Parliament, say that it is not appropriate to discuss those issues? I say not.

In my constituency, a particular area of concern is the underachievement of boys at school. By any measure of attainment, boys from disadvantaged socioeconomic groups perform less well at school. Only 28% of white boys on free school meals in Telford achieved five A to C GCSEs, whereas girls from a similar background were doing significantly better. More boys than girls experience behavioural difficulties; they have more exclusions from school and more admissions to pupil referral units. I used to be involved in a pupil referral unit, and there were very few girls there. Boys then start to self-identify with a bad boy image. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, with all that goes with it—the anger, frustration and self-harming—and then their life chances are kind of set in stone. We see that more young men are engaging with the criminal justice system, are in the prison population, or are in gangs and involved in knife crime. Then we wonder why those same young men have violent relationships with the women in their life.

It is deeply simplistic to characterise men as either violent or chauvinistic. Most men are neither. I did not come to Parliament to talk only about women's issues, and I definitely did not want to find I could not talk about issues of fundamental importance to my constituents. We talk a lot about hedgehogs, UK sea bass stocks and trees, and various other topics of constituency interest, but I want to talk about issues that are important in Telford. In Telford the male suicide rate is higher than the west midlands average and the national average. However, what does Telford and Wrekin Council talk about? It, too, has embarked on an elaborate social media campaign parading photographs of men on Facebook holding up signs saying "I support the white ribbon campaign". The poor men can hardly refuse, for fear of being labelled anti-women. I really wanted to know what the council was doing about men and boys in Telford.

The fact that no one wants to talk about the issue is the crux of it. I am on the Select Committee on Education. We talk about getting girls to do STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and maths. That does not mean much in Telford, particularly for a boy from Brookside who struggles with maths and English and is getting into trouble at school, becoming angry and frustrated, being excluded and then getting into trouble with the police. So men feel they must talk about women's issues and wear white ribbons, and women feel that they do not want to be disloyal to the sisterhood. Today I thought twice about coming along. I did not want people to take to Twitter and attack me for wanting to talk about men's issues. Then I remembered why I came to Parliament. It was to talk about issues that matter to people in my constituency. I am glad that I am here, along with everyone else who has come along—and I am glad about the valuable contributions they have made. I feel that I owe it to the failing boys in Telford, and the young men they will turn into, to be here today to put their case.

The men in my life talk a lot. They talk about sport and work, and sometimes politics. They definitely know how to get their voices heard; but they do not always say

[Lucy Allan]

what they are feeling or what is worrying them. They feel the need always to be strong, brave and the breadwinner—the man with the chiselled jaw in the Gillette advert, if anyone remembers that. Men are uncomfortable expressing their feelings and talking to someone about how distressed or desolate they feel. That is because society has embedded the social expectation for men to be strong at all times. Failure to do that is considered weakness, or failure as a man. We need only look at society today to see the pressures that the workplace and providing for their family place on men's shoulders. Not feeling able to talk about the issues only makes things worse. I echo what many hon. Members have said—that the impact of suicide on children and the families left behind is indescribable: the guilt, the sense of abandonment and rejection, and the loss, which a child can never quite fathom. A family member left behind does not recover from suicide.

I want to finish on a positive note. Today is about men's health. It is about improving gender relations, promoting gender equality and highlighting positive male role models, so I am delighted that this debate has been held. We definitely need a more collaborative gender politics. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley quite achieved that, but I am sure that was his intention. Let us make sure that it is okay to talk about all these issues. Let us remember that women have men in their life whom they care about deeply. Seeking help is hard, and it is harder still for men, as an admission of weakness. It is even harder still if society generally will not talk about these issues. I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time for this debate, and I am extremely grateful to the my hon. Friend for being brave enough to call for it. I particularly thank him for urging men to seek help, and letting them know that they are not alone. If this debate has achieved that, he is to be congratulated.

3.30 pm

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): As the shadow Mental Health Minister, I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this debate on Day. I will respond specifically to the motion, which tackles male suicide.

I thank Members from throughout the House for their contributions to the debate, which have revealed just how significant a challenge male suicide is in all our communities. I also add my thanks to CALM for the work it has done to raise the profile of the issue and push for a debate on it. Its #BiggerIssues Thunderclap campaign today has reached millions of people on Twitter and across social media. That is an important indication of the strength of feeling on this issue. On Monday, the Mind media awards featured countless nominations for programmes and coverage that had raised the profile of this significant issue. The campaign award was won by the #FindMike campaign, which was run by Jonny Benjamin and Neil Laybourn, recognising the contribution that they have made to the debate.

I pay tribute to the chair of the all-party group on suicide and self-harm prevention, my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), for the vital contribution that she and the group have made and continue to make to the ongoing debate on suicide. As a society, we should be doing everything that we possibly

can to prevent it. I also thank the Samaritans and the Royal College of Psychiatrists for their helpful briefings ahead of this debate.

The rate of male suicide in this country is a national scandal. It is shocking that in today's society the number of people taking their own life is increasing. The fact that such a disproportionate number of those suicides are by men demands our urgent attention. I shall share again some statistics that we have already heard, because they are so significant: of the total number of suicides in the UK in 2013, 78% were male and 22% were female, and suicide is the single biggest killer of men aged under 45 in the UK. Every time a person is lost to suicide, it is a tragedy—for their loved ones, their friends, their community, and society as a whole.

Members from across the House have mentioned cases of suicide in their constituencies, and sometimes within their own families; each one is tragic and devastating in its own right. The impact of suicide can be wide-reaching and incredibly long-lasting. Apart from the obvious human cost, which often affects whole communities in schools, colleges or workplaces, we must consider the huge economic cost. I was particularly struck by the Department of Health impact assessment, which put the economic cost of just one suicide at a staggering £1.7 million.

This debate has given us an important opportunity to examine the factors that might lie behind the shocking statistics. A report by the charity Mind outlined some of the possible reasons why men are more likely to take their own life. It suggests that men compare themselves to a gold standard of masculinity, power and control, and are more likely to feel shame and guilt when they fall from that standard. There is a link between unemployment and suicide—unemployed people are two to three times more likely to take their own life. Just this week, the University of Liverpool published research into the number of suicides that, tragically, have happened in areas with a higher number of work capability assessments.

Philip Davies: The hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan) try to draw attention to work capability assessments and blame suicides on them. Will she accept that it was the Labour Government who introduced work capability assessments, under which more than 60% of people were found fit for work? In work capability assessments now, only 27% of people are found fit for work, so her Government were finding more people fit for work than this Government ever have. Will she at least acknowledge that fact, rather than trying to make a rather cheap political point?

Luciana Berger: I pointed out just one reference to the work capability assessment that is particularly relevant because that research has been prominent in the press today. There are many other factors—that is just one—and I will come on to address them, but that research has been conducted academically and is particularly relevant this week. That is not a political point; it is something that is significant in many communities and that has been raised by Members of all parties, not just by the Opposition.

Some groups of young men are particularly at risk. Research conducted by the charity METRO found that more than a third of LGBT young people have attempted suicide at least once. Shockingly, it has recently come to

light that suicides in our prisons have increased by more than 50% in recent years. Every four days a prisoner takes their own life, and the majority are men. Analysis by the Samaritans and a number of academic studies show that there is also a very strong link between socioeconomic class and suicide, with those living in deprived areas on the lowest incomes being most at risk.

Men are more likely to take risks with drugs and alcohol. They are also much less likely to open up to their friends and family and seek emotional support, as many Members have said. We have also heard concerns about the impact of economic crises on suicide rates, which I echo. My hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) referred to debt, and we also heard about the challenges in Greece, which has seen an increase in suicides.

All those individual factors are important and demand our consideration and attention, and I hope that the Minister will respond to each of them in turn. Whatever factors contribute to a person wanting to take their own life, there is one thing of which we must never lose sight: suicide is not inevitable. If people are in crisis, good care can make a vital difference, and it can and does save lives.

We have heard about the challenges in ensuring that people with mental health problems get the support that they need, and there are particular challenges due to fragmentation in the system. Service users, professionals and experts are warning of a mental health system under unsustainable pressure. The number of people becoming so ill with mental illness that they need hospital care has increased. At the same time, the number of mental health nurses has decreased, and we are hearing of too many instances of people having to travel hundreds of miles for a bed or, in some cases, not getting any help at all.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has advised that men tend to use more lethal forms of suicide than women. It is therefore vital that the very first time someone says they have had suicidal thoughts, they get the best support possible. It is vital that that support is provided in the first 24 hours after a crisis begins. Mental health charities have long been campaigning for better crisis care. Research from the charity *Mind* found that people in mental health crisis might not be able to get help immediately.

I echo the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Bridgend and for York Central about the role of the police. Some important pilots of street triage teams are going on throughout the country. I had the opportunity to join one in Liverpool and saw at first hand the fantastic work being done by the police and mental health professionals to contend with issues of suicide and suicide prevention. They often identify people and take them to a safe place, but we know that only one third of people who use NHS crisis care services are assessed within four hours, which should concern all hon. Members. Research has found that when people present to services, perhaps after having been brought there by a member of the police or a street triage team, there are often not enough staff to provide the care that they need.

When someone has a mental health crisis and is most at risk of suicide, one of the places they are most likely to be taken is the local hospital's accident and emergency department. I echo the point made by the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately): there is

a serious shortage of liaison psychiatrists in acute hospitals. I have had the opportunity to join a number of such teams in A and E. They do an incredible job in very difficult circumstances and under a lot of pressure. I have heard the staff say that they are not able to deal with all the cases they would like to in an adequate time, which should concern all of us. Having experts on hand is key to ensuring that people get the support they need. I would welcome an update from the Minister on the work he is doing to increase the number and coverage of liaison psychiatrists in our hospitals.

Labour Members welcome the mental health crisis care concordat—the national agreement between local agencies to work together more closely when responding to people in mental health crisis. I note that great strides have been made in supporting the police to improve their response to people with mental health problems. However, it is not clear what tangible progress is being made on the ground in relation to suicide as a consequence of the crisis care concordat. A King's Fund report published last week found that just 14% of people felt that they received appropriate care in a crisis. I hope the Minister will share with us his plans to evaluate what the crisis care concordat has achieved and what it might go on to achieve.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend rightly raised the complex and under-researched issue of suicide contagion. I echo the concerns raised by Members from both sides of the House about the challenges caused by the lack of the research into suicide. There are some great research facilities, but they are few and far between. Although their work leads the way, funding for all types of mental health research is significantly lower than funding for research into physical health conditions. Public Health England published guidance in September on how to identify and respond to suicide clusters. I hope the Minister will tell us about the work his Department is doing to understand more about and prevent suicide contagion.

Ensuring that people in mental health crisis get the support they need is an urgent priority. However, to stem the tide of male suicide, we must do much more to prevent men from reaching the crisis point in the first place. A number of hon. Members have talked about the important fact that three quarters of people who take their own life are not in contact with mental health services. Men who suffer from depression are much less likely than women to look for formal help from mental health professionals. They are also less likely than women even to talk to their family and friends about how they are feeling. We need a cultural shift so that men feel able to discuss their mental health, seek help and get the support they need.

Just as important as ensuring that men feel able to talk openly about their mental health is ensuring that when they come forward, there are services available that they feel comfortable accessing. We need to do more to ensure that men can access information about mental health problems. We must make support available in what might be considered traditionally male settings, such as where men meet, eat and watch sport. That point has already been made this afternoon. I have seen at first hand the work done by Everton in the Community, an organisation connected to Everton football club that looks at mental health in particular. It has mental health champions and does work on the football playing

[Luciana Berger]

field and just after matches, and it has a significant impact. It is a great project and there are others, but they are not the norm, so we need to do more work.

There is a real need for joined-up working between different sectors, including health, social care, education, employment, social welfare and the Ministry of Justice, to reach out to men who are depressed and at risk of suicide. Underpinning all of that is the need for a concerted and co-ordinated approach from the Government to prevent suicide. The Government's suicide prevention strategy was published in 2012, yet there is still a high rate of suicide in our country. The strategy has not been as successful as any of us would like. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend said that she is concerned that the strategy lacks teeth and that there are no timeframes or tangible reporting mechanisms by which to measure its success. Does the Minister agree that it is time for an urgent review of the suicide prevention strategy? We also need timely access to data about suicide. It is not right that there is a two-year delay in receiving such figures. What plans does the Minister have to improve the availability and transparency of information about suicide across the country?

In the light of the rising suicide rates, it is clear that we need a revolution in suicide prevention to address the fact that many more men than women take their own lives. For too long, mental illness has been the subject of stigma and prejudice, which means that people—particularly men—often feel that they cannot talk openly about their mental health problems. A few brave public figures, such as Stephen Fry, Graham Norton and my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), have spoken up about their own mental illness, but for too many people mental health remains hard to speak about openly. Only last week, in my constituency surgery a man in his 50s told me that he is not able to relate to either his siblings or his parents about the mental health condition he has been affected by throughout his adult life.

It is incumbent on all of us to make the rhetoric about parity of esteem a reality. Challenging stigma is key to making equality for mental health a reality. We need a cultural shift in our schools, colleges, universities and workplaces to enable men to discuss their mental health and feel able to seek help. We need to overcome the stereotypes of masculinity placed on men's shoulders and give them the support they need. Each suicide is a terrible tragedy and a waste of precious life. Members from both sides of the House have talked about the important work that must be done to tackle the challenge and about the many practical steps that must be taken. It is clear from their contributions that together we can prevent suicide and save the lives of many men. I look forward to the Minister's response.

3.47 pm

The Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. Do I have until half-past 4?

Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair): Yes.

Alistair Burt: It is nice to get a reasonable amount of time without being shouted at for spending a bit of time on my feet. I am pleased to be in that position today.

Philip Davies: Me too.

Alistair Burt: And so is my hon. Friend.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate and picking the topic. I thank CALM and the other charities that backed the debate, as well as all the colleagues who have spoken. I will come to everyone's speech in due course, but a couple of colleagues—my hon. Friends the Members for Worcester (Mr Walker) and for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately)—have been in here for the whole time and have not made a speech. It is sometimes unusual for colleagues to sit and listen because they are interested in the debate, without feeling the need to contribute. We all appreciate their presence. I thank the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) for her comments, which I will come on to. I am only mildly annoyed that she said some of the things I wanted to say, but I can say them again. She either read my mind or had a look at my speech in advance.

I will spend the bulk of my remarks dealing with the suicide element of the debate, but I want to start with International Men's Day because I recognise its significance and because it is why we are here. I have previously referred to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) as “the Member for grit and oyster”, and he proved that to us once again today. This place is used to rough speeches. If any hon. Member wants to get anything done, say anything mildly controversial or challenge people, there is the chance that they will not only challenge but put some people's noses out of joint in doing so. My hon. Friend is particularly good at both those things. We all have to take the rough with the smooth—we have all sat in the House of Commons and heard things from both sides that we do not like, but that is all part of it. That is what this place is about and we do not get things done by always going along with the status quo. Today, I heard from my hon. Friend things that I appreciated and things that that I thought were profoundly wrong.

I echo the feelings of those who said today that the purpose of International Men's Day is to highlight the fact that gender equality is not a zero-sum game. It is not one thing to be gained at the disadvantage of another. The Department of Health's approach to illnesses and conditions that might specifically affect men or women is that both deserve equal attention and neither is supported at the expense of the other. That is important. There is a strand of that argument on both sides that occasionally expresses itself in challenging ways. The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) made brave reference to the row at the University of York to say that it is right and important to think about International Men's Day, and for a university to censor it and prevent something from happening frankly looks rather silly. There is a lot of stuff in the United States at the moment about the prevention of free speech that is getting into that area. Academic institutions need to be particularly careful about ensuring that they do not shut down debate just because they do not like it. The hon. Lady was quite right to say what she did.

I think our debate today has emphasised that this is not a zero-sum game. There are particular issues on which men are specifically challenged. It is important that they are raised as issues in their own right and that it is not suggested that they have arisen because men

have been disadvantaged by women. The underachievement of boys, particularly white, working-class boys, is a real issue that any of us would be concerned about. It does not need to be considered in the context of whether girls are doing better. It is just a fact for those boys, and what can we do about it? My hon. Friend the Member for Shipley was right about that.

The difficulties of family problems, separation and other such matters are particularly hard because the courts have as their primary objective the interests of the child. It is not about the interests of one party or the other; the paramount duty of the court is to have the interests of the child as the basis of what it does. How that is interpreted can be tough in contested situations. The pain felt by men who suffer separation is real. That is not to suggest that pain is not suffered by women in similar circumstances, but the facts are as they are and not to raise them and not to regard them as important would be to miss something. My hon. Friend was also right on that.

As for the issues my hon. Friend raised, some of his challenges to put things on the record were right and some of them, I feel, are wrong, but I am grateful to him for being prepared, as he always is, to confront issues that some others might shy away from. That is what this place is all about.

The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) made a quite excellent speech, again demonstrating to people outside this place that some colleagues here get so immersed in a subject that they really know their business and are able to speak authoritatively on it from years of experience and practice. The hon. Lady gave us an object lesson in that. She was right about language. When she said that the phrase we should use now is not “to commit suicide” but rather “to take one’s own life”, that was not designed to chastise my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley or anyone else. I had a conversation on this subject this week with Jonny Benjamin, who I am pleased to say is here and following the debate closely, because I had also used the former phrase. I did so because it is a common phrase, but it is right to challenge its use, because, exactly as the hon. Lady said, it suggests that to take one’s own life is similar to committing a crime. That was not my intention when I used the phrase and I understood entirely when Jonny suggested that the right wording is “taking one’s own life”. As the hon. Lady said, the feeling of loss experienced by affected families is considerable; that the language used could add to that a sense that their loved one did something criminal had not occurred to me, but on reflection I certainly understood it. Her remark was not meant to chastise anyone. I have corrected my way of looking at the matter as a result of what I was told. That is just sensible sensitivity.

The hon. Lady also mentioned the importance of coroners. In case Members do not know, because I did not know until I took on this job, I can tell them that coroners write to me if they feel that there is something in a case that has a wider governmental impact that relates to my Department. It is an important part of the process that coroners indicate when they feel that they have uncovered something in a particular case that has a wider implication and the Government can do something about. I appreciate the work of coroners and I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to them and thank them for their thorough work in investigating deaths. It is much appreciated by Government.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) spoke about attitudes and the importance of gender equality not being zero-sum game, which I appreciate. I also recognise that my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley quite rightly challenged gender stereotypes in his contribution. My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke mentioned parental leave, which is dealt with by the Department for Education, so we will get an answer to her on that. It is an issue, and it is strange, although perhaps not surprising, that it is handled similarly around Europe and around the world and that men do not take the opportunities that are given to them, but I suspect that that attitude may change over time. I will ensure that the Department for Education gives her an answer.

My right hon. Friend also made reference to living in a multi-generational household. I too live in such a household, but there are only two males in mine. All the rest are women. There is me and Mr Darcy, my darling daughter’s pug. We are the only two blokes in our house, and I depend on him for male company when I get home. Multi-generational houses can be a lot of fun, and I appreciate living in one very much.

I have mentioned the hon. Member for York Central challenging the University of York, but she also made reference to the issues at Bootham Park hospital, in which we are both well versed. I appreciate her work on this and that of my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy). It is a particular situation that has arisen owing to the closure of that hospital because of the risks that she mentioned. It exemplifies the fact that work has to be done as swiftly as possible to replace the facilities that have been lost, and she is entirely right to say that the trust must have a good eye on where people are being treated now and how we can get back to local facilities as soon as possible. She knows that my door is open if she wants to see me when the moment is right, and we are pressing the local authorities to bring forward their plans.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall)—may God continue to bless his constituency and all its wonderful people—spoke of the need to challenge stereotypes. He also made reference to something that I want to highlight because it is absolutely central to the problem—the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree also mentioned it. This is what has been so wrong: the acceptance. My hon. Friend gave every impression of being outraged that we have sort of accepted that there is a figure for suicide in this country and a gap between men and women; we have sort of got used to it. He is right, and that will be at the heart of my remarks about how we deal with the matter. He has looked hard at the statistics to examine the gap between men and women and found that it is not only consistent, but widening. I thank him for his work.

I visited the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway) a few months ago to meet a group that she brought together to deal with a variety of mental health issues. She can take my kind regards back to them, because I found the meeting to be very instructive. In her contribution, she spoke of her difficult personal experience and made reference, as several colleagues did, to the issue of men’s feelings about their place in society, their feeling of inadequacy should they admit to any sense of failure, their worry about not fitting in, banter and everything else.

[*Alistair Burt*]

That brought to my mind the relatively recent tragedy of Gary Speed, the Welsh international manager, and the impact it had on the sporting community that someone seemingly in full command of his life and everything else could have such things going on to lead him to do what he did. Along with other celebrities and colleagues in the House talking about such things, it is those occasions that wake people up and make us say, "This is a bigger problem than we realised." That is probably one of the reasons why we are all present today.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby North and the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree referred to the good that can come from sports clubs, associations and so on. In my constituency I am lucky enough to be a member of a number of organisations—for example, I am president of Biggleswade athletic club and I regularly go to see matches at the football clubs. They are places where people can go, gather together and form associations. Bearing in mind the difficulties we have been discussing, including feelings of loneliness and isolation—for men in particular—the more people can be scooped up by and remain part of groups and organisations the better. They are a vital link. Perhaps women do such things differently from and better than men, but perhaps sports clubs and the other such places can do something more for men. In that connection, I commend the work being done at Everton.

My hon. Friend the Member for Derby North commented on asking people how they are and getting the reply, "Fine." Are they really fine? Most of us leave it at that, because we do not want to get involved in the conversation, but it is important to take such opportunities.

May I make another point? It is a bit personal, but not too harrowing as it turned out. It is an important point. Last year my old school magazine reached me and in the obituaries column was the name of one of my classmates, someone I had also been at university with. I was completely horrified. We had been in touch reasonably regularly over the years, but perhaps not for a year or so. I thought, "My friend has died and I don't know anything about it."

In actual fact, fortunately, it turned out to be a mistake. My immediate reaction had been to hit the last number I had for my friend to find out what had happened, and I had discovered that the magazine was wrong. It had shocked me, however, and I remember saying to him, "Do you know what this teaches me? We have a number of friends we haven't been in touch with for a while—we don't always know where they are—and we will end up seeing each other's families at each other's funerals."

At my sort of advanced age, if we have not been in touch with friends for a bit—I have a lot of school friends I remember well, even if I have not spoken to them for a while—we might simply miss something. Again, I think blokes do such things worse than women. If it were not for my wife keeping up with friends using Facebook and so on, my social life would be much worse. That is something for men to think about. If we have not been in touch with friends for a bit, we should do it this weekend.

The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan) made reference to Scotland's suicide strategy, and I was pleased to hear about it.

The strategy goes back a long time, to 2002, so it is a long-term strategy to combat the brutal fact that the suicide rate is higher in Scotland than in the rest of the United Kingdom. Any lessons to be learned from a falling rate are important. It is right to focus on what might work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan), too, talked about the underachievement of boys at school and the particular issues in her constituency. She mentioned Twitter—she need not be worried about being attacked on it, because she has nothing to worry about—and I will speak about social media later. The importance of her remarks, however, was in talking about the issues.

Although the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) did not make a speech as such, she intervened with particular pertinence, as she always does on such occasions. It is good to see her in her place and taking a strong interest in the debate throughout.

I have a little more to say, given the time and the opportunity. I hope to be pertinent. I want to put on the record some of my own thoughts on the subject—although the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree has anticipated some of my views. I want to see the ambition of our society and of the Government changed in relation to the issue of suicide. Fundamentally, I want our position to be that we challenge the inevitability of suicide. As far as our statistics are concerned, our rates are mid-range for societies such as ours, but that is not good enough.

Do we need to know more? How do our strategies compare with those of others? Have we identified the right drivers, and are our local and national strategies flexible and dynamic enough to respond? Why, in a world where gender equality is encouraged as the norm, must we speak specifically about men because this affects men more than women?

Since I have been in office, I have been much moved by those I have met in relation to suicide. I have met those who help in prevention and counselling, those who work clinically, those who campaign and, most of all, those who have been touched by the tragedy of suicide in some way. I am fortunate. I have not personally been affected through the loss of a close friend or a family member, but I have known others more tangentially who have. I have met people whose children have taken their own lives, and others who have come close to it themselves.

The other day I met Jonny Benjamin, as I said, whose story of having been persuaded against suicide by a stranger on a bridge led to his extraordinary efforts years later to find, successfully, the man who saved him. He is taking a close interest in the debate today. He spends much of his time taking his story, and the issues surrounding it, out there to help others. Other people around the country are also doing such things—I commend their work, and I deeply appreciate what Jonny is doing. The shock and emptiness left by suicide is excruciating to behold, hard to listen to and desperate to feel.

We have a new challenge. What must we do to have the best suicide prevention strategy in the world? To be mid-range is no longer good enough for any of us. With that in mind, I assure the House that mental health is a key priority of the Government, and I set our work in that context. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree raised that issue. We want to do all we can to build on

our momentum and to ensure that people get access to the services they need when they need them. We have done a certain amount towards fulfilling that commitment, and the hon. Lady was generous enough to praise one or two of the things that have been done.

Jonny Benjamin and others have done a great deal of work on making people more aware. His #FindMike campaign has captured many hearts and minds. We have legislated, for the first time, for parity of esteem between mental and physical health, through the Health and Social Care Act 2012. We were the first Government to include access and waiting times for mental health. Last year we gave the NHS more money than ever before for mental health services, with an increase to £11.7 billion, and we have invested more than £120 million to introduce waiting times standards for the first time.

I am conscious that when I say such things, people say, "Well, not in our area." There is an issue with how the national money appears in local clinical commissioning groups, but we are on to it—there will be better monitoring this year, and we have made it clear that CCGs must use a proportionate amount of an increase that they receive for mental health services. We are watching out for that, because it is a fair criticism.

We have also helped to extend the accessibility of successful talking therapies, in which field we are a world leader. We invested more than £400 million in recent years in the improving access to psychological therapies programme, to ensure access to talking therapies for those who need them. That has led to real improvements in the lives of people with anxiety and depression.

We have also invested more than £33 million in crisis care. We launched the crisis care concordat in 2014, and every local area now has in place a crisis care action plan to support people experiencing a mental health crisis to receive the right help and support when they need it. I welcome the Care Quality Commission report of some months ago, which we commissioned. Although it was a bit tough in places, it provided a sort of baseline for where we do well and where we can do better. I recognise that accident and emergency did not come out well, and we need to strengthen the relationships there. I noticed that police and ambulance services did well when responding to people in crisis, but best of all were the independent and voluntary agencies involved with such people.

There are lessons to be learned, such as the need to build on all that work through street triage and so on. I shall mention that later, but it has been one of the most interesting outcomes. The crisis care concordat is not found universally, and some local areas that I have visited might want a different approach, but there is no doubt that the concordat and what the Government have sought to achieve through it have made a real difference. It is certainly being monitored locally and nationally—the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree is right about that—and I take a keen interest in it. I expect to see the CQC reports improve as times go on, because we want to look at the areas where concerns were found.

One of the ways in which we can better look after people with mental health issues is to recognise that they often have physical issues as well. Sometimes that has been poorly regarded in the past, and it can add to feelings of depression, isolation and not being considered and so play into the issues that we are discussing. It is important to address premature mortality in people

with mental illness, and we have committed NHS England to doing so through the NHS mandate. One way in which we can do that is to look at the person behind the illness and provide treatment and care for the whole person, so that we also address the physical health and social care needs of people with mental illness.

Let me say a brief word about children, because this starts early. I am particularly keen to ensure that we get the right support in place for young people. We have committed to invest an additional £1.25 billion over the life of the Parliament to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. We know that, for many people, mental illness can manifest itself early in life, and that the first experience of psychosis is often during adolescence. We are using that additional investment to improve awareness of mental health issues in our children and young people and to improve the information and support they receive at school on mental health and wellbeing.

There cannot be enough warning about the dangers of peer pressure and social media and the ways in which they can induce depression and harm among young people at a sensitive age. My hon. Friend the Member for Telford referred to Twitter, and we see that what young people face on Facebook and other social media can be immensely damaging. New technology is a boon, but it has risks and dangers and it is important to talk about that.

May I commend the report issued just this week by the British Youth Council's youth select committee on young people's mental health? It made this recommendation:

"Cyberbullying and sites which promote self-harm can have a significant impact on the mental health of young people. Hoping that children will simply stop using social networks is not a solution. We recommend that the Government should facilitate a roundtable for charities, technology companies, young people, and the Government to work together to find creative solutions needed to help young people stay safe online".

The Government will issue a full response from both my Department and the Department for Education, but I commend the Youth Council and that select committee for the hard work they have put in, which will certainly be taken seriously.

About a month or so ago I got a letter from a young lady not in my constituency—she had written to the Prime Minister. She said:

"I am writing to you to express my ideas on new legislation... The topic I have chosen is extremely personal to me. I have lost a friend to suicide, and I feel as though if he had had a better understanding of his own illness, he would not have felt the need to take his own life. Not only this, I also feel that if the people surrounding him at his time of suffering were better educated on the topic, it would have helped him to feel less alone and unaccepted in today's society."

It was a good, brave letter and I hope to see the young lady at an event we are doing to combat stigma. She made the point that the problem starts early, and I am pleased that the Government now have a Minister in the Department for Education, the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), who is devoted to mental health issues in schools. I appreciate his work. We are working together on that, which demonstrates the Government's determination to work across Departments on these issues.

Finally—I appreciate the House's indulgence—I turn to talk about suicide and men.

Mr Robin Walker: One issue that we have not touched on much in the debate is homelessness. Men are more likely to be homeless and sleep rough: I think that 87% of rough sleepers are men. A constituent of mine, Hugo Sugg, has talked about how sleeping rough drove him to thoughts of suicide. He now wants to campaign for a better attitude towards youth homelessness and how we encourage people to look at those who are suffering from homelessness, to give them a chance to turn their lives around, working with some of the fantastic charities in this space. Will the Minister join me in paying tribute to the charities and organisations that campaign on homelessness for the job they do in saving men from suicide?

Alistair Burt: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Those connected with housing increasingly recognise the relationship between housing, mental health issues and suicide. When I was with my hon. Friend the Member for Derby North, I met the lady responsible for the YMCA there and its housing outreach, and she made some pertinent comments. Housing and homelessness are closely connected with the problem we are discussing, and I commend the constituent that my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester mentioned.

We know that men are often reluctant to talk about mental health problems. Many colleagues have referred to men's attitudes, so I do not think that I need to labour that point. They are reluctant to seek help when they need it. In part, we know that is because some men feel that it may be a form of weakness. We need to assure men that that is not the case, as many colleagues have said. We, along with the charities Mind and Rethink Mental Illness, are seeking to reduce the stigma around mental illness through the Time to Change campaign.

Time to Change aims to empower people to challenge stigma and speak openly about their own mental health experiences—particularly men—and to change public attitudes towards those with mental health problems. The campaign has improved the attitudes of more than 2 million people. However, we know that men can be a particularly hard-to-reach group, and we are looking at further ways to improve reach in that area.

We know, tragically, what the outcome of unacknowledged mental ill health can be for a person. When someone bottles it up—that phrase was used in this Chamber today—their condition can worsen and may, in the worst cases, increase the risk of suicide. As I mentioned earlier, suicide rates in England remain low compared with other European countries and other UK administrations, but I am concerned, as we all are, to see that rates have been rising in recent years. We anticipated that after the global financial crisis in 2008, and it has been seen in other countries around the world, as the hon. Member for York Central said. We know about that, but it is important that the inevitability of that does not go unchallenged. We can appreciate that such times bring extra pressures, but we need to ask what we can do when we know they are coming.

We know that the recent rise in suicide rates has been driven by an increase in male suicides, which is what led my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley to call for the debate in the first place. The threefold difference between male and female suicide rates has increased further, and we know that is a common experience in other countries around the world. It is right, therefore, that preventing

suicide is dominated by efforts to prevent male suicide, but we recognise that this issue affects everyone. Whether men or women, boys or girls, when it happens it is an immense tragedy.

The greater risk of suicide among men is a complex issue. Many of the clinical and social risk factors for suicide are more common in men. Cultural expectations that men will be decisive and strong can make them more vulnerable to psychological factors associated with suicide, such as impulsiveness and humiliation. It is critical that, in addressing those issues, we provide information and support in a way that suits men's needs and behaviours, and that we provide services that are appropriate for men, which may include moving away from traditional health settings.

What are we doing about it, and what will we do about it? We published the cross-Government suicide prevention strategy for England in 2012, and I am committed to implementing it by working across Government and with our partner organisations in the NHS and other sectors such as transport and the community, voluntary and charitable sectors. I will also be speaking to our partner organisations soon to discuss how we can review and strengthen the national suicide strategy. I want to make it clear that I see that as a dynamic and flexible instrument, not as something that we will do and then I will see how it works and make some decisions in years to come. We are looking at it now. It needs to be reviewed and refreshed now. It is an ongoing process, and I am committed to it.

The objectives of the strategy are to reduce suicide and to support the people bereaved or affected by it. It is right that men are identified in the strategy as a high-risk group for whom our suicide prevention activities should be and are prioritised. The strategy also recognises that schools, social care and the youth justice system have an important contribution to make in suicide prevention by promoting mental wellbeing and identifying underlying issues such as bullying, poor self-image and lack of self-esteem.

As well as having the strategy, we continue to provide financial support for the National Suicide Prevention Alliance, which brings together our key partners across Government and the community, voluntary and charitable sectors with expertise in suicide prevention. I am particularly pleased to say that many of the organisations that campaigned for the debate are members of the NSPA. It has been working with all those organisations to develop its strategy for delivering improvements in suicide prevention, which I welcome. My Department of Health officials are helping with that work. Those organisations make tremendous individual contributions to suicide prevention. The Campaign Against Living Miserably, which was prominent in calling for this debate, works tirelessly to target men specifically, and to support them, so that they feel able to talk about mental health issues. The Department of Health provided financial support to CALM in its early days, and I am proud to see how it has grown in size and profile.

I have had a variety of meetings on the issue since I took office; I have mentioned some already. I went to see the Samaritans bereavement centre in Peckham for World Suicide Prevention Day, and to mark the launch of a new initiative between Cruse Bereavement Care and the Samaritans. I met the British Transport police and saw the extraordinary work they do with Network Rail.

I saw some of the triage work going on in Birmingham, including placing a mental health professional in the police control room 24 hours a day to help provide necessary information. I held a meeting on suicide prevention on 29 June, with researchers, the Samaritans, and representatives from areas such as Merseyside, the east of England and the south-west.

We have started to look at something called zero suicide. I have an interest in the concept and ambition of zero suicide. It was pioneered in Detroit by a college acquaintance of mine from many years ago, Ed Coffey, and I am very interested in his work. We can follow part of it, although some things are different in the States and will not be pertinent here. The whole concept of zero suicide—recognising that as an ambition, and challenging the inevitability of suicide—is really important and has very much grabbed my attention. Public Health England also recently published the refreshed “Help is at Hand” document, which provides compassionate support and information to people bereaved by suicide.

I will conclude by saying a little about research and data, as it will cover a number of issues raised by colleagues. One of the key drivers for improving our approach to suicide prevention is investing in research and data. I want us to lead the world in suicide prevention research, and to be at the forefront of service delivery, using the best knowledge and information to provide the best care. We have invested over £1.5 million in suicide and self-harm prevention research since bringing in the national suicide prevention strategy, to inform and target our strategy for reducing suicide rates. I will have a look at whether that is enough, and at what more needs to be done.

The hon. Member for Bridgend mentioned longitudinal studies. We are committed to carrying on the work on that. We have provided the Multicentre Study of Self-harm in England with £300,000 this year. I will very much bear in mind the opportunities that there might be for us to do more.

The zero suicide ambition I mentioned is being piloted in three areas: Merseyside, the south-west and the east of England. Early learning from the pilots has identified some innovative practice, which I am sure will help other areas to develop innovative plans for reducing suicide in their communities. There will be more research that we can work through to find whether it could have applications elsewhere.

Luciana Berger: Will that work extend to our prisons, which are a particular area of concern?

Alistair Burt: I know the Ministry of Justice is looking closely at the increase in prison and detention suicides. Again, it is not huge, statistically, but any increase is a matter for concern.

The work capability assessment has been mentioned. It started in 2008, which is about the time that the rise in suicides began. The authors of the recent study that has been mentioned have said that they were cautious about making a link or claiming cause and effect, but I have already asked the Department of Health to have a look at that study, because I feel it is important that my Department looks at the matters involved.

This has been a really good and important debate. First, it has put the issues connected to International Men's Day on the agenda and allowed us to talk about

male issues, in a way that is not a zero-sum game. We have been able to make reference to some difficult issues that are not discussed enough, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley for that. We have spent the bulk of our time discussing suicide, and Members on both sides of the House have been able to work together and demonstrate a common interest in things that affect us all. The sense I get from everyone is that none of us is prepared to accept the status quo and simply see the statistics accepted—my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North made that point.

These will not be easy issues to tackle. More men commit suicide than women, not because someone is making them do so—it is not anyone's fault—but that is a fact. What more can we do? What can we learn from overseas and from the work being done in different areas of this country? I am absolutely confident that this House will talk about this issue again. I hope that when we do, we will have learned still more. People and organisations outside the House do such excellent work on this; with the benefit of that work, perhaps our ambition to make this the country with the best suicide prevention strategy in the world can, in time, become a reality.

4.24 pm

Philip Davies: Thank you, Mr Rosindell, for chairing this debate, along with the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes). We very much appreciate that.

I echo the Minister's remarks: we have had a very good debate. We had the expertise of the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), who chairs the all-party group on suicide and self-harm prevention, and represents a constituency that has been more tragically affected by suicide than most. It has been great to have my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) here, as she is Chairman of the Women and Equalities Committee. I certainly support her view that we need greater genuine gender equality.

I am grateful for the presence of the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), who, as a good constituency MP, rightly drew attention to how the issue affects York. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall) is a member of the Backbench Business Committee and so helped to grant this debate, and I am grateful to him for that. I was very struck by his point about how stubborn the levels of suicide have been for many years, and how difficult it is to tackle the issue. My hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Amanda Solloway) talked powerfully about the need to end the stigma around some of these issues.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan), who went on to make a very good speech after her early criticisms of me; I will forgive those. She spoke about her son, who sounds like a hero to me—I very much hope to meet him sometime soon—and her genuine belief in true gender equality. I echo the Minister's remarks to her on not worrying about Twitter; I have 11,000 Twitter followers and all of them hate me.

We were very grateful for the perspective from the Scottish National party, given by the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan). He spoke about what the Scottish Executive are doing and how seriously they treat the issue, before going slightly off piste on the work capability assessment;

[*Philip Davies*]

I am sure we will forgive him for that. The shadow Minister spoke about how much more there is to do on this issue. Everyone here would echo that. We all appreciate the Minister's commitment to this difficult issue, and how hard he works to try to tackle it. He comprehensively covered everything he personally and the Department are doing to tackle it.

The debate was enhanced by the passionate and important contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately), for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy), for Christchurch (Mr Chope), for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner) and for Worcester (Mr Walker). I echo the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester about homelessness. I spent some time volunteering with a wonderful charity in Leeds called St George's Crypt, which does great work on that. The hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) has stayed here for the duration of the debate, which does her an awful lot of credit. I should also mention my hon. Friends the Members for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) and for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), who have also sat and listened to the debate with great care. We are grateful for that.

Before we conclude, I will say that I do not agree with the Minister and the hon. Member for Bridgend about language and the word "committed". One problem we have in our society is political correctness. Lots of people in this country are petrified of saying anything

in case someone takes offence. I do not believe that any word or phrase is offensive; the context in which it is used and the intention behind it are what makes it offensive. When people start taking offence where none was ever intended, we get into terrible problems, because people will not speak out lest someone complain that they were offended. If people feel offence where none was intended, that is more their problem, as far as I am concerned, than the problem of the person who made the remark. I cannot agree with the Minister and the hon. Lady on that point.

This has been an important debate. We have raised issues that very rarely get discussed in the House of Commons. Lots of people throughout the country are delighted that some of those issues have finally been raised, as they have been campaigning on them for years and years, and not really getting the recognition they deserve. We have done the country and the House a great service by debating these things, and for that I am incredibly grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for granting the debate. It has shown why that Committee is so important to the House; long may that continue.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the matter of male suicide and International Men's Day.

4.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Thursday 19 November 2015

DEFENCE

Afghanistan: Locally Employed Civilians

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Penny Mordaunt):

Following our announcement of the start of the drawdown of British forces in Afghanistan on 19 December 2012, the Government established redundancy and intimidation schemes for their current and former Afghan local staff. The scheme recognises the vital role locally employed staff played in working with us to achieve a more secure, stable and prosperous country.

I want to update the House on two important changes I am making to our intimidation policy. These should enable us to investigate claims of intimidation better, and to reassure the House and the public that our investigations are conducted in an effective and professional manner.

First, in order to address the concerns of our armed forces, veterans and Government officials who have served in Afghanistan, the MOD is setting up a dedicated email address which will enable those who have worked with Afghan local staff to report concerns over the welfare of specific individuals.

Our dedicated investigative team in the country will look into each concern and, where possible, confirm the welfare of the former local staff member. If they raise a concern it will be investigated by our team in Kabul, who have already supported over 330 people in country, providing financial support to enable 30 to move to a safer location within Afghanistan. If the local staff member consents, we will aim to provide reassurance to those contacting us that their former colleague is safe.

This email address gives our people direct access to the investigative teams and should become the first step for all of those concerned about their former colleagues. More information on the email address can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-uk-locally-employed-staff-in-afghanistan>.

Second, to provide further assurance that the policy is being delivered acceptably I have decided that we will establish an assurance committee. This will reflect on the application of the policy in a cross-section of cases and make recommendations on how the policy could be improved. The committee will be made up of people with relevant expertise, including a former interpreter who is relocating to the UK under the redundancy scheme. He will provide a direct interpreter perspective on what the process is like for former local staff and the challenges they face in Afghanistan.

This is in addition to steps we have already taken to ensure the professionalism and independence of the policy: investigation of intimidation claims is undertaken by highly trained police officers either from the MOD police or seconded from Home Office constabularies:

the legal adviser for decisions in Afghanistan is independent—the current post-holder is Danish; and, to provide further assurance, an independent barrister assessed the first 160 or so cases and will assess 20% of future case decisions to ensure the policy is being applied correctly.

The UK is committed to supporting our former local staff. We are taking reasonable steps to protect them when they are at risk because of their work for us. I am confident that the Government are meeting their responsibility through these comprehensive arrangements.

[HCWS318]

Queen Elizabeth Class Base-porting: BT Solent Cables

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon):

I have today laid before Parliament a Ministry of Defence Departmental Minute describing the contingent liability for the installation of British Telecom (BT) Solent cables in support of Queen Elizabeth Class (QEC) base-porting.

It is necessary to conduct dredging works in the Solent and approaches to Portsmouth Harbour ahead of the arrival of the QEC aircraft carriers to ensure their safe transit to and from their home-port.

Two BT fibre-optic cables currently lie between the mainland and the Isle of Wight and must be removed prior to commencement of dredging works. BT have proposed that rather than burying the replacement cables they 'surface lay' the cables to ensure they are relocated as soon as possible, minimising the impact to the capital dredging works which are scheduled to commence on 17 December.

Surface laying the new cable is not BT's preferred solution as they consider the new cables will be more vulnerable to damage from fishing activity. BT requires the MOD to carry the liability for any repairs to the cables until they have naturally 'self-buried' into the seabed and forecast that the cables could be at risk to damage twice within the first five years and once in the following five.

If cable repairs are necessary, each one is estimated to cost £360,000. The maximum contingent liability against the MOD is therefore £1,080,000. The duration of the liability will be 10 years from the date the new BT cables are installed, with this activity scheduled to complete in early December. If the liability is called, provision for any payment will be managed through normal supply procedure. The Department will be noting this contingent liability in its accounts.

[HCWS315]

Ukraine: Ministry of Defence Support

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon):

I have today laid before Parliament a Ministry of Defence departmental minute concerning a further gifting package which the UK intends to make to the Government of Ukraine.

Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and its destabilising activities in eastern Ukraine, including direct military support to the separatists, has demonstrated its disregard for international law. Since fighting began, nearly 8,000 people have been killed and approximately 18,000 injured. Around 1.4 million people have been displaced in Ukraine.

The latest ceasefire agreement, reached on 29 August, has seen a reduction in violence in the conflict zone. However, until there is a political settlement to the conflict the Ukrainian armed forces (UAF) have to remain deployed forward and continue to suffer fatalities and casualties. As a result of the prolonged engagement in this conflict, the UAF face a chronic shortage of basic equipment, and have requested help.

This Government are committed to supporting Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. Our proposed gift of non-lethal equipment is designed to prevent further Ukrainian fatalities and casualties and to help improve resilience on the ground.

The gifting package consists of 170 large tents with ancillary equipment to mitigate winter conditions and 600 sets of cold weather clothing. Subject to completion of the departmental minute process, delivery is expected to be undertaken over the coming weeks. The total cost of this proposed package of equipment is approximately £971,000, including transportation costs and contingency.

[HCWS317]

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Yorkshire and Humber CCS Cross Country Pipeline

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom): I have been asked by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make this written ministerial statement. This statement concerns the application made by National Grid Carbon Limited under the Planning Act 2008 on 18 June 2014 for a proposed development known as the Yorkshire and Humber carbon capture and storage (CCS) cross country pipeline.

The pipeline would transport CO₂ from the proposed White Rose CCS generating station via a multi-junction at Camblesforth (North Yorkshire) to a coastal point near Barmston (East Riding of Yorkshire). The CO₂ would then be transported by an offshore pipeline (which would require separate consenting) to a saline rock formation storage site under the North sea.

Under sub-section 107(1) of the Planning Act 2008, the Secretary of State must make her decision within three months of receipt of the examining authority's report unless exercising the power under sub section 107(3) to extend the deadline and make a statement to the House of Parliament announcing the new deadline. The Secretary of State received the examining authority's report on the Yorkshire and Humber CCS cross country pipeline on 19 August 2015 and the current deadline for her decision is 19 November 2015.

The deadline for the decision is to be extended to 19 May 2016 (an extension of six months). This extension is to enable a decision on the Yorkshire and Humber

CCS cross country pipeline application for development consent to be made after the decision on the White Rose CCS generating station application for development consent is taken. This will allow the need for the Yorkshire and Humber CCS cross country pipeline to be fully assessed. The extension will also provide further opportunity for any outstanding issues to be considered.

The decision to set a new deadline is without prejudice to the decision on whether to give development consent for this project.

[HCWS313]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Justice and Home Affairs Pre-Council Statement

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): An extraordinary meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council will be held on 20 November in Brussels. The meeting has been convened by the Luxembourg presidency of the Council of the European Union, in response to the terrorist attacks in Paris. I will attend on behalf of the UK.

I will of course reiterate our deepest condolences to France, and make clear that the UK stands ready to provide any additional support and assistance. In terms of the EU's response, I will press the need for greater information sharing and action on information, including alerts via the second generation Schengen information system (SISII) which will allow appropriate action to be taken at external border crossing points. I will also highlight the need to reinforce border management. I will underline the urgency of adopting, with the European Parliament, a strong and effective passenger name records (PNR) directive, including intra-EU PNR. I will highlight the range of actions needed to tackle the threat posed by firearms, as well as sharing information on our approach. And I will encourage other member states to develop an early identification system for those at risk of radicalisation, offering to share our own training expertise in this area.

[HCWS314]

Surveillance Camera Commissioner: Annual Report

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is today laying a copy of the 2014-15 annual report of the surveillance camera commissioner before the House, as required by section 35 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012. The report has also been published on the commissioner's website.

The surveillance camera commissioner is an independent role appointed under section 34 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 to encourage compliance with the surveillance camera code of practice, review the operation of the code, and provide advice about the code—including changes to it or breaches of it.

The current commissioner is Tony Porter, whose three-year term of appointment commenced on 10 March 2014.

[HCWS316]

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 19 November 2015

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