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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 14 December 2015

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Northern Powerhouse

1. **Graham Evans** (Weaver Vale) (Con): What support his Department is providing to the northern powerhouse initiative. [902663]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton): The northern powerhouse is a project that runs across a number of Government Departments. The contribution made by this Department includes: the local growth funds, 11 of which are worth nearly £3 billion; the £400 million northern powerhouse investment fund; the devolution deals being agreed right across the north of England; and, of course, the doubling of the enterprise zones in the northern powerhouse announced in the spending review by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Graham Evans: Earlier this year, the Government invested over £113 million in high-performance computing in my constituency at the Hartree Centre, a joint venture between the Science and Technology Facilities Council and IBM bringing high skill, high wage jobs to Weaver Vale. Does my hon. Friend agree that investment in technology and science is key to the growth of the northern powerhouse?

James Wharton: I commend my hon. Friend's important and significant work in this area. He is a passionate advocate for his constituency and for investment in it. This is just one more example of Government investment in the north to build the northern powerhouse and rebalance our economy. As we saw in the autumn statement, science and innovation spending is being protected. We are investing in the economic growth of the future. This is a great example of that and my hon. Friend deserves commendation for the work he has done to deliver it.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will this Government stop patronising the north? We are a powerhouse. Give us the investment in infrastructure. We are the people who still make things in this country. We make the wealth of this country. Many people in this part of the world—London and the south—live parasitically on our efforts. Stop patronising, start investing!

James Wharton: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for the northern powerhouse project. The Government recognise the potential of the north to drive our economy. The north can make a difference if it is invested in, and, crucially, if the people of the north are given real control over their own future. That is what we are doing. That is what the devolution agenda is about and what some of the investments I spoke of are about. We are going to deliver it. It will make a real difference to his constituents and to mine.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): What support are the Government giving to small businesses in the northern powerhouse area to ensure that they benefit from all the procurements that will come from it?

James Wharton: The hon. Lady raises an important point. The £400 million northern powerhouse investment fund will be targeted specifically at small and medium-sized enterprises. Growth hubs across the north are driving that investment and giving that support. We want our big industries to succeed and drive forward our economy, but our small and medium-sized enterprises are important too. We want to invest in them and give local people the controls they need to ensure they can reach their potential.

Alison Thewliss: The Minister will be aware that the Scottish Government procure 46% from small and medium-sized enterprises compared to the UK Government's 26%. Will he look at the Glasgow and Clyde Valley city deal, which has a supplier development programme to encourage SMEs?

James Wharton: City deals can be key drivers for growth. I welcome those that have already been agreed and we continue to have talks, including with some of the great cities and city regions in Scotland, on where we can go further and what more we can do. I hope we can deliver more in due course, because we can already see the difference the deals are making.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): On behalf of the whole House, we thank all hard-pressed and often low-paid council staff and others who even now are helping those areas of the north so badly affected by the recent flooding.

In contrast to the rhetoric about the northern powerhouse, the Office for National Statistics recently reported that the north is falling further behind as a result of under-investment and that it is getting worse. The average Londoner now produces £42,000 a year added value, while in the north-east the average is only £18,000. In the place of more cuts, will the Minister now include specific, substantial and urgent northern investment in his local government settlement later this week?

James Wharton: The hon. Gentleman raises the important point that our economy has for too long been unbalanced. The whole point of the northern powerhouse project is to address that imbalance, ensuring we unlock the significant growth potential that exists across the north and the contribution the northern powerhouse can make to our economy. We can see, from a number of the announcements, that that investment is going in, but more importantly it is going in hand-in-hand with local control, giving control to the people who know best how to grow the economies of the north because they live in them and are part of them.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Stephen Phillips. Not here. Oh dear. Where is the fellow?

Fire and Rescue Services

3. **Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the effect of changes to the level of funding for fire and rescue services on the effectiveness of those services. [902665]

6. **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): If he will take steps to minimise future reductions in the budgets of fire and rescue services. [902668]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): Fire authorities have continued to provide an excellent service while making sensible savings. The number of incidents is 42% lower than 10 years ago, while the number of fire deaths and injuries is at an all-time low.

Andy McDonald: The existing grant distribution formula disproportionately penalises grant-dependent authorities such as Cleveland, regardless of socioeconomic deficits, unparalleled levels of industrial risk and/or their efficient performance. What assessment will the Minister make to identify less efficient authorities that can make savings and, more importantly, what capacity grant-dependent authorities have to make further savings?

Greg Clark: I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the magnificent work of firefighters, who, with the other emergency services, council staff, engineers, the armed forces, and indeed the whole community, have worked tirelessly to protect and help people during the flooding in the north of England.

Over the past five years, fire authorities have had spending reductions of less than local authorities. I have given the hon. Gentleman figures showing how well they have performed and managed those cuts, and the National Audit Office has said that the picture is one of financial health. In Cleveland, for example, the fire authority's spending power is £48 per head of the population, compared to the national average of £37. So that is reflected in the formula.

Mr Cunningham: The Minister mentioned the cuts to fire services over the years and said he took great pride in their work, particularly in places such as Cumberland, so I think he should award them a decent wage increase. What guarantee can he give that local fire and rescue services will not be negatively impacted if taken over by local police and crime commissioners?

Greg Clark: As the hon. Gentleman knows, we are consulting across the country on whether to remove barriers to better local collaboration between all the blue light services. Such collaboration would be initiated locally, where it is wanted, for the purposes of providing a better service, if those changes would help.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that greater collaboration between the fire service and the police service necessary to reduce costs will not end the distinction between firefighters and police officers?

Greg Clark: I can certainly confirm that. They are two distinct services with proud and distinct histories, but, as I think my hon. Friend would acknowledge, the opportunities for them to work together should be taken, whenever it could make a difference to people on the ground.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): I was greatly encouraged by what the Secretary of State said about amalgamating services, particularly with local authorities. Wiltshire fire service has been in discussion with the first-class, Conservative-controlled Wiltshire Unitary Council. Will he encourage the fire service, which has also been negotiating with Dorset council, to seek to find areas of co-operation with Wiltshire council?

Greg Clark: That is a matter for the local services. The consultation proposes requiring that those discussions take place, but it is up to them what they conclude.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I also pay tribute to the magnificent response of fire and rescue services to the floods in Cumbria and other northern areas. Fire and rescue services are rescuing people, pumping out water from flooded high streets and homes and rescuing livestock, thus limiting damage to rural communities, yet all those fire and rescue services have suffered cuts over the last five years. We have lost nearly 7,000 firefighters—one in eight—and equipment and appliances have been cut by more than 12% in metropolitan fire and rescue services. The fire service is at a key juncture. It is not safe, effective or efficient simply to keep cutting resources. Does the Secretary of State agree that more cuts will further damage the service's ability to meet the risk in local major incidents, such as the recent floods, and will he commit to providing adequate resources so that the service can continue to contribute to national resilience on the scale and at the speed the public expect?

Greg Clark: I would draw the hon. Lady's attention to the National Audit Office report, which was published quite recently. It says that the picture to date is one of financial health and that

"fire authorities have not changed emergency response standards as a result of budget cuts".

The evidence is that all but one stand-alone fire authority increased its reserves by 67% in real terms from 2010 to 2015. That tells me that the fire services are coping well with the reductions they have been invited to make.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): I have lost confidence in the Staffordshire fire authority, which has decided to build a brand new fire station in Lichfield, but to reduce the number of appliances to half of what it is presently. Will my right hon. Friend work with Matthew Ellis, the police and crime in commissioner in Staffordshire, who has good, positive plans to combine the police and fire services for the betterment of the whole county?

Greg Clark: That is the purpose of the consultation that we have embarked on: to remove the barriers that have prevented that kind of collaboration. I am very interested in what my hon. Friend has to say about the proposals in Staffordshire.

Affordable Housing

4. **Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of Government investment in affordable housing. [902666]

13. **Mr Robin Walker** (Worcester) (Con): What recent progress his Department has made on increasing the provision of affordable housing. [902675]

18. **Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the adequacy of Government investment in affordable housing. [902680]

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): We have successfully delivered 270,000 affordable homes since 2010. More specifically, the 2011 to 2015 affordable homes programme delivered 193,000 affordable homes, exceeding expectations by some 23,000.

Louise Haigh: It is no surprise that the Minister is so keen to crow about his numbers of affordable homes, but I can assure him that, in Sheffield, £250,000 is not considered affordable. Will he therefore introduce a statutory definition of affordability based on average income, not market rate?

Brandon Lewis: I think the hon. Lady is referring to the maximum price for a starter home. If she looks, she will see that the average paid by first-time buyers is dramatically lower, which, along with the 20% discount we are introducing for starter homes linked to Help to Buy, makes buying a home affordable again for more people.

Mr Walker: In Worcester, according to city council figures, 260 new affordable homes were delivered in the last financial year, a record for any year since 1997. That record was delivered by a Conservative administration the year after a Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition delivered just 76 new affordable homes. Please can the Minister advise us how he will support well led councils such as Worcester to keep delivering more affordable homes?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend gives a good example of a good, well run local authority delivering housing for its constituents. We are determined to stand by those authorities and work with them. That is why I am delighted that the Chancellor committed a further £8 billion in the spending review to deliver 400,000 affordable homes across the country.

Wes Streeting: Given that average property prices in London have exceeded half a million pounds, first-time buyers will need to earn at least £70,000 a year to buy their first home. Does the Minister consider that affordable and, if not, what effective action will he take to put home ownership within the reach of the many and not just the few at the top?

Brandon Lewis: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is now joining our call to build more homes that are affordable for people. Starts are up some 57% in his constituency since 2010, which is a good start, but we want to go even further. That is why we want to deliver more shared ownership, giving people a wider opportunity to get on the housing ladder, along with the 20% discount on starter homes through Help to Buy on just a 5% deposit.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): Some Opposition Members believe that homes can be made more affordable, particularly in London for example, by returning to the bad old days of rent controls. Will the Minister assure me and many other Members of the House that the Government have no intention of giving powers to any future Mayor to reintroduce rent controls in London?

Brandon Lewis: As my hon. Friend will know, we are very keen to see more and more localism and devolution of power, but I am happy to tell him that this Government will not allow us to fall into the trap that Labour often encourages people to fall into. The reality is that rent controls simply drive supply down and end up increasing rents, so we are very much against them and they will not be allowed under this Government.

John Healey (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): The Minister has talked about extra housing investment, and I would not want him or the Chancellor, who has said the same thing, to mislead the House. After the Chancellor's autumn statement, the annual housing investment from the Government will be £1.7 billion. Under the money inherited in 2010 from Labour, it was £3.1 billion—not an increase, but a cut; not a doubling, but almost a halving. Does the Minister agree, therefore, that this must be the reason why his Government have built 30,000 fewer affordable homes to buy via shared ownership than Labour did in our last five years?

Brandon Lewis: I am somewhat surprised that the right hon. Gentleman should ask a question of that type, bearing in mind that he was the Minister who oversaw the lowest level of housing starts in this country since the 1920s. What the Chancellor has now done has meant that this Government are overseeing the biggest building programme in about 30 years.

John Healey: The Minister is wrong on the big picture as well. Under our national affordable housing programme, the number of homes built each year was bigger than under the last Government when he was the Minister. The hard truth is that for so many people, the dream of buying their own home is totally unaffordable and out of reach. Now the hon. Gentleman plans to fiddle the figures again by changing the definition of “affordable” to include so-called “starter homes” that can be sold at up to £450,000. Will he at least agree with Labour and the Building Societies Association, whose members will lend for these homes, that the discount on these starter homes should be permanent, not a cash windfall at the end of five years, but there for the next generation of first-time buyers as well?

Brandon Lewis: I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman and I have a big disagreement on this. He seems to want to stop property owners having the right to deal with their property in the way that any other property owner would, but we want to support people who aspire to own their own home. That is why we want to keep building more homes generally and keep building more homes for people at that discount rate for first-time buyers. We are proud that under the Conservative-led coalition during the last Parliament, we oversaw an increase in affordable homes—unlike the loss of 420,000 that we saw under 13 years of Labour.

Home Ownership: Government Support

5. **Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to (a) support shared ownership and (b) help people to buy a home. [902667]

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): The autumn statement confirmed £8 billion for over 400,000 affordable homes, including 135,000 new shared ownership homes and £2.3 billion towards delivering 200,000 starter homes. Our Help to Buy ISA scheme, launched on 1 December, means that we have a Help to Buy equity loan scheme as well, which is being extended through to 2020-21. That means that just a 40% equity is being provided by the Government for people in London, and that will be launched in 2016.

Mary Robinson: I was very pleased recently to attend the opening of Prospect House in Cheadle Hulme—a brand new development of 11 apartments available for shared ownership, and I welcome further measures introduced by the Government to expand this scheme. What steps is the Minister taking to encourage local authorities to build more shared ownership housing and ensure that these developments utilise brownfield sites?

Brandon Lewis: I am happy to respond. We will relax or remove local authority restrictions to shared ownership to make it easier for people to find the right home for their families. Brownfield land has an important role in meeting housing need, and we are committed to ensuring that 90% of suitable brownfield sites have planning permission for housing by 2020.

Social Housing

7. **Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): What assessment he has made of trends in the number of homes built for social rent since 2010. [902669]

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): Since 2010, we have delivered 270,000 affordable homes, including nearly 200,000 homes for rent. The majority of rented homes, delivered through the affordable homes programme, are for affordable rent, delivering more homes for every pound of Government investment. The spending review committed some £1.7 billion to deliver 100,000 affordable rented homes.

Mr Betts: Let me draw the Minister's attention to the question I asked, which was about social rented housing, not affordable rented housing. Will he confirm that during the last Parliament, the only social rented houses built had been funded before the 2010 general election, and that there is no funding at all for social rented housing in the comprehensive spending review for this Parliament? Does the Minister accept that the combination of the policies of Right to Buy for housing association tenants and the sell-off of high-value council properties means fewer social rented homes being available for people and longer waits on the waiting list for those people who want one?

Brandon Lewis: Actually, there was a 70% increase in social housing waiting lists under the last Labour Administration, and thanks to the flexibilities we have created, it has fallen. We also saw more social council

housing built in the last Parliament than in the entire 13 years of Labour Government before that, and there is still over £2 billion of headroom in the housing revenue account for local authorities to go further and build more. I encourage them to do so.

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): The building of genuinely affordable homes for social rent in this country has plummeted, and no matter how much the Minister tries to dress up the Government's record, his Department's figures are clear and speak for themselves. In 2010, more than 38,000 homes were built for social rent, but by 2014-15, that figure was a truly dismal 9,500. The Housing and Planning Bill makes it virtually impossible to build homes for social rent. There was also the disgraceful sneaking out last week of proposals to end secure tenancies for local authority tenants. What exactly do this Government have against people who rely on social housing to make ends meet, and when is the Minister going to address the huge shortfall in social housing units?

Brandon Lewis: As I said a few moments ago, in the last five years of Conservative government more council homes were built than in the entire 13 years of Labour government, during which the number of affordable homes dropped by 420,000. There is still more than £2 billion of borrowing headroom enabling local authorities to build more. We have made it clear that we will help all those who aspire to own their own homes by extending the right to buy and delivering starter homes throughout the country.

Autumn Statement: Devolved Services

9. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the effect of policies in the spending review and autumn statement 2015 on his Department's expenditure on policies and services which in Scotland are devolved to the Scottish Government. [902671]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton): As the hon. Gentleman will know, the services of this Department are devolved to Scotland, so there are Barnett consequential of spending decisions that affect the Department. As a result of the spending review, the Scottish Government's capital budget will increase by 14%.

Alan Brown: The Chancellor confirmed in the autumn statement the extension of the right to buy to housing associations, thereby effectively privatising them. As we all know, the existing right to buy has decimated social housing stock throughout the United Kingdom. The Scottish Government recognised that, and abolished the right to buy. Given that the new discounts and the so-called one-for-one replacements are not being financed by additional Government funding, will the Minister explain what effect the Chancellor's proposals will have on housing in Scotland?

James Wharton: The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to the policy intention to replace homes on a basis of at least one for one, which is greatly welcomed by Conservative Members. As I have said, the spending review will have a Barnett consequential impact on the

Scottish Government's capital budget, amounting to £1.9 billion, which is in addition to the borrowing powers they already have. That will enable them to deliver on what they want to do for Scotland—just as we want to deliver on our objectives and manifesto priorities in England and Wales.

Flooding

10. **Mr Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that new developments do not affect the risk of flooding to existing properties. [902672]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): There are strict tests in national planning policy to protect people and property from flooding, which all councils are expected to follow. They include ensuring that new development does not increase flood risk elsewhere.

Mr Robertson: In my experience, the Environment Agency often does not object to a planning application even when the area on which building is proposed floods, and especially when other areas could be caused to flood by the development in question. Will the Secretary of State look into the agency's policies and practice in this regard?

Greg Clark: I will certainly do that. I recognise my hon. Friend's constituency experience, and, indeed, his expertise as vice-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on flood prevention. However, the national planning policy framework states that any new application in an area of flooding risk

"must demonstrate that the development will be safe for its lifetime...without increasing flood risk elsewhere, and, where possible, will reduce flood risk overall."

That test must be passed for the development to be permitted.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Is it not time to recognise the fantastic work that firefighters do in dealing with floods, and to make it a statutory duty for fire and rescue services to respond to flooding?

Greg Clark: I am grateful for the opportunity that the hon. Gentleman offers me to pay tribute again to the fantastic work that is being done in the north of England, and which has, over the years, been done throughout the country at times when such emergencies occur. I will bear in mind what he has said, and it will be considered during our future discussions.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Loyn bridge, in Gressingham—which is in my constituency—has been partly washed away, and the roads on either side of it have caved in because of the flooding. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that everything will be done to ensure that the repairs are completed as quickly as possible, as the bridge is the main thoroughfare across the Lune valley?

Greg Clark: I will indeed. I note the leadership that my hon. Friend has shown in, and with, his community in responding to those conditions. We are determined to ensure that things are put right with the greatest dispatch,

and we are working closely with the authorities throughout the area. The funds that have been made available so far will allow an assessment of what is required for restoration to be made, which will be followed by the repairs themselves.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State think it is right that the Government are helping new people buy their own home under the Help to Buy scheme, but those very same people will not be eligible for flood insurance under Flood Re, which his Government are introducing in April?

Greg Clark: The negotiation with the insurance companies has been very clear: we want to make sure that everyone in the country can benefit from the insurance that gives them peace of mind when they buy a new property.

Planning Decisions

11. **Michelle Donelan** (Chippenham) (Con): What plans his Department has to increase the role of local communities in planning decisions. [902673]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): Over 1,700 communities are preparing neighbourhood plans to shape development in their area. These will form part of the development plan and be used to determine planning applications. The Housing and Planning Bill reforms will speed up and simplify the process and allow communities better to engage in local planning.

Michelle Donelan: The Minister will be aware that the planning inspector has deferred a decision on Chippenham's housing development plan and has asked Wiltshire council to come back after a few queries. During this time, what measures could be put in place to ensure we do not have a free-for-all of aggressive planning applications against the best interests of the strategy of the town?

Mr Jones: Having a five-year land supply in place puts local planning authorities in a strong position to resist unwanted development. Furthermore, national planning policy reiterates the importance of sustainable development, not development anywhere or at any cost, and I am sure my hon. Friend's local authority is well aware of that when making decisions.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Last Thursday at business questions I raised the case of Porlock avenue in Audenshaw in my constituency, where a small semi-detached property that is now privately rented has been converted into a house of multiple occupation as part of the asylum dispersal programme. Does the Minister understand the dismay of the neighbours of this property that the owners are able to circumvent planning and licensing regulations because there will be only five people housed in the property?

Mr Jones: I cannot comment on an individual case without knowing all the facts, but I refer the hon. Gentleman to the measures in the Housing and Planning Bill, particularly those in relation to dealing with rogue landlords.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): The interpretation of neighbourhood plans appears to be causing difficulties, in particular in the beautiful village of Hook Norton in my constituency. Will the Minister meet me to discuss how villagers can ensure the neighbourhood plan is adhered to?

Mr Jones: And a great village Hook Norton is, and it is the home to a fantastic brewery. I hear what my hon. Friend says and I will certainly undertake to meet her, or I am sure my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning will.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Local communities in York desperately need family housing built for social rent on the 35-hectare York central site, yet we hear that high-value flats are going to be placed on that site. Will the Minister listen to local communities and ensure their voice is prioritised?

Mr Jones: This Government have demonstrated that we want local people to have a strong voice through neighbourhood planning. The issue the hon. Lady mentions is on the record, and her local planning authority should be listening to the concerns and comments of local residents.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): In council areas where there is no adopted local plan, local communities are continually let down by the planning process. Will my hon. Friend consider allowing objectors the right of appeal?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend makes a good point. By 2017 we will make sure all areas have a local plan in place. The Housing and Planning Bill sets out in some detail how we are going to achieve that.

Inverness City Region Deal

12. **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): What recent progress has been made on the proposed Inverness city region deal. [902674]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton): The Government, along with the Scottish Government, are working with Highland Council to identify the opportunities for an Inverness and Highland city region deal. The discussions are ongoing. They are positive and constructive. I hope they will lead to the outcome that I am sure the hon. Gentleman hopes for. He is absolutely right to raise this important issue. City deals can be a great driver for growth; they can help us realise economic potential, and that is what we want to see.

Drew Hendry: Highland Council has submitted a detailed and innovative plan for city deal investment, with the support of the Scottish Government. Will the Minister commit to advancing discussions, and will he indicate a timescale for finalising the process to allow the deal to get under way?

James Wharton: Discussions are already under way. Officials met local representatives on 2 December and will continue to work through the plans to ensure that they are robust, that they deliver what is needed, that

they meet the requirements that we place on such deals and that they have the support they need to continue. We wish to see them progress positively. That is the strongest assurance I can give the hon. Gentleman at this time, because of course those things need to be done properly and thoroughly before plans are taken forward.

Local Government Funding Model

14. **Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure that the funding model for local government is fair. [902676]

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): I will shortly be presenting to the House the local government financial settlement for 2016-17. I will set out how we will deliver a sustainable settlement for that year and later years and pave the way for future reforms to fund vital services, promote growth and efficiency and devolve power and resources, just as local government has requested.

Margaret Greenwood: Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that since 2010-11 the areas of greatest need in England have seen the largest cuts in local government funding, breaking the historic link between the amount that a local authority spends per head and local deprivation levels. Over the past five years, councils such as Wirral have had severe cuts to their funding, whereas other areas have seen an increase. Forecasts suggest that Wirral will lose at least £126 million by 2020. What will the Government do to ensure that funding for local authorities genuinely reflects the needs of the people who live in the area?

Greg Clark: The hon. Lady should wait to see what the settlement has in store, but she should know from the past few years that Wirral's spending power, at £2,240 per dwelling, is 7% above the national average. Her council has reserves of £80 million, a third higher than they were in 2010. It is important that she bears that in mind.

20. [902683] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): People in rural areas such as my constituents pay an average of £80 more in council tax than those elsewhere, yet they receive about £130 less in central Government funding, which has an impact on local services. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is time to look for a fairer funding formula for all taxpayers?

Greg Clark: I recognise that the cost of delivering services is higher in areas with a sparse population, for obvious reasons. The rural services delivery grant was introduced to reflect that extra cost, and it has since been increased. I will obviously have to bear that in mind when we assess what is needed in the financial settlement.

Marie Rimmer (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): It is a year since a National Audit Office report found that the Department for Communities and Local Government had limited understanding of local authorities' financial sustainability. Does the Secretary of State understand the unsustainability of high percentage, across the board cuts in low tax base authorities, and the fact

that the complete removal of revenue support grant and the retention of all business rates without national redistribution will drive those authorities into the ground?

Greg Clark: I would have thought that the hon. Lady, as a former council leader, would be in a position to welcome the spending review settlement, which not only provided protection in cash terms for the resources available to local government over the four years ahead but did what local government requested and made money available for the care of the elderly through the social care precept. I would have thought that her experience caused her to welcome that.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): Will the Secretary of State ensure that the settlement reflects the pressures on top-tier authorities from adult social care costs, and particularly that it restates the opportunities for greater integration of health and adult social care spend, as supported by, for example, the London Borough of Bromley?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In advance of the spending review I had a communication from the Local Government Association estimating that the gap, if unaddressed, would be £2.9 billion. In the spending review settlement the Chancellor allocated £3.5 billion, to reflect the need to help our elderly population. That was a significant result for local government. As we come to make the settlement for individual authorities, we will ensure that that is in the hands of local people.

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab): At least 340 unaccompanied child asylum seekers disappeared in this country between January and September, which is twice as many as did so in the calendar year before. That leaves them at terrifying risk of abuse, sexual exploitation and radicalisation. Councils say that funding cuts mean they do not have the resources properly to protect these incredibly vulnerable children, so why are the Government going ahead with a further cut to the unaccompanied child asylum seeker grant?

Greg Clark: These are important statutory responsibilities of local authorities and it is vital that they discharge them. Through the spending review settlement, the Chancellor has made available funds to local government that make sure that the cash settlement by the end of the spending review period is the same as it is at the beginning. That is a positive result for local government.

Syrian Refugees

15. **Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP):** What recent estimate he has made of the number of local authorities that have resettled Syrian refugees. [902677]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Refugees (Richard Harrington): The number of local authorities that have resettled Syrian refugees changes frequently, as more Syrians arrive for resettlement in the UK. Although it is not practical to give a running commentary on the number of local authorities participating in the scheme, I can confirm that at the beginning of December about 50 local authorities had confirmed places before Christmas.

Roger Mullin: Does the Minister share my concerns about the rise of Islamophobia in the country, fuelled by the right-wing press? Will he issue guidance to local authorities and community organisations on how best to deal with it and to support refugees?

Richard Harrington: Of course I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about Islamophobia. All I can say is that I have found nothing but a warm welcome from all parts of the UK for the refugees who have arrived in this country, and I am certain that will continue.

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): A lot of local authorities, including my Sefton authority in the north-west, are seemingly confused about their role. Is there anything the Minister can do to add clarity and hurry things along?

Richard Harrington: Our dealings with local authorities vary very much, depending on the particular cases. We do not have any power to insist that refugees go to certain places, but we are working with county councils, district councils and metropolitan borough areas. The system is therefore very flexible, and all I can say is that at the moment it has been working very well, because the number of places that have been offered is broadly equivalent to the number of refugees arriving.

Planning Developments: Neighbourhood Plans

16. **Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con):** What weight his Department gives to neighbourhood plans when assessing planning developments at the appeal stage. [902678]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton): Planning appeals are determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Once brought into force, a neighbourhood plan is part of the development plan.

Chris Heaton-Harris: As the Minister will know, a few weeks ago the villagers of Earls Barton were trooping to the polls to vote on the referendum on their neighbourhood plan, at the very same time as the Secretary of State was allowing a housing planning appeal in their area. After all the work my constituents have put in, what assurance can the Minister give them that this work on neighbourhood plans will be worth while?

James Wharton: I recognise my hon. Friend's diligent commitment to representing the views of his constituents and taking an interest in local matters, including this one. He will appreciate that I cannot comment on individual planning cases, but neighbourhood plans are, where appropriate, given significant weight, and individual decision letters will set out why there is a difference and why a neighbourhood plan has been departed from. The Secretary of State will always give appropriate weight to neighbourhood plans, which are an important part of our planning process and of localism. We welcome them and we want to see more agreed.

Local Government Grant Formula

19. **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the local government grant formula in directing funding to areas of need. [902681]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): We will shortly present our proposals for a sustainable and fair 2016-17 local government finance settlement to the House. We propose to continue our approach of transforming local authorities from being dependent on grant to benefiting from promoting local growth.

Helen Hayes: Spending on adult social care has fallen by £65 per person in the most deprived communities, whereas it has increased by £28 per person in the least deprived. In one of the councils I represent, the estimated shortfall in adult social care funding following the comprehensive spending review is £20 million, of which £2 million can be raised by increasing council tax by 2%. Is it not true that allowing an extra 2% rise in council tax merely devolves the blame without fixing the problem?

Mr Jones: In the provisional local government settlement that will come very shortly, we will announce changes to the local government finance system to rebalance support, including to those authorities with adult social care responsibilities, by taking into account the main resources available to councils, including council tax and business rates.

Edinburgh City Deal

21. **Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): What recent progress has been made on the proposed Edinburgh city deal. [902684]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton): We are speaking with Edinburgh and south-east Scotland to look at proposals for a city deal there. It is welcome that so many parts of Scotland are keen to be part of the process of delivering city deals. We must ensure that, when they are agreed, they are agreed in such a way that will drive economic growth, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Peter Grant: Despite the obvious wealth that exists in some parts of Edinburgh and south-east Scotland, there are also significant areas of very severe deprivation. Some 21% of children in the proposed city region live in poverty just now. The economy of the area has not been helped over the past few months by Government decisions on renewables. Rather than just talking about this deal, will the Minister tell us what the timescale is, first, for a decision and, secondly, for actual action on it?

James Wharton: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the diverse nature of the area about which he talks. We see great potential for growth across Edinburgh and south-east Scotland. We want to ensure that we can realise that potential and deliver that growth. We will continue to have talks, which have been productive and are constructive, with interested parties

on the city deal. We will continue to work constructively to deliver that city deal if it can be delivered in the right way. These things must be decided properly and after due consideration. That is the process that is currently under way.

Rogue Landlords

22. **Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): What plans he has to tackle landlords who knowingly rent out unsafe and substandard accommodation. [902685]

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): The Housing and Planning Bill contains measures to tackle and go further with rogue landlords than anything we have had before. We want to rule out rogue landlords who rent out substandard accommodation and to do all we can to ensure that tenants have a good and safe environment. Our proposals include a database of rogue landlords and letting agents, banning orders for serious or repeat offenders, a tougher fit and proper person test, extending rent repayment orders and introducing civil penalties.

Cat Smith: Over the past five years, despite the poor quality of many privately rented homes, rents have soared and they are now a fifth higher than they were in 2010. Why are the Government not taking any steps in their new Housing and Planning Bill to help private renters with these soaring rents?

Brandon Lewis: If the hon. Lady looks at the private rented sector over the past five years, she will see that its increases are, on average, lower than the increases in the social housing sector, hence our reason for the changes in the Budget. We are going a lot further than ever before in cracking down on rogue landlords, whom everyone across the House would like to see put out of business.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): An important part of protecting tenants is ensuring that landlords understand their obligations and that tenants understand the remedies that are available. What action is the Department taking to ensure that tenants and landlords understand their rights and responsibilities?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Apart from the extra measures that we are taking in the Housing and Planning Bill, in which we will do all that we can to publicise to tenants what they need to be aware of so that they know what to expect, we have also published a guide for tenants, so they can clearly understand their rights and what to expect from a good quality landlord. We should be clear that the majority of landlords offer an excellent service and that tenants are happy with them.

Topical Questions

T1. [902653] **Oliver Colville** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): At the start of topical questions before Christmas, may I wish everyone a very happy Christmas across the country?

Since our last oral questions, the spending review has announced the biggest affordable house building programme by a Government since the 1970s, delivering at least 400,000 affordable homes, and has confirmed that resources available to local government will be maintained in cash terms until 2020. We have agreed devolution deals with Liverpool and the west midlands. We have completed the Committee stage of the Housing and Planning Bill and Third Reading of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill. We will continue to develop new devolution deals with communities in order to devolve more power and resources right across the country.

Oliver Colvile: As my right hon. Friend might know, I am running a campaign to try to save the hedgehog. Will he ask his Department to provide guidance to local authorities on how to make gardens in new-builds more hedgehog-friendly and ensure that we can have a hedgehog superhighway?

Greg Clark: I know that this is a prickly issue for my hon. Friend, so let me come straight to the point. I will not be issuing guidance on the protection of hedgehogs, but I draw Members' attention to the excellent publications of the British Hedgehog Preservation Society. I recommend its guide to looking after hedgehogs to any hon. Member who wishes to curl up this Christmas and read it.

Mr Speaker: The words "hedgehog superhighway" did not trip off the Secretary of State's tongue, but I feel sure that he is preserving them for another occasion.

T3. [902655] **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State explain why the very same councils that have the highest numbers of vulnerable children are also those that have seen the highest budget cuts under his Government?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): If the hon. Lady looks at the figures, it will be quite apparent that the local authorities with the highest spending power are those that she refers to. Councils will see a rise in their resources in cash terms over this Parliament, from £40.3 billion to £40.5 billion in 2019-20. The hon. Lady will shortly see the outcome of the local government finance settlement.

T2. [902654] **Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming plans submitted for the tearing down of the PowerGen building in Solihull—an eyesore that has blighted the lives of my constituents for a generation? It is being replaced by hundreds of new homes of many different types, including 260 badly needed assisted living apartments.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): My hon. Friend has given a really good example of a local authority making good use of brownfield land to provide the housing that its local community needs. I congratulate him on thinking properly and locally in that way.

T7. [902659] **Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): In a hasty attempt to reverse the Office for National Statistics decision to reclassify housing associations

as "public", Ministers were recently reported to be considering the sale of £44 billion of Government grant on housing association balance sheets to private investors. Housing associations have made it clear that they would strongly oppose such a move and David Orr, the chief executive of the National Housing Federation, has called it an "unhelpful distraction". Will the Secretary of State assure the House and the housing association sector that the sale of Government grant on housing association balance sheets to private investors is not under consideration?

Greg Clark: Yes.

T4. [902656] **Mr Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): Last year, Christchurch Borough Council's local development plan was adopted with new green-belt boundaries. Will my right hon. Friend ensure public confidence in that plan by making it his policy to call in for his determination any application by a local authority to depart from the plan by giving itself planning permission to build on the very green belt that was so recently confirmed?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend outlines an important point. It is absolutely right that once a local authority has its local plan in place, it should adhere to it. If his local authority dared take an opportunity to go outside the local plan, I am sure that my hon. Friend would be the first to ask me or the Secretary of State to consider the application.

T8. [902660] **Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): Crippling cuts have led to some local authorities having to close their local welfare assistance schemes altogether. Food banks in these areas are reporting increased need. Given that the Government are continually presiding over 5 million people living in food poverty, will the Secretary of State commit to protecting future funding and reinstating the local welfare ring fence?

Greg Clark: It is important that local authorities should take their local welfare responsibilities seriously. When we have the local government financial settlement, I am sure that the hon. Lady will be pleased to see that that continues to be recognised.

T5. [902657] **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): The people of Lincolnshire know what is best for the people of Lincolnshire. Will my right hon. Friend outline the benefits on offer in the current devolution deal and tell me how the Lincolnshire bid is going?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton): My hon. Friend is, of course, well placed to represent the views of the people of Lincolnshire and he does it very effectively. The whole approach of the Government towards devolution is bottom up; it is about bespoke deals that recognise that areas are different and that local people know best the tools they need to drive economic improvement and improve lives for the communities that they represent. Discussions in Greater Lincolnshire are going well and include the issues of skills, transport, housing and water management. I hope they will conclude successfully and that a deal will be reached that will last for a very long time.

T9. [902661] **Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Business Secretary to explore how councils in steel communities can use imaginative and creative approaches to business rates to support the steel industry through this difficult time?

Greg Clark: I have had discussions with the Business Secretary and his colleagues. It is very important that we empower those local communities to be able to act in support of the businesses and the employees of those industries. Through the extension of the enterprise zone in Teesside, for example, the hon. Gentleman will see that practical support has been given to make sure that the prosperity of those regions continues to grow, despite these challenges.

T6. [902658] **Stephen Hammond** (Wimbledon) (Con): I am delighted to see the extra supply of affordable housing that will result from the Housing and Planning Bill, but a key to that is supply. Does my hon. Friend agree that the London Land Commission is crucial to this, and will he keep under review all the powers that it may need to ensure the supply of that land?

Brandon Lewis: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I am honoured to be joint chair of the London Land Commission and I can assure him that we will make sure that that land becomes available and plays its important part in delivering housing for the needs of London. Once we reach the 12-month point from when it starts, we will carry out a review to make sure that the commission has all the powers it needs to deliver on that promise.

T10. [902662] **Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): On Saturday I was out with Caroline Pidgeon, who is London Lib Dem mayoral candidate. We were campaigning on the subject of police community support officers. Will the Secretary of State talk to the Policing Minister about ensuring that PCSOs continue to play the essential role that they play in keeping our streets safe, particularly in boroughs such as Sutton, where we have the Safer Sutton Partnership, which joins the police and the local authority together?

Greg Clark: I am glad the right hon. Gentleman reminded us of the name of his candidate, because I think it had escaped many of us in the House. I am happy to confirm the importance of all our police officers, including PCSOs, in keeping our streets safe.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): Simon Stevens has described social care funding as “unresolved business” from the spending review. Does the Secretary of State agree with him that it is time for a fundamental rethink about how we fund social care in the future?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend, who has a deep and long-standing interest in the matter, will know that the funding of adult care needs to be done jointly between local councils and the NHS. The Health Secretary and I are working very closely to make sure that the funds that the Chancellor has made available are put to good use so that our elderly people are properly cared for, whether they are in the charge of councils or in our hospitals.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Do the Government have any plans for fresh initiatives, other than business improvement districts, to help traders in small suburban shopping centres, such as Stirchley in my constituency?

Mr Marcus Jones: This Government are doing a number of things to help the type of traders that the hon. Gentleman refers to. We have allowed sensible planning changes to allow local areas to respond more flexibly to changing market conditions on the high street. We are tackling over-zealous parking practices and I am working closely with retail organisations on the Future High Streets Forum to develop strategies that will enable our high streets and communities to meet the future needs of the consumer.

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): I commend Staffordshire fire and rescue service for its work in fire prevention, which has contributed to a fall in call-outs, but does my right hon. Friend agree that further integration and collaboration between police, fire and other blue light services would help to identify vulnerable people more effectively, which would lead to better outcomes for the public and great efficiency savings?

Greg Clark: I agree that closer collaboration between our blue light services offers the opportunity to offer even better services, as well as to make efficiencies, so I encourage her and her colleagues to make their representations through the current consultation so that we can do that without the current barriers.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): On the very last day of consideration of the Housing and Planning Bill, the Conservatives passed an amendment to bring to an end secure tenancies in social housing. That was done without consultation or any impact assessment. Can the Secretary of State tell me where he warned council tenants that this was in the Conservative manifesto?

Brandon Lewis: Apart from the fact that that was outlined in the summer Budget, the tenancies of current council tenants are not affected. The provisions in the Housing and Planning Bill laid on 7 December prevent councils from offering new tenants life-time tenancies in future.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Some areas, such as the Isle of Wight, will have a much more difficult task than others in increasing their income through increasing the business rates base. Will my right hon. Member meet Isle of Wight Council to discuss this matter?

Greg Clark: I would be delighted to meet Isle of Wight Council. In taking this historic step of giving 100% business rates to local government, it is very important that, with local government, we agree on how places that do not have such a buoyant business rates base do not lose out.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Many of my constituents were dismayed when I went back at the weekend after hearing last week, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) suggested, that the Government were going to limit council tenancies. What does the Minister say to people in my constituency

who are absolutely dismayed that this Government have pulled a flanker on them, and pulled the rug from under them, in what they consider to be their rights as tenants?

Brandon Lewis: I refer the hon. Lady to the answer I gave a few minutes ago and remind her that council tenants who already have a tenancy are not affected by this—it is about new tenancies. This is the right thing to do, as I am sure she would agree, given that the previous Member for Holborn and St Pancras had a council house when he was on a Cabinet salary. I am sure that many taxpayers would wonder whether that was good expenditure.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): South Gloucestershire, Bristol and Bath and North East Somerset councils work very well as a functional unit. Does my right hon. Friend understand that any attempt to reintroduce Avon, directly or through the back door via Treasury pressure, would be regarded as an enormous betrayal, and will he guarantee that it will not happen?

Greg Clark: I can assure my right hon. Friend that I have no intention of reintroducing Avon by the front door, back door or side door.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Further to my earlier question, if the new one-for-one replacement for right to buy was funded directly by the UK Government instead of other means, what would the Barnett consequential be for Scotland?

James Wharton: As I said earlier, the Scottish Government are seeing a significant increase in their capital budget as a result of the announcement in the spending review. The Barnett consequential of individual policies are worked through and delivered. The British Government—the Government here in this place—meet our obligations in that regard, and will continue to do so, to ensure that the Scottish Government get a fair deal and can continue to deliver what they need to deliver to meet their obligations and the concerns of hon. Members.

National Minimum Wage: Sports Direct

3.32 pm

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the relevant Minister if he will make a statement on Sports Direct plc and its compliance with the national minimum wage legislation.

Mr Speaker: I call the relevant Minister, Mr Nicholas Edward Coleridge Boles.

The Minister for Skills (Nick Boles): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I share the hon. Gentleman's concern that working people are paid the full amount that the law requires for every hour that they work, and I welcome his urgent question. We take the enforcement of minimum wage laws very seriously. That is why we have increased the enforcement budget from £8.1 million in 2010 to £13.2 million in 2015-16. While I am not able to comment on enforcement action in relation to individual employers, I can assure the House that Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs follows up every complaint it receives in relation to breaches of the national minimum wage. I encourage any employer or worker who is concerned that these laws are not being complied with in their workplace to contact HMRC or ACAS, through its confidential hotline. HMRC undertakes targeted enforcement activity in the most high-risk sectors of the economy.

As the Prime Minister announced in September, the Government are taking a number of further steps to crack down on employers who are not paying workers the minimum wage. We have already increased the penalty for breaches of minimum wage legislation to 100% of arrears, up to £20,000 per worker, and from April 2016 the Government will double the maximum penalty from 100% to 200% of arrears so that employers comply with the law and working people receive the money they are due. Furthermore, a new team of compliance officers will be established within HMRC to investigate the most serious cases of employers not paying the relevant minimum wage. The team will have the power to use all available sanctions, including penalties and criminal investigation. We will also continue to name and shame employers who do not pay their workers what they are entitled to.

As a Government, our message to employers is straightforward. We will work to reduce burdens on business by cutting regulation and corporation tax. In return, we expect employers to pay working people at least a decent legal minimum—the national minimum wage and, from next April, the national living wage for workers aged 25 and over. I can assure the House that we will not hesitate to crack down hard on employers, large and small, who break this social contract by failing to pay the wage that the law requires.

Mr Umunna: I thank the Minister for his reply. I am proud that the last Labour Government, in the face of the then Conservative Opposition, introduced the national minimum wage in the first place, when people in our country were earning as little as £1 an hour. I am also proud—the Minister mentioned this—that the overwhelming majority of British businesses, notwithstanding any legal requirements, seek to treat their workers with dignity and respect.

We know enough about the practices at Sports Direct plc, which has a branch in my constituency, to conclude that this company is a bad advert for British business and one with a culture of fear in the workplace, which we would not wish to see repeated elsewhere. As the Institute of Directors has said, it is

“a scar on British business.”

I appreciate what the Minister said about not necessarily being able to respond in specific instances, but may I ask him this question? HMRC enforces the national minimum wage. A complaint has been made by Unite the union, of which I am a member, against Sports Direct, accusing it of being in breach of the legislation. HMRC says it cannot act without evidence being provided by workers in that workplace, but, of course, all of them are refusing to come forward in the warehouses concerned, for fear of the repercussions that will follow. Why cannot HMRC go ahead and carry out an investigation in this case, which surely will render other evidence without workers being required to put their necks on the line?

Secondly, may I ask the Minister a generic question? An issue has come up whereby employees are required to go through body searches to check for potential theft. The time they spend going through body searches is not time for which they are paid. The law is unclear in this area. Can the Minister give industry an indication of whether, in the Government's view, time spent going through body searches would count as working time for the purposes of the legislation?

Thirdly, employees face having 15 minutes of working time deducted if they clock-in just one minute late. The law is not entirely clear about that situation, either. Do the Government believe that if an employer is engaged in those kinds of practices, they are not in keeping with the spirit of the legislation?

Fourthly, the enforcement of national minimum wage legislation is carried out not by the Minister's Department, but by HMRC. How can we expect HMRC to do the work that we require of it if the Government are pushing through an 18% real-terms cut in HMRC's funding over the course of the spending review period?

Finally, I have no doubt that the reaction of the employer concerned will be to say, “We comply with the law,” but surely what it needs to understand is that the British public expect a lot more from it. We often do not do things that the law allows us to do, because we do not think that that is the right way to treat our fellow citizens. Surely that should apply to the company in this case.

Nick Boles: The hon. Gentleman asked a series of very important and good questions. The first point I would like to make is that, if any employee of any company has any fear of repercussions, I can reassure them that the ACAS hotline is genuinely confidential. I am sure the hon. Gentleman would be willing to endorse the fact that ACAS is an absolutely, resolutely independent organisation, so people should have no fear of calling that hotline out of hours and reporting a practice.

I did say in my brief response that HMRC enforcement is entitled to conduct targeted enforcement activity in sectors of concern, so it is entirely open to HMRC to investigate proactively in sectors where it feels that breaches may be in evidence. In that sense, it does not necessarily need to wait for a specific complaint to be able to investigate breaches.

I have read the article that revealed some of the allegations being made about Sports Direct. The hon. Gentleman asked about the search and whether the time it takes is working time or not. This is an intensely vexed legal question and he will know, as a former employment law practitioner, how much of his former colleagues' time it is taking up. I cannot give an absolute pronouncement, but what I can say is that anything that counts as work as part of somebody's employment contract must be compensated at least at the level of minimum wage. The question is whether such a search counts as work under their employment contract, and that question can be explored legally.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the second claim that was made—about employees being docked 15 minutes for being one minute late. Although it is legally permissible for time to be docked for late arrival, it is important for every hon. Member to understand that the minimum wage legislation will apply to the 14 minutes as well as to the rest of the time that people work, so employees cannot not be compensated for those 14 minutes if that would bring their overall wage rate down below the national minimum wage. I hope that that goes some way to reassure him.

The hon. Gentleman made a general point about the cut in funding for HMRC of 18% over the spending review period. I will have to take his word for it because I do not have the global figures to hand. I pointed out to him the very significant and dedicated increase in funding for the minimum wage enforcement team. It has gone up by more than 50% since 2010 and will go up £3 million this year alone. I can therefore reassure him that, whatever else is going on in HMRC, this is a priority in which we are investing and on which we will beef up activity.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to make the general point that obeying the law is the minimum we expect of employers. We expect employers to behave responsibly and to be good citizens. We hope they would not be satisfied with just obeying the law, but would want to go a great deal further, and in a sense, our expectations about the behaviour of large and profitable employers are even greater than those for others.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am glad that the Minister graciously welcomed the urgent question. Unfortunately, the Treasury wrote to me this morning to say that the matter was not urgent and should not be aired. Upon examination, I concluded that it was and should. We look very much forward to the exchanges.

Mr Peter Lilley was standing, but the right hon. Gentleman has thought better of it. Never mind—fair enough. I call Mr Marcus Fysh.

Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): My constituents have approached me with concerns about Sports Direct on several occasions since the election. It appears that Sports Direct can sometimes make somewhat aggressive use of and have a somewhat aggressive attitude towards flexible working. Flexible working can suit some people, but does not always suit others. When it comes to such employment laws, has my hon. Friend given any thought to a general anti-avoidance rule, such as the one we are considering in the tax sphere?

Nick Boles: Mr Speaker, you know that it would be a career-limiting move for me to depart in any way from the script laid down by my colleagues at the Treasury, but may I just repeat that I welcome the urgent question and was glad to have the opportunity to answer it?

I thank my hon. Friend for his suggestion. I am not going to pretend that we had given thought to that, but he has now triggered such a thought. I would be happy to discuss with him how it might work.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab) *rose*—

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP) *rose*—

Mr Speaker: We will come to Mr Skinner, who is the constituency Member, but I call Hannah Bardell.

Hannah Bardell: The allegations against Sports Direct are extremely concerning, and we echo the calls of Unite the union for an HMRC investigation into the reported breaches of the national minimum wage legislation at the Shirebrook warehouse. We stand in unity with the employees, because such practices do nothing to engage them and make them feel positive about the place in which they work.

Allegations of such a serious nature must be taken very seriously by the UK Government, and they must do much more to support the accreditation of living wage employers. The Scottish Government have led the way in encouraging more than 400 living wage employers in Scotland. We have the second highest proportion of employees paid the living wage—80.5%—across the countries and regions of the UK.

Scottish National party Members want the Government to commit wholeheartedly to supporting an HMRC investigation into these business practices. What lessons can be learned from this case, especially when the UK Government are gearing up to implement the new minimum wage premium, which is not a living wage? If they cannot enforce the current minimum wage, how on earth will they manage to enforce such increases?

Nick Boles: I welcome the contribution from the hon. Lady who represents the Scottish National party. Of course it is the job of the enforcement team in HMRC to follow up any concerns that they have in relation to specific complaints or sectors where they feel that abuse of the minimum wage legislation and other employment legislation is rife. However, I am sure she will understand that I cannot comment on a particular case.

In general, I do not often welcome investigations by *The Guardian* newspaper, but it is vital that media organisations investigate these matters. The Government will never be able proactively to investigate every employer in the country. If the media can uncover things, I promise that the Government will review their findings and enforce the law, where necessary.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): I echo the Minister's comments on the ACAS hotline. I called the hotline with a constituent who came to my surgery believing that he had been paid below the minimum wage. I found ACAS extremely professional during that phone call and would recommend the service to any hon. Member who had a case in their constituency.

[Robert Jenrick]

May I question the Minister on the upcoming change to the minimum wage, with the introduction of the living wage? I read that in a recent Department for Business, Innovation and Skills survey of 1,000 employers, nine out of 10 employers strongly welcomed the introduction of the living wage and said that it would boost productivity and the morale of their employees. However, it was concerning that four out of 10 employers said that they had not communicated with their staff regarding the upcoming potential rises in pay, and that eight out of 10 still had not updated their payroll or created new procedures to implement the living wage. Will the Minister comment on that, so we can be sure that legitimate businesses are ready and do not get into a similar situation?

Mr Speaker: I was going to recommend that the hon. Gentleman conducted an Adjournment debate on the subject until I realised that he had just done so.

Nick Boles: I thank my hon. Friend for pointing out, from direct experience, how good the ACAS hotline is. On the national living wage, which is coming in next April, a substantial Government communication campaign will start in the new year. We feel that it is in the months leading up to its introduction that communication will be most effective in making sure that employees and employers know that it is coming in, know what is required and begin to work out how to implement it in their systems.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): The Sports Direct scandal has occurred even though the national minimum wage has become a national treasure. Everyone supports it now, but, like all great social reforms, it had to be fought for in the teeth of bitter, all-night opposition in this House. Even when great social reforms become part of the political consensus, they still have to be fought for. The battle to sustain and enforce the minimum wage must be continuous and, frankly, requires more than just warm words from Ministers.

The TUC estimates that at least 250,000 workers are not being paid the minimum wage. What is the Minister's estimate? Have the Government even made one? In the last Parliament, it was revealed that just nine firms had been charged for non-compliance with the minimum wage. Will he update the House on how many legal proceedings are under way against firms for non-compliance? Can he even tell us how many workers have received the money that they are owed after a notice of underpayment has been issued by HMRC, because up to now the Government have failed to provide those data? Will he order an urgent investigation into Sports Direct concerning the alleged abuses, which have led the Institute of Directors to label it

“a scar on British business”?

The Minister says that he is acting, but where are the results? How will he get results with the closure of so many HMRC offices? It is easy to talk the talk on low pay, but it means nothing to millions of low-paid workers, whose labour employers feel they can turn on and off like a tap, unless Ministers walk the walk on the minimum wage. When will we see real action to enforce it?

Nick Boles: I am happy to acknowledge that the national minimum wage was one of the great achievements of the Government led by Tony Blair. I note simply that there are more supporters of that Government's achievements on this side of the House than on the hon. Gentleman's side. I look forward to receiving the same acknowledgement from Opposition Members when, next April, we introduce the national living wage, which is significantly higher than any increase in the national minimum wage he and his colleagues proposed during the last election campaign.

The hon. Gentleman asked some good and proper questions about enforcement, but he glided over the fact that the budget for enforcement has gone up by more than 50% since his party was in government and that we have increased the arrears penalties, increased the powers and stepped up the programme of naming and shaming companies, large and small.

In 2014-15, 705 employers received penalties, totalling more than £934,000. We are setting up a new dedicated team to focus on tackling the most serious breaches, and to consider whether directors of employers that persistently breach legislation should be disqualified. In 2014-15 we identified £3.29 million arrears for 26,318 workers, we conducted 735 successful investigations, and we charged 705 penalties, worth £934,000. We successfully defended 17 of the 23 appeals against enforcement notices. If, from the luxury of opposition, the hon. Member for Cardiff West wants to suggest further activity that we could carry out, I am always happy to hear about it. Fortunately, we are doing a lot more than the Government he was part of to defend one of the only achievements that Labour Members are still willing to talk about.

Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): There are reports that some large retail businesses have already increased their hourly salary for employees to a level above the national living wage, following the Government's announcement. Will the Minister update the House on his understanding of that?

Nick Boles: I have heard such reports, and while I do not have the list of major retailers that have announced that measure on the tip of my tongue, that extremely welcome news underlines the point made earlier: we expect more than just obedience to the law; we expect social responsibility and for employers to see benefits from the improved morale and retention that come from paying people better wages.

Mr Skinner: The Minister should not expect social responsibility from the man who controls Sports Direct in my constituency, at the warehouse at Shirebrook on a pit site. That man has not made £6 billion because he is a considerate employer; he is a monster of a man who does not even reply to MPs' letters—I have sent him many. He has £6 billion and is on *The Sunday Times* rich list, because he is the type of man that will not take any notice of HMRC unless the Government really mean business. This man, Mike Ashley, would fit very nicely on millionaires' row, along with his pals. This will be a test of the Minister's mettle—get stuck in.

Nick Boles: I have never had the pleasure of being encouraged to get stuck in by the hon. Gentleman before, but I promise to follow up on that. Let me be clear: I do not care how famous or well connected

employers are, and I frankly do not care how much money they have made. They must obey the law, and if they do not, we will enforce it. We will fine them and disqualify directors if necessary.

James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): As well as strong enforcement by the Government, it should be possible for those who are employed by bad businesses to vote with their feet and move to better employers. What is being done to help to create more and better jobs for those employed by Sports Direct, and to communicate the availability of those jobs?

Nick Boles: I thank my hon. Friend for bringing us back to the important and constant theme of this Government, which is an economy that is creating new jobs at an unprecedented rate. Most of those jobs are now full time, and most not only pay more than the minimum wage, but pay more than the national living wage that will be introduced in April. It is ultimately through a dynamic economy that we will create opportunity for anyone who does not feel that they are getting a square deal from their current employer.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): When Sports Direct announced that it would build its factory at Shirebrook, people in north Derbyshire were delighted. It is a tragedy that an organisation that employs nearly 3,000 people should have such a terrible reputation. What steps can the Minister take to communicate with that company and try to ensure that its future success does not come at the expense of my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner)?

Nick Boles: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has pointed out how important that organisation is as an employer in his constituency. It is important we acknowledge that Sports Direct employs a great many people, and I am sure a great many people are very happy to work there. I reinforce the point, however, that no company director and no company owner will want the House of Commons to be discussing, in the terms we are discussing, the kind of breach that was alleged in the newspaper article. I am absolutely certain that, when faced with the kind of enforcement action I have set out, any employers, including those in his constituency, will want to sort themselves out.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): What message of Christmas cheer does my hon. Friend have for all those people who are self-employed and earning far less than the minimum wage, but are faced with having to submit quarterly returns to HMRC instead of annual ones?

Nick Boles: I am full of admiration for anyone who is self-employed. It brings many rewards, but money is not always one of them. I am absolutely clear that the Government must do everything they possibly can to reduce the burden of regulation on those who are self-employed.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Does the Minister recognise that what is so disturbing about the newspaper report is the fear among many people working there? In some instances, women are apparently not willing to stay away from work, even if their child is sick

for a day, simply because they may lose their job. Is it not totally unacceptable to have such fear and exploitation in a company? Does it not remind one of the early years of the last century when workers were treated in such a contemptible way? Finally, why was the advice given to Mr Speaker that this was not an urgent question? If the Minister is so keen on coming to the House and welcoming *The Guardian* investigation, why did he try to stop the question being asked in the first place?

Nick Boles: Mr Speaker, it is always for you to judge whether a question is urgent. I simply acknowledge that this question is important, which is why I am so delighted to answer it. On the hon. Gentleman's broader points, while the Government believe in deregulation and reducing the burden on business, we have made it clear that certain laws are absolute and must be adhered to: minimum wage legislation is one, along with health and safety legislation and a whole slew of other employee protections. We intend to enforce those protections robustly.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): According to the Office for National Statistics, a quarter of million people are not paid the minimum wage. According to the Minister, HMRC has found 26,000 of them. What is the Minister going to do to bridge the gap? If the Minister does not have any ideas—it does not look as though he has a plan—may I suggest something? To not pay the minimum wage is a criminal offence. Why have there not been any prosecutions taken out against directors who are not paying the minimum wage? The department in the Attorney General's office responsible for taking out prosecutions has been cut for the past three years and there has not been a single prosecution during that time.

Nick Boles: The hon. Lady always comes to this House knowing the complete answer to every question, but it might help her sometimes if she would actually listen to the list of measures we have introduced that go significantly further than any enforcement activity the Government she supported ever brought forward to defend their minimum wage. When the set of enforcement measures is working as well as it currently is, I see no reason to take any instruction, however helpfully phrased, from the hon. Lady.

Mr Speaker: This is an extremely important matter but we have other important business to follow, so I am looking for pithy questions and answers.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): On the facts, the case in *The Guardian* is disturbing. Does the Minister agree that one good piece of news is that, whatever else happens, in April next year Sports Direct will have to pay these people 11% more than they are getting now?

Nick Boles: That is absolutely right. That has happened because the majority Conservative Government have run the economy sufficiently well that we can expect employers to do that and still prosper.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Minister has pointed out that HMRC conducts risk-based enforcement in sectors where there is a high risk of

[Tom Brake]

workers not getting paid the legal minimum wage. Is the sector in which Sports Direct operates a high-risk sector? If so, how many proactive initiatives has HMRC launched in it?

Nick Boles: The targeted sectors are those where low pay is prevalent and where many employers are therefore close to the minimum wage boundary and those where there have been significant breaches in the past and where there is therefore good reason to expect other such breaches in the future. I cannot tell the right hon. Gentleman how many such investigations there have been, but I am happy to write to him and place a copy in the Library.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister wrote to me on 14 October about the care sector—one of the sectors he just referred to—saying that HMRC was investigating several companies in the sector, but he could not confirm which companies or comment on the progress of the investigations. Given what he said about being strident with the owners, managers and directors of these companies, will he be strident with MiHomecare and Mitie—previously run by the new Tory Baroness McGregor-Smith—about whose conduct significant concerns have been raised?

Nick Boles: It is not the job of a Minister of the Crown to lay down the law on individual cases and companies that have not been found definitely to have breached the law. I have been as clear as possible about any employer, large or small, that does breach the law, and I hope the hon. Gentleman can apply that to any particular case.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): In our area, everyone knows that English native speakers cannot get a job at the Sports Direct warehouse, despite 3,000 people working there, and there was a baby born in the toilets there. Why were there 80 ambulance visits to Sports Direct in two years? Is it because employees are too scared and not allowed time off to see the doctor, and there is therefore a misdirection of NHS resources? Might there also be tied housing, meaning that people are too scared to speak because they are provided with a house to live in, the rent and the transport they have to pay for to get to work? We need a full investigation not just into Sports Direct but into the plethora of agencies it used to employ.

Nick Boles: If the hon. Gentleman or any other hon. Member has allegations and evidence of bad practice in relation to minimum wage, or any other, legislation they would like to bring to my attention, I would welcome it. The hon. Member for Streatham (Mr Umunna) mentioned that a trade union had raised concerns about this particular employer. If employees do not trust the Government

phone line, despite the ACAS hotline being genuinely confidential and independent, and if they would like to submit their evidence through the union, they can, but I am sure hon. Members will understand that they need to be willing to engage with enforcement officers to provide evidence. The Government have to act on the basis of evidence; however well researched the *Guardian* article was, it is not enough on its own.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Is it not time the Government considered introducing a specific criminal offence of exploitation, which they refused to do in the Modern Slavery Bill in the last Parliament?

Nick Boles: We have enough criminal offences; what we need is effective enforcement, and that is exactly what the 50% increase in the enforcement budget and the new powers we are giving to the HMRC enforcement team will achieve.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): My understanding is that the trade unions have made representations on behalf of staff who, for good reasons, want to remain anonymous. Should HMRC continue to ignore representations on behalf of legitimate trade unions, or should it act now and search the offices of Sports Direct?

Nick Boles: I have made it clear that if any individual complaint is to be assessed for its validity, HMRC needs to be able to follow it up. I have also made it clear that in sectors of concern, HMRC undertakes targeted enforcement activity that does not wait for a complaint. It will be listening to this debate.

Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister said that it is ultimately a growing, dynamic economy that should give people confidence about being able to find well paid jobs, but good employment practices and legislation also give them confidence. One issue that is greatly worrying a number of residents in my constituency is the use of tips and service charges to top up wages and the murky world of requirements used by employers such as Turtle Bay, a local restaurant. Will the Minister meet me and some of the campaigners from the GMB union to look into these practices further? I know he has recently conducted an investigation, but it would be incredibly beneficial to those on low wages in my local community to look at how these practices are used to top up wages or otherwise, especially ahead of the new higher minimum wage that he has talked about.

Nick Boles: In my experience the hon. Lady is often on to things before the rest of us, so I would be delighted to meet her.

Mr Speaker: What a perceptive fellow the Minister is. We are most grateful to him, and I thank him for engaging with the urgent question so comprehensively.

Climate Change Agreement

4.5 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): It gives me great pleasure to report to the House on the United Nations conference of parties in Paris last week. COP21 has delivered an historic new global climate change agreement that takes a significant step forward towards reducing, on a global scale, the emissions that cause climate change. For the first time, nearly 200 countries have made a commitment to act together and to be held accountable. In doing so, this agreement will help to protect not just our environment but our national and economic security, now and for generations to come. As the Prime Minister said in his speech at the start of conference:

“instead of making excuses tomorrow to our children and grandchildren, we should be taking action against climate change today.”

I am proud to say that there are no more excuses. With the Paris agreement, we have shown that the world has committed to action.

This deal is unequivocally in Britain's national interest. It moves us towards a level playing field at a global level within which the UK's society and businesses can thrive, as we transition to a low-carbon economy. This is a deal we are wholeheartedly committed to, recognising that action by one state alone cannot and will not solve climate change. It is what we do together that counts.

This is a moment that all parties in the House can take significant credit for. Together, we passed the Climate Change Act 2008, which set an example to the world of what ambitious domestic climate action looks like. Together, since Copenhagen in 2009, we have supported a long, difficult and complex negotiation, which has brought us to this point. I want to pay tribute not just to the Prime Minister and my colleagues across Government, but to my predecessors as Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change for all the hard work they put in to bring us to this point.

As a country, we should be proud of the role we have played, leading in the European Union, working closely with major global players, including the US and China, and leading many of the negotiations. My Department, with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development, has worked tirelessly to build the political conditions and the capacity to enable countries to act. The UK team in Paris last week showed commitment, passion and resilience. When Laurent Fabius asked me to chair the finance session at 4 am on Friday morning, I was well supported, and when I left at 6.30 am, they stayed to write up the conclusions and send them to the presidency. That, Mr Speaker, was commitment.

The UK played a key role in building alliances and shared positions, especially with the most vulnerable countries, to ensure that pressure for ambition could be maximised. The deal in Paris was not done to us; it was done by us. Indeed, it reflects many of the elements that we as a country have already committed to as part of the Climate Change Act. Of course Paris is not the end of the road. We cannot sit back and say, “Job done.” Far from it: Paris is the beginning. Now the hard work to implement the agreement begins.

Let me turn to what the nearly 200 countries have agreed. First, we have set out a clear long-term goal for the world to achieve net zero emissions by the end of the century. The long-term goal sends a strong signal to investors, businesses and policy makers that the shift to a global low-carbon economy will happen and it provides the confidence needed to drive the scale of investment required. We have confirmed our collective ambition to limit global temperature rises to below 2° C. We have agreed a further aspiration of 1.5°. However, the current level of commitments by individual countries will not meet this ambition, so crucially, countries will come back to the table to assess overall progress towards the 2° goal in 2018 and every five years thereafter.

As investment grows and the costs of low-carbon technologies come down, the Paris process will provide not just the opportunity but the political pressure to step up individual countries' emissions reductions targets. Starting in 2020, countries are expected to update their own plans to cut emissions, and will be legally obliged to do so again every five years, thus providing regular political moments to scale up ambition.

This agreement is not only comprehensive in its scope, as it also recognises the role of both developed economies and emerging economies in helping the poorest and most vulnerable countries to protect themselves from the effects of climate change as they transition to a low-carbon economy.

Over the last five years, the UK's £3.87 billion international climate fund has been helping millions of the world's poor better to withstand extreme weather and rising temperatures. At the UN Secretary-General summit in September, the Prime Minister announced a significant uplift to increase climate finance by at least 50% with £5.8 billion-worth of climate finance over the next five years to support poor and vulnerable countries to adapt to climate change and to curb emissions. This is part of a global commitment to mobilise \$100 billion a year from both the public and private sector to protect the most vulnerable and support economic growth from 2020. Other developed countries, including Germany, France, the US, Japan, and Canada have all recently announced increases in their climate finance.

Important as the Paris agreement is, we will achieve our ultimate ambition only if it acts as a catalyst for transformational action from all parts of society. That is why it has been so important to see real action over the last month from business and civil society. A new initiative, for example, called “Mission Innovation”, will see some of the biggest global economies—including the UK, US, and India—doubling their investments in clean energy research and development. Crucially, it is private investors who will join us in this endeavour to bring down the costs of low-carbon technologies.

Here in the UK, we have committed to doubling spending in clean energy research and development, so that by 2020 we will be spending in excess of £400 million. That pledge has been matched by 19 other countries worldwide. This is in recognition of the fact that we will tackle climate change effectively only if we find technologies that are both clean and cheap. Let me emphasise that the announcement I made last month—that I would set out proposals to close coal by 2025 and restrict its use from 2023—added to the momentum at Paris.

[Amber Rudd]

The Paris agreement truly marks an historic turning-point. It builds on the Kyoto protocol, and for the first time ever provides the comprehensive framework in which not just developed countries, but nearly every country of the world has committed to take the global action needed to solve a global problem. Of course, it was hard fought and of course it required compromise to bring everyone with us. Of course, too, it has not solved every problem in one go.

Now we have to set about implementing the commitments made, but we should not underestimate the significance of what has been achieved. All parties have recognised that economic and global security requires us to tackle climate change. All have come together to commit to a single goal—net zero carbon emissions by the end of the century. All have agreed to set out plans to curb emissions and to be held accountable for their actions. We have made a huge step forward in meeting our responsibilities to this and future generations. As the excellent Executive Secretary to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Christiana Figueres, said:

“I used to say we can, we must, we will. Now I can say we did.”

4.14 pm

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement, and for giving me advance sight of it. I also thank her for paying tribute to successive Secretaries of State on both sides of the House. She is right to recognise that the cross-party consensus that has existed since 2008 helped to build the road to Paris, and gave the United Kingdom its voice in the negotiations. It is a precious legacy for all of us, and we must not allow it to fracture now.

For the first time, leaders from nearly every country in the world have come together to cut carbon pollution and set us on the path to a cleaner, greener future; to agree on a common goal of building a carbon-neutral global economy within a generation; to reduce pollution; and to switch to cleaner energy—and, as the Secretary of State rightly recognised, all countries have agreed to raise their ambition every five years until the job is done. I particularly welcomed the Secretary of State's announcement that the developed world would do its fair share by providing at least \$100 billion of finance to assist poorer and more vulnerable countries.

This is a moment to celebrate, not because the agreement is sufficient—we must be honest about the fact that the pledges made by each country do not add up to a commitment that will keep temperature rises well below 2°—but because it gives us enough to take us much, much closer to climate safety, and sends a clear signal to global financial markets that the era of unchecked fossil fuel use is coming to an end.

This accord is testimony to the fact that we are stronger and safer when we work together, both at home and abroad. Our voice has been heard more loudly because we have worked closely with our friends in the European Union and we have spoken together, united and with one voice. Our voice has also been heard because of the hard work and the skills of our lead negotiator, Pete Betts, and his team in the Department for Energy and Climate Change, who worked tirelessly with Sir David King and his team of diplomats in the Foreign Office to

secure the agreement. Let me place on record our thanks for what they have achieved. Let me also commend the dedication of the British scientists, campaigners, faith groups, business leaders and civil society organisations who mobilised public support for this global deal. Last month, along with some of my hon. Friends, I joined hundreds of thousands of people to march peacefully through the streets of London, Edinburgh and other major cities around the world, to ensure that our collective voice was heard in the negotiating rooms of Paris.

The question that must now be asked is “What does this deal mean for Britain?” In recent months, the Government have made a series of decisions that have reversed our progress on the road to climate safety. Ministers have attacked the cheapest options for achieving carbon targets, and household energy bills may rise as a result. Last week, during the Paris negotiations, they decided to raise household and energy bills again through the capacity market auction. Hundreds of millions of pounds will go to energy companies to keep open power stations that would have been open anyway. It is difficult to see how that is consistent with what the Secretary of State has said today, and with her claim to be acting to control costs. Will she explain that to the House today?

Ministers have also undermined our progress on carbon capture and storage, which is crucial to ensuring a just transition and support for climate change action from the communities of Britain who work in the important industries that rely on fossil fuels. In Yorkshire and Scotland, communities, scientists and engineers are reeling from the Chancellor's decision to axe a £1 billion fund for CCS. Can the Secretary of State tell us today that that decision will be reversed?

The Government have wasted no time in blocking new wind farms even where they enjoy strong local support, and have made severe and short-sighted cuts in energy efficiency and solar power schemes. Thousands have lost their jobs, and thousands more could still do so. Millions around the world will go into the coming winter facing the prospect of cold homes and high energy bills, and in this country that is avoidable. The Government's decisions will cause immense damage to human lives and to the planet.

Following the Prime Minister's important words in Paris, will the Secretary of State demonstrate to the House that the Government as a whole will listen, and that they will prevent the Green Investment Bank from being sold off in a manner that will remove its green mandate, leaving it free to invest in fossil fuels; cancel the new tax on more efficient vehicles; and stop another tax raid on the renewable energy industry? All those steps will take us backwards on climate change and jeopardise jobs in the industries of the future. It raises this question: what is this Government's plan for meeting Britain's climate change commitments? The Government's own advisers, the Committee on Climate Change, recently warned that existing energy policy is “failing”, and only this morning the CBI called for more clarity for British business. On news of the Paris deal and the goal it contains to limit global temperature rises, its director told the BBC:

“Businesses will want to see domestic policies that demonstrate commitment to this goal”.

So can the Energy Secretary confirm whether her Government's recent string of green U-turns will now be reviewed in the light of the new assurances we have that every country will play its part in addressing climate change?

Secondly, can the Energy Secretary confirm that the UK will continue to support raising European targets on reducing carbon pollution by 2030, to ensure we are making our fair contribution to the international effort and grasping the maximum potential for our economy from green industries? Finally, will the Energy Secretary ask the independent Committee on Climate Change to review the adequacy of Britain's existing carbon reduction targets in light of the new internationally agreed goal of limiting global temperature rises to well below 2 °C, and ideally to no more than 1.5 °C?

Two weeks ago the Prime Minister said that when we look back, we will ask

“what was it that was so difficult when the world was in peril?”

The Secretary of State rightly said in her statement to the House that there are no excuses, and I look forward, as do all my hon. Friends, to hearing how she intends to breathe life into this historic landmark agreement.

Amber Rudd: I thank the hon. Lady for her questions and welcome her support for the overall global deal. In answering her questions, I would make the following points. First, the UK's emissions are 1.2% of the world's, so our emphasis must be on making sure we get an international deal. That is why we were so committed to it. That is why we spent the past week flat-out trying to achieve it, and working to ensure we got China into the deal, which is responsible for 26% of the world's emissions—more than the EU and the US combined. We remain committed to the Climate Change Act and to making sure we go forward on a low-carbon future, but there is no value in it if we do not actually have influence in the rest of the world. That is what we achieved this week: making sure that that influence was absorbed and taken on, so we reached that agreement—very late on Saturday night.

To answer the hon. Lady's questions about our position in this country, I repeat that we are committed to the Climate Change Act 2008 and to our goals and our carbon budgets, but the difference between her side of the House and ours is that we will not risk security of supply and we will not put additional costs on consumers. She asks about the capacity markets but I am afraid that her interpretation is wholly wrong. The purpose of the capacity market is to take absolutely no risks with security of supply. That is what we have done, and we are proud of doing that.

In terms of the actions on renewables, this is about ensuring that our consumers pay the right price for the renewables to which we remain committed. As the costs of renewables come down, it is absolutely right that the subsidies come down. It is completely wrong to characterise us as having any negativity about renewables. We remain committed to them, but we will continue to make provision for them at the best value for money.

As far as CCS is concerned, it was a tight spending round in the review with the Treasury. The cost was £1 billion, and we made a decision not to proceed with the fund. I believe that CCS is going to play an important part in decarbonising in the future, particularly industrial CCS, and we will work internationally to make progress on that. Overall, this Government are absolutely committed to a low-carbon future that is value for money and constantly provides security to consumers and families.

Mr Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): As far as I am aware, there are only two peer-reviewed studies that have computed the total reductions in emissions promised by the member states at Paris, fed them through the standard climate model and calculated the impact on future temperatures. Both have concluded that the temperature in 2100 will, as a result of this treaty, be a mere 0.2 °C below what it would otherwise be. Has my right hon. Friend any alternative figures, and would not the trillions of pounds being spent on such a puny achievement be better spent on alleviating poverty and eradicating disease?

Amber Rudd: I thank my right hon. Friend for his question, but at its core is a suggestion that what we are doing will not alleviate poverty. On that he could not be more wrong. Particularly through climate finance and the investment that will come from the private sector, which Governments will be able to leverage, we will help to alleviate poverty and provide energy in areas of Africa and India that have never had it before. That is an essential part of what we will achieve.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I should gently point out to the House that hon. or right hon. Members who were not present at the start of the Secretary of State's statement should not expect to be called. Now that I have made that point, it would be rather unseemly for them to continue to stand, as well as fruitless.

Callum McCaig (Aberdeen South) (SNP): I add my thanks and that of my party to the Secretary of State, her team and all those both at home and abroad who made the deal possible. The term “historic” has rightly been used in the rhetoric, but we will be judged not on words but on deeds.

We very much welcome the money to be provided to those most at risk from climate change and to those who have contributed least to it. That is the theme of climate justice, which I have spoken about here before. The deal is not perfect, and it has been acknowledged that it is not enough. We need to up our game both at home and abroad if we are to meet the target of a 2° C rise or well below, and extensively so if we are to meet the aspiration of a 1.5° C rise.

It strikes me that we almost have two Secretaries of State—the one who made her eloquent statement extolling the virtues of the low-carbon economy, and the one who answered questions and reiterated some of the appalling betrayals that the green economy has suffered at the hands of this Government. She said in her statement that there are no excuses, but for the past six months I have heard excuse after excuse. On onshore wind—excuses. On the solar feed-in tariffs—excuses. On carbon capture and storage—excuses. On the Green Investment Bank—yet more excuses. Will she rethink those policies and reinvest in them, or are we to hear yet more excuses?

The world stands on the brink of a global green revolution, and the economic possibilities are enormous, yet we seem determined to throw away our lead in various technologies. To use the words that my hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Mr MacNeil) regularly uses, the Government are being penny-wise

[*Callum McCaig*]

but pound-foolish. There has been betrayal on carbon capture and storage—I had to question my hearing when it was said that it had a bright future in the UK following the recent decision. It might, but it will be technology developed by others, and others will make the money out of it. That is so short-sighted that it is beyond belief.

Scotland wants to play its part, and we can play our part, but we require this Government to match their rhetoric with deeds. Will the Secretary of State back the green economy and allow us to play our part, or will we hear yet more excuses?

Amber Rudd: I simply do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's characterisation. I share his enthusiasm for the low-carbon economy, but we are going about it in a different way from the one taken under the coalition. We are making sure that we deliver better value for money, and we are investing in the future in a way that has not been done over the past 20 to 25 years—for instance, with nuclear and with offshore wind, which I am sure he would support. While supporting the low-carbon economy, we must also maintain security of supply, and I am sure he will continue to support the Government's commitment to oil and gas in Aberdeen.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): My right hon. Friend will recall meeting my concerned residents in Wealden, who talked about other countries' commitments to climate targets. What is her Department doing to encourage other countries to meet their climate targets?

Amber Rudd: My right hon. Friend rightly says that not all countries have the same resources as we do to meet their targets. I am happy to say that we have a number of helpful tools that we offer in working with other countries, such as the global calculator. It helps them to work out what steps they need to take to meet their targets, and we expect to step up that engagement to help them to do so.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I commend the Secretary of State for her role in this agreement and, in particular, the formation of the so-called "high ambition coalition" between developed countries and vulnerable countries, which was such an important part of getting the deal that she did. Labour Members want her to be part of a high ambition coalition at home as well as abroad. She mentioned the very important goal of net zero emissions contained in the agreement—I believe this is to be in the second half of the century. Can she confirm not only that that will apply globally, but that it must apply to each and every country that is a signatory to the agreement?

Amber Rudd: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his words, and I certainly share his enthusiasm nationally for high ambition—perhaps less of the coalition, for now. It is a great achievement to have the zero emissions target within the long-term goal, but for now the UK will continue to focus on our Climate Change Act targets for 2050.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Given that the UK's climate change laws are stricter than the obligations agreed in Paris, does my right hon. Friend agree that

there is a real risk of British business being put at a competitive disadvantage if we do not cut the costs of energy, particularly for energy-intensive companies?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is right to highlight the issue of competitiveness. The fact is that getting this global deal is a way of addressing that issue, because other countries will have to step up and make the same sort of plans that we are making. But the best way to reduce the costs of energy is to drive them down through the sort of actions this Government are taking.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): In all the acres of media coverage of the Paris agreement, George Monbiot sums it up best:

"By comparison to what it could have been, it's a miracle. By comparison to what it should have been, it's a disaster."

I welcome the inclusion of the 1.5° goal, but it is meaningless without policies to deliver it—in particular, keeping the vast majority of fossil fuels in the ground. Will the Secretary of State tell us how the Government's recently agreed duty to "maximise" the economic recovery of oil and gas is anything other than completely incompatible with what she has just signed up to in Paris?

Amber Rudd: I am going to interpret that as a cautious welcome from the hon. Lady. There is an element of this deal that she must agree is rather extraordinary: having 200 countries participate. The answer to her question is that we cannot take any risks at all with energy security. Maximum economic recovery is absolutely a commitment from this Government. We have to get a balance right. We have to make sure that we protect energy security while growing our low carbon economy—we can do both.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): I, too, congratulate the Secretary of State and her team on what they have achieved in Paris. She will be aware that since 1990 the UK has decreased emissions by about 28%, which is faster than the EU average, whereas other EU countries have had difficulty in achieving anything like that. Indeed, Austria, Holland, Spain and Portugal have all increased emissions since 1990. What processes exist within the EU to make sure that that is not allowed to continue?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend, who is so experienced in this field, has highlighted the issue of the EU sharing of responsibilities, which we will move to next year. I do not doubt that this will be a challenging negotiation, but the UK's experience is that we can demonstrate our leadership by showing that we have driven down emissions while growing our economy. We hope that we will be able to demonstrate that to other countries and encourage them to follow suit.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): First, I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of her statement and congratulate her on her involvement in the Paris talks. Will she now take the chance to review and reset the last six months of policy of her Government? Solar and onshore wind—the cheapest forms of renewable generation—energy-efficiency and carbon capture and storage have all been cut. Will she look again at the diesel generation loopholes and make

sure that transportation plays its full part? Those are to name but some things. I fear that this Government view investment as cost today, rather than as, more correctly, savings for the future, except of course when it comes to nuclear. Just what will change in her Department as a result of the Paris talks?

Amber Rudd: I am happy to say that the Paris agreement allows us to continue on the path that this Government have set in delivering a low carbon future, sticking to our Climate Change Act commitments and always ensuring that we take no risk with security of supply and that we provide value for money for consumers.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on what has been achieved and the French Government on their magnificent hosting of this summit. Given that much of the climate finance pledged by the wealthy nations is likely to be classified as official development assistance and that many of our friends in Europe show no real sign of increasing the amount of ODA that they are giving as a percentage of their gross national income, is she concerned that some of this climate finance might be taken away from the amounts available for the refugee crisis in Syria and other concerns around the world?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is right to praise the French Government who managed this summit in an extraordinarily able way and with great diplomatic skill. The matter of the \$100 billion to be mobilised by 2020 is challenging for everybody involved, and we will constantly return to it to ensure that it is delivered, but let us not forget that the money is “mobilised”, so it is not entirely the Government’s to deliver; it is also an attempt to generate private sector influence as well.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Let me add my congratulations to all those involved in the important talks in Paris. One of the most remarkable things about the agreement is the aspiration to hold reductions to 1.5 °C. As the Secretary of State rightly said, the Paris process adds political pressure to emissions reduction. Will she apply some of that political pressure on the Chancellor of the Exchequer who said the other day that he had inherited zilch and that the decision on carbon capture and storage was not a cut?

Amber Rudd: I think I will just welcome the hon. Lady’s comments about our 1.5° ambition, which was achieved while working very closely with the high ambition coalition.

Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): It is no longer a question of whether the world tackles man’s impact on the climate, but when. It is a huge achievement to have included developing economies in that ambition, and to have made that ambition realistic. What part can we play in accelerating research and development for game-changing technology, and what part will the clean energy from Hinkley Point in Somerset play in that process?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the distinguishing factor of this agreement, rather than of previous ones, is that it includes developing countries. We are committed to ensuring that we work across other Governments to develop new energy sources through our programme of mission innovation. I also agree that nuclear power, including that from Hinkley

Point, which is the first new nuclear deal to be commissioned for 25 years, will be an important part of the low carbon future.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): The Secretary of State is correct in wanting a level playing field between Britain and other countries, but the failure of Paris to reach the aspirations of the Durban conference to have legally binding limits on carbon dioxide emissions from all countries must put this country at a disadvantage because we do have legally binding commitments. We have already lost great chunks of the steel industry and the aluminium industry. How will the right hon. Lady produce that level playing field to the advantage of our industries?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point about competitiveness. Although there are some elements of this that are not legally binding, there are plenty that are. The fact is that every country has to come back every five years and to demonstrate what they are doing. There will, I hope, be a political moment at that point. Non-governmental organisations, civil society and businesses will be watching and campaigning to ensure that we always make progress. Countries cannot go back on their commitments; they can only go forward. The hon. Gentleman should not underestimate the impact that this deal will have internationally.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I add my congratulations to the Secretary of State and all those who have worked for many years on achieving an impressive outcome. Will the Secretary of State confirm whether the success criteria set before the conference were achieved at it?

Amber Rudd: My hon. Friend asks a good question. Most of our criteria were met, but nobody will have left the conference saying that all their criteria were met. That is how we got a deal—everybody had to compromise a little. That was the achievement of the agreement.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for a landmark statement. I congratulate her on her personal stamina at 4 am and in particular on the tribute that she paid to her predecessors of all political parties. I think she will agree that the fact that Europe has spoken with one voice was a significant part of the process. None the less, there is still the inconsistency. Does she not agree that, although it was essential that we signed up to ambitious targets in Paris, there is an inconsistency in our scrapping schemes, signed in the last Parliament, that had a meaningful role in dealing with climate change at home?

Amber Rudd: The success of the Paris agreement was the intended nationally determined contributions that each country had to make and come forward with to participate. Almost every country had done that by the day of the agreement. But those are voluntary and very few countries criticised each other. Each country delivers in its own way. That is what the UK will continue to do.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): On current trends of uncontrolled immigration, this country will have a population of 30 million more by the end of the century. What impact does my right hon. Friend think that will have on our CO₂ emissions?

Amber Rudd: I reassure my hon. Friend that the big influence on our CO₂ emissions is generally from the power sector and industry. We will monitor them constantly to enable there to be continued reductions.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): I also commend the Secretary of State and her officials for the part that they played in securing the Paris agreement. With that agreement in place, Britain will need to be more ambitious, if anything, when it comes to emissions reductions yet the Government are struggling to meet their renewables target, particularly when it comes to heat and transport. As in so many areas, the Chancellor ultimately calls the shots, but will the right hon. Lady let the House know what progress she has made in persuading the Secretary of State for Transport to do more to decarbonise that sector?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: the challenge for the renewables target is heat and transport. I reassure him that I am working closely with the Secretaries of State for Transport and for Communities and Local Government to put together a plan to ensure that we can make that target.

Mark Spencer (Sherwood) (Con): The Secretary of State will be aware that the largest percentage of electricity generated today still comes from coal-fired power. Will she give further reassurance that, as we move to a lower carbon future, consumer prices will remain at the forefront of her thoughts, as well as continuity of supply and carbon leakage?

Amber Rudd: I reassure my hon. Friend that we would in no way sacrifice our security of supply as we move towards a low carbon economy. I can also tell him that putting an end date on coal is an important part of making sure that we meet our low carbon future. We should be proud of the fact that we are the first developed country to put an end date on that.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Does the Secretary of State have full confidence that the funding commitments and action plans that Governments have signed up to will be adhered to? I commend her on her statement and the work that went into the agreement, which uses human rights language much more strongly than any environmental agreement had used before. But how confident is she about adherence and follow-through?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman is right that the financial contributions—the \$100 billion by 2020—were a key element in bringing on developing countries, which had never participated before in this sort of commitment. That is one side of the agreement. It is absolutely essential that we deliver on it, but Governments and businesses—not only Governments—are going to do that. The success of the agreement over the next five, 10 or 15 years will be tested if that does not happen.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State and her whole team on the part they played in reaching this historic deal. She will know that it is not only about acting globally, but about acting locally. Will she join me in paying tribute to community groups, such as Transition Town Totnes and Sustainable South Brent, and to groups all around the country? They are keen to meet her to talk further about the role they can play to further the goals.

Amber Rudd: I will always be delighted to meet my hon. Friend's constituents. She is right that it is much more effective if these actions are taken locally and nationally, but above all not top-down internationally.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Will the right hon. Lady bridge her rhetoric to reality by announcing investment in the Swansea, Cardiff and Newport tidal barrages scheme, which will exploit for the first time ever the neglected immense power of the tides, which are entirely predictable and, when linked to power schemes in the valleys, are entirely demand-responsive? Tidal power is green, non-carbon and eternal.

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman is right. We are looking closely at the opportunity for tidal power. My Department is now engaging in due diligence and if tidal power can meet the targets of being secure, clean and affordable, we will certainly take it very seriously.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the UK energy market's capacity to replace unabated coal by the cut-off date of 2025?

Amber Rudd: We will carry out a consultation at the beginning of next year in order to address that, but I have been very clear in the policy choices that I set out that we expect to bring on more gas to cover some of the coal that will be coming off.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Investors in renewable energy tell me that they want certainty from the Government's energy policy. Can the Secretary of State set out the key targets and milestones for the implementation of the Paris agreement to provide the certainty that is necessary for investment to be made in renewables?

Amber Rudd: Many of our targets have not changed as a result of the Paris agreement, although of course I will be discussing them closely within my Department. We have already set out our plans for offshore wind and we will shortly set out our plans for solar.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The Scottish First Minister announced £12 million of climate justice funding in addition to the Scottish Government's international development fund so, building on some of the other questions, what new money for climate adaptation will be announced as a result of the agreement, and will it be additional to existing official development assistance commitments?

Amber Rudd: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been very clear. As I said in my earlier comments, he has already announced a 50% increase in our climate finance, which has been very much welcomed by developing countries.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State agree that this is good news from Paris, but that the hard work now begins, turning aspiration into action? Does she agree that we must maintain the vision that this country has had for some time of sharing intellectual property and innovation with many other countries? For example, the Engineering and Physical

Sciences Research Council committee on sustainable production, which I chair, shares with other countries innovation that can reduce their carbon emissions?

Amber Rudd: The hon. Gentleman is right. That shared vision across different countries is essential. Confidence in the technology section of the agreement was very important for some of the developing countries. I should add that we have doubled our innovation spending on energy to join the Americans and other developed countries in Mission Innovation, which is all about sharing investment and technological discoveries.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State on her role in achieving this historic agreement. Does she accept that if the Government are to meet their commitment and show leadership in the world, they must change their approach to renewable energies, in particular to onshore wind?

Amber Rudd: That was a cautious compliment from the hon. Gentleman. That is not what I found internationally. In discussions with other Ministers, I found a lot of interest in what we were doing to drive down the costs of renewables. Renewables should not have a subsidy forever; the point is to try and engage with the industry to lower the cost. The success of a truly low carbon international economy will be achieved when the cost of green energy is reduced.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): As a Co-operative party MP, I have long been a supporter of co-operative community renewal energy schemes, of which there are a number in this country. When I met representatives of one such company last week, they told me that the uncertainty that the Government have created around the feed-in tariff was causing them problems with planning into the future. How will the Secretary of State provide policy certainty for such groups who want to do their bit in meeting this agreement?

Amber Rudd: I remind the hon. Gentleman that over the past 15 to 20 years the costs of solar panels have come down by 80%, so it is right that the subsidy comes down accordingly. I will shortly make an announcement about what it will come down to, and I am sure he will be interested in the result.

Airports Capacity

4.50 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Patrick McLoughlin): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about airports policy.

Aviation is a British success story. Today we have the third largest aviation network in the world, second only to the US and China. But with that success comes challenges. Heathrow is full; Gatwick is filling up. If no action is taken, the entire London system will be full by 2040. Yet we need new connections to new cities in new economies. There are other challenges too. Airports create jobs and opportunities. Technology is changing. Planes are becoming quieter and more efficient, but there is still inevitably an environmental impact. For some, the argument seems simple: oppose all expansion anywhere, or back it, but always somewhere else. Yes, there are opportunities in the network of national airports, with global connections from cities such as Birmingham, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester and Newcastle, but growth there will come alongside growth in the south-east, not instead of it.

That is why in September 2012 Sir Howard Davies was asked to lead a commission on the issue. The Airports Commission's final report was published less than six months ago. It made a strong case for expansion in the south-east, and we have considered that evidence. The Government accept the case for expansion, and the Government accept the commission's shortlist of options for expansion. We will begin work straight away on preparing the building blocks for an airport national policy statement in line with the Planning Act 2008. Putting this new framework in place will be essential groundwork for implementing the decisions we take on new capacity, wherever it is to be built.

Sir Howard Davies and his team produced a powerful report. The Heathrow Airport Ltd scheme was recommended by the commission, but all three schemes were deemed viable. We are continuing to consider all three schemes, and we want to see action, but we must get the next steps right, for those keen to push ahead with expansion and for those who will be affected by it.

We will therefore undertake a package of further work. First, we must deal with air quality. I want to build confidence that expansion can take place within the legal limits, so we will accept the Environmental Audit Committee's recommendation to test the commission's work against the Government's new air quality plan. Secondly, we must deal with the concerns about noise. I want to get the best possible outcome on this for local residents, so we will engage further with the promoters to make sure that the best package of noise mitigation measures is in place. Thirdly, we must deal with carbon emissions, so we will look at all measures to mitigate carbon impacts and address the sustainability concerns, particularly during construction. Fourthly, we must manage the other impacts on local communities. I want people who stand to lose their homes to be properly compensated for the impacts of expansion, and I want local people to have the best access to the opportunities that expansion will bring, including new jobs and apprenticeships. We will therefore develop detailed community mitigation measures for each of the shortlisted options.

[Mr Patrick McLoughlin]

We expect to conclude that package of work by the summer. Critically, that means ensuring that delivery of the timetable for the additional capacity set out by Sir Howard does not alter. The commission reported that an additional runway would be required by 2030, and we intend to meet that requirement. In saying this, I am fully aware that some will wish that we would go further, and others will wish we were making no such progress at all. We are prepared for that, because I want to get this decision right. That means getting the environmental response right and, in the meantime, getting on with the hard work to build the new capacity to the timetable set out by Sir Howard in the commission's report. I commend this statement to the House.

4.54 pm

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement, but it should not have fallen to him to announce that the Prime Minister has broken the clear promise he gave to the House in July, when he said:

"The guarantee that I can give... is that a decision will be made by the end of the year."—[*Official Report*, 1 July 2015; Vol. 597, c. 1473.]

So, my first question is simple: why is not the Prime Minister explaining his own U-turn?

My time to respond is very limited due to the brevity of the Secretary of State's statement, but I want to register our protest against the Government's decision to announce their new position in the press. The Secretary of State said that,

"when an announcement is to be made, I will make it in the House."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 2015; Vol. 603, c. 1135.]

Instead, we got a last-minute note from our essay-crisis Prime Minister explaining why he could not meet his own deadline. That shambolic announcement on Thursday has rightly been condemned by businesses and by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

We need a new runway in the south-east, but the environmental concerns have been known since July, so what has the Secretary of State been doing in the past six months? The Government's announcement was such a shambles that he could not tell us basic information about the new environmental and mitigation work. What are the areas he believes still need to be addressed and were not adequately covered by the Airports Commission? Who will be leading that work? What are the terms of reference and when will it report?

If the Secretary of State cannot answer those basic questions, is it not confirmation that the Government have abandoned everything but the pretence of following due process and that the Prime Minister broke his promise because he has put avoiding a by-election in Richmond Park ahead of the national interest?

Turning to another issue raised by the statement, the Government have always said that the Sub-Committee's recommendations would be subject to a full Cabinet discussion. Has that discussion taken place or have the Secretary of State's colleagues been left as much in the dark as the rest of the House?

Finally, what steps will the Secretary of State now take to address the blight and uncertainty that this latest politically motivated delay will cause?

Mr McLoughlin: I find it rather hard to accept from the hon. Lady that we are somehow taking too long over this matter. I will go over a little bit of the history. In 2001, Labour Ministers were reported to be seriously considering building a third runway at Heathrow, to relieve the increasing congestion in London. In December 2003, the then Transport Secretary, Alistair Darling, published a White Paper on plans for a third runway and a sixth terminal at Heathrow, to be completed within 12 years. In 2007, the then Government published a public consultation document weighted firmly in favour of Heathrow to accommodate a new runway and 220,000 extra flights a year. In 2009, the then Government approved a third runway, taking the number of flights handled by the airport from 480,000 to more than 700,000 a year. It is not worthy of the Labour party to complain about the time we are taking to come to a decision on a very thorough report.

Indeed, the Leader of the Opposition seems to think so as well. He gave an interview on Sky Television last Thursday, during which the correspondent asked him:

"I think people are a little confused at the moment about exactly though what Labour's policy on Heathrow specifically is. Can you clarify it for us, what is Labour's position?"

The Leader of the Opposition answered:

"The position is that we've put these questions on how we go ahead with airport expansion on the basis of capacity across the south-east, on the basis of the need for a hub and of course the effects on neighbouring communities and the environment and noise. Those answers have to be given before any decision can be taken about where the expansion should take place."

It gets better. The correspondent said:

"So, at the moment you do not have a position on Heathrow specifically?"

The Leader of the Opposition replied:

"At the moment that is our position".

I do not think I will take too many lectures about getting the timescale right.

I stand by what I said in my statement, which is that Sir Howard said there needs to be a conclusion and a runway available for operation by 2030. Even on the timetable I have announced today, that is well within the range of possibilities of the programme about which we are talking, particularly in the light of the Planning Act 2008, which was of course passed by the previous Labour Government.

Sir Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend recall that the recommendation of a previous commission, led by Lord Justice Roskill, was not accepted by the Government of the day? Is it not right to take time to consider two aspects of Davies? One is the very weak section on the environmental aspects of developing Heathrow, and the other is the need to address the fundamental contradiction that if it is right to have a hub airport in London, three runways simply do not suffice.

Mr McLoughlin: My right hon. Friend has covered and followed this issue for a lot longer than anybody else in the House. He makes valid points that we need to address. There is no doubt about what is happening to overall capacity as far as aviation and aircraft movements are concerned. I am incredibly grateful not only to Sir Howard Davies but to the rest of the members of the commission for the work that they have done to produce a very valuable report, on which we will be able to reach conclusions in due course.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): I, too, thank the Secretary of State for early sight of his statement. In Scotland, 90% of international visitors travel by air, of whom more than a third come through Heathrow as a hub, and traditional exports of salmon, shellfish and whisky are vital to the economy. Air access determines our ability to attract investment, grow jobs and grow the economy, so a decision on capacity is vital.

The UK Government have known all the environmental issues all along. They could have chosen Heathrow, Gatwick or somewhere new, all with environmental conditions. They could have chosen nothing at all: they could have ruled that out and allowed others to get on: indecision stops everyone from taking action, and keeps people and communities in stasis.

That is being said not just in Scotland and not just by me. Let me quote the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr Goodwill), at an Association of British Travel Agents conference in June 2015. He said that

“we cannot afford to stall on making a decision any longer. A thriving travel industry indicates a thriving economy; government policy must support the growth of the travel industry.”

On 7 September, the Minister in the Lords said, “There is no dithering”, and added that the decision would be made

“as the Prime Minister—the head of the Government—has made clear, by the end of this year, that is 2015.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords, 7 September 2015; Vol. 764, c. 1218.*]

Indeed, in October 2012, the Secretary of State said that the Davies commission would make recommendations “in 2013. Although some people say that it will take rather a long time, it will not take that long once it gets under way.”—[*Official Report, 18 October 2012; Vol. 551, c. 476.*]

In his speech to the Conservative party in October 2012, he said:

“There’s another area where we have got to help businesses too. And that’s to compete internationally... But in the south east the runways are filling up. And the jets are circling in our skies. That’s hitting our prosperity. It’s bad for the environment. It’s putting off investors. It’s costing jobs. And it’s holding Britain back.”

In his speech to the last Conservative conference, he said:

“On Airports in the south east. I don’t hide the challenge.”

I could go on. As the Secretary of State said, “It gets better.” The Prime Minister has twice told this House in Prime Minister’s questions that we would have a decision. Let me ask this—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order.

Mr McLoughlin: I thought the hon. Gentleman, in quoting various announcements, was—

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): It was a holding position.

Mr McLoughlin: As my hon. Friend says, he was in a holding position, because one thing he did not tell us was which scheme, or indeed which airport, he supports. He failed to do that. As I have said, it is right that this is a very big issue, and it has dogged Governments for many years. We will take a decision, but we want to do some further work on some of the environmental impacts,

bearing in mind some of the recent developments. Bearing in mind the report published on 26 November by the Environmental Audit Committee, which has just looked into this issue, saying that we should take a fresh look at certain issues, I would have thought that the House accepted that that is what we will do before we come to a decision in the summer.

Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend accept that there is a need to reach a decision on airport expansion, but that it should not come at the expense of environmental considerations? We have to get it right. As he said in his last answer, even Sir Howard Davies has accepted that since he published his report, the issue of air quality has moved on and that those changes must be examined to ensure that our decision is based on a like-for-like comparison and that we are not just hoofing it on the wing.

Mr McLoughlin: I thank my right hon. Friend, who took a great interest in this issue when he was in the Department. He is right that we have moved significantly further by accepting the case for more airport capacity in the south-east and the three recommendations in the report. That enables us to look at the specific issues that have come about as a result of events since the publication of the report, as well as at how the decision will affect communities and what kind of mitigation we can put in place for those who will be affected to make the decision more acceptable in the longer term.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): More than two years ago, the Transport Committee supported the expansion of hub capacity in the national economic interest and backed Heathrow, with environmental safeguards. The Davies commission, which reported six months ago, came to very similar conclusions. It appears that the Government have done no work or very little work since that time. We are six months on and, according to the CBI, the UK economy is losing out to the tune of about £1 billion a year because of the lack of long-haul hub capacity. Will the decision ever be taken?

Mr McLoughlin: In fairness, the hon. Lady, who chairs the Transport Committee with distinction, was part of a Government that failed for many years to take a decision on where the extra capacity should be. Sir Howard says that it is very important that the new capacity is available by 2030. What I have talked about today will be within that timetable. We are just taking a little longer. If we had not done the work on air quality that we are embarking on, we might have slowed the process down, rather than sped it up.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): I remind my right hon. Friend, in all possible friendliness, that what the Labour party may or may not have done is completely irrelevant. It is of no interest to any of us and is unlikely to be so. Does he agree that this decision not to make a decision is truly lamentable? This is absolutely no way to run what he is pleased to call

“a world-class transport system to support a world-class economy.” As the Davies commission reported absolutely clearly what its preferred decision was, without any prevarication, what exactly was the point of it?

Mr McLoughlin: I will make a number of points. I am very sorry that my right hon. Friend thinks that the fact that there was no action from a previous Government is completely irrelevant to the situation we find ourselves in. I do not accept that. The simple fact is that the Davies commission has identified, in a thorough report, that extra capacity is needed. It has said that three options can be considered, and we are right to consider those three options. I hope very much that, by the summer, we will be able to tell the House which one carries the most favour with the Government.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): The Secretary of State knows that I hold him in high regard, even when I heckle him, but it took the Conservatives 18 months to get past the Liberal Democrats' red line on increases in aviation capacity, they used the Davies commission to buy three more years to get them beyond the general election and they have bought another six months by avoiding making a statement until today. Why does the Secretary of State not just admit that this is a political fix to get us past the mayoral election in London? Given his integrity and honesty, why does he not own up to the fact that this has nothing to do with the national interest?

Mr McLoughlin: I do not mind the occasional heckle from the hon. Gentleman—indeed, I am quite used to that by now. He says that this is just a fix to move past the mayoral elections, but we have always known when those elections were, and if it had been a fix we would have simply said when the Davies report was published that we were not going to respond for 12 months. My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) has been perfectly clear about where he stands on this matter, unlike the right hon. Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan) who, when he was Minister of State and attending Cabinet in 2009, said that he was firmly in favour of Heathrow expansion.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): My right hon. Friend has held office since the Airports Commission received its instructions in September 2012, so he will know that the foreword to its report states:

“The Commission urges the Government to make an early decision on its recommendations. Further delay will be increasingly costly and will be seen, nationally and internationally, as a sign that the UK is unwilling or unable to take the steps needed to maintain its position as a well-connected open trading economy in the twenty first century.”

My right hon. Friend is a decent and loyal team player, and he is loyally presenting the team position today. Does he understand that when the Conservative team imitates the Labour candidate for Mayor of London by putting personal and party interests ahead of the national interest, we all lose?

Mr McLoughlin: As a distinguished Chair of a Select Committee, my hon. Friend expects his Committee to be listened to with the respect that should be given to a Select Committee. The Environmental Audit Committee recommended that the Government take more time to address air quality, and stated:

“On air quality, the Government will need to re-examine the Commission's findings in the light of its finalised air quality strategy.” That report was published on 26 November. Today is 14 December, and even with the best will in the world, it would have been impossible to have read and responded

to all the points in that report in those few weeks. I am giving another Select Committee the kind of respect that my hon. Friend would expect for his own Committee.

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): The Government have made one hell of a mess of this, which does not bode well for a swift resolution for this or any other future infrastructure decision. In many respects, the Davies commission was a template for the National Infrastructure Commission, and the Government have completely ridden roughshod over it. What reassurances can the Secretary of State provide that in matters of airport capacity and other infrastructure, the NIC will be able to take essential long-term decisions for the competitiveness of our nation, and not be thwarted by short-term, partisan considerations?

Mr McLoughlin: Even the National Infrastructure Commission will be subject to decisions taken in this House and by the Government of the day—that was even the case in the way the NIC would have been set up by the Labour Opposition, had they been successful at the general election. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that these are big issues, and setting up the NIC is a fundamental way forward that will help to address some of them. It will still be for the House and the Government to ensure that other legal requirements—such as those on air quality—are abided by, and we must consider other issues when making such decisions.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): I commend the Secretary of State for his statement and I applaud the Government for making the environmental impact an important issue. As part of that work, will the Government also investigate current noise and air pollution problems with two runways at Heathrow?

Mr McLoughlin: I understand the conditions faced by my hon. Friend's constituents. I mentioned in my statement that noise is one of the considerations we have to get right. The advance of technology means that planes are becoming quieter, but she is absolutely right. She represents a constituency very closely affected by this decision. It has to be taken after looking at all mitigation measures expected to be put in place by any of the three promoters of the scheme.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): The Secretary of State is a very honourable gentleman, particularly as he is my constituent. I am sure that deep down he is not particularly happy today. In his statement, he talked about the best possible outcome for local residents. Does he accept that my Vauxhall constituents may not be considered as local residents to Heathrow, but that it is crucial that their views are taken into consideration? They live under early morning noise pollution that is absolutely shocking. An extra runway at Heathrow will make it much worse.

Mr McLoughlin: One suggestion for alleviation in the commissioner's report is an end to night flights and the flights to which the hon. Lady refers. These things always have to be taken into account. Although I live in her constituency, I do not exercise my vote there.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Either the Government have decided to go ahead with Heathrow expansion but are delaying the announcement to avoid embarrassing their candidate for London Mayor, or they

need more time to massage Heathrow's terrible record on noise and pollution. If it were to be Gatwick, we would have been told today. Is this not a cowardly and pathetic way to decide an issue that will blight the health and lives of millions of Londoners?

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman has taken a view on the Government's decision before the Government have made the decision. That is fairly typical of what he does. I have been very open with the House on the reason for the extra work that needs to be done. There are people on the Government Benches who have been incredibly consistent on this matter and there are people on the Opposition Benches who have been less consistent. I went through the whole programme of where we got to on the timetable, and if there has been a deliberate wasting of time, it was by the previous Labour Government.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend understand the dismay and frustration in the south-west as a result of this latest delay? Our infrastructure comes to the west of London. He himself has been responsible for massive rail investment, including electrification and the spur line to Heathrow. As this latest delay will have an impact on potential inward investment in our region, what confidence can we have that a decision will finally be arrived at next summer? This is not a London issue; this is a national issue.

Mr McLoughlin: I agree with my right hon. Friend that this is a national issue. I am grateful to him for pointing out the amount of infrastructure investment the Government can proudly point to. We are increasing investment in infrastructure by 50% in this Parliament, something I am immensely proud of. He says that the delay will not allow us to meet what the commission report says, but I disagree with him. Even on what I am saying at the moment, which is that there will be a decision by summer next year, we will be in a position to meet the timetable for extra capacity by 2030, which is when Sir Howard says it is desperately needed by.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): This dithering is disgraceful. It puts the political career of the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) above the national interest, and he could not even be bothered to be in his place for the Secretary of State's statement. [*Interruption.*] He was not in his place at the beginning; he came in late. I do not believe—perhaps the Secretary of State can tell us—that there are any new environmental considerations that were not known to Davies and have not been known to the Government over the past 10 years or so.

Mr McLoughlin: I very much regret the position the hon. Gentleman takes. He served on the Transport Committee for a considerable time. The position of my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) on the expansion of Heathrow has always been perfectly clear. I do not think anybody can be in any doubt about it.

The hon. Gentleman said that my hon. Friend was not in the Chamber, but of course he is, which is more than can be said of the right hon. Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), who said in 2009 in the *Evening Standard* that he was firmly in favour of Heathrow expansion. At that time, he was a Transport Minister attending Cabinet.

At least my hon. Friend has always been very specific about where he stands. I think the hon. Gentleman's question was unworthy of him.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): My right hon. Friend is right to seek to nail down the environmental issues first, because, as the House knows, if he does not, we will be in judicial review for the next generation and nothing at all will happen. That said, last week on BBC radio, the chief executive of Heathrow Airport Holdings Ltd clearly indicated that he thought Heathrow was full for freight purposes. Even today, we are losing business to Schiphol, Frankfurt, Charles de Gaulle and Dubai. We have to take action now. It will be 15 years before there are wheels on new tarmac anywhere in the south-east. Will my right hon. Friend do his utmost to get Manston airport open again so that we can turn it into a freight hub, relieve the pressure on Heathrow and take Britain forward?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend has led this campaign and never misses an opportunity to mention Manston airport, not only in the Chamber but every other time I meet him. He mentioned John Holland-Kaye's comments on the "Today" programme last Friday which I think were about current capacity for flights from Heathrow for the movement of freight, but my hon. Friend is talking about setting up a completely new operation at Manston, and I wish him well in his campaign.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I believe that the delay is not merely political expediency; I believe that the Secretary of State has come to realise something I have known for 15 years: expansion at Heathrow is just too difficult. As well as air quality and noise, will he address the business case, over which the Airports Commission's economic advisers seem to differ? Will he properly assess the ground-based security and crash risks of the different options—they were not so assessed in the commission's report? Will he force Heathrow airport to declare where the flight paths will be, particularly the approach paths, and the differences between what the commission recommends for Heathrow and what Heathrow is prepared to accept?

Mr McLoughlin: I think I might need an Adjournment debate to answer those questions. The Airports Commission has considered all those points in detail, and I have said that extra work is being done, which is the right thing to do.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): As one who publicly supported increased air transport movements in Farnborough in my constituency, may I ask my right hon. Friend to confirm that the Government have not ruled out additional runways at both London Gatwick and London Heathrow, given the importance of this matter to the entire economy? Does he think that the Heathrow hub proposal by Jock Lowe, which would be far less destructive, stands a much better chance than it previously did?

Mr McLoughlin: As I have said throughout my answers, all three options—a third runway at Heathrow, a Heathrow hub and a second runway at Gatwick—are under consideration. That remains the position, but my hon. Friend, who is a keen aviator himself, will know of the difficulties that have to be addressed. That is the right thing to do.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): I admire the Secretary of State's chutzpah in explaining that the Prime Minister has decided to be indecisive, but if he is keen to give further consideration to the serious environmental considerations of air pollution, why have the Government been lobbying heavily in the European Commission against the air quality package?

Mr McLoughlin: The hon. Gentleman tells us that we have been indecisive, but he was a member of a Government who could make no decision whatever on this matter. As for where we stand on various things in the European Commission and the European Parliament, this is about a whole range of issues, not necessarily one individual, small item.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): My right hon. Friend justifies the additional delay by saying, quite rightly, that he wants to get the decision right. It just occurs to me that if we had done the same with HS2, it could have been cheaper and less environmentally damaging. May I say that that is an observation and not a question? No reply is needed.

Mr McLoughlin: I should give one, just to put the record straight. The HS2 route has undergone considerable improvement, much of which my hon. Friend has campaigned for, and he has got his own way on what he wanted in his constituency.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): It is like something straight from "Yes Minister". "What do we want?" "Airport expansion!" "When do we want it?" "At the appropriate juncture, in the fullness of time"—after umpteen inquiries, reports and working groups, and a cost of millions of pounds to the taxpayer, all for a by-election in Richmond Park. "He used to be indecisive, but now he's not so sure." Will the Government get on with it, as the country expects us to?

Mr McLoughlin: I am still waiting to hear—it should be such a simple, easy answer—what the SNP's position is on this matter. Which scheme do SNP Members support? They are silent on it. They want everybody else to give their answers, so that once the decision is made they will attack it and say they would go down a different route. That seems to be the only point of the SNP in this Chamber: to wait for a decision to be made, then attack it. No wonder SNP Members are in such a difficult position today.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): The effect of a hub airport in the United Kingdom stretches to all parts of the United Kingdom, including up in the Leeds area. Those travelling transatlantic who want to get airside at Leeds cannot do so because the first flight out of Leeds is around midday, so capacity is vital to the economy. However, I believe that all the options before us are wrong and I would like my right hon. Friend take to this opportunity to look further at what I think is a better option, a fourth: two more runways at Stansted.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Before I call the Secretary of State, I remind Members that we are asking questions, not making statements, and those questions should be a lot shorter.

Mr McLoughlin: I hear what my hon. Friend says, but the call from most Members in the Chamber is to make a decision. If we reopen the whole question and go back to his suggestion, it might take rather longer.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Given the high risk that the work that the Secretary of State has announced today will not bring the Heathrow plan any closer but will just reinforce the idea that it is far too hot a political potato, why does he not revert to the Gatwick option, safe in the knowledge that, under his stewardship, HS2 will be ready well before 2030, thus allowing Birmingham to complement Gatwick?

Mr McLoughlin: I mentioned in my statement the importance of seeing other airports in the United Kingdom grow and offer more services. I think I mentioned Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow—I will be told off for the ones I failed to mention—but the point is well made by the hon. Gentleman: services from other airports are also very important indeed.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): The Secretary of State said that the Government accepted the case for expansion. Presumably that is why they set up the commission in the first place, so it did not need three years to tell them that. He also said that the Government accepted the Airports Commission's shortlist of options. Increasingly, he presents the case as though there are three equal options from the Airports Commission, but has the commission not made an unequivocal recommendation? Should not the Government at least be open about that? Is he aware that last week the chief executive of International Airlines Group, Willie Walsh, while expressing concerns about the cost of Heathrow, said that there was

"no business case for expanding Gatwick,"

and:

"Very few airlines support the proposal and no one would move there while Heathrow remains open?"

Mr McLoughlin: I could also cite quotes from Willie Walsh which would put a question mark over the Heathrow proposals. If we are getting into the game of quoting Willie Walsh, we will find many that could be cited on this subject. The correct thing for the Government to do is to look at all three options in light of the environmental work and the mitigation circumstances that we would like to see, and then return to the House once we have decided with which option we will go forward.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): The Secretary of State has let himself down in the way he has responded to questions, making it an issue of party ping-pong and who is responsible for what delay. Let us be absolutely clear. I welcome his remarks about air quality, which is very important for Heathrow. However, he has heard me speak about the fact that there are more European headquarters of multinational companies in Slough than in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland put together. What research has he done on how few such companies will remain in the UK—anywhere in the UK—as a result of the ongoing delays in making this decision?

Mr McLoughlin: I am sorry that the right hon. Lady was so disappointed with the way I have responded. I responded partly in view of the way in which the Labour Front-Bench team attacked the Government for their indecision. I realise that the right hon. Lady has presented a petition to No. 10 Downing street in support of the expansion of Heathrow airport. This is an issue that divides colleagues in political parties, and I think it right for the Government to make sure that the proper environmental work is done before any move forward is taken.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): As a member of the Transport Select Committee, I have to observe that the Government have got themselves into a rather big hole on this issue. At least, however, they have my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, a former miner, to dig them out of it. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that this decision will be taken in the early summer and that it will look favourably at the Davies commission, which made a clear recommendation to build a third runway at Heathrow?

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): Stop digging!

Mr McLoughlin: The shadow Chancellor says stop digging. He should learn lessons from his own shouting from a sedentary position.

John McDonnell: That was a compliment!

Mr McLoughlin: Oh, that was a good one; I will put that in my book.

As for the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies), the important part of the Davies commission recommendations was having the extra capacity in place by 2030. I believe, given what I have said today, that we are on schedule to be able to deliver that extra capacity by 2030.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): As somebody who supports the expansion of Heathrow, let me indicate my frustration that progress has been caught up in an internal Conservative holding pattern. The Secretary of State has on three occasions this evening reiterated the commitment to the 2030 timescale. Will he assure us that in six months' time a decision will not be taken to kick the can further down the road?

Mr McLoughlin: I have said that I hope to come back to the House in the summer. I am not going to say exactly when that will be from today's date, but I fully accept the point that services to Northern Ireland are incredibly important. Northern Ireland is already well connected to London. There were around 17,000 flights between Belfast and London in 2014, of which about 6,000 were to Heathrow. I do not underestimate the importance of connectivity to London for Northern Ireland or indeed for Scotland.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): If the decision on the new runway were made on the basis of environmental data that are seen not to be robust, it would lead to delays and legal challenges that would last far longer than if we waited for more reliable data. London Gatwick has already briefed me on its concerns

about the quality of the Davies commission data. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that he will look at all the data over the next few months and get them as robust as possible, so that when a decision is made, it can be enacted straight away?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If any lesson has been learnt from the preparations for HS2, it is the need to ensure that all the processes are gone through diligently and properly. There were a number of attempts to secure judicial reviews in relation to HS2, and nearly all of them failed.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The Secretary of State has come to the House today to try to hoodwink us all into thinking that he is the most incompetent and indecisive Secretary of State that there has ever been, but no one is fooled by his attempt to take a hit on behalf of the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith). This is a fix for next year's mayoral election, and nothing else. It certainly has nothing to do with anything that is in the national interest. [*Interruption.*]

Mr McLoughlin: I am going to do it again. The shadow Chancellor has just said "That was a compliment."

Let me say to the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford)—who has been present for all the exchanges—that it is not my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park who has changed his position on the question of Heathrow, but the right hon. Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan), who, when he was a transport Minister, said that he was firmly in favour of its expansion. As for the date of the mayoral election, if we had initially wanted to put off the decision until after the election, we would have simply said that there would be no decision for 12 months, and would then have considered it for 12 months. The fact is that we are making progress. It is important that we make more progress by 2030, and that is what we shall do.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): No matter how skilfully the Secretary of State tries to pretend otherwise, we all know that this rather grubby little announcement—if I may say so—is all about trying to get the Conservative party and my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) over next May, and to cross that particular line. This is no way for the Government to make decisions and announcements. They talk about the northern powerhouse as if they really believed in it—which, indeed, I am sure that they do—and the Secretary of State must know that expanding Heathrow is essential for the northern powerhouse, so will he please act in the national interest rather than just making a grubby little announcement to benefit London and our excellent mayoral candidate?

Mr McLoughlin: I am glad that my hon. Friend is showing support for the northern powerhouse. It is very important to me and very important to the Government, and we are backing it with huge amounts of investment in electrification and new train services. The two new franchises that were announced last week will have a very beneficial effect on transport connectivity between our major cities in the north. That is vital, as is getting the whole question of future aviation capacity right.

Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): What a pathetic way to make decisions about infrastructure in our country! Is the Secretary of State not a little bit shamefaced over what is an excruciatingly painful example of political procrastination, although it is obviously in the national interest for him to get on with it at Heathrow? On a scale of one to 10, just how embarrassed is he?

Mr McLoughlin: Political procrastination? In 2001, “Labour ministers are reported to be seriously considering building a third runway”.

In 2003,

“The transport secretary, Alistair Darling, publishes white paper”.

In 2007,

“The government publishes a public consultation document” in favour of expanding Heathrow. In 2009,

“The government approves a third runway, taking the number of flights handled by the airport from 480,000 to more than 700,000”.

I will take no lectures on ducking big issues, because the ducking of big issues was done when the hon. Gentleman was a member of the last Labour Government.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): I am pleased that the Secretary of State recognises the importance of regional airports while more airport capacity is delivered in the south-east. What is he doing to encourage more airlines to fly on more routes from Manchester airport?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. While he talks about Manchester, I also talk about Birmingham, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow. I think it is absolutely essential to try to get more connectivity from airports so that people do not necessarily have to travel to Heathrow or to Gatwick to get the flights they want. That is very important.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I like the Secretary of State, so I feel for him, as he is like a sheep snagged on barbed wire: the harder he tries to extricate himself, the more firmly entangled he becomes. To help the Secretary of State, may I suggest he takes this opportunity—no ifs, no buts—to abandon environmentally unsustainable plans for a third runway at Heathrow and pledges instead, first, to improve surface access to Luton and Stansted airports to make better use of spare capacity there, and, secondly, to deliver HS2 on time so that we can see far more people travelling by rail, instead of taking short-haul flights?

Mr McLoughlin: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question, and remind him that the Davies commission was set up by the coalition Government to make and examine the case fully for what we should do for the future. I was proud of serving in that coalition Government, and I was proud of a lot of the things they achieved. The Davies commission and setting it up was just one of them, and now the right hon. Gentleman is wanting us to back away from the difficult questions it poses to us.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the independent and impartial Airports Commission clearly stated that Heathrow was the best option? If Governments in the future decide

against that and wish to expand Gatwick, may I have a guarantee that the significant investment that will be required in housing, highways, the rail network and healthcare and all other public services will be forthcoming?

Mr McLoughlin: There are already significant commitments with regard to Gatwick; improving the infrastructure for Gatwick is already taking place and further such schemes will be coming on board over the next few years. It is vital that we get the surface access to our airports correct. That is something we are dealing with over a period of time. My hon. Friend asks whether there would be other consequences if the decision should go towards Gatwick. That will be the case for any option we choose, and of course we want to look at those options and see which ones we would want to take forward.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): The Government are developing some capacity for hot air balloons in the process of trying to get to this decision. Rather than just talking about the issue and waiting, may I remind the right hon. Gentleman that Birmingham has current hub capacity and a brand new runway now?

Mr McLoughlin: I wholly concur with the way in which Birmingham has gone about its expansion both of the runway and the airport overall, and I think HS2 will have a very important impact for Birmingham airport as well, so I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): Will the Secretary of State give us an assurance that there will be a decision in the summer, because the only question my constituents ask is whether this thing will actually be decided upon or not?

Mr McLoughlin: As I have said to the House, I think it is very important that we stick to the timetable of Sir Howard Davies’s report, and that is having extra capacity available by 2030. I will want to follow that timetable.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): In order to demonstrate that this is not a political fudge, can the Secretary of State clearly state what additional work is going to be undertaken to refine and reassess air quality and noise considerations, who is going to do that work, who is going to assess it, and how the final decision is going to be made? Lastly, as a Scotsman, can I just ask the Secretary of State please to explain exactly at what time of year is summer? I would also point out that not once today has the Secretary of State said in which year—which summer—he is going to report, so can he pin down the year, or is that another fudge?

Mr McLoughlin: To try to reassure the hon. Gentleman, who is yet another Scottish nationalist to get up but not to say which option he supports, let me point out that what I have said and been clear about is that we will stick to the timetable that gives the extra capacity that is needed by 2030.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I normally try to support my right hon. Friend, but I must admit that I am struggling somewhat on this occasion. Can he give

an absolute assurance that if results of the further work on air quality and noise were to go against Heathrow, the default position would be to accept Gatwick and not waste more years by setting up yet another commission?

Mr McLoughlin: If my hon. Friend looks at my statement, he will see that I made it quite clear that the Government accept that the three options put forward by the commission are the right ones for providing extra capacity, so the answer to his question is that I do accept that.

I did not fully answer all the questions that the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) asked. I meant to say that the work will be done by the Department for Transport.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): We all accept that we find ourselves in a difficult political spot, but the Secretary of State is right that we are talking about a national infrastructure project that will affect runway and aviation capacity throughout the country. Will he commit to meeting me and representatives of regional airports—he did not mention East Midlands, Speke and Durham Tees Valley, so perhaps he can squeeze them in as well—to ensure that we plug the 15 to 20-year gap before we get extra capacity in the south-east?

Mr McLoughlin: I did not mention every airport in the country, but I tried to mention the bigger airports outside London—I will get in trouble for saying that—such as Manchester, Newcastle, Edinburgh, Birmingham and Glasgow. I did not mention East Midlands, which is just down the road from my area, but would I like to see more services from East Midlands airport? The answer is clearly yes.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I welcome the decision to delay the final decision until the environmental concerns have been resolved. Colleagues and I are in negotiations with the Civil Aviation Authority and NATS to control noise from aircraft coming in to Heathrow over the Thames valley. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the resolution of that issue is crucial to our future support for Heathrow?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Aviation capacity does not only affect the areas directly involved but has a wider impact across the rest of the economy and the rest of the country.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): In light of the Paris conference, which we have just heard a statement about, what recent discussions has the right hon. Gentleman had with the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change and the Committee on Climate Change about how increased airport capacity will affect the UK's ability to meet its emissions reduction targets?

Mr McLoughlin: One of the people who served on the Airports Commission was a member of the Committee on Climate Change, Dame Julia King, who has since been ennobled, so we and the Davies commission took that matter into account. There have obviously been further developments since then, such as the Volkswagen scandal. As the Environmental Audit Committee said, it is right that we should judge our response based on

the new information that has become available. Sir Howard Davies also said that in his evidence to that Committee, and I want that to be done. As I have said, I still believe that we can deliver on the 2030 timetable set out in the commission's report.

Karen Lumley (Redditch) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the decision is important for our regional airports, such as Birmingham International airport, which I recently visited to see its increased capacity and success? Will he acknowledge that we may see a second runway in Birmingham in the future, along with High Speed 2?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend never misses an opportunity to promote Birmingham airport. The only thing I slightly disagree with her about is that I do not regard airports such as Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, East Midlands, Glasgow and Edinburgh as regional airports.

James Berry (Kingston and Surbiton) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for confirming that the Government will not outsource key policy decisions to unelected commissions and will not be rushed into making a decision about a runway that will not be operational until 2030. Will he confirm that if the third runway is still to be considered, it will only be with the three caveats that Davies placed on it, about a fourth runway, night flights and meeting EU air quality limits?

Mr McLoughlin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, in that whatever decision is finally taken—three options are still being discussed—we must get the best mitigation deals possible for the people affected. The three points he mentioned would certainly be important considerations in any decision, including if the decision should be taken for Heathrow. As I say, we are looking at three options.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): The Government seem to have one of two positions, and I would be interested to understand which one it is. Either we have accepted the Davies commission, subject to sorting out these environmental issues, and therefore we will go down that route if we are able, or we have now decided that there are three equal options and we are looking at all three from scratch. Which of the two routes are we going to go down?

Mr McLoughlin: We have accepted the Davies report on the need for capacity by 2030 and the three options, and it is those three options that we are looking at. I know the Davies commission supported one in particular, but the Government have to look at all three of the options available.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): In the Secretary of State's defence, we have not built a full runway in the south-east of England since 1946 and so I am not sure whether another six months will make so much difference—so long as he does make the decision in the summer of 2016. When he decides, will he make his decision in the interests of the whole country, including the 9.5 million residents of the midlands, whom he and I represent, and not just in the interests of the denizens of west London?

Mr McLoughlin: If one looks at the record of this Government, one sees that we have always acted in the national interest. We have done that on extra railway capacity and we are going to do it on the other big infrastructure investment proposals. They are always controversial and it is right, in this day and age, that we take every measure we can to mitigate the environmental impacts of any decisions we take.

Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): Job prospects in the south-west and in the rest of the country outside the south-east would clearly be best enhanced by an expansion at Heathrow, but it needs to be legally secure. Does my right hon. Friend agree that sometimes it is best to have a thorough look at these things and that a stitch in time might in this case save nine?

Mr McLoughlin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that. One thing I have learned from taking through some of the big infrastructure projects that I have been responsible for is that it is right to make sure we can prove on all the possible challenges we will face that we have done the right amount of work in preparation for whatever decisions we put before the House.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): What drives air quality is car emissions. Heathrow has far superior and far more rapid public transport links, including four rail links. Gatwick has the one rail link, which, as the Secretary of State is well aware, is not the best one in the country. Will he assure us that in any analysis of air quality, a full understanding will be taken of the impact of the extra car journeys that would inevitably result from the vast increase in passengers and from the employees required, none of whom would be local, were Gatwick to be chosen as the option?

Mr McLoughlin: Those are all points that have to be put forward and addressed in the work that we are going to do in the coming months on air quality. As I say, a lot of this work has been covered by Davies, but a lot more is still to be done. My hon. Friend is right to show his concern and also to point out that there is no easy or straightforward answer on aviation capacity. We must also accept that aviation is a very important industry for this country, employing many thousands of people, including right across the supply chain and the delivery chain. On that basis, I hope that he will accept my assurances.

Points of Order

5.54 pm

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I think you were in the Chair when the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) accused my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), who has sat quietly and respectfully throughout this exchange, of not being in his place. Although my hon. Friend is completely wrong on absolutely everything to do with runways, it is extremely unfair to his constituents and to his future supporters in the mayoral election that they should think he was not here for the whole of the time that this statement took place.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that point of order. I thought it was very clear from the response given from the Government Benches that the hon. Member for Richmond Park was indeed here and had been here throughout. That was the case even at the time the point was made, but the right hon. Gentleman has made it once again and it is now firmly on the record.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would, however, like to point out that at the point the Secretary of State started his statement the hon. Member for Richmond Park was not in his place.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I was not in the Chair when that happened, but that is now also on the record.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It was with complete horror that I read in the papers yesterday allegations that a British official was present in January 2002 when Shaker Aamer was tortured and that further officials arrived at Bagram airbase on the same plane as the then Prime Minister. Such serious accusations of a UK Government being complicit in torture not only bring disrepute on this institution, but cause grave concern about the UK Government's record on upholding the universal declaration of human rights and on honouring the historic values of the right to a fair trial. I am looking for the Government to make an urgent statement on this matter and am calling on the Prime Minister to honour his words from 2010, when he said:

“For public confidence, and for independence from Parliament, party and Government, it is right to have a judge-led inquiry”.

He also said:

“That is what we need to get to the bottom of the case. The fact that it is led by a judge will help ensure that we get it done properly.”—[*Official Report*, 6 July 2010; Vol. 513, c. 180.]

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order and for the notice she gave the Chair about it. This is obviously not a matter for the Chair, but, as she can see, a Foreign Office Minister is on the Treasury Bench, he will have heard what she has said and I am sure he will respond in due course.

European Union (Approvals) Bill [Lords]*Considered in Committee*[NATASCHA ENGEL *in the Chair*]**Clause 1**APPROVAL OF DRAFT DECISIONS UNDER ARTICLE 352
OF TFEU

5.59 pm

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Natascha Engel): With this it will be convenient to discuss clause 2.

The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel): Clause 1 provides for approval by Parliament of two draft EU legislative measures, as required under section 8 of the European Union Act 2011. Such approval is needed because both measures are made under article 352 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union. Section 8 of the Act does provide for exemptions, in order to avoid the requirement for an Act of Parliament, but the measures here do not fall within any of the exempt purposes.

Clause 2 concerns the territorial extent of the Bill, its commencement date and short title. Subsection (1) 2 provides that the Bill extends to the whole of the United Kingdom. Subsection (2) provides that the Bill will come into force on the day that it receives Royal Assent. Subsection (3) provides for the Bill's short title. I ask hon. Members to agree to clauses 1 and 2 standing part of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Third Reading

6 pm

Priti Patel: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The brief explanation that accompanied the clause stand parts in the Committee stage covered all the points that need to be made about the content of this very short Bill and the reason it is required. Obviously, we covered some of the points on Second Reading. It is fair to say that our debates on this Bill have covered the two clauses sufficiently. Perhaps it is worth reflecting on the fact that the Bill before us forms part of the ability of Parliament to examine and give clearance through the much broader protection and oversight that the European Union Act 2011 affords us. Bills such as this give another layer of protection in dealing with European Union legislation.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): As my right hon. Friend rightly says, the only concern is why such trivial matters are being dealt with by way of an Act of Parliament. Does she agree that, while these might be

trivial matters and while the public might be concerned that they are being dealt with by way of an Act of Parliament, the public will be equally concerned that major matters such as perhaps the accession of Turkey to the European Union will go through exactly the same procedure?

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks. It is fair to say that, when it comes to debating such matters, I would not use the term “trivial”. The European Union covers not just that particular area, but other aspects, such as the accession of Turkey to the European Union. There will be debates on that matter and engagement with the European Scrutiny Committee. I am delighted to see the Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee in his place this afternoon.

I was very clear on Second Reading that there were concerns over what this legislation meant—whether it was burdensome and whether there were costs to the taxpayer. I use Third Reading to emphasise again that there are no burdens of administration or extra costs to the taxpayer. The Bill covers two clauses, one of which relates to the tripartite social summit, the other to the participation as an observer of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the work of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. They are two very straightforward clauses in a very straightforward Bill. On that basis, I commend the Bill to the House.

6.3 pm

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): I must admit that I find myself called to the Dispatch Box today in a state of some bewilderment. We are here to debate two matters. The first is whether a new position should be established within an organisation with the somewhat abstruse name of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Council. Establishing that new position in some way facilitates the admission of Macedonia as an observer to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. The second provision relates to the continuation of the tripartite social summit for growth and employment. I think that is why I am here.

There appears to be a need to update the formal basis of this summit, mostly in recognition of the fact that its function now relates to the “agenda for jobs and growth” and not the “agenda for employment and growth” as was previously the case. Will the Minister confirm that that is the case? If it is, the substance of this Bill is almost the definition of bureaucratic minutiae. Although I understand that both provisions relate to draft decisions of the European Council, which need to be approved by each individual member state as well as by the European Parliament, I find the use of primary legislation in these circumstances quite extraordinary. It comes at a time when the Government are hacking away at the social safety net via secondary legislation, on which it is frankly an uphill struggle to get Ministers to agree even to a short debate up in the Committee corridor. It suggests that the Government do not have their priorities in order.

Anyway, here we are, and I will use my time briefly to recap some of the context of these proposals, which I do not expect to be the subject of raging controversy in today's debate. As we have heard, the first part of the Bill relates to the admission of Macedonia as an observer

[Emily Thornberry]

at the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. That move follows a report from the European Commission, which was published earlier this year and which set out a number of recommendations to revive Macedonia's long-stalled candidacy for accession to the EU.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): My hon. Friend will be aware that the Greeks get very upset when the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is called Macedonia. Perhaps she could use the full title to ensure that we do not upset our Greek colleagues.

Emily Thornberry: My hon. Friend is quite right. I do apologise. I hope that *Hansard* will get it right even if I do not.

This process was initiated in 2005, but has been put on hold as a result of widespread concerns more recently over the country's deteriorating record on human rights. The admission as an observer of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to the EU's Agency for Fundamental Rights was one of a number of recommendations made in the European Commission's recent report. As the Minister helpfully explained during the debate on Second Reading, it is hoped that

"Observer status at the agency could allow the country to have access to advice and assistance on fundamental rights issues to help to tackle its reform challenges, and provide assistance and help to the country on human rights issues."—[*Official Report*, 3 November 2015; Vol. 601, c. 897.]

At the rate this Government are going—I am talking about removing the requirement to respect international law from the Ministerial Code and pressing ahead with their plan to repeal the Human Rights Act—perhaps the Minister and a few of her colleagues should join the Macedonian delegation and learn a few lessons.

The second provision relates to changes to the basis of the EU's tripartite social summit for growth and employment. The Bill's explanatory notes describe this summit as:

"a regular forum for meetings of representatives of the European social partner organisations, the European Commission, and the Council to enable high level discussion between the three parties of employment and social aspects of the European agenda for growth and jobs."

Beyond those exceptionally vague generalities, further details of the summit's role are surprisingly hard to come by. Nevertheless, any discussion of jobs and growth is hardly objectionable, and certainly not objected to by me. In fact, should representatives of the UK take part in any upcoming meetings, it might provide an ideal opportunity for Ministers to take on board some of the valuable lessons that our European friends may have to offer. At a time when our jobs market is not exactly the envy of the entire continent, the Government should welcome such an opportunity. We have, for example, a higher proportion of graduates doing jobs for which they are over qualified—at 59%—than any other country in the European Union, apart from Greece and Estonia. We have a higher rate of underemployment—with a 10th of our entire workforce working less than they want to—than any other EU country except for Ireland, Spain and again Greece. That particular problem appears to be getting worse. The most recent employment figures from the Office for National Statistics showed that, even though the number of people in work in the UK

has risen, the total number of hours worked by the UK has actually fallen. Perhaps the Minister's European counterparts could teach her a thing or two.

We do not intend to oppose this Bill. In fact, I welcome it, at least as far as it goes, as it offers a reminder of some of the things for which we have to be grateful in our membership of the EU, not least the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, including some of the most basic rights in the workplace, which many people take for granted. At a time when the Government are undermining those rights on a number of fronts, particularly in the Trade Union Bill, we should welcome the opportunity that this debate provides to remember the positive role that the EU can play in our lives, particularly when it comes to protecting dignity and security in the workplace. It is disappointing that the Government do not seem to share those values.

6.9 pm

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): I am sure that Members from across the Committee will be delighted to hear that the SNP will be supporting the Bill; they will be even more delighted to hear that I will try to keep my comments as brief as possible. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] I think that is the most popular thing I have said since I became a Member.

EU expansion has been a great success, and it is good to see our friends and colleagues from across the European Union working more closely together. I am particularly pleased to see Macedonia join the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights as an observer; that will be particularly helpful as it deals with the refugee crisis. I hope the country will benefit. It is also a reminder of the countries that have the biggest burden in dealing with the refugee crisis, and the UK could certainly do more.

On the second point, we wholeheartedly support any work to improve dialogue between the EU institutions, employers and workers' representatives through the tripartite social summit for growth and employment.

We need to remain part of the European Union. There are great benefits to that, as I am sure Members across the Committee agree. We support the Bill.

6.11 pm

Kelvin Hopkins: It looks as if the Bill will go through without too much controversy, but it is worth commenting on the state of employment across the whole European Union, including the UK. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) has drawn attention to our own problems. Before some hon. Members were born, here in Britain we had the biggest TUC demonstration in history when unemployment went over 1 million; it is now closer to 2 million. We will leave that to one side.

The Bill seeks approval for amendments to be made to the tripartite social summit for growth and employment following institutional changes brought in by the Lisbon treaty. The organisation is meant to discuss increasing the employment rate and investing 3% of gross domestic product in research and development—all sorts of worthy things. However, the EU is living in a dream world if it really thinks it is doing well economically. Austerity has been imposed in many EU countries and there are incredible rates of unemployment—typically 25% in the worst-off states; in Britain, that would mean 4.5 million

people unemployed rather than 1.8 million or whatever it is. The situation is in a very bad way and some of the larger countries are quietly suffering—particularly France. People in France are nervous about their futures while they remain stuck inside the euro, if not the European Union.

Anyone who thinks that everything is fine and dandy is being Panglossian—“all is for the best in this best of all possible worlds”. If people in the European Union really believe that, they are living in a dream world.

The reality is that the EU is economically failing. I have mentioned Greece, Italy and France, but Finland also has serious problems; it is thinking of printing billions of euros to try to stop the country from sinking. There are all sorts of serious economic problems inside the eurozone and indeed the European Union. The only way those countries are ever going to get the jobs and growth that are so often talked about is for them to be able to reflate their economies on a national basis. That means they have to be able to control the value of their currencies in relation to others as well as their interest rates. They also need their own fiscal policies. When they can reflate behind their own barriers, Europe as a continent will start to grow again and millions of people who have been out of work for a long time can get back into work.

This is an innocuous Bill, but we should focus occasionally on some of the points about jobs and growth that it covers to show how bad the situation is. When I was a young person, everyone had a job. There was full employment—in fact, there was a labour shortage. Between 1945 and the 1970s there was a growth in living standards such as we had never seen before. Since then, things have gone badly wrong and there have been crises. As I have said from these Benches before, there are more serious crises to come. I do not think that the European Union is being economically successful and when it talks constantly about growth, stability and jobs, it is living in a dream world.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, without amendment.

Relocation of Migrants in need of International Protection (Opt-in Decision)

[Relevant documents: 2nd Report from the European Scrutiny Committee, Session 2015-16, HC 342-ii, Chapter 3; 3rd Report from the European Scrutiny Committee, Session 2015-16, HC 342-iii, Chapter 8; 5th Report from the European Scrutiny Committee, Session 2015-16, HC 342-v, Chapters 1, 2, and 3; and 9th Report from the European Scrutiny Committee, Session 2015-16, HC 342-ix, Chapter 3.]

6.15 pm

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. 9355/15 and Addendum and No. 11132/15, international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece, No. 11843/15 and Addendum, establishing a crisis relocation mechanism, and No. 11844/15 and Addendum, international protection for the benefit of Italy, Greece and Hungary; and agrees with the Government's decision not to opt in to proposals establishing provisional measures for the relocation of individuals in need of international protection or to the proposal establishing a crisis relocation mechanism.

The motion covers a series of EU proposals on the relocation of migrants within the EU. They formed a central part of the EU's summer response to the ongoing migration crisis and have been the subject of long negotiations within the EU and of previous debates in the House.

The current migration crisis has been described as the worst refugee crisis since world war two. It has severely tested the ability and resolve of the EU and member states to provide a comprehensive and sustainable response that is able to support member states under the most pressure and ensure protection for those in real need of it. The situation has been and remains complex and fast moving. Proposals have been brought forward and adopted extremely quickly; at times, Interior Ministers have met almost weekly, and as soon as proposals were adopted, they were often superseded by others.

Since the crisis began, the Government have been clear about our views on relocation: it is the wrong response. It does absolutely nothing to address the underlying causes of the crisis and does nothing more than move the problem around Europe. Relocation also reduces incentives for member states to tackle abuse, process applications and strengthen their borders. It may also encourage more migrants to travel illegally to the EU. We must ensure that the permanent relocation proposal does not reduce the obligation on all member states to have fully functioning border and asylum systems.

The Government have consistently stated that the UK would not opt in to measures, whether temporary or permanent. I apologise to the House for the fact that we have had to override scrutiny on these relocation measures. The European Commission brought forward proposals on relocation as a response to an emergency situation. The Prime Minister and Home Secretary were required to make the Government's views on such measures clear in hastily arranged EU Council meetings.

The debates on relocation continue within the EU. Only a tiny number of people have been relocated under the agreed temporary measures and many member states

[James Brokenshire]

are now stepping back from their previous commitments. Concern is growing about the merits of the permanent mechanism.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree with the position of Slovakia? It believes that the decision should have been taken by unanimity.

James Brokenshire: Obviously, we are not party to the arrangements as we are using our opt-out. My hon. Friend highlights some of the issues that have arisen since the measures were put into place. I am aware that Slovakia and Hungary have recently filed legal challenges in the European Court of Justice against the relocation scheme. There are relevant concerns. In our view, the proposals are ill conceived and many more now question the viability of relocation as a tool to manage the migration crisis.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I strongly support the Government's decision to opt out. Will the Minister explain something? Under the scheme that was agreed, if migrants were allocated a given country to settle in but then decided they would rather live in another EU country, what would stop them from moving?

James Brokenshire: My right hon. Friend has highlighted what might be described as secondary movement, and we remain conscious of that. Obviously, there is secondary movement within the Schengen area, but we maintain our own border controls and visa requirements. Practical issues with the scheme have been highlighted; to date, only about 160 people have been relocated under the measures thus far.

Rather than relocating those arriving in Europe, the Government have made clear that our policy is to focus our efforts on resettling vulnerable people in need of international protection. We continue to make the case that this is not just an EU problem but an international issue requiring concerted action from a whole range of international parties.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Is not the problem on secondary movement the fact that once migrants have become citizens of an EU member state, the free movement of people means that they are entitled to go anywhere? Even under our own laws, asylum seekers go to the head of the queue in getting nationality.

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend makes an important point in respect of rights and entitlement to citizenship, but he will know that there are certain tests that we adopt—good character requirements, for example—and other steps that we take to assure ourselves in respect of those who may be granted citizenship, and that that process is conducted over a number of years before someone would be so entitled. Citizenship is certainly not automatic. I underline the point that I made—we maintain our own visa and border requirements in respect of those who come here, and adhere to them clearly for those who are not EU citizens.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): There is another problem that arises before secondary movement. What if the refugees do not want to go to the countries to

which they have been allocated? If they are put on trains and forcibly sent to countries that they do not want to go to, that has echoes of uncomfortable times in the past.

James Brokenshire: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point about the operation of the scheme. That has been a practical issue for EU member states that are party to the scheme when migrants have displayed an unwillingness to participate in the relocation arrangements envisaged by the measures to be debated this evening. Such practical issues have to be confronted.

The migration crisis is constantly changing and requires a flexible but robust response. Our approach has been designed to protect the UK interest while making a contribution to helping those in need and addressing the unprecedented challenge faced by our partners. Relocation is not proving to be successful. In our view, time would be better spent on measures that would make a real difference. We must secure the external border, quickly provide protection to those who need it and return those who do not. That is where the focus of this Government will remain, and I trust that the House will be minded to support the motion.

6.21 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I am glad we have the opportunity to debate this vitally important issue today. Political unrest and widespread violations of human rights have led to millions of people being displaced. The UNHCR says that there are 4.3 million Syrian refugees alone. This is, as the Minister said, the worst humanitarian crisis in Europe since the second world war, and it is clearly the most important issue now facing the EU.

Over the past nine months, the EU has seen unprecedented levels of migration, with more than 812,000 asylum seekers registered in the EU up till the end of September. The UNHCR says that more than 3,000 people are tragically dead or missing as a result of attempted crossings of the Mediterranean. The vast majority of the pressures of those incoming migrants has fallen on Italy and Greece, with 99.5% of migrants who cross the Mediterranean arriving in these two countries. That is the background to the EU-proposed programme of relocation in the UK. Britain rightly has an opt-out in relation to migration matters and has decided not to opt back into these measures.

Although we support that decision, it is disappointing that it has taken over six months and repeated prompting by the European Scrutiny Committee to secure this debate on the Floor of the House. We recognise, of course, that situations are often fast-moving and that the Government should not be constrained, but we think the Government should reflect on the approach they have taken so far in relation to the procedure.

On the substance of the matter, although we do not want to see Britain opt into mandatory quotas, we believe that we should take an active role in tackling the migration crisis across the EU, as well as on our doorstep. In this respect we take issue with the Government's response. Just as we have joined military operations to play our part in tackling ISIS, so we have a moral responsibility to work with other EU states to help to deal with the large numbers of refugees who are fleeing the barbaric conditions in Syria and elsewhere.

The Government have pledged to accept 20,000 refugees over this Parliament—4,000 a year. After more than two years of Labour calling on the Government to take action, this is undoubtedly a welcome step and was welcomed by the House, but the Government still refuse to accept people in desperate need who need relocation from other EU states.

Four thousand refugees represents less than 0.5% of the refugees entering the EU this year. That is not good enough. The UK has a proud history of offering sanctuary to those in need of refuge and should not shrink from its responsibilities because it has the fortune not to be on the frontline of the crisis.

John Redwood: Can the hon. Gentleman explain how many refugees he thinks we ought to take and what the criteria would be?

Keir Starmer: Our position is that mandatory quotas are not the way forward. Any numbers taken in this country should be on only a voluntary basis. In view of what we see as the current failure of relocation policy, the Government should rethink whether we should take some numbers from Europe on a voluntary basis. It would be for the Government to decide what number, on a voluntary basis, would be the right number. It has been suggested that if every city or county in Britain took just 10 refugee families, we would be able to help perhaps 10,000 individuals. As I say, in the first instance we call on the Government to reconsider their approach in the light of the prevailing situation.

It goes without saying that under any scheme, and under a voluntary scheme in particular, there should be robust and effective vetting and safeguarding procedures, wherever those procedures take place. We therefore call on the Government to reconsider the refusal to take people relocated from other member states on a voluntary basis, without opting into a mandatory system. Even if we are not part of the mandatory relocation scheme, we should do everything in our power to ensure that it works effectively. The EU relocation scheme has so far relocated just 130 individuals from Italy and 30 from Greece of its intended 160,000 people, which seems to indicate that it may be incapable of dealing successfully with the pressures being faced in Italy and Greece. In addition, only six of the 22 member states have notified the EU that they have the capacity to host relocated individuals.

What steps, if any, are the Government taking to support the relocation programme and to help to cope with this volume? On a point that has been raised on more than one occasion by the European Scrutiny Committee, in the absence of voluntary relocation how do the Government interpret the principle of solidarity and fair sharing of responsibility in the EU?

Let me turn to the questions that we have on the motion, which we support. Can the Minister update the House on the number of Syrian refugees who have arrived in Britain since the Prime Minister announced that we would take 20,000 over the course of this Parliament? In addition, the Home Office has stated that 55 local authorities will welcome Syrian refugees into their communities before Christmas. How many of those authorities have so far welcomed refugees? The Government say they are reluctant to take migrants relocated from within the EU for fear of creating new

pull factors, but they have consistently produced little evidence that this would be the result of allowing internal relocation. As the European Scrutiny Committee has observed, the Government have been thin on substance on this issue. Can the Minister now give some substance on the pull factor argument? Surely we must recognise the level of desperation that forces people to leave their homes and attempt the journey to the EU in the knowledge that they or their loved ones might not make it. That will be a significant factor whatever relocation programme is put in place.

Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con): Can the shadow Minister assist us by explaining how many people leave Syria, how many come into Greece and why there is a large difference between the two numbers?

Keir Starmer: I am not sure that I am in a position to deal with that intervention; it is probably better put to the Minister.

The Government have rightly said that they will take refugees from outside Europe, and we support that, but what about those who have made it into Europe? Of course the Government do not want to get drawn into a mandatory relocation programme within Europe, but why cannot there be a voluntary arrangement that we could enter into in order to play our full part in solidarity and fair responsibility for refugees across Europe? Just as we have joined with our European and other international allies in trying to defeat ISIS and other causes of refugees and migration, so we should play our full part in dealing with the crisis here in Europe, with huge numbers already desperately needing relocation. On the basis of the figures, at least at first blush, it looks as though the relocation programme is not working as was anticipated. As I say, only 160 or so individuals have been relocated. In those circumstances, we ask whether the Government could and should do more.

I finish where I started and return to the way in which this matter now comes before the House. Recognising that the situation is moving fast, will the Minister give an assurance that the House will be properly updated and that time will be allowed for proper scrutiny and debate as the relocation policy rolls out over the coming weeks and months?

6.31 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): As Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee, I have been invited to attend four meetings—two in Luxembourg, one in Brussels, and one in Italy this last weekend—bringing together most of the national parliamentary chairmen with responsibilities in the area we are discussing. I pay tribute to the chairman of the Schengen committee in the Italian Parliament, Laura Ravetto, for taking this extremely important initiative.

I would like first to refer to a meeting that took place under the auspices of COSAC—Conference of Parliamentary Committees for Union Affairs of Parliaments of the European Union. That body, which consists of the chairmen of the national parliamentary EU committees, is given a very wide remit in matters of the kind that we are discussing. Although its meetings are webcast and published, it does not get anything like the attention that it really deserves. Having served on the European Scrutiny Committee for 30 years, having been its Chairman

[*Sir William Cash*]

for the past five years, and now having been re-elected as Chairman for this Parliament, it is important for me to say that I have never seen such an explosion of anger at a meeting of COSAC in all the time that I have been taking part in those meetings.

The reason for that is the lack of democracy that lies at the heart of this proposal. The hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) was with me in Luxembourg, and he will bear witness to the sheer anger about its imposition against the wishes of the individual countries concerned—about five in all, from central and eastern Europe. They were absolutely furious about having these mandatory controls imposed on them. This raises a fundamental question of intense sensitivity to the people who live in these countries. The way in which the issues are debated and discussed in the upper echelons—the rarefied atmosphere—of the European Union in its institutional framework bears almost no relationship to what is going on on the ground as regards the voters themselves. When the national chairmen came together at the meeting, they expressed themselves in very clear language indeed.

Apart from all the other things that are going on with the referendum and our complaints about the single currency—and the exchange rate mechanism before that—this raises the whole question of the straitjacket, ever further political integration, and the compression chamber, which I have been referring to since I led the rebellion on the Maastricht treaty back in 1990. I mentioned then, in black and white, in pamphlets and in debates, the compression chamber that was building up. This is an example of that compression chamber, which is now exploding, as was made clear in the COSAC meeting and replicated yet again in our discussions last weekend on the Schengen agreement. I know that we are not members of Schengen, and we will perhaps have an opportunity to discuss that in a moment.

Kelvin Hopkins: I was with the hon. Gentleman at the meeting in Luxembourg, as he rightly said. Does he agree that there seemed to be some intimidation of smaller, less economically powerful nations by larger, more economically powerful nations?

Sir William Cash: There is the case of Germany, to come straight to the point.

At the meeting it was discussed whether the 28 member states represented there, excluding us and Ireland because we are not part of Schengen, would welcome the proposals that were set out in the motion. In a nutshell, the countries concerned—the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania—were being told that they should go along with these mandatory arrangements irrespective of their resentment about that, their parliamentary votes against it, and their application to the European Court of Justice. As the Minister said, Hungary and Slovakia had brought proceedings in the Court of Justice to challenge the validity of this. These countries were, in effect, being told that they were wrong, and that in saying that the motion should merely “take note” of the relocation proposals, which was almost over-generous of them in the circumstances, they were refusing to accept the notion that they should welcome it. That is what led to the explosion. The debate went on for nearly

four hours. This must not be underestimated. It is not just something to be floated over as, with respect, the Minister did; I understand why he probably did so. It is fissile material. It is a perfect example of the total want of democracy in the European Union in imposing, by mandatory arrangements, a settlement on countries that simply do not want it. It is a perfect example of what I have described as the compression chamber blowing up in such circumstances.

That is the background against which we should consider this. It is not just a question of whether we like it or not, but of how the European Union operates in practice. One need only look at how the Greeks were treated by the Germans with regard to the whole austerity programme or how the Portuguese president, a few weeks ago, disregarded, ignored and refused to accept the decision of the voters by not acknowledging the new party of government. The list is considerable, and, as far as I am concerned, that is the basis against which this issue ought to be judged.

I am, of course, delighted, but not surprised, that the Government have decided not to opt into the arrangements. I say with enthusiasm that our policy of trying to deal with the problem of refugees at source, which I have applauded from the very beginning, is the best way to go about it, not to allow these people in. At Friday's meeting, the issue was raised of why Germany took the line it did. The answer, as I have said on the Floor of the House on a number of occasions over the past couple of months, is that it was very much to do with its desire to have more people working in the country, not just for altruistic reasons but for economic reasons. It wants to compensate for the fact that it will soon have a much lower working-age population. It made the decision because that is what Germany wants, irrespective of the impact it will have on the European Union. Angela Merkel's popularity happens to have plummeted over the past few weeks because, in my opinion and that of many other commentators, she has misjudged the situation.

The real point is that, to bring in 1 million people to Germany—that is basically what is happening—is not the end but the beginning of the story. Those 1 million people will themselves have their own children and probably bring their families over as well, because the charter of fundamental rights will be made available to them. This is, in fact, an opening of what I described the other day as a tsunami.

On top of that—I have referred to this on a number of occasions on the Floor of the House—nobody can doubt for a moment that there are a number, albeit perhaps small, of jihadists among those people who have come over. The reality is that only a few are needed in order to wreak the kind of carnage and havoc that we witnessed in Paris. To those who would criticise people like me for mentioning that, I say that it is a fact that that is what is happening, and on a scale unprecedented since the second world war.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am very concerned to hear what the hon. Gentleman has just said. Does he actually have hard evidence that jihadists are arriving in the United Kingdom under the disguise of migrants? Given that some people pose as police officers and social workers in order to commit heinous crimes, does he think we should abolish the police and social workers as well?

Sir William Cash: The reality is that there are declared jihadists who have been in Syria and other parts of the middle east. Jihadi John, as he was described, is a very good example of a declared jihadist who came from the United Kingdom, but I was not making a point about the United Kingdom, although I do perceive the danger. I was referring to the fact that there is no doubt that citizens—admittedly, they were French—who had been to Syria and come back via routes that enabled them to get to Paris contributed to the carnage. People can dispute that if they wish, but the facts are clear. The reality is that real problems have to be addressed, and that is an extremely important part of this debate. People can have differing views, but the reality is that there are real dangers.

I am also bound to say another thing with respect to the manner in which the Government have dealt with the issue. I want to make this point briefly, but it is important. The Minister passed very briefly over this and made a slight apology for what happened, but, with regard to override, I am going to put it in stronger terms. Scheduling a debate after the Government have reached an opt-in decision makes a mockery of their own commitment to enhanced scrutiny of their opt-in decisions and to provide full transparency and accountability to Parliament. The Government have provided no explanation, even this evening, for their failure to schedule an opt-in debate during a September sitting of Parliament, when the House could have expressed a view on the merits of opting into the first two relocation proposals, or an opt-in debate before the expiry of the opt-in deadline of 8 December on the proposed amending regulation.

Mr Rees-Mogg: Would my hon. Friend be more sympathetic to Her Majesty's Government, as I might be, if it were not true that it was nearly three years ago, in January 2013, that the European Scrutiny Committee requested a debate on the Floor of the House on the free movement of people? Their failure to schedule debates is long standing.

Sir William Cash: It is indeed. I always want to encourage the Government to do better, but on this occasion they have done a lot worse. The delay in scheduling opt-in debates is inconsistent with the letter and spirit of the commitments made to Parliament by the Minister for Europe. I would be grateful if the Minister for Immigration would deal with that, because he owes not only the European Scrutiny Committee, but, much more importantly, the House and this country's voters an apology for the way in which it has been dealt with. I am sure he will give that apology; perhaps he would like to do so now. Is there a chance that he might? Is he listening to what I am saying?

James Brokenshire: I am grateful to the Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee for allowing me to intervene on him. As I said when I gave evidence to the Committee, the Government have had to deal with a fast-moving situation, and, as I have already indicated today, we are sorry that it has not been possible to have the debates in the way we would have chosen to have them, but that is a reflection of the exceptional circumstances with which we have been dealing. There have been opportunities for debates and to respond to questions by way of statements, but that is the situation to which we have been seeking to respond.

Sir William Cash: Is that an apology? I would like the Minister to reply. I want to know whether, in these circumstances, which are unusual and unprecedented—*[Interruption.]* The Home Secretary's Parliamentary Private Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton North (Michael Ellis), should keep his calm. It is very important that he should understand that these matters relate to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons, not to purely personal opinions. We are very concerned about that and I have made my point.

Kelvin Hopkins: I support the hon. Gentleman's comments on delayed debates on the Floor of the House and even in Committee. The Minister said that having matters were fast moving, but I hardly think that having to wait two years for a debate is fast moving. The issue is fast moving when the Government want it to be, but when they do not want it to be fast moving, it moves very slowly indeed.

Sir William Cash: I thoroughly agree with my fellow member of the European Scrutiny Committee and with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg). The point has been made.

In the joint address to the European Parliament on 7 October, the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, described the Dublin rules as "obsolete". The French President highlighted the link between the Dublin rules and the proper functioning of the Schengen free movement area and said:

"Calling into question the free movement of people, by returning to internal borders, would be a tragic error".

He went on to say:

"But pretending that Schengen, with its current way of functioning, allows us to face border pressures would be another mistake."

The question, therefore, is whether the Dublin system is at risk of breaking down and whether further fragmentation of the Schengen free movement area can be avoided. An extraordinary contradiction emerged from the meeting I attended over the weekend. The people there were very anxious to be sure that we had a proper border control system, but they also insisted on an external border system. I am sure the Minister is aware of that from his discussions in Brussels and elsewhere. The irony of the situation is that at the same time as they are insisting on greater border controls—as I have said on other occasions, there is almost more barbed wire in Europe today than there was during the cold war—they also want a complete external border system surrounding the whole of the European Union, presumably with the exception of the non-Schengen countries, namely ourselves and the Irish. I hope the Minister appreciates that, under the pressures exerted by the migrant crisis, there is a real desire to go further towards having a complete external border and to go deeper towards having political union. At the same time, they want effective border controls, but those two things are inconsistent.

I understand that the Government now propose to use taxpayers' money to increase the effectiveness of Frontex, but when we consider the scale of the borders—a massive area of the European continent is supposed to be completely sealed off along the EU's external borders—we can see that the costs will be absolutely monumental. Frontex has already proven to be ineffective.

[Sir William Cash]

It does not work and I doubt whether it is possible to make it work, but through an insistence on its external borders, more and more pressure is being exerted towards the deeper integration of the European Union.

I want the Minister to tell us how we can have an effective system of the kind now proposed, with a full external border for an enhanced Schengen system, and the United Kingdom staying in the European Union at the same time. I see this as a very important moment in terms of our having to leave the European Union. The Schengen arrangements, reinforced by Frontex, to which the British taxpayer is expected to contribute, and the increasing pressures towards political union seems to me to be a subject on which we should speak more and more clearly and loudly.

There are real dangers in all of this. I simply think that bringing the Turkish action plan into operation will make the situation even more intractable. More could be said about that. At this moment in time, with their internal border controls, Germany and several other countries are in breach of the Schengen free movement area. Border controls have been introduced by Austria and Germany, justified on the grounds of public and internal security, and imposed unilaterally without prior notice, whereas the Schengen border code specifies a maximum period of two months. Those countries are in breach of the code, and I understand—the Minister may confirm this—that Germany is facing infraction proceedings. Angela Merkel is facing very substantial pressures from within her own country as a result of the mistakes that have been made.

The reality is that the Commission opinion has shown the interdependence of member states participating in the Schengen free movement area and the risk of a domino effect whereby unilateral action by one member state has an immediate effect on the security of its neighbours. That is causing the most enormous pressure and enormous volcanic eruptions in the countries concerned. People simply will not wear it.

6.54 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I welcome the chance to debate this vital humanitarian issue, but like the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), I am deeply disappointed that it has taken so long to bring it to the Chamber. As was pointed out by the Labour Front-Bench spokesman, the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), it is six months since the European Scrutiny Committee first asked for this debate. It may be longer since it first asked for another debate, but I was not in Parliament to know that.

The Chair of the Select Committee has gone in detail through the steps the Committee had to take to get this debate, so I will not repeat them. On 11 December, three days ago, he finally got answers to some of the questions he had been asking for months, and in some cases, for years. Today, six days after it was too late for us to have the remotest chance of changing the Government's mind, because the deadline for opting in has passed, we are finally having this debate.

I find it impossible not to contrast the Government's willingness to cancel an entire day's business in the Chamber to hold a debate that they wanted on bombing Syria with, frankly, their complete stonewalling of the

due parliamentary process that allows us to debate how we can and should do more to help some of the millions of innocent victims of the bombs already falling on that country.

Heather Wheeler (South Derbyshire) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is a fellow traveller on the European Scrutiny Committee, but will he be slightly more precise with his wording? We are not bombing Syria; we are bombing Daesh in Syria. It would be very helpful if all Members used those words so that there is no misunderstanding about what we voted on.

Peter Grant: This is not the place to rehearse the weakness of the Government's case for saying that the bombs will not injure or kill innocent people. If the hon. Lady had listened carefully, she would have heard me make the point that the people we are talking about are those who have already fled or are in the process of fleeing from the conflict. I suggest that, having taken the deliberate decision to become part of that armed conflict, the moral responsibility on the United Kingdom is even greater than it was before. We are now part of that war and we bear a moral responsibility to help to deal with some of the desperate human consequences of it and do what we can to help.

As things now stand, the Scottish National party cannot and will not give an entire endorsement to the Government's decision not to opt in to the proposals. That is not because we believe the proposals are perfect—far from it; it is because they offer a real attempt by all the nations of Europe, or certainly all the nations of the European Union, to recognise that this crisis is far too big for any one, two or three countries to cope with on their own. It is far too important—it is literally a matter of life and death—for us to risk the chaos that will ensue if 27, 37 or any number of different countries all go their own way.

We have had a foretaste of what happens when countries unilaterally and at a moment's notice close their borders, open their border, close them again and then open them to some people, but not to others. That is how we have ended up with tens of thousands of desperate, broken people behind barbed wire fences, which is when the tensions and violence are in danger of escalating beyond all control.

We cannot allow the Government to let their own party disagreements on Europe and immigration stand in the way of a moral and compassionate response to what has rightly been described as the worst humanitarian crisis that, please God, most of us will ever witness in our lifetimes. We must see this, first and foremost, as a crisis of protecting the victims of war, not as a crisis of immigration caused by the victims. Our highest priority at all times should be the welfare of millions of people—yes, millions of our brothers and sisters, and millions of citizens of this planet with whom we share a common humanity—because we owe them a moral and, I would argue, a legal duty to protect them as far as we possibly can.

As I have said, having taken a deliberate decision to play even a small part in the war, the United Kingdom has accepted a significant moral responsibility to help to secure the futures of the victims of that war. The numbers are truly breathtaking. We know that at least 4 million people have already fled Syria, and that over

7 million more have been displaced within their homeland, most of whom would leave today if they thought they had any chance of getting out. We could be talking about more than the entire population of London losing everything—their homes destroyed, and their families in many cases murdered, or at best torn apart, perhaps losing contact for the rest of their lives. Surely, these people deserve the best future and the best support that we, in our hearts, can possibly find the human decency and kindness to offer them.

Given that the Government's own advice is that the United Kingdom's military action in Syria is likely to last for three years, this is not a short-term problem that will be fixed with a short-term solution. It is not enough simply to throw money at emergency aid, important though that is. We have to consider massive infrastructure spending to provide 4 million people—and probably many more millions of people—with the housing, health services and education that they are legally and morally entitled to receive. It is not credible to expect three or four countries around the Mediterranean shoreline to provide all that by themselves, even if there is a significant influx of cash from the UK and elsewhere.

In a written answer that I received on 27 October, the Minister of State, Department for International Development was able to identify only three countries in the whole of the middle east and north Africa as being able to provide safety and access to essential services to refugees: Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. He declined to say how many refugees the Government thought those countries could realistically be expected to support, despite my direct question to that effect. I suggest that the total will be nowhere near 4 million, never mind the potential 10 million or more.

Expecting Greece to provide the infrastructure to support all the refugees who land on its shores for three years, five years or longer is simply unrealistic. Again, this is not about the money. It is not possible for Greece to produce the infrastructure to look after, house and educate the number of desperate refugees it is already trying to support.

The Government, for their own reasons, continually seek to blur the lines and to encourage us to think of these men, women and children as willing economic migrants. There is even the suggestion that some of them might be terrorists in disguise—a suggestion for which there is not a scrap of evidence. They are not willing voluntary migrants. They did not volunteer to have their homes blown to pieces. They did not volunteer to have their towns destroyed. They did not volunteer to have their families killed. They are refugees who are fleeing for their lives and the lives of their children because, if they stayed at home, their children would die. They have a legal and moral right to receive whatever help we can give them.

The humanitarian crisis in and around the Mediterranean shows that the previous rules on who should look after refugees are not fit for purpose in a situation of this scale. They were not designed in the expectation that one country would have to cope with 50,000 or 60,000 migrants coming in at a time. They were not designed in the expectation that one of the poorest countries in Europe would look after the welfare of hundreds of thousands of refugees who arrive in the space of a few months.

It is reasonable to expect the initial process of confirming identities, performing security checks and registering and fingerprinting refugees to take place as close as possible to where people land in the European Union. Some people refer to that as the hotspot approach, but I find that phrase demeaning and dehumanising. It makes it sound like the hotspot of a problem, rather than a place of opportunity, where we can show the kindness that these people can expect. I prefer to refer to such places as first reception facilities.

That approach, whether it is called the hotspot approach or first reception facilities, is one that we can support, just as the Government support it, but if it is not done properly, it might as well not be done at all. For much of the past six months, the conditions in and around the official registration centre on Lesbos have been an affront to human decency. The fact that that is happening on this continent is something of which every last one of us should be utterly ashamed. It is happening not because the various agencies and volunteers do not care, but because they do not have the capacity or resources to cope with the task.

As soon as refugees have been through the necessary registration process, the aim should be to help them get to their end destination as quickly as possible by safe, legal and dignified means. We should remember that these are human beings we are talking about. That needs to be done with full co-operation between the countries of Europe, both in agreeing which countries the refugees will settle in and in helping them to get there. This is another area where we cannot support the Government's refusal to be part of any of the options that have been put forward.

So anxious are the Government to persuade their wavering supporters that UK sovereignty over UK borders is sacrosanct that they will not even compromise on it if it prevents us from honouring our legal and moral obligations to some of the most vulnerable and desperate citizens on the planet. I find it astonishing that the same people who, less than two weeks ago, were condemning us for not showing solidarity with our allies when it came to committing acts of war in Syria should now be so resistant to showing solidarity in supporting and protecting the innocent victims of war.

The Government are asking us to agree with their decision not to take part in the EU scheme. We believe that it was a bad decision, taken for the wrong reasons. Tonight's vote will not force the Government to change their mind, but we believe that the principle at stake is important enough that we should put on the record our belief that the UK Government are failing to live up to their moral obligations. For that reason, we will oppose the motion tonight.

7.5 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I support the Government's decision to exercise the opt-out. I am pleased that the Government and the official Opposition agree that the United Kingdom should not be part of the Schengen system and that they both wanted to exercise the opt-out.

As an island nation with a neighbour in the Republic of Ireland and with the three countries on our principal island entirely surrounded by water with no land frontier, it clearly makes sense for the United Kingdom to have

[John Redwood]

her own border arrangements. Indeed, it is fundamental to a sovereign people and a sovereign Parliament that one of the decisions that we should be able to make for ourselves is who we invite in and on what terms we invite them in to become citizens of our country. It is a great privilege to be a citizen of our country. It brings all sorts of benefits, as well as responsibilities. Surely that is a decision that this Parliament should wish to make, with the Government offering guidance and leadership, to show that we are in control on this fundamental point.

As the Minister indicated in response to interventions, even though we have opted out of this proposal for allocating refugees and other recent arrivals in the European Union under a quota system, what the Schengen countries do at their common external frontier still matters to the United Kingdom. While we remain under the current European Union treaties, we have to accept the freedom of movement rules. That means that if any other country or part of the European Union accepts people in, they may well be eligible, in due course, to move to the United Kingdom. We are therefore interested directly in how those countries conduct themselves and what they wish to do by way of inviting people into the general European Union area.

We are also interested in the policy of the Schengen countries, which we have opted out of, because the British Government have none the less agreed to spend money and offer resource to police the common external frontier of the Schengen area. In particular, we have committed resources to tackling some part of the desperate problems that the EU migration policy has caused in the Mediterranean, where all too many people commit themselves to hazardous and expensive journeys and then need to be rescued by the Royal Navy and other naval contingents.

Sir William Cash: Does my right hon. Friend have any idea of the extent of our share of the costs to which he has just referred? Perhaps he might ask the Minister to consider that. As I understand it, it could be as much as £150 million, but, because the cost of providing for Schengen relocations will, by its nature, be ever-increasing, presumably that amount will go up.

John Redwood: That is an important issue and the Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee is right to raise it.

I have some sympathy for what the SNP has said. It is a disgrace that our rich and relatively successful continent is facing this huge crisis, with many refugees and economic migrants arriving, and the system is unable to cope with them. We have to ask why that is. Given that we do not wish to see people undertaking such hazardous journeys and that we do not feel that the way in which European Union policy is impacting on those people is decent, we need to influence our partners in the European Union to do something better.

Again, I find myself in complete agreement with the Government. They are right that the correct thing to do for refugees is to work with the United Nations and our other partners to make sure that there is a safe place of refuge near to the place they fled from, and be there to talk to them and to consider who would like to come to

countries in Europe and elsewhere and decide on what basis we will admit people from those camps. That is surely the humane way to approach the issue, and it obviates the need for people to undertake extremely hazardous, and often very expensive, journeys. Only the richest and fittest among those groups can undertake such journeys, only then to discover that the hazards are too great and that they may lose their lives or need rescuing from the Mediterranean. Surely the money that we are spending on picking people out of the Mediterranean could be better spent on an orderly system closer to the place from which people are fleeing, and on helping them to get legal transport to come to the country of their choice once they have been offered that facility.

Such a system would also mean that we could make clearer and better distinctions between economic migrants and genuine refugees. There are, of course, a lot of genuine refugees from a country such as Syria, but different considerations should apply in the way that we respond to a lot of economic migrants who come along at the same time from a range of countries in the middle east and Africa.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): Does the right hon. Gentleman have anything further to add about the unaccompanied children who are arriving in Europe and who appear to be extremely vulnerable and in need of assistance?

John Redwood: Of course our hearts—mine as well as the hon. Lady's—go out to those children, and such things should not be happening. It is only happening because adults have allowed it to, or made it happen, because children do not normally have their own money or wherewithal to do such things. Somewhere in the process adults have persuaded or set up those children to make those journeys, and placed them in the hands of people traffickers who may be very destructive towards their interests and their lives. The remit of the United Kingdom is quite large, but we cannot get into the homes and minds of all the parents, aunts and uncles who commit those children to such hazardous journeys, or into the minds of other adults who should be offering care if a child's parents have been tragically taken from them by violence in the country in which they were living.

Surely the European Union, with all its powerful and rich countries, could do a better job in coming up with an orderly and sensible way of handing help and assistance to genuine refugees who are being forced out of war-torn areas or countries by civil wars and violence. We must also send a clear message to economic migrants that there is an orderly system, and that they are not welcome if they turn up as illegal migrants. People should go through a proper process in the country from which they are coming, or in a place adjacent to that country if they have already started their journey. That would be a better way of doing things.

When Angela Merkel—perhaps for the best of reasons, both because Germany would like a bigger workforce and because she felt very sorry for these people—suggested that many more migrants should turn up, I fear that that compounded the problem. Far from being a caring solution, it meant that many thousands more people committed themselves to hazardous journeys, only to

find when they arrived that other countries in the European Union did not have the same view as Angela Merkel, that the policy was not clear, and that certain borders were shut in a rather unpleasant way with razor wire and high fences, because the numbers were simply too great and people could not be handled.

I support the motion and urge the Government to do far more to try to persuade our partners that EU policy is letting down refugees and economic migrants, as well as the member states and inhabitants of the European Union. This issue is of vital interest to us because we want the EU to have a more caring policy, and because decisions taken in any other EU country can have a direct impact on our own migration policy, owing to our current status as a member of that body and as part of the freedom of movement provisions. Many people watching these awful tragedies unfold on television, or when reading newspapers or even listening to some of our debates in this place, will conclude that as an island nation we can—and should—control our own borders. We could do a rather more humane job than the European Union is currently doing, and perhaps for Britain, that is the best answer.

7.14 pm

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Lab): I will not speak for long, Madam Deputy Speaker, but it is important to say something in this debate. I support my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) and his emphasis on behaving in a humane way towards migrants, as well as his point about the rather small numbers of people currently being allowed into our country. Like him, I believe that we should consider taking more of those desperate people into this country from areas where they risk death on a daily basis.

I support the Government's position, and it is right that this country should have its own controls, but I think that that should go further and that other EU countries should also be able to control their own borders—that is what has caused the enormous row that the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) mentioned. I believe that a fundamental component of democracy is that a country should control its own borders and who comes in. That is sometimes difficult to do, but it is fundamental. Borders matter, and trying to eliminate them in pursuit of the creation of some kind of super-state—that is effectively what has been happening in the European Union—is a mistake and will eventually come to a sticky end. It is noticeable that tensions are rising strongly at the moment.

As I said in an earlier intervention, refugees may not want to go to the country to which they have been allocated. If they are allocated to countries that do not really want them, they may not be made welcome, cared for, or well treated when they get there, and that is another serious problem. A way of helping refugees to go to places to which they want to go, and where they will have some kind of welcome and be looked after, would be much more sensible than a forced allocation policy. The UK can do that and we should not opt in to the arrangement, but other countries in the European Union should be in the same position as us.

I do not accept free movement; I think it has been a mistake. If we want to recruit people from other countries who have the skills we need, that is fine. That could be done on a temporary or permanent basis, but it should

be a choice and not that of some supranational body that says, "You must accept people because those are the rules of the club and you ought to accept those rules." I do not accept those rules, and neither do many people in Britain.

There is a conflict here. We must ensure that we behave in a humane way to other people. We all admire and wish to adopt such humanitarian actions, but large, substantial and unregulated movements of people can militate against the humane feelings that we all have. There comes a point when people think, "We can't cope", and destabilising massive population movements are not conducive to humane behaviour.

In the 19th century there were vast open spaces in the United States, South America, Australasia and elsewhere, and countries recruited people because they needed them and it was not a problem. We recruited people from Ireland in particular, as well as from elsewhere. We have also been very humane with certain immigrations. When I was younger in the 1960s, the Ugandan Asians were being seriously threatened and we accepted them into our country. Indeed, one or two Members of the House are descended from that population, and those people have made a massive contribution to our society. We have behaved well in the past, but when movements of people become so large and seemingly unstoppable, our humanity starts to break down—not individually in the Chamber, but as a society—and people start saying, "We can't cope. There is a desperate housing crisis and unemployment and so on".

Peter Grant: The hon. Gentleman clearly has a point, but would it destabilise the United Kingdom to take a share of the 4 million people who have fled Syria? How can it stabilise anyone for all 4 million to be left in two or three countries in the Mediterranean?

Kelvin Hopkins: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says. I have said, and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras on the Labour Front Bench has said, that we should accept more people from Syria. There is absolutely no question about that. We should play a bigger part in helping refugees to escape their terrible situation. The number the Government have decided to accept is far too low. That said, we are not going to have an open border policy in which very, very large numbers of people come here, because that would be politically destabilising. It would not be good.

Germany's population was falling. It is a very successful industrial country with a low birth rate, which means it needs workers. Our population is increasing rapidly. We are going to overtake Germany and become the country with the largest population in the whole of the European Union. We are therefore in a very different situation from Germany. If we had a serious labour shortage, and lots of space and vacant housing, we would want to recruit more people.

Sir William Cash: Has the hon. Gentleman also heard that our own population is growing exponentially and that we will get up to about 70 million really quite soon? Such an increase is way beyond the space and capacity of the United Kingdom and its expenditure.

Kelvin Hopkins: I do not want to get into specific numbers, but our population is increasing substantially. The German population was falling. The population of a number of other European countries is falling too, and they will no doubt want to recruit sufficient young and energetic people to make sure their economies carry on working well.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Médecins sans Frontières estimates that over 466,000 people have arrived on the beaches of Lesbos. The population of Lesbos is about 86,000. Do we not have a responsibility to help them, as they cannot possibly deal with that number of new people arriving in their area?

Kelvin Hopkins: As I said, I agree with my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras that we should take more. We should be doing more to help the refugees who need help, but I do not think that compulsory allocation to countries across the European Union or a free flow of migrants across the continent is sensible. In the end, I think it would militate against a humane and managed way of looking after people.

On this occasion, the Government are right. I understand that the Scottish nationalists do not agree and will vote against the measure, but the Labour Front Bench and the Government are together on this and I support them. In the longer term, we have to look to the restoration of sensible border controls within the European Union between member states, and not just the breaking down and the elimination of borders and having an indefensible common external border.

7.23 pm

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): I am actually going to support the Government today, too. There seem to be amazing levels of support, which is always quite dangerous, but it is refreshing that the Scottish National party is here in force to ensure that these matters are properly debated and scrutiny is carried out effectively.

The reason I support the Government is partly that the European Union has made an absolute hash of it. I phrase myself slightly more bluntly than the hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) who, in glorious understatement, said that the scheme of the European Union was not working as anticipated. Well, I thought that was on a par with the late Emperor of Japan, who at the end of the war said:

“The war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan’s advantage.”

When we think that, according to the *Daily Express*, 184 people out of 160,000 have been relocated, it is a failure even by the terms of the European Union. It introduced a plan that was hotly opposed by elected Governments. It imposed it by qualified majority voting. We, fortunately, had an opt-out, which we used. But what underlies this policy is, to my mind, also so wrong.

Here I disagree with the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant), who made a very powerful speech about the duty we have to mankind in general. I very much accept that. The duty to refugees is fundamental. It is tremendously important and is something the United Kingdom has done for centuries. The question then is how to do it well, how to do it effectively, and how to

preserve life so that we actually save people. It seems to me that what the European Union has done has made the situation worse for the refugees themselves. Of over 900,000 who have come by boat to the shores of the European Union in 2015, 3,671 have either died or gone missing. The terrible events in the Mediterranean in 2014 led the Holy Father to say:

“We cannot allow the Mediterranean to become a vast graveyard.”

The reason this happened is the pious but failed hopes of the European Union’s refugee policy: the idea that as soon as people get into the boundaries of the European Union they will get citizenship, but if they cannot get here there is nothing that will be done for them. That seems to me to encourage people to take these crazy risks that have led to the tragedies. The EU’s policy is itself creating dangers for refugees.

The refugees who come are not the halt and the lame, but the fittest and the most able to take the risks involved in trying to cross the sea to come to the European Union. We have seen that 70% of the refugees who have come to the European Union are in fact men, primarily young men. A system has been set up that creates incentives and leads people to take foolish risks to come here in the first place. The people who are most at risk—the children, the elderly and the frail—are left behind, because if they apply from their risky country, the forces of the EU will not let them in.

Her Majesty’s Government have got this right, but the numbers are hopeless. The 20,000 over five years is absolutely a step in the right direction, but of course we should do more. We should think of how many we take from the European Union under the free movement of people. In the year to March 2015, we took 183,000 economic migrants from the European Union; 183,000 people who were safe in their own country and not at risk of persecution. They were not in fear of their lives. They wanted to come here for the most noble and honourable reason—to improve the condition of themselves and their families. They moved halfway across a continent to do it and that is something I admire hugely. That is a very Conservative thing to do—to wish to better oneself and to take that risk. That is what entrepreneurs do. However, they are economic migrants, not refugees. And because we take so many people from the European Union under the guise of the free movement of people, when it comes to taking those who are genuinely at risk of their life we take 4,000 a year. We take 4,000 a year from the camps in Syria who may die if they do not escape, and we take 183,000 because we believe in the principle of European citizenship and that anyone who wants to come here from the EU should be free to waltz in, wherever they have waltzed from.

This is not only undesirable in domestic political terms: it is undesirable in moral terms. We are not helping those who are most in need; we are helping those who do not in fact need our help and support. We are helping those who are safe, rather than being generous to those who are at risk. This seems to me a fundamental failing of the European Union, because—instead of giving aid to refugees—it encourages people to take unwarranted risks, and gives benefits to those who are already safe.

Why do I stick to this number of 183,000 and what is the context? The context is that there is a limit to the numbers any country will take in any one year, not because free movement is a bad thing in itself but because the societies to which people move cannot cope

with the influx above a certain level. There is not the infrastructure, there are not the schools or hospitals, and the society lacks the capacity to absorb large numbers at one point. Their arrival needs to be staggered over a much longer period. If we have so many coming from safe countries, inevitably we have to be mean with the numbers we can control because they do not benefit from the European treaties and free movement with the EU.

The EU's whole approach is wrong, and we, in our renegotiation, are unutterably feeble; all we are doing is muddling about with a few benefits, which is not why people come anyway. As I said earlier, they come for that noble, inspirational reason: they want to improve their lives and those of their families. They do not come because they are benefits cheats, yet we grub around on that, rather than thinking about the real problem—the scale of immigration from the EU. As the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) pointed out, free-for-all immigration does not work for our democracy. Our people—our voters, our electors—do not want it, they reject it, and yet the Government do not even ask to get this back under domestic control. Instead, they do not opt in to one part of things with many parts, but it will not have any great effect.

I will support the Government tonight, but what was the best reason we heard for why the 800,000 Mrs Merkel is welcoming in will not come here? Apparently, our ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary to Germany has reported to Ministers that we do not need to worry about them coming here because the Germans are slow at processing citizenship applications. Well, isn't that lucky? They are slow. I always thought German bureaucracy was efficient, but clearly not; when it comes to processing citizenship applications, they might take 10 years. So we will not get 800,000 today or tomorrow. But we will get them the election after next. That, I am afraid, is where the Government are failing and letting down the British people. They have opted out of one thing, but they have left the big, the real, the major problem at the centre—

Mike Weir (Angus) (SNP) *rose*—

Mr Rees-Mogg: Of course I will give way.

Mike Weir: I am finding it difficult to follow the hon. Gentleman's argument. Why, once these 800,000 people have been settled in Germany for 10 years, are they all suddenly going to come to the UK, with their new German citizenship papers?

Mr Rees-Mogg: The amount of immigration to this country from the EU shows that we are a great magnet. Everyone seems to want to come to the UK, including to the glories of Scotland. It is extraordinary the draw we are. In a way, I am proud of this. I love the fact that people all around the world think the best place to live is the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It should give us a glow of pride about the success of our nation under this glorious Conservative Government, who are bringing us peace and prosperity.

Alison Thewliss: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that part of the benefit of being in the EU and having those open borders is that British citizens can go and live in Europe and that as many of them go and live there as come here?

Mr Rees-Mogg: No, I do not accept that. The reason the British go and live abroad and are welcomed abroad is that most of the British who go abroad are quite well off and mainly retired, and therefore they take a lot of income into poorer European countries that happen to have a little more sunshine. I quite understand. It is the Florida effect. People want to go to the southern European countries, but they take wealth with them, which would be welcomed even if we were not members of the EU, because poor countries always want to attract rich migrants. Rich countries cannot take an unlimited number of poor migrants, which is why we should focus on the most needy—the real refugees, the ones in Syria and the camps—and cut back on the 183,000 economic migrants coming from the EU. When the Government do that, they will deserve much more support than the support they will get today.

7.34 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): It is perhaps a consequence of the route by which this matter has come to the House today that much of the debate has focused on the constitutional and jurisprudence aspects of the EU, when it should have been about how we respond to what others have already described as one of the most remarkable and unprecedented humanitarian crises to hit Europe since the end of the second world war.

I have been struck by the number of hon. Members who have referred to the timing of this debate. I share the concern of those who have pointed out that the matter has been brought before the House when the decision has de facto already been made, but surely there is a more human aspect to the timing: winter is coming. Those who have made the journey to Europe—we heard about the remarkable numbers in Lesbos alone, let alone in Greece more widely—will now suffer real hardship as a consequence. It is also apparent that people will keep coming this winter. We will not see a diminution in the numbers making that journey. Surely, that is why there is so much to regret in the Government's position. If SNP Members divide the House tonight, the Liberal Democrats will be with them. I suspect it will not take us long to get through the Lobby, but, like them, I think it is the right thing to do, notwithstanding my reservations about the arrangements being debated.

This year alone, 950,000 people have arrived in Europe, having risked their lives to get here. They do not come because they are the able ones; they come because they are desperate, and surely, as a consequence, we should have a humanitarian response. Mrs Merkel's action in Germany was not the cause of their coming; it was a response to it. It is worth considering the consequences of the lack of concerted European action to the challenge. Ranked by asylum applications per head, Hungary has gone from ninth to second, behind Germany, while the UK has gone from seventh to 17th.

The Minister did not spend much time on the Government's reasoning, but we know from comment elsewhere that they have spoken of the pull factor that would come from opting in. This has been considered by a Lords Select Committee that described itself as not convinced by the Government's reasoning. It is worth considering the reasons the Committee came to that conclusion. It wrote:

"we heard arguments that the Government's concern that the proposal could act as a 'pull factor', which would encourage further migration to the EU, was not supported by evidence.

[Mr Alistair Carmichael]

The migrants affected by the present proposal are those belonging to nationalities for which international protection is on average granted in at least 75% of cases—at present, those from Syria, Eritrea and Iraq. The situation in each of these countries is dire: it is clear that the vast majority of those leaving these countries are fleeing civil war or the imminent threat of persecution. This is underlined, for instance, by the presence of millions of Syrian refugees in camps in Jordan and Lebanon. The Government’s argument that the relocation of 40,000 migrants who have reached Greece or Italy will somehow encourage more to leave their countries of origin is therefore unconvincing.”

That is—to borrow the expression of the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg)—a somewhat masterful understatement.

What are the elements that could produce safe routes and a humanitarian approach? We need to extend the family reunion rules. We need to allow more people who have family in the United Kingdom to come here safely. The current rules mean that a Syrian father granted asylum in the United Kingdom would be allowed to bring his wife and younger children, yet if he had a 19-year-old daughter, for example, she would not ordinarily be able to come here. Her parents would be forced to choose between leaving her behind and paying smugglers to bring her to the United Kingdom. In either scenario, she would be at grave risk.

The priority for my hon. Friends and me is to bring in 3,000 unaccompanied refugee minors who have reached Europe, and there has been an ongoing dialogue on that between my party and party leader, and the Prime Minister. If there is an opportunity at the end of this debate, we would like to hear from the Minister what progress has been made on that.

We must also extend the resettlement scheme as a matter of urgency. Twenty thousand refugees over five years is a drop in the ocean. We can and should do more to take those vulnerable Syrian refugees, who now face a bitterly cold winter in camps in Syria’s neighbouring countries and other parts of Europe. Come the Division, the Liberal Democrats will be with the Scottish nationalists this evening.

7.41 pm

James Brokenshire: We have certainly heard a number of important points, which in some ways have strayed more widely than the measures in the motion before the House and which may also arise in the debate to follow.

We will continue to work with European partners to develop and implement a sustainable and comprehensive solution that allows people to live fulfilling lives in their home countries or in countries of first asylum. Intra-EU relocation should not, in our judgment, be the response. The Government have been clear that the UK will not take part in it and have urged the EU to concentrate on actions that address root causes, control illegal migration and tackle abuse, not just actions that respond to the consequences of large-scale spontaneous migration. We have also been clear that, despite weaknesses in the Dublin arrangements, which we agree need reform, their underlying principles remain sound, with member states taking full responsibility for the effective functioning of their own border and asylum systems.

In our discussions with the EU we have been measured and constructive, while promoting and defending UK interests. Our approach reflects the need for a concerted

humanitarian response for those who need our protection. On the issue of solidarity, let me underline the front-line and other support that this country has given through the European Asylum Support Office, Europol, our search and rescue operations, our support for the common security and defence plan and our approach to resettlement, as well as the aid assistance that has been provided. Underpinning all that work is the idea that measures should not undermine the principle that asylum should be sought in the first possible safe country. Therefore, I urge the House to support the Government’s motion.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 274, Noes 52.

Division No. 148]

[7.43 pm

AYES

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Adams, Nigel | Davies, Byron |
| Afriyie, Adam | Davies, Chris |
| Aldous, Peter | Davies, David T. C. |
| Allan, Lucy | Davies, Glyn |
| Allen, Heidi | Davies, Dr James |
| Amess, Sir David | Davies, Mims |
| Andrew, Stuart | Davis, rh Mr David |
| Ansell, Caroline | Dinenage, Caroline |
| Argar, Edward | Djanogly, Mr Jonathan |
| Atkins, Victoria | Donelan, Michelle |
| Bacon, Mr Richard | Double, Steve |
| Baker, Mr Steve | Dowden, Oliver |
| Barclay, Stephen | Doyle-Price, Jackie |
| Barwell, Gavin | Drax, Richard |
| Bellingham, Mr Henry | Drummond, Mrs Flick |
| Benyon, Richard | Dunne, Mr Philip |
| Beresford, Sir Paul | Elliott, Tom |
| Berry, Jake | Ellis, Michael |
| Berry, James | Ellison, Jane |
| Bingham, Andrew | Elphicke, Charlie |
| Blackman, Bob | Evans, Graham |
| Blackwood, Nicola | Evans, Mr Nigel |
| Blunt, Crispin | Fabricant, Michael |
| Boles, Nick | Fallon, rh Michael |
| Bone, Mr Peter | Fernandes, Suella |
| Bottomley, Sir Peter | Fox, rh Dr Liam |
| Bradley, Karen | Frazer, Lucy |
| Brady, Mr Graham | Freeman, George |
| Brazier, Mr Julian | Freer, Mike |
| Bridgen, Andrew | Fuller, Richard |
| Brine, Steve | Fysh, Marcus |
| Brokenshire, rh James | Gale, Sir Roger |
| Bruce, Fiona | Garnier, rh Sir Edward |
| Buckland, Robert | Garnier, Mark |
| Burns, Conor | Ghani, Nusrat |
| Burns, rh Sir Simon | Gibb, Mr Nick |
| Burrowes, Mr David | Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl |
| Burt, rh Alistair | Glen, John |
| Carswell, Mr Douglas | Goodwill, Mr Robert |
| Cartledge, James | Graham, Richard |
| Cash, Sir William | Grant, Mrs Helen |
| Caulfield, Maria | Gray, Mr James |
| Chalk, Alex | Grayling, rh Chris |
| Chishti, Rehman | Green, Chris |
| Churchill, Jo | Green, rh Damian |
| Clark, rh Greg | Griffiths, Andrew |
| Cleverly, James | Gummer, Ben |
| Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey | Gyimah, Mr Sam |
| Coffey, Dr Thérèse | Halfon, rh Robert |
| Collins, Damian | Hall, Luke |
| Colville, Oliver | Hammond, Stephen |
| Costa, Alberto | Hancock, rh Matthew |
| Crouch, Tracey | Harrington, Richard |

Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hermon, Lady
 Hinds, Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kawczynski, Daniel
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leigh, Sir Edward
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lord, Jonathan
 Loughton, Tim
 Lumley, Karen
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark

Mercer, Johnny
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Murrison, Dr Andrew
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Opperman, Guy
 Parish, Neil
 Paterson, rh Mr Owen
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pincher, Christopher
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rutley, David
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham

Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin

Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy
 Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr David Evennett and
Margot James

NOES

Arkless, Richard
 Bardell, Hannah
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Boswell, Philip
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Crawley, Angela
 Day, Martyn
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Durkan, Mark
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Hendry, Drew
 Hosie, Stewart
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Lucas, Caroline
 MacNeil, Mr Angus
 Brendan

Mc Nally, John
 McCaig, Callum
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McGarry, Natalie
 McLaughlin, Anne
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Mullin, Roger
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Paterson, Steven
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, rh Angus
 Saville Roberts, Liz
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomson, Michelle
 Weir, Mike
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri

Tellers for the Noes:
Marion Fellows and
Owen Thompson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. 9355/15 and Addendum and No. 11132/15, international protection for the benefit of Italy and Greece, No. 11843/15 and Addendum, establishing a crisis relocation mechanism, and No. 11844/15 and Addendum, international protection for the benefit of Italy, Greece and Hungary; and agrees with the Government's decision not to opt in to proposals establishing provisional measures for the relocation of individuals in need of international protection or to the proposal establishing a crisis relocation mechanism.

European Agenda on Migration

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I inform the House that Mr Speaker has not selected the amendment in the name of Douglas Carswell.

7.55 pm

The Minister for Immigration (James Brokenshire): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. 8961/15, a European Agenda on Migration, No. 9345/15, EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling, unnumbered Document, a Council Decision on a European Union military operation in the Southern Central Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR Med), unnumbered Document, a Council Decision to launch EUNAVFOR Med, and a Draft Action Plan on Stepping up EU-Turkey cooperation on support of refugees and migration management in view of the situation in Syria and Iraq; and supports the Government's aim of working with the EU and Member States and other international partners to develop a coherent and sustainable approach to addressing current migratory pressures, focused on shorter and longer term actions to break the business model of people smugglers and traffickers, to break the link between rescue at sea and permanent settlement in the EU, and to address the root causes of migrants' journeys.

Today's debate offers an important opportunity to look at the range of measures proposed to address the migration situation. The first of the documents listed on the motion, the "European Agenda on Migration", was published on 15 May and sought to provide a blueprint from which to address the worsening situation by outlining an overview of the various measures available to the EU. It is fair to say that subsequent documents listed for the most part provide the detail of that blueprint.

The Government support many aspects of the European agenda. We agree that there should be more effective joint action on returns and against people smugglers. We favour stronger co-operation with third countries, as well as more effective management of the external border. Indeed, we have continued to press our European partners on those points, both before and since the publication of the Commissioner's communication.

We have also welcomed the proposals against migrant smuggling. Its focus on strengthening co-operation to tackle the gangs profiting from the crisis through people smuggling, including enhanced approaches with international partners, is sensible, and we support the strategic priorities outlined.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): Does the Minister agree with me that it does not sit well with Mrs Merkel that she should be criticising the Hungarians who have done their level best to implement the Schengen arrangements, as they are required to do, by seeking to secure their border, which is the European border? Has the Minister or the Home Secretary had an opportunity to speak to Chancellor Merkel to say that she should be supporting the Hungarians, not attacking them?

James Brokenshire: As my hon. Friend will know, we are not part of Schengen, so the operations to deal with internal Schengen arrangements are for those who are party to them. As was discussed in the previous debate, what happens at the external Schengen border is important, which is why we have sought to support Frontex in a number of its activities, given the potential impact on us in the UK.

Looking at the approach off the coast of the European border, it is interesting to note how the subsequent Council decision on an EU military operation in the southern central Mediterranean has in many respects been a positive step in the joint efforts to break the business model of the people smugglers. That has had the UK's full support. On 7 October, the operation moved into phase 2, the high seas phase, and was renamed Operation Sophia, in which the UK is playing an important role.

The purpose of Operation Sophia is to tackle the human smugglers and traffickers, disrupting their business model, which trades so carelessly in the lives of others. We must not forget, however, that Operation Sophia is only one part of the Government's support for sea operations in the region. Since May, the UK has saved over 9,000 lives in the Mediterranean.

The last document listed, the proposed Turkey-EU action plan, has been broadly welcomed by political leaders across the EU and was the subject of an EU-Turkey summit on 29 November. The Government share the view that a plan of this kind is needed in order to ease the refugee burden on Turkey, while preventing further uncontrolled migration to the EU. Turkey is a key relationship partner for the EU and is a country with which the UK has had close co-operation for some time. It also has a pivotal role in the migration crisis, given that so many of the migratory flows through Greece and the western Balkans come through Turkey.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend concede that there could be an element of disingenuousness in the embracing of Turkey in this context, given that so many of the problems that we have seen recently have come through Turkey?

James Brokenshire: It is important to look at the action plan to provide an overarching response to the challenges we face. Clearly, that involves Turkey as an active partner, which means working within Turkey and alongside it further afield. It is important to recognise and support Turkey's efforts in hosting well over 2 million Syrian refugees. It is important to continue to retain that focus, which is why we are providing financial support as part of an overarching package to assist with the efforts taking place in Turkey.

However, I stress the importance of the Prime Minister's announcement that, as part of the United Kingdom's responsibilities, we would resettle 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees over the next five years. We remain on track to resettle 1,000 before Christmas, building on our previous scheme. However, it is neither feasible nor desirable for us to try to meet the needs of all those who require protection within the European Union, nor is it the right solution for the majority. That is why the Government have placed so much emphasis on supporting protection in refugees' regions of origin, and we have committed a further £100 million to fund refugee camps on Syria's border.

As well as focusing on humanitarian assistance, the Government have consistently focused on finding a comprehensive and sustainable solution to the refugee crisis. The Prime Minister has continued to emphasise the need of the EU to deal with the root causes of the crisis, rather than merely responding to its consequences.

In Syria, that means working with the international community to end the brutal conflict there, and to defeat Daesh. The recent development of a Syrian

opposition negotiating committee following talks in Riyadh last week is a positive addition to the peace plan that was produced in Vienna last month. It could be an important step towards a solution in Syria, and therefore part of the long-term solution to the migration crisis. In Libya, that means helping to form a Government of national accord which can regain control of the country's borders and tackle the smuggling gangs. A strong, unified response to Libya, like the one that was demonstrated only yesterday in Rome, is imperative to securing the political agreement that will allow that country to move towards improved security. And, as I have said, in Turkey that means working towards comprehensive border management, ensuring that a humanitarian response is given to those who reach the country while also disrupting the organised criminal networks that seek to profit from the flight of others.

The situation relating to the migration crisis is constantly changing. The Government maintain a watch on all developments, so that we can reshape and refresh our engagement and share our expertise and resources in a targeted way to protect the UK's national interest, assist our European partners, and ensure that our efforts have the greatest impact on the support that we offer. We remain committed to effective practical co-operation with our European partners in pursuit of this agenda, and that is what the motion underpins.

8.2 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): The motion covers a number of important documents, including the "European Agenda on Migration" and, of course, the "EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling". The scope of the documents is broad, and their ambition is commendable. The "European Agenda on Migration", for example, aims to set out an agenda for a fair, robust and realistic migration policy, and the action plan includes wider steps on issues such as people smuggling, recovering criminal assets, data gathering and the sharing of information, and the use of military assets.

We support those aims, and the motion's call for "a coherent and sustainable approach to addressing...migratory pressures".

We also praise and support the efforts of our Royal Navy and other armed forces, who have rescued more than 5,577 migrants from the Mediterranean so far. It would be appreciated if the Minister could update us on the figure. The key question, however, is the extent to which the Government are helping to deliver that approach, and whether the European Union as a whole is achieving it. It is clear from the concerns that have been highlighted by the European Scrutiny Committee, and from the painful reality on the ground that we have seen in many parts of the EU, that a

"coherent and sustainable approach"

has not yet been adopted. These documents attempt to identify an approach that will ensure that Europe remains a safe haven for those who are fleeing atrocities and persecution, while also securing its borders and creating the conditions for economic prosperity.

If there is to be a coherent and sustainable solution to the migrant crisis, we must crack down on those who seek to take advantage of people in their time of need. Ruthless criminal networks organise the journeys of large numbers of migrants who are desperate to reach the European Union. They make substantial gains while

putting migrants' lives at risk, often squeezing hundreds on to unseaworthy boats, including small inflatable ones. Scores of migrants drown at sea, suffocate in containers, or perish in deserts. Smugglers treat migrants as goods, just like the drugs and firearms which they often traffic along the same routes. That is why we support the current operations which are aimed at preventing the smuggling of people into the European Union, and agree that undertaking such operations provides an opportunity to have an immediate impact on the crisis.

However, as the motion acknowledges, action must also be taken to address the root causes of migration. Many of those root causes lie deep in global issues that the international community has been trying to address for many years. Civil war, persecution, poverty and climate change all feed into migration, which is why the United Kingdom must be involved in reinvigorated diplomatic efforts to bring peace and stability to countries such as Syria, from which most of the refugees originate. There is also an important role for targeted aid and assisting the development of the countries in question.

Against that background, there are a number of issues that I would like the Minister to clarify. It is important for there to be ongoing parliamentary scrutiny of UK involvement in anti-trafficking operations. Will the Minister commit himself to informing the House before any further developments are agreed, and, in particular, to informing us of any decision to move from phase 2 to phase 3 of Operation Sophia?

There are some contradictions relating to the current state of operations. The initial EU plan stated that phase 3 involved the disposing of vehicles and vessels used for trafficking, but the Government have said that 40 migrant boats have already been disposed of as part of phase 2. Can the Minister explain that, and can he tell us whether the phases have now changed?

As well as ensuring that the vessels used for trafficking are disrupted and disposed of, we must ensure that the people smugglers who take advantage of vulnerable people are brought to justice. Can the Minister provide details of what the UK is doing on that front, along with any details relating to the investigation and prosecution of those who have already been apprehended?

8.7 pm

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): The question of the "European Agenda on Migration" and the action plan appear in a motion which we had to urge the Government to split from the previous one. Although there are some differences between them, in practice there are also some important similarities, as the Minister said at the beginning of his speech. However, a number of issues relating to this motion are of grave concern. I remind the Minister that, in his explanatory memorandum on the communications—this was some time ago, but I do not want to go through all that again—he said that the Commission had failed to

"present the correct set of policies to address the problems that Europe is currently facing in the Mediterranean and from mother migratory pressures".

I am sure that he will understand my asking this question, which is pretty obvious: what are the correct policies, if this is the wrong one?

The Commission considers that the asylum system in the European Union, and the operation of the Dublin rules, are regarded as being "fundamentally unfair".

[*Sir William Cash*]

Let me ask another question. Is the Dublin system broken—and, given the behaviour of the German Chancellor, it appears to me that it is—or can it be repaired? If so, do the Government want it to be repaired? What changes do they want to be made when the Dublin rules are reviewed next year?

The Government have already made it clear that they favour a policy of resettlement—and I thoroughly support them in that respect—rather than relocation. Those words tend to be used rather freely, but resettlement is quite different from relocation. Relocation applies to individuals who are already in the European Union, who have applied for asylum in a front-line member state, and who are presumed, on the basis of their nationality, to be very likely to qualify for international protection. Resettlement, on the other hand, applies to those outside the EU who are admitted from their country of origin or from camps neighbouring conflict areas. Member states have collectively agreed to resettle 22,504 individuals from outside the EU in 2015 on the basis that they are in need of international protection. I have to say that, although that is the assertion, regrettably serious questions have to be raised about the nature of some of the people who claim to be in need of international protection. Many no doubt justify receiving protection, but I then move on to the United Nations convention—the 1951 Geneva convention—and the breadth of the definition that is applied, and my concern is that what we really need is a re-evaluation of the definitions of what is a refugee, what is a migrant and what is an asylum seeker.

I have to say that at the meeting I referred to in the previous debate which took place in Rome only last Friday, at which all the Chairmen of the relevant Select Committees were present, there was in fact an endorsement of my proposal, which I have been putting to various international and EU meetings over the past four months, for a review of these definitions. These definitions have been expanded even from 1951 and now cover so many different areas and types of people that it is extremely difficult to imagine whether any reasonable basis for a refusal to relocate them can be pursued.

We have already heard about the very few—about 100, I think—who have been relocated. The reason for that is part of the problem, which I will come on to in a moment: the charter of fundamental rights, which is applied in this instance and also for the purposes of the Human Rights Act 1998 and the European convention on human rights. I know that people feel very strongly about this on both sides of the equation, and we have agreed that we would repeal the Human Rights Act, but in my judgment the depth of the analysis of the charter needs to be greatly improved. People who are claiming asylum can fall back on these international conventions in a way that creates a blockage of the legal system and the jurisdiction and jurisprudence of the human rights legislation, whether in respect of the charter or the European convention on human rights. There is therefore an increasing statistical and legal problem which is that more and more people are claiming asylum and, effectively, being granted it. I am not saying there are not many cases where that is justified, but I am saying that I think the definitions are so wide that this is becoming a very difficult problem and is not in fact going to lead to any serious policy of returns or deportations.

The Government have underlined the importance of breaking the economic model that encourages criminals to put people in harm's way at sea, and that has to be highly commended. There are certainly advantages to the effectiveness of Operation Sophia, which has been well supported by the United Kingdom. The trouble is that with many traffickers and smugglers the problems exceed the capacity to deal with them. How effective does the Minister believe Operation Sophia has been because of the absence of an internationally recognised Government in Libya?

I now turn to the question of the extent to which we have entered into a sensible arrangement with Turkey. Turkey and the EU have signed a deal to give Turkey fast-track visa privileges in return for £3 billion-worth of aid and, I believe, the prospect of continuing financial support. There is also the prospect of a revitalised EU membership in return for a commitment to a migration action plan. I am profoundly cynical about this arrangement. I think it is based on giving money, almost in the nature of a bribe to Turkey. From what I have been hearing—and certainly from a meeting I attended very recently—the authorities in Turkey have been by no means diligent in enforcing the arrangements that are supposed to have been in place. The fact that so many people are making their way through the continent of Europe northwards towards Germany, causing an enormous amount of disruption, owes a great deal to the inefficiency with which I believe Turkey has been behaving recently.

In addition to that, without getting into the foreign policy and defence implications, Turkey has been at loggerheads with Russia, and that is a severe complication in relation to concerted action in Syria. Turkey is also profoundly committed to dealing, as it sees it, with the Kurds. That is probably more important to Turkey than anything else in this context, and that is also an obstacle to a coherent policy. I am therefore profoundly cynical about exactly how the Turkey deal will operate.

In terms of these fast-track visa privileges and its desire to come into the EU, we have to bear in mind that there are 78 million people in Turkey already, and I am told that that is increasing at something like the rate of about 1 million every 18 months. As the population expands, Turkish engagement with the EU and people coming over here will increase exponentially.

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): I hope my hon. Friend will acknowledge that the discussions about possible future visa liberalisation involve the Schengen countries; they do not involve those EU member states that are not part of Schengen.

Sir William Cash: Unfortunately, the Minister was not here when I spent a little time talking about the Schengen aspect of this in a previous debate. I believe that the current proposals, which increase the range of the border issue to external borders and include Schengen, will burst. This is not going to work. There is not the money to pay for it. The failure rate of Frontex is evident. I believe that the arrangement will not work in future, and the fact that we are not a member of Schengen will not alter the pressures of the kind we have witnessed recently that come as a result of people entering the Schengen area and, having acquired a passport and EU citizenship, making their way through the whole of the EU.

I accept that Schengen is not, for the moment at any rate, part of the UK's bailiwick, but the pressures that are now beginning to grow are increasing the necessity for us to leave the EU, because, from what I have been hearing from other member states, Schengen is becoming a potent force towards a greater degree of emphasis on political union. It is a most remarkable state of affairs. The Minister for Europe was not here earlier, and I see him puzzling over what I am saying, but I say emphatically that the Schengen agreement is not only under review but already being broken by a series of countries. However, there is an enormous desire to make it work even more effectively. As it does so, the pressures for political union within the Schengen area will tend to increase.

Before I turn to the 1951 UN convention and the EU charter of fundamental rights, I want an answer to the question that I put to the Minister for Immigration earlier about how much, if at all, the United Kingdom is liable to contribute to the EU border force. Is it true that we will contribute £150 million?

James Brokenshire *indicated dissent.*

Sir William Cash: It is not true, apparently, but I will be glad to hear the Minister say it.

James Brokenshire: Time did not allow me to respond to my hon. Friend's question in the last debate, but we do not contribute to the core funding of Frontex. The agency is funded through a specific mechanism. He will know that we are not part of the Schengen arrangements, to which Frontex relates. We provide operational support through vessels, expertise and briefing.

Sir William Cash: I heard much the same back in the days of the Maastricht treaty, when we were told that we were not going to have creeping federalism. I sincerely believe that what the Minister has just said is what he believes will happen, and I trust him to say exactly what is going on—I will take his word for it—but the pressures are there. That is all I am saying.

James Brokenshire: My hon. Friend will no doubt take a great interest in the announcements that we are expecting to be made tomorrow about the EU border force. We will look closely at the proposals, but we will not take part in them because we are not part of the Schengen arrangements. To ensure that our national interests are protected, we will scrutinise them carefully.

Sir William Cash: I am extremely grateful to the Minister for those remarks.

The UN convention on refugees was incorporated into EU law by virtue of the charter of fundamental rights, so when the European Court of Justice implements EU policies, it interprets key passages such as the right of migrants to claim asylum if they reach EU territory, under article 18 of the charter, and the non-refoulement prohibition on removal to an unsafe state, under article 33 of the UN convention. There is therefore interaction between the 1951 UN convention and the charter of fundamental rights.

As the Minister will know only too well, the European Scrutiny Committee looked at the problem of the charter of fundamental rights in the last Parliament and came to the conclusion that we should override it. I do not want to go back into that debate too much, but I remind him that the previous Labour Government were completely

against the incorporation of the charter into the Lisbon treaty. Furthermore, the noble Lord Goldsmith, who was the then Prime Minister Tony Blair's envoy, sought and achieved a protocol that, on the face of it, excluded the charter of fundamental rights from UK legislation. We argued about that in the European Scrutiny Committee at the time, and I and other members of the Committee warned that it would not stick. Sure enough, as usual—I say “as usual” with regret—our prediction was right, and the European Court of Justice is now applying the charter of fundamental rights within the scope of European law. That is part of the problem, because as I have said, the charter incorporates the UN convention on refugees and all the definitions that go with it. As I said, I believe that those definitions must be reviewed, but they cannot be reviewed if they are part of the charter, which is applied by the European Court of Justice.

For practical purposes, the whole issue is caught up in the *acquis communautaire*. That is causing an enormous problem of interpretation and a logjam in the ability to deal with migration policy. I freely admit that a lot of this is a bit complicated, but unfortunately many people over the years have failed to understand that European Council and Council of Ministers meetings are not just about people sitting around and deciding to tweak education policy or transport policy, as Cabinet meetings might be in relation to domestic legislation. Decisions at those meetings lock the United Kingdom into legal obligations that can be removed only by the unanimity of all member states. That is the problem—it is a legal and political system, and it affects the issue of whether people are refugees or migrants.

I have no less sympathy for genuine refugees than anybody else. I have devoted a great deal of my time in the House to international development issues such as sanitation and water and people who are in refugee situations, but the current problem is not the same thing. It is not about having policies that we can rearrange and adjust; it is about the fact that we are being driven into a deeper *acquis*. That needs to be said in this debate, because the charter of fundamental rights means that the human rights dimension of the current problem, including the definition of refugees and asylum seekers, is locked into the *acquis*. In my opinion, that is one reason why so few of them are being dealt with appropriately.

As the Minister and I, and all of us, know only too well, the UK is not part of Schengen, but we are part of the Dublin regulation, which means that EU states and other UN convention signatories are obliged to allow for asylum claims as of right if a migrant reaches EU territory. However, the UN convention is not specific about how that obligation needs to be disposed. Arguably, to claim asylum under the convention, a refugee needs to arrive directly from the state from which they are fleeing. In practice, that can mean that an applicant has not been processed elsewhere en route. We are now dealing with 900,000 people, and the scale of the situation is as much of a problem as anything else.

Under the convention and the charter of fundamental rights, frontier states are not—I repeat not—allowed to block the entry of those with a genuine right to claim asylum. The question of setting up a border fence—as I said earlier, there is more barbed wire in Europe than at any time since the cold war—is extremely uncertain in law. The non-refoulement prohibition in the UN convention on the removal of an asylum seeker to an unsafe state

[*Sir William Cash*]

can also be interpreted in different ways, including so as not to exclude removal to a safe third state or safe recent transit state. I want to get this on the record, because it is important that the Government look at it all carefully when they get the opportunity to do so. As I said, the charter of fundamental rights is subject to the European Court of Justice, whereas the United Nations convention is only a convention. We are dealing with a complicated legal situation, which I believe is generating even more problems from the European Union.

Although I accept entirely that this motion is merely one that “takes note”, many of the things that I have said have not been incorporated in the motion. I say with great respect to the Minister and to the Minister for Europe that some of these issues are difficult and intractable, but they none the less relate to the Schengen area and have a continuing and ongoing effect on the UK. I say that because as long as we remain part of this European Union—the Minister will accept that I do not think we should any more—we do not alter the fact that we are affected by these things. This migrant issue, with all the tragedies it involves for those who are drowning in the Mediterranean and with the great deal of problems that come from fake passports, jihadists and so on, makes the situation even worse. I simply say to the Minister that he should not think I am asking him to reply to all these points this evening, as I am sure he will not have the chance to do so. Will he, however, please take note of the fact that there are other arguments than those contained in the motion?

8.30 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): As has been mentioned, there is a fair amount of overlap between this motion and the previous item, so I will not repeat some of the comments I made in the prior debate. Unlike the previous motion, we will not be forcing this one to a vote, although one or two parts of it give us significant concern. I shall discuss those in a few moments’ time.

Yet again, I am disappointed, because we are talking about a refugee crisis, yet everything in the papers talks about migrants and migration. This is not a crisis of migrants or migration; it is a crisis of refugees fleeing for their lives. If we could get that into the mindset of not only our Government, but Governments across Europe, we might start to address this emergency in the correct terms. The terminology is important. We fully support the fact that we need to have co-ordinated and firm action against the criminals who are exploiting the vulnerable and desperate through people smuggling and people trafficking, but, as the Immigration Law Practitioners Association is keen to point out, people smuggling and people trafficking are not the same thing. They are very different in the eyes of the law, although it is sometimes difficult to tell them apart in practice in individual circumstances. This means that they need to be addressed in different ways.

We should also remember that the House of Lords EU Home Affairs Sub-Committee has recommended to the European Commission that when setting the legislation and directives that deal with people smuggling and people trafficking, we should make a distinction when it is clear that the smuggling has been carried out for humanitarian motives. Some may question whether that

could ever be the case, but if it is clear that the act was done not for criminal purposes or for financial gain, but possibly through a misguided belief that it was a humanitarian act, would it be appropriate to classify such smugglers as international criminals? I certainly would not think so and the House of Lords Sub-Committee did not think so either. I would therefore be interested to know what the Government’s attitude to that is.

The motion also refers to action to tackle the “root causes” of migration, and I would be interested to hear what the Minister thinks are the root causes of 800,000 refugees arriving in Greece over the past year or so. What are the root causes of 4 million people being in the refugee camps in and around the Mediterranean coast? Unless the Government can prove to us that there were 4 million people last year and the year before, and every year for the past 10 years, the unescapable conclusion will be that the root cause of this crisis is war, violence and persecution in Syria and in other countries in that region.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): In the previous debate, the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) said that the risks families take when trying to leave a situation such as my hon. Friend has just described were “foolish”. Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Gentleman does not understand the situation and his comment speaks to the mindset that my hon. Friend was discussing?

Peter Grant: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments and I fully agree with them. I had wanted to say more in response to what the hon. Member for North East Somerset said, but as he is not here I will not respond to him just now. There may be people taking risks that could be described as foolish, but they are not foolish risks—they are desperate risks. These people are not stupid. Some of them are very highly educated, highly skilled workers in their homeland, and the reason they are risking their lives and, even more remarkably, those of their nearest and dearest, including their own children, is because they have taken a calculated risk that leaving them behind in Syria puts their lives at even greater risk.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that part of the problem is that there is no means of safe passage across land once borders have been closed, which means that there is no option for many people but to go by sea?

Peter Grant: Absolutely. One thing that drives people into the unseaworthy boats of the criminals is that they have no other way of getting out. If the only way can get out is by risking their lives with the smugglers, that is what they will do. Sadly, all too often the evidence is washed up on the beaches of Europe and north Africa.

Does the Minister accept that the root cause of this emergency is not the benefit system or the wonderful economic growth that is happening in Britain, but the desperate, desperate tragedy that is unfolding in Syria and some of its neighbouring countries? That is the situation that must be addressed once and for all if we want this emergency to be resolved, even in the longer term.

The hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) mentioned the £3 billion of aid that is going to Turkey. We want to know what transparency and accountability is attached to that money. How do we know that it will be used for the correct purposes? I am not as enthusiastic a friend of the Turkish Government as some of those on the Government Benches. I cannot forget what the Turkish military are doing to the Kurdish people right now, and until they stop, there must be a limit to how willing we are to accept them as fully fledged respecters of human rights and of the rule of international law.

In the letter received by the Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee on 11 December, the Minister addressed this question of how the UK will respond to specific calls for assistance under the EU civil protection mechanism. In his final comment he said that he believed that there was more that other member states could do to support all this work and the various funding strands among the UK's contribution. It made me remember a story that used to be popular a few years ago in certain management circles about the four workers called Anybody, Somebody, Nobody and Everybody. There were various versions of the story, but the nub of it was that there was always a vital job that had to be done. Everybody agreed that Somebody had to do it, and Anybody could have done it, but Nobody actually did. I just wondered whether what the Minister was saying was that they all agree that everybody else should do a lot more, but they cannot agree on who that is. Perhaps the Minister, either here in the Chamber or in the Scrutiny Committee, will clarify and amplify his comments. Which specific member states should be doing more? What more is it realistic for them to do? What are they doing already? We cannot judge whether other member states should do more unless we have an indication of what they are already doing.

One part of the Government's motion gives me a great deal of concern. It talks about the need

"to break the link between rescue at sea and permanent settlement in the EU."

I did not realise that there was an automatic permanent link of that kind. If somebody is rescued from the sea, they are almost by definition a refugee. They are claiming asylum. We have to assess whether they are entitled to asylum. If they are here solely as an asylum seeker, they do not have an automatic right to live here forever. In theory, they can be asked to go home when it is safe to do so. I just wonder whether we are seeing yet another acceptance by the Government that the emergency situation in Syria will continue for years and years. People have come here because they want a safe haven for a few years before they go home. Are we accepting that it will be years, possibly decades, before Syria is fit to take them back? I will look for clarification from the Minister on that—not necessarily this evening, but hopefully in the near future. I hope that we do not have to wait as long as the Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee has had to wait for some of his answers.

At one point, we considered pushing this matter to a vote simply because of that comment about the link between rescue at sea and permanent settlement. We decided against it, but I do wish to put on the record our deep, deep disquiet about the wording of that part of the motion, because it is inaccurate and it continues to create an impression that a significant number of these 4 million desperate citizens are trying to come

here because they are attracted to living in the United Kingdom. They are not; they are trying to get out of Syria because they do not want to die. I just wish that the terminology that has been used and the language of this debate would recognise that this is a crisis that has fundamentally been caused by war, violence and civil unrest. It has not been caused by an economic miracle happening in the United Kingdom or in Germany.

8.39 pm

Mr Douglas Carswell (Clacton) (UKIP): In noting these documents and discussing this text, we are being invited, in effect, to give our approval to a deal struck between the European Union and Turkey—a deal negotiated and signed without our input, involvement or ability to vote it down. We should not approve it. I tabled my own unselected alternative motion.

A few days ago, the EU announced what is, in effect, a four-part deal with Turkey. I see perfectly well what might be in it for Turkey, from whose point of view it is a very good deal. However, it is not in our national interest. First, the deal will give 75 million Turks visa-free, unrestricted access to the Schengen area from next October. We may not be part of Schengen, but that does affect us. There will be no mechanism to log people coming into the Schengen area and none to log people out. The deal can only add to the porousness of the EU's frontiers, which can only contribute to the increase in numbers of those camped outside Calais seeking entry into the UK.

Secondly, the talks between the EU and Turkey mean that Turkish accession to the EU is back on the table. I would not wish joining the EU on anyone, certainly not a friend such as Turkey.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I have some concern about Turkey's abuse of religious minorities—Christians, and the Kurds in particular. We are now considering supporting its joining the EU. Why should we do that given that its human rights abuses are so terrible?

Mr Carswell: The hon. Gentleman makes an incredibly powerful point. We are sometimes made to deal with Turkey as an equal, yet it does not have the belief in equality within Turkey that we in the west—Europe and north America—hold so dear. That is a valid and powerful point.

Thirdly, as part of the deal between the EU and Turkey that we are being asked, in effect, to approve, the EU will give Turkey €3 billion a year, of which a hefty contribution will come from British taxpayers. But it is the fourth aspect of the deal outlined in these papers, under the euphemism of "migration management", that I find most objectionable. Each year some 400,000 migrants from Turkey will be allowed to settle within Schengen. Of course, we are not in Schengen, but again the issue will affect us. Those 400,000 will be assigned to Schengen member states by quota. Once those 400,000 migrants per year have a right of abode in the EU, they will acquire with it the right to live anywhere within the EU.

Do we seriously imagine that those allocated to a high-unemployment, sclerotic Portugal or Italy will remain in those countries? No—within a short time those assigned to Portugal will have every right to come and live in Peckham and those assigned to live in Italy will have

[Mr Carswell]

every right to move to Ipswich. This is a deal being signed up on our behalf and in our name with profound implications for us, and we have no say over it. We can expect many more thousands of migrants to find their way into this country as a direct consequence of this deal and many voters out there will deeply resent the fact that they have simply not been asked.

The Government motion talks about our need to work with our international partners. Indeed we must, but I ask Ministers to be a little more circumspect when we select those international partners. It is difficult to assess the spread of Sunni radicalism in Syria and the middle east as a push factor without also examining and bringing into the equation the effect of Saudi Arabia and its promotion of radical Wahhabism. The EU has imposed sanctions on Iran; it is a pity that the documents do not consider action against those in Saudi Arabia who also export radicalism. I cannot support the motion in front of us. I regret that even if the House objected and even if we rallied heroically through the Division Lobby to defeat the motion and voted down this tepid motion and its Minister, nothing would change. It would not matter a jot. We have signed away the right to reject a duff deal with Turkey made in our name, the consequences of which will be with us for yours to come. And here, in an empty Chamber, on a Monday evening, there is nothing we can do about it. This is how we are governed.

8.45 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I want to mention briefly three aspects of the European agenda on migration, the first document mentioned in the Government's motion. The first of those three aspects is safe legal routes. That European agenda document acknowledges that

"vulnerable people cannot be left to resort to the criminal network of smugglers and traffickers. There must be safe and legal ways for them to reach the EU".

Similarly, the House of Lords European Union Committee said that one effective way to address the root causes of irregular migration is to create safe and legal routes for refugees to enter the EU. The UNHCR endorsed an EU target of around 20,000 resettlements across Europe each year by 2020—a modest and wholly achievable proposal if there is political will. We welcome the Government's resettlement programme, overdue as it may have been.

Sir William Cash: There has been an accumulation of documents over a long period. Had the proposal from the European Scrutiny Committee been taken up earlier, we would have been debating those documents when the numbers were at the level that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned. We are now talking not about 20,000 or 40,000, but about 400,000, 500,000 or 600,000 migrants.

Stuart C. McDonald: I am speaking first about plans for resettlement. I shall come on to relocation later. Resettlement through the UNHCR is not the only method of providing safe legal routes. We have urged and continue to urge the Government to listen to the expert organisations calling for broader family reunion rules, and to consider the case for humanitarian visas so that fewer people are compelled to risk their lives crossing the Mediterranean.

The second aspect of the agenda document that I want to mention, and probably the most important, concerns hotspots, which both the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have talked up in recent months. Everyone knows that Greece's asylum system was already chaotic before the crisis began, and Italy's is probably not much better, so expecting those systems to cope with the crisis would be unreasonable. That is where the so-called hotspot approach is supposed to help. The theory is that the full weight of EU asylum institutions will

"work on the ground with frontline Member States to swiftly identify, register and fingerprint incoming migrants...Those claiming asylum will be immediately channelled into an asylum procedure where European Asylum Support Office (EASO) support teams will help to process asylum cases as quickly as possible."

In addition, €60 million was to be invested in emergency funding to support the reception of migrants and the provision of healthcare to migrants in member states under pressure.

I have not had the benefit of visiting any hotspots, but I have read and listened with concern to recent reports from those who have visited. Those include reports from the International Rescue Committee, which said that

"the way hotspots are currently being rolled out is causing chaos, increasing tensions and violence, and leaving more people without basic shelter."

In October an update from the Commission explained some of the reasons why that might be the case. At that stage, only six member states had responded to its calls by providing just 81 out of 374 experts requested, and just six member states had responded to calls by providing 48 border officials out of the requested 775 border guards, screeners, de-briefers and interpreters that were thought necessary.

Lots of serious questions remain about how hotspots are to function and their basis in law, so I would be interested to know whether the Minister can comment on the legal basis for hotspots; whether people in those hotspots have access to legal advice; whether the way a person is dealt with in a hotspot area will depend on their nationality; the proportion of those in hotspots who are recorded as having claimed asylum; the number who have been removed directly from hotspots; and, more generally, when data on outcomes from hotspots will be published, and the UK contribution to all this.

Thirdly, on relocation, I was disappointed not to be able to attend the earlier debate that focused more intensively on that. The Government's motion talks of "working with the EU and Member States and other international partners"

to address current migratory pressures, but the difficult starting point for the Government is that they wash their hands of relocation plans, despite those being pivotal to the agenda on migration, and instead leave responsibility for that to everyone else.

The House of Lords described the Government's reasons for opting out of relocation as unconvincing. I would say that that is being pretty kind to the Government. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) said, the idea that whether or not the UK takes part in relocation schemes affects the number of people attempting dangerous crossings is utterly unsupported by evidence. It has been several months since the UK first said that it was going to shirk its responsibilities in this regard, and still more and more people make the crossing. They are doing that because they are fleeing

desperate circumstances, not on the off-chance that they will be incredibly lucky in a lottery of a relocation scheme and end up in the United Kingdom. A European relocation scheme should be a response to an emergency situation—a humanitarian crisis. As the Lords EU Committee said, failing to opt in means that we are failing to live up to our duty of solidarity and burden-sharing between member states.

A crisis on this scale requires collective action. Dealing with more than 900,000 people arriving in desperate circumstances is an impossible task for two or three countries to take on. In a Union of 500 million people their arrival poses a huge challenge—there is no doubt about that—but it is surmountable given that they represent less than 0.2% of the population. As the European agenda document states:

“No Member State can effectively address migration alone. It is clear that we need a new, more European approach.”

That is the approach that the Government should take rather than their head-in-the-sand approach to what is going on in Europe just now.

8.51 pm

James Brokenshire: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will respond briefly to some of the points that have been raised during the debate.

Organised immigration crime is an important issue. It is worth underlining that in recent months we have developed a 90-member-strong organised immigration taskforce which has had a strong focus on the crime networks operating in some source countries and at transit points, including the Mediterranean, as well as the UK border and in France. We have disrupted more than 600 organised crime groups this year, and our taskforce will be expanded to a 100-strong team. Access to and sharing of data is vital to joint efforts to combat the criminal gangs. In the Government's view, it is essential that enhanced data sharing, including with Europol, forms part of the EU's response.

The Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), asked about the Government's priorities for action by the EU. I have written to the Committee on this previously, but to underline the position, we have highlighted four points: first, how EU money is spent on tackling problems at source in transit countries; secondly, an increased focus on fighting organised crime, with better joining up between member states; thirdly, dealing with economic migration regarding those who enter the EU without effective controls staying without consequence, where the issue of claims of refugee status not made out needs to be addressed more firmly; and fourthly, a stronger coherence between upstream development work and the return of economic migrants.

My hon. Friend highlighted the issue of Dublin. We strongly support the Dublin regulations. We believe that an applicant's asylum claim made in the EU should be dealt with by the member state most responsible for their presence in the EU. We are aware, however, that the Commission is reviewing the Dublin regulations with a view to bringing forward a new measure next spring. We are co-operating with that review, but we believe that the long-standing principles at the heart of the Dublin system are the right ones, and that it would be a major error to replace them with completely different, untried and untested measures.

In respect of the operations in the Mediterranean and Operation Sophia, we are in phase 2, which is the high seas operation. The House will no doubt be updated, through reports of EU Council of Ministers meetings, should there be further progress, which we look to. This is very much focused on the situation in Libya. We welcome the support from a broad range of Libyans from across the political spectrum in recognising the urgency of creating a long-awaited Government of national accord, and urge all political actors to sign on 16 December. The Rome ministerial meeting of 13 December demonstrated unified international support for the UN-led effort to establish a Government of national accord in Libya. We continue to support that and to see it as a priority for moving forward.

The EU-Turkey action plan covers most of our priority areas, including controlling the flow of migrants to the EU from Turkey. It is about improving education, health and labour rights for Syrian refugees in Turkey to address the potential push factors for further migration. It is important to stress that Turkey is accepting the return of some failed asylum seekers and tackling smuggling networks. The agreed action plan incentivises Turkey to do more on border management. It does not guarantee visa liberalisation in relation to Turkey, and the UK does not have to offer a reciprocal visa concession. It is important to underline and stress that.

Jim Shannon: In an earlier intervention, I mentioned the human rights abuses taking place in Turkey. Has the Minister had any discussions with his ministerial colleagues about that matter? It is clear to me and many other Members that those human rights abuses have not stopped; indeed, they are continuing.

James Brokenshire: I underline to the hon. Gentleman that, although we support Turkey's EU accession process and are working on it closely with Turkey, EU member states and the European institutions, the accession process recognises that Turkey needs to do more to meet EU standards through continuing reform, particularly in the area of fundamental rights and the rule of law. Active and credible accession negotiations remain the best way for Turkey to make further progress.

We have touched on the hotspots issue. The UK stands ready to support, through the European Asylum Support Office and others, and to ensure that the appropriate support mechanisms are in place.

Our position on the migration crisis is practical, pragmatic and focused on the need for a concerted humanitarian response for those who need our protection; ensuring the sustainability of EU asylum systems; pursuing effective co-operation with EU partners; combating illegal migration and those who profit from it; and protecting our security. That is where the Government's focus remains, and I urge the House to support our motion.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. 8961/15, a European Agenda on Migration, No. 9345/15, EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling, unnumbered Document, a Council Decision on a European Union military operation in the Southern Central Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR Med), unnumbered Document, a Council Decision to launch EUNAVFOR Med, and a Draft Action Plan on Stepping up EU-Turkey cooperation

[James Brokenshire]

on support of refugees and migration management in view of the situation in Syria and Iraq; and supports the Government's aim of working with the EU and Member States and other international partners to develop a coherent and sustainable approach to addressing current migratory pressures, focused on shorter and longer term actions to break the business model of people smugglers and traffickers, to break the link between rescue at sea and permanent settlement in the EU, and to address the root causes of migrants' journeys.

Business without Debate

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That at the sitting on Wednesday 16 December the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Secretary Iain Duncan Smith relating to the Welfare Cap not later than ninety minutes after their commencement; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; proceedings may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Dr Thérèse Coffey.*)

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 6 and 7 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS

That the draft Payment Accounts Regulations 2015, which were laid before this House on 17 November, be approved.

DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

That the draft Disclosure of Exporter Information Regulations 2015, which were laid before this House on 17 November, be approved.—(*Charlie Elphicke.*)

Question agreed to.

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Ordered,

That Kevin Foster be a member of the Backbench Business Committee.—(*Jackie Doyle-Price, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

Student Nursing (Finance)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Jackie Doyle-Price.)

8.57 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I am grateful for this opportunity to lead my first Adjournment debate on the serious issue of finance for student nurses and midwives.

I have a long-standing interest in the issues. I spent much of my career outside this place working for a number of charities to widen access to higher education and to tackle broader educational disadvantage. As deputy leader and cabinet member for health and wellbeing in the London borough of Redbridge, I became acutely aware of the challenges facing frontline staff and managers in both of the NHS trusts that serve my constituents in Ilford North. I am also a proud supporter of Unison and draw Members' attention to my declaration of interests. I am grateful to Unison, the National Union of Students, of which I am a former president, and many other organisations for their assistance in drawing together the evidence for this evening's debate.

With just a few lines in the autumn statement, the Chancellor announced the biggest shake-up in the funding of nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects since the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968. By scrapping student bursaries and charging them tuition fees, the Chancellor is passing on the full cost of training to these essential frontline staff for the first time. The scale and potential consequences of his decisions merit further parliamentary scrutiny and public debate, and I hope that tonight will provide the first of many opportunities for that debate to take place.

Nursing and midwifery students currently pay no tuition fees for their studies and receive a non-means-tested grant of up to £1,000 and a means-tested bursary of up to £3,191 to help with the costs of living while they study and train. That is significant because students on both courses are required to work throughout their degrees in clinical practice, where they are subject to the full 24-hour care cycle. They work evenings, nights and weekends. Many will spend 60% of their degree doing that, with nurses required to work at least 2,300 hours across their degree. Even with the current levels of financial support in place, many struggle to make ends meet. Their courses are longer, their holidays are shorter and their placements are demanding. Those who do paid work outside their course can end up working more than 60 hours a week as a result, and they should not be expected to do so.

There has been a public outcry at the planned loss of the NHS bursary, but the Government's plans go even further. Nursing and midwifery students will not only lose their grant and bursaries for maintenance; they will be expected to take out loans to pay for their tuition fees for the first time. These changes will burden students with eye-watering debts of at least £51,600, which they will begin to pay back as soon as they graduate, because nurses currently earn a starting salary just above the repayment threshold, which, shamefully, is now to be frozen at £21,000. As a result, nurses will on average take a pay cut of £900 a year to meet their debt repayments. That is no way for Ministers to treat the people who form the backbone of the NHS.

Given that the Government see fit to charge students for the cost of their tuition, will the Minister confirm whether he intends to pay student midwives and nurses for the hours they have to put into staffing our hospitals? If a private sector company tried to get workers to work long shifts and to pay for the privilege of working those long shifts while training, they would rightly be condemned. We should be no less outraged by what Ministers propose for nurses and midwives.

The impact of the changes will be felt beyond nurses and midwives; physiotherapists, occupational therapists, dieticians, chiropodists, podiatrists, radiographers, paramedics, prosthetists and other allied health professionals stand to lose out. We are not talking about the highest-paid people in this land; this assault on the living standards of key public sector workers is rightly causing outrage among NHS staff and members of the public who cherish the work they do on our behalf.

Given the scale and significance of the reforms, it is outrageous that the Government chose to sneak them out in the autumn statement. The Chancellor's statement made an oblique reference to replacing

"direct funding with loans for new students".—[*Official Report*, 25 November 2015; Vol. 602, c. 1363.]

The policy decision on page 126 of the Blue Book merely says:

"Students studying nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects from September 2017 will be moved on to the standard student support system, with the details subject to consultation."

As the Government have placed so little information in the public domain so far and higher education institutions and potential applicants are already turning their minds to the 2017 admissions round, I hope that the Minister can shed some light on the details this evening. Will he confirm that the Government will consult on the principle of the policy changes, not merely on their implementation? What is the full timetable for the decision from consultation through to implementation?

What analysis have the Government conducted of students in receipt of NHS bursaries for tuition and maintenance costs? Will they publish an equality impact assessment for the proposals? What research have the Government conducted into the financial hardship facing existing nursery and midwifery students and students of allied health subjects?

Why do the Government think it is fair that students from the most deprived backgrounds should have their grants taken away while some of the wealthiest people in our society receive tax cuts? How much of this debt do the Government expect to write off because those indebted by these reforms are unable to repay them in full?

Which Department will meet the cost of servicing the RAB—resource accounting and budgeting—charge for the student loan debt: the Department of Health or the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills? What are the Barnett consequential for health education budgets in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, where different arrangements are in place?

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this issue before the House. I understand that 56,000 students on the mainland, including Scotland and Wales, may be in debt as a result of this change. In Northern Ireland, the Health Minister has committed himself to continuing the bursary. We are doing that in Northern Ireland; perhaps the rest of the United Kingdom should do the same.

Wes Streeting: I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Gentleman. He rightly points out that this change will open up a postcode lottery across the United Kingdom, as its different parts choose to treat nurses and trainee nurses and midwives in different ways.

In the junior doctors dispute—the Government have belatedly seen sense and decided to reflect on their position—we faced the prospect of junior doctors in my constituency flocking to other parts of the United Kingdom because the situation there was more generous. With great respect to all the people represented in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, I want to keep in my constituency the talented trainee doctors, nurses, midwives and other health professionals living in my constituency so that they can serve my constituents when they work at King George and Whipps Cross hospitals. These are very serious issues.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman is making an excellent speech and excellent points on the significance of nursing to the whole country. He might like to know that the students I have met in Scotland send a message of solidarity to their colleagues in England. They do not want to see bursaries cut, because nurses are under enough pressure as it is. I congratulate him on securing this debate.

Wes Streeting: I am very grateful for that intervention and I wholeheartedly concur with the hon. Lady.

Government Members may wear the NHS badge on their lapel, but they are quick to attack the conditions of NHS staff when it comes to taking difficult decisions. [*Interruption.*] They ask how I would fund it. When we were in government, even when we made changes to higher education student finance, we did not do this. We will take no lessons from the Conservative party on spending plans. It attacked Labour's spending plans at the 2010 general election because we wanted to halve the deficit and it was promising to eliminate it. Then what did it do? It halved the deficit. When it comes to their record on spending plans, the Government are in no position to hector other parties.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that what is so devastating about these plans is that people from my constituency and from my background—I am a former Unison activist who looked after NHS staff—will not be able to go into the nursing profession? We are crying out for nurses and for people to fill the positions. The NHS has been burdened by the use of agency staff because the staff are not available. This policy will put people from my constituency off going into those positions.

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend speaks with great experience. The Government should heed the points she makes.

I will turn to the other questions I have for the Minister. How will clinical placements be funded under the student loans system? The Government talk about the number of places they can expand, but it is not like expanding a history undergraduate course because occupational placements need to be arranged. The Government should explain how they intend to fund them.

[Wes Streeting]

Given the number of mature applicants for nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects, what assessment have the Government made of the likely impact of the reforms on applications from mature students? Are the Government at all concerned that applications from mature students may fall, given the detrimental impact that the coalition Government's student finance reforms had on mature and part-time student numbers? Given that many people choose healthcare as a second degree and may not be willing to take on more than £100,000 of debt, how will the Government ensure that this route is not closed to such students? Have the Government conducted any evaluation at all that might give us a clue as to the extent of the risk that these reforms pose to recruitment?

The Government suggested in the spending review that half of all applicants to nursing courses are turned away. Do they have any evidence of what stage they are turned away at? If it is really the case that people are flocking to these professions, will the Minister explain why my local NHS trust has been so reliant on temporary and agency staff, including nurses who have been flown over from Portugal, to address the recruitment and retention challenges facing the NHS?

Additional allowances are currently available for students with different circumstances. Will the Minister inform the House whether any changes will be made to additional allowances, such as the extra weeks allowance or the dependants allowance? If so, what are those planned changes and what assessment have the Government made of their potential impact?

Given the press speculation over the weekend that the Government plan to increase the overall cap on university tuition fees, what assurance can the Minister give the House that students studying nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects will not see their tuition fees and debts hiked up even further than is being suggested? Given that the Government seem content to shift the goalposts for existing students and graduates, does the Minister really expect current or future students to believe that the terms and conditions they sign up to will not be changed and applied retrospectively further down the line? At the very least, I hope the Minister will confirm this evening that the NHS will continue to fund the tuition fees for existing students for the remainder of their studies.

When the coalition Government chose to increase tuition fees in 2010, the move was subject to a debate and a vote in this House. Given the media speculation that Cabinet Office Ministers are busy trying to find ways to avoid proper debate and scrutiny of a possible increase in the overall cap on tuition fees, will the Minister give the House an assurance that we will have a full debate and a vote should the Government choose to extend tuition fees to nursing, midwifery and allied health subject courses? Many students have already written to Ministers in the Department of Health and are awaiting a reply. Will the Minister commit to meeting student representatives to discuss their concerns?

It is not hard to understand why the Government's shift in policy is generating so much concern and anxiety. In recent days I have heard representations from, among others, Unison, the Royal College of Nursing, the National Union of Students, the University of Hertfordshire,

the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy. I have been contacted by student nurses and midwives in my constituency, and received messages of support for this debate from those in the constituencies of other right hon. and hon. Members.

Before I conclude, I would like to share with the House some of the stories that I have heard, and I will finish by making a few points about nursing and midwifery students. These are exceptional people and their dedication to others is truly remarkable. They work long hours, often in difficult situations, and they take a direct role in caring for patients when they are at their most vulnerable. Nursing students have told me how immensely challenging their work can be. They hold the hands of patients in their final moments, and comfort them as they pass. They are the face of reassurance to patients, and a bedrock of support for families.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech, and I wanted to share my thoughts as someone whose son's life, and whose own life, was saved by a student midwife. Does he agree that making those people not just work for free but even pay to save the lives of people like me and my son, is simply despicable?

Wes Streeting: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend, and I am grateful to her for sharing her difficult personal experiences.

Nurses care for us in some of our darkest and most painful moments, and the weight of their responsibility carries with it a heavy physical and emotional load. The same is true for our nation's midwives. One spoke of the difficulties that she faced when a baby was stillborn and she had to comfort the mother, while also taking hand and foot prints so that the parents would have memories of the baby they lost. She will never forget the shift when she spent 12 and a half hours with a mother who miscarried twins. She had five hours of rest, and then came back to do another 12 and a half hours with the same woman. She has supported the delivery of 10 babies, and she feels immense pride in being part of the wondrous moment of childbirth.

As the saying goes "Save one life and you're a hero; save 100 lives and you're a nurse." These people are seeking to qualify into these difficult professions and form the NHS of tomorrow. They deserve our respect, admiration and support, as well as the right incentives to continue or even commence study in the first place. Ministers should listen to the students who are protesting, and to the nearly 150,000 people who have signed the petition to keep the NHS bursary. The Government owe it to patients and students to think their proposals through properly, and I ask them to pause this process. It would be a tragedy if the next Florence Nightingale or Edith Cavell were discouraged from the profession because of these changes. I look forward to the Minister's response, and I hope that in the coming days, weeks and months, he will listen carefully to the voices of those who form the backbone of our national health service.

9.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer): It is a privilege to respond to this debate, and the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting)

made a powerful speech. I know that he has experience and expertise in student finance. He was on the front line when we had discussions in this place some years ago, albeit outside the Chamber, and he brings passion and knowledge to this debate. He may feel that I am rehearsing points that he has heard previously, but before I address some of the specific and detailed questions that he rightly raised, I hope he will not mind if I run through some of the issues and reasons why the Government feel that this measure is the right thing to do at this time.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that nursing remains one of the few subjects not within the purview of the current student finance system. To our mind, the current system is not delivering as it should for either students or patients. Simply put, nursing is one of the most oversubscribed subjects in the whole academic range, and the fifth most popular subject that UCAS offers. Last year, there were 57,000 applicants for the 20,000 nursing places available.

I do not wish to go down the route of discussing NHS finance, because it will lead us to a place that is not easy for the hon. Gentleman's argument and not particularly realistic. There is no way that any Government of any stripe would be able to offer a place to every single person with the necessary qualifications who wished under the current funding system to apply for a nursing place. The question for us is this: how do we change the system to give more people the opportunity to study nursing, and do so in a way that we are able better to supply the nurses and the nursing positions required in the NHS?

The hon. Gentleman asked a very important and pertinent question, which is why in his hospital, which I know from having gone there and from discussing this with him in other debates in this place, he should be seeing a shortage of filled nursing places. It is a function of parts of London that there are problems in recruiting—I was in Hull last week where they have a similar problem, albeit for different reasons—and yet there is an oversubscription for places. He could have added that we almost have a record number of nurses in training at the moment. So how does that add up?

Under the Government, we have seen a significant expansion in the number of nurses in the workplace. The response to the tragic events at Mid Staffs, the subsequent Francis report and the results of the Morecambe Bay inquiry led us to the conclusion that had eluded previous Governments: we needed safe staffing levels on wards that were not, in some parts of the country and in some hospitals, safely staffed. That required a significant increase in nursing numbers, which could be provided in the short term only by agency nurses. That is why we have not only increased the number of nurses in training—clearly, they take a while to come through—but have been required to take action on the cost of agencies taking advantage of the situation. That does not change the fact that it is simply not possible, within the current funding set-up, to satisfy either the demand for or the supply of nursing places.

There are other reasons. Even if we did not need to do something to get a better match between the number of nursing places and what the NHS requires and students want, I would want to push this reform. It is for that reason that I directly disagree with the hon. Gentleman's assessment of student finance reform. I disagreed with

him when we had this discussion in 2011, albeit not in this Chamber. If I may gently put it, I think those on the Conservative side of the House were proved right by those reforms. The simple fact is that we now have more applications from disadvantaged students to higher education than ever before in the history of higher education. We have seen a significant expansion in the number of students full stop going into higher education. Eighteen-year-olds from the most disadvantaged areas were 72% more likely to apply to higher education in 2015 than they were in 2006. It has happened in precisely the opposite way to what he and his friends on the Labour Benches, when they were making the argument in 2011, expected to happen.

Wes Streeting: The Minister should look more carefully at what happened to mature student applications following the reforms—they plummeted—and think about the profile of the people applying to be nurses and midwives. Does he accept that the majority of loan debt will never be paid back, including by graduates who will earn far more than nurses?

Ben Gummer: I will turn to mature students, but I hope the hon. Gentleman will concede my central point. The significant majority of students going into nursing are doing so at an undergraduate point at 18 or 19 years of age. For that cohort across the rest of the higher education sector, we have seen the most spectacular expansion in opportunity than at any time since higher education was opened up more broadly to people after the second world war. That is something that Members on both sides of the House should celebrate. I know that those on the sensible wing of the Labour party also embrace the reforms and see why they were a good thing.

I disagree with many in the Opposition, but to be direct with the hon. Gentleman, I want to bring those advantages to student nursing. I want to expand the number of places available to people from all backgrounds to give them the opportunity to enter nursing, and I want to secure the advantages that come from bringing people from non-traditional and disadvantaged backgrounds into nursing, in the same way as we achieved in the rest of the higher education sector. I believe passionately in that. Even if the NHS and the students themselves—the 37,000 who applied but did not get a place last year—did not require this change, I would still be making it, because it is the right thing to do for those who otherwise would not have an opportunity. Under the new student financing arrangements, they will have that opportunity.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): I wish to press the Minister on my hon. Friend's point about mature students. In higher education, the number of mature students attending has now fallen by half. This is directly related to the current funding regime. The social mobility commissioner has cited education as the key vehicle by which mature people can achieve social mobility. How will the Minister prevent the number of mature nursing students falling as it has done in higher education?

Ben Gummer: I will turn to that point with pleasure, if the hon. Gentleman will give me a few minutes, because I have several things to say about mature students. I accept that this area of the proposals requires close attention, which is why I want to ensure that they are as robust as possible and that the consultation, to which the hon. Member for Ilford North referred, is as good as possible.

[Ben Gummer]

I want to answer the questions from the hon. Member for Ilford North about the consultation. We will consult on the full gamut of the reforms, but we will not consult on the principle, because that has been decided, as was outlined by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. It is unfair to say he sneaked it out, given that it was made evident in his speech and was reacted to by the Opposition, as I know because I heard them. As for the timetable, the consultation will begin in January. We have not determined precisely when it will conclude, but it will be a full consultation. In significant part, it will look at how to ensure that mature students are supported, and I can confirm one element of it: we will allow mature students to apply for a second loan. Of course, that will account for only a small number of the cohort, but we will look at the impact of the changes on mature students, because they make up about a third of the cohort going into nursing.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I am a little confused by the Minister's argument, which appears to be that by removing an existing advantage, he will create an advantage for more people to enter the nursing profession. Most people listening will find that slightly illogical, but he is not normally an illogical person. Would it not be sensible to do as my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) suggested and have a proper impact assessment followed by a vote in Parliament, so that we can decide the right way forward, on the basis of that impact assessment?

Ben Gummer: The right hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, and I can tell him that an economic impact assessment and an equality impact assessment will be published with the consultation. I hope that that will begin to inform the debate. He might imagine that my proposition does not align with what he thinks the effect will be. I just ask him to look at what happened in 2011 when we did the same for the vast majority of other students, when Opposition Members put exactly the same arguments and warnings, and since when the precise opposite has happened.

Mr Howarth: The Minister is being generous in giving way twice, but we are not talking about what happened then; we are talking about a particular group that at the time was excluded from the provisions. He has not yet explained why he has now decided to include them in those provisions, other than by saying he is taking away an advantage that already exists.

Ben Gummer: It is simply because I wish to see the same advantages that accrue to those already on the new finance system accruing to those who are not. I want to see an expansion in the number of places and I want to see the effects of the changes made by the Office for Fair Access to university admissions in the rest of the sector applied to nursing, so that we see not only an expansion in the numbers of nurses being trained, but a broadening of the backgrounds of those going into nursing, exactly as has happened in all other areas of higher education.

I want to explain, I hope quickly, how this change forms part of a wider reform we are making in student access to nursing. The hon. Member for Ilford North framed his entire speech, understandably so, around the

university route into nursing, but he omitted to reflect on the fact that the Government have stated that we will introduce an apprenticeship route into nursing to degree level—level 6. That will provide an alternative route into nursing, whereby nurses will be able to earn while they learn from healthcare assistant level all the way to a full nursing qualification at degree level. It will be possible for them to do so as mature students, which means it might take a bit longer, but they will be able to earn all the way from an existing job to gaining a nursing qualification—an innovation that should be welcomed on both sides of the House and which will mark a real expansion of opportunity for the current NHS.

Jess Phillips rose—

Ben Gummer: Before I give way to the hon. Lady, I should also explain that there are many people working as healthcare assistants at the moment who do not have the opportunity to progress to a nursing position unless they leave the workforce to do so. That puts many of them in an impossible position, because they have families to support and other duties and responsibilities. For the first time, we have been able to give that group of people an opportunity to progress, through the apprenticeship route, to a full nursing position. That will expand the whole area of career progression to include one of the larger cohorts in the NHS workforce, in a way that no Government have previously been able to do.

Jess Phillips: I wonder whether the Minister can clarify whether people will be paid for doing that apprenticeship and, if so, at what rates they would be paid. He rightly referred to getting mature students with families into work, so will he also say whether that cohort will fall foul of the rule that people must be doing 16 hours of work, and not be in training, to receive the Government's 30 hours of free childcare? It was made clear in the Childcare Public Bill Committee that those nurses currently studying would not be able to access the 30 hours' free childcare because that would not be considered work. When they saved my life, it looked like work.

Ben Gummer: The hon. Lady speaks with authority from her own personal experience—I have noticed that recently she has spoken her mind without holding back. We are in detailed discussions with the Nursing and Midwifery Council about precisely how the apprenticeship route will work. The council is the independent regulator and has to certify that the qualification matches the existing degree/university route. The qualification has to have complete equality of both esteem and rigour. Of course we envisage the apprentices earning a salary. We envisage opening the route to existing healthcare assistants to give them the opportunity to progress to a nursing grade while continuing at a similar salary point as an apprentice. However, because the hon. Lady's question about maternity care pertains to student nurses rather than apprentices, I will ensure that I write to her in detail.

The hon. Lady clearly sees why this is an idea with strength, so I hope that in asking her question she realises that there will be two routes into nursing: the university route and the apprenticeship route. I think this is potentially one of the most exciting innovations in the workforce of the NHS for several decades, because

it opens up nursing to a whole range of existing workers who have not had an opportunity before, and provides a wholly different route into nursing, but with the same rigour and robustness that the existing university degree route provides.

Peter Kyle *rose*—

Ben Gummer: I shall give way once more, but I do not want to detain the House much longer.

Peter Kyle: I thank the Minister for giving way a second time. It is clear that he really cares about getting mature students into these nursing training programmes. If the numbers fall as we go forward, will he come back to us and report on it, and will he pause any further reforms until that decline is halted?

Ben Gummer: I expect to be held account for this significant reform right the way through the changes that are envisaged. I hope to be able to return to provide good news about progress, as has happened in other student areas. That is why we want to be very deliberative about the way in which we form this consultation, because it is important to get it right.

I have taken note of the careful questioning of the hon. Member for Ilford North, who clearly understands the full gamut of the issues that need to be addressed in this consultation. Let me answer some of the questions he raised, and I shall write to him about any that I do not answer.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the funding of clinical placements. We have already started discussions with Universities UK about that, and it will form part of the wider consultations. The Barnett consequentials will be a matter for Her Majesty's Treasury, as is the case for everything else connected to Barnett consequentials. I know that BIS officials are discussing the issue in the normal way.

The hon. Gentleman asked about research into financial hardship, and I know that that will form part of the consultation. The Government will be open to any further research beyond the economic impact assessment.

I was asked whether I would be happy to meet students. Of course I would. I have already met Unison and the Royal College of Nursing to discuss the changes I wish to make. I should not pretend to answer for them, but I have had productive discussions with both, especially about the apprenticeship route. I know that we will disagree with both Unison and the RCN about bursaries, but I think there is an understanding, particularly on the part of Unison, of how we are trying to open up different routes to nursing for different parts of the workforce. If we get it right, the apprenticeship model will be a strong one.

The hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) made an important point in her intervention about agency nurses, so let me answer that as I am passing. As I alluded to earlier, part of the reason we are looking

at that issue is to ensure that we provide a more sustainable workforce throughput, so that we do not need to rely on agencies and bank staff for the peaks in NHS demand. That is why we need to do something about numbers, and I hope that, as a result of the Chancellor's announcement, we will increase the number by 10,000 over the course of this Parliament—a very significant increase in the establishment of student nurses. In fact, it will be the largest increase in student nurses under any Government since 1948.

I hope I have answered the majority of the questions put by the hon. Member for Ilford North—

Wes Streeting *rose*—

Ben Gummer: Clearly I have not. I will allow him an opportunity to intervene once more, but I do not want to detain the House much longer.

Wes Streeting: I particularly welcome what the Minister said about treading carefully and thoughtfully around the consultation. The one issue he has not addressed, however, is whether extending the tuition fees regime to nursing, midwifery and other allied health subject students will be subject to a full and thoughtful debate followed by a vote in this House and the other place.

Ben Gummer: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a definitive answer to that question yet. Let us wait and see the outcome of the consultation, so that the House can be best informed. I imagine that there will be ample opportunities in Backbench Business Committee debates and indeed Opposition day debates, and I know that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues will want to bring these issues up for further debate. I will reflect the hon. Gentleman's concerns to the Secretary of State and to the Leader of the House, and I am sure they will receive them with interest.

I genuinely thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing forward this debate, which has provided an opportunity for the Government to explain our plans and the rationale behind them. There will be points on which we will disagree, but I hope the hon. Gentleman will see the force of our arguments about wanting to expand the nursing workforce, to provide different routes into nursing and to provide the sort of opportunities to 18 and 19-year-old undergraduate nurses that have been extended to other parts of the higher education sphere. These are big proposals. They could mean a remarkable and rapid transformation of the NHS workforce, and a significant expansion in the number of nursing students. We need to get it right, and I hope that, through a constructive discussion across the House, drawing on the kind of expertise we have heard from Members in this short Adjournment debate, we will indeed get it right.

Question put and agreed to.

9.35 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 14 December 2015

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Foreign Affairs and General Affairs Council

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs will attend the Foreign Affairs Council on 14 December and I will attend the General Affairs Council on 15 December. The Foreign Affairs Council will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, and the General Affairs Council will be chaired by the Luxembourg presidency. The meetings will be held in Brussels.

Foreign Affairs Council

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

Ministers are expected to exchange views on recent developments in the Eastern Partnership States (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine) and the future direction of the Eastern Partnership initiative following the publication of the European Neighbourhood Policy review on 18 November.

COUNTER-TERRORISM

Following the attacks in Paris on 13 November, Ministers will discuss the need to maintain a strong, unified international focus on countering the threat from Daesh; reiterating support for the global counter-ISIL coalition and affirming the commitment to working towards a long term political solution in Iraq and Syria, achieved through a comprehensive strategy. The Foreign Affairs Council is likely to reflect elements of these discussions in its conclusions. Ministers will also discuss broader counter-terrorism work by the EU, in line with its existing strategies.

EU-TURKEY

Ministers will be joined for lunch by the Foreign Minister of Turkey, Mevlut Cavusoglu. Turkey remains a key partner for the EU across a range of important issues, including regional security, counter-terrorism, energy, trade and migration. The FAC provides an opportunity to continue to develop a strategic partnership between the EU and Turkey, building on the EU-Turkey summit of 29 November. The UK will seek to reinforce that sense of partnership by encouraging discussion on a broad range of issues that reflect the breadth of the EU's relationship with Turkey.

IRAQ

Ministers will exchange views on the political and security situation in Iraq. They will discuss how EU activity and resources, particularly those under the EU's ISIL/Syria/Iraq strategy, can support the objectives of the global coalition to counter ISIL and longer term security, stability and prosperity in Iraq.

LIBYA

The FAC will be briefed by UN Libya special representative, Martin Kobler, on the latest developments in the UN-led political process. The UN has played a vital role in bringing the Libyan parties closer together. It is essential we continue to demonstrate our full support. The UK Government welcome the UN special representative's urgent pressure for a deal, and recognises the important role for the EU in providing immediate support to a Government of National Accord.

General Affairs Council

The General Affairs Council (GAC) on 15 December is expected to focus on: preparation of draft conclusions for the European Council on 17 and 18 December 2015; the inter-institutional agreement on better regulation; the presidency Trio programme; the European semester; and the enlargement and stabilisation and association process.

PREPARATION OF THE DECEMBER EUROPEAN COUNCIL

The GAC will prepare the draft conclusions for the 17 and 18 December European Council, which the Prime Minister will attend. The December European Council agenda is expected to include: migration; economic issues (including economic and monetary union and the single market); the UK's renegotiation; and external relations issues including Russia/Ukraine.

INTER-INSTITUTIONAL AGREEMENT ON BETTER REGULATION (IIA)

The GAC will receive a further update on the progress of the IIA negotiations following the recent tripartite talks between the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council. The Council may also discuss the amended IIA text following political tripartite negotiations, depending on the progress made ahead of the Council.

18-MONTH PROGRAMME OF THE COUNCIL

The GAC will discuss the Trio programme of the forthcoming Netherlands, Slovakia and Malta presidencies of the Council of the European Union. We expect one of the key priorities of the Trio to be a focus on delivering stronger economic growth and improving competitiveness.

2016 EUROPEAN SEMESTER ANNUAL GROWTH REVIEW

The GAC will receive a Commission presentation of the 2016 annual growth survey (AGS) which was released on 26 November. The AGS marks the beginning of the 2016 semester process and focuses on the key themes in President Juncker's investment plan. Within the AGS, the Commission recommends three main pillars for the EU's economic and social policy in 2016: boosting investment, pursuing structural reforms to modernise European economies and pursuing fiscal responsibility. There is no specific commentary on the UK, however the UK supports the Commission's headline priorities.

ENLARGEMENT AND STABILISATION AND ASSOCIATION PROCESS

The General Affairs Council will discuss the Commission's annual enlargement package, published on 10 November, and agree conclusions on the enlargement strategy and the Western Balkans countries and Turkey. The December GAC is the annual opportunity for the Council to take stock and give direction to the EU's enlargement strategy and pre-accession reform priorities for individual countries.

The Government's views on the package were set out in my explanatory memorandum of 12 November 2015. We will broadly welcome the Commission's new approach in this year's package with improved metrics in the Country reports and a five year as opposed to annual strategy. We will reiterate our continued firm support for future EU enlargement on the basis of firm but fair conditionality, with countries moving forward on merit as they meet the conditions. We will also take the opportunity to reiterate the importance of maintaining the credibility of the enlargement process and the need for the EU to improve its approach to strategic communications in order to underline the benefits of the accession process. We will reinforce the importance of rule of law reform and economic governance to accession countries and welcome the centrality of these issues in the package.

[HCWS388]

HOME DEPARTMENT

National DNA Database Strategy Board

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): I am pleased to announce that I am, today, publishing the annual report of the National DNA Database (NDNAD) Strategy Board.

Chief Constable Chris Sims, Chair of the National DNA Strategy Board, has presented the annual report of the National DNA Strategy Board to the Home Secretary. Publication of the report is a statutory requirement under section 63AB(7) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 as inserted by section 24 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.

The report provides demonstrates the important contribution of the NDNAD to the investigation of crimes. I am grateful to the Strategy Board for its commitment to fulfilling its statutory functions.

Copies of the report will be available from the Vote Office.

[HCWS389]

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture and Fisheries Council

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): The Agriculture and Fisheries Council will take place on 14 December in Brussels. The Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) who is responsible for Farming, Food and the Marine Environment, will represent the UK.

As the provisional agenda stands, the following items will be discussed:

The primary focus will be the agreement of the Council regulation fixing the 2016 fishing opportunities for certain fish stocks and groups of fish stocks applicable in EU waters and, for Union vessels, in certain non-Union waters, as well as a proposal fixing the 2016 fishing opportunities in the Black Sea.

There will be a proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the manufacture, placing on the market and use of medicated feed and veterinary medicinal products.

An exchange of views on Sustainable Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in the Bioeconomy will also take place.

There are currently six confirmed Any Other Business items which are information from the Luxembourg presidency, and two others:

Codex Alimentarius;

Official Food and Feed Controls;

Aid scheme for the supply of fruit and vegetables, bananas and milk in the educational establishments;

Measures fixing certain aids and refunds related to the common organisation of the markets in agricultural products;

Organic production and labelling of organic products;

Empowering young farmers;

Deteriorating situation in the pigmeat market (requested by the Polish delegation);

Quality concerns related to honey imported to the EU (requested by the Hungarian delegation).

[HCWS390]

Ministerial Correction

Monday 14 December 2015

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Fisheries Policy

The following is an extract from the speech of the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) in the debate on Fisheries Policy in Westminster Hall on 3 December 2015.

George Eustice: We are rebalancing the quota. We have made it clear that 25% of the uplift will go to the under-10s. We are doing that by giving the first 100 tonnes to the under-10s, and 10% thereafter. That will mean that next year, for instance, much of the inshore fleet

will have a substantial increase in the amount of mackerel they have. There will probably be a trebling of the amount of mackerel, which they will then be able to trade as currency.

[Official Report, 3 December 2015, Vol. 603, c. 223WH.]

Letter of correction from George Eustice:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the debate on Fisheries Policy on 3 December 2015.

The correct response should have been:

George Eustice: We are rebalancing the quota. We have made it clear that 25% of the uplift will go to the under-10s. We are doing that by giving the first 100 tonnes to the under-10s, and 10% thereafter. That will mean that next year, for instance, much of the inshore fleet will have a substantial increase in the amount of **North sea haddock** they have. There will probably be a trebling of the amount of **haddock**, which they will then be able to trade as currency.

ORAL ANSWERS

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MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Monday 14 December 2015

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Not amended, further considered; read the Third time and passed

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Motion to take note of EC documents—(James Brokenshire)—on a Division, agreed to

European Agenda on Migration [Col. 1355]
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Student Nursing (Finance) [Col. 1372]
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Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
