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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Tuesday 15 December 2015**



# House of Commons

*Tuesday 15 December 2015*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Higher-level Skills

1. **Karl McCartney** (Lincoln) (Con): What steps he is taking to support higher-level skills in further education. [902698]

**The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid):** I am sure the whole House will want to join me in sending its best wishes to Major Tim Peake, who successfully blasted off towards space just 30 minutes ago. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]

We are reforming technical education and establishing clear routes into higher-level skills and employment. We are spending £2.5 billion on apprenticeships—double the amount in 2010—and £1.5 billion on adult skills, growing degree and higher apprenticeships and establishing specialist colleges.

**Karl McCartney:** I join the whole House in sending the Secretary of State's good wishes to our fellow countryman.

Under the Conservatives, Lincoln's improved educational map offers the young people of Lincoln myriad—nay, a plethora of—opportunities. Does the Secretary of State agree that prioritising funding for young adults, the low-skilled and those actively looking for work is the right thing for a Conservative Government to do?

**Sajid Javid:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, who I know cares passionately about skills for young adults. He will be pleased to know that we rightly prioritised spending on further education in the recent spending review, which will enable colleges, such as Lincoln college in his constituency, to offer more to young people.

**Mr Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): Further education colleges are vital for apprenticeships in engineering and construction, in which there is an acute shortage of skills across the country. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the cuts in funding to FE colleges in terms of delivering this much-needed agenda?

**Sajid Javid:** I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is talking about cuts in FE spending. I know that is what Labour was scaremongering about just a few weeks ago, but we have actually protected the adult education budget in cash terms, we will double spending on apprenticeships by 2020 and we have extended the availability of advanced learner loans. Taken together, this will mean a 35% real increase in FE spending by 2020 compared with this year.<sup>1</sup>

22. [902721] **Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I welcome the removal of the cap on university places, but what assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the effect on further education colleges, such as Wiltshire college in my constituency, given that they are fishing from the same pool in terms of vocationally based diplomas and apprenticeships?

**Sajid Javid:** I welcome my hon. Friend's question. We have seen an increase in that, especially in FE colleges that offer higher education courses, which is exactly the kind of diversity and growth we want.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): But as ever, it is smoke and mirrors with this Secretary of State. He knows that the Chancellor has announced an extra £360 million of savings from the adult skills budget, so will he come clean and tell us where those cuts will be made?

**Sajid Javid:** The Department will shortly issue a skills funding letter answering some of the hon. Gentleman's questions, but perhaps he missed the point that I just made: the adult education budget is protected in cash terms, we will double spending on apprenticeships by 2020 and the FE budget will be up by the end of the Parliament in real terms.

#### Met Office Funding

2. **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): What steps he is taking to ensure that the Government receives value for money from its funding of the Met Office. [902699]

**The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid):** The Met Office plays a key role in our economy. A recent review of the public weather service assessed it as delivering up to £1.5 billion of annual value. As the shareholder for the Met Office, I and my officials regularly hold it to account and ensure it delivers value for money for the taxpayer.

**David T. C. Davies:** The BBC, no less, reported in 2012 that in 11 out of the previous 12 years predictions about increases in temperature had been wrong and that there had been a warm bias. Does the Secretary of State, as the shareholder, agree that he should be asking some tough questions at the board meeting about why we should be imposing expensive climate change policies on businesses and householders, when so often the predictions behind them are proved to be inaccurate?

**Sajid Javid:** I always like to ask tough questions, but I note there was flooding in my hon. Friend's constituency recently, and the Met Office played a key role in helping

1. [Official Report, 5 January 2016, Vol. 604, c. 1-2MC.]

the emergency services and protecting lives and property. Today is an opportunity to commend the Met Office for some of the work it does.

### Trade Opportunities

3. **Andrea Jenkyns** (Morley and Outwood) (Con): What steps he is taking to promote trade opportunities for UK businesses. [902700]

**The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid):** I chair the exports implementation taskforce, which is driving cross-Whitehall support for exports. In November, my noble Friend Lord Maude launched the five-year Exporting is GREAT campaign, which promotes real-time global export opportunities to business.

**Andrea Jenkyns:** In November, I hosted an event in my constituency with the China-Britain Business Council to which I invited small businesses to come and find out more about trading with China. The all-party parliamentary group on China is aiming to help 50 Members to organise similar events. Can my right hon. Friend tell me how his Department plans to make good use of our new trading relationship with China to help small businesses expand into these vital global markets?

**Sajid Javid:** Let me commend my hon. Friend on her efforts to encourage businesses in her constituency to export more to China. While exports to China have doubled in the last five years, there is a lot of potential and a lot more that we can do. The recent visit by the Chinese President helped to highlight that, and the effort that my hon. Friend is making with UK Trade & Investment, the China-Britain Business Council and others provides an example to us all.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What steps has the Secretary of State taken since the steel summit to increase trade opportunities for the UK steel sector?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The more we can export of higher-value steel products, the more we can help. We have been discussing this with UKTI and steel producers. We are coming up with a plan, and this will certainly feature in the trade meetings we have in due course.

**Amanda Milling** (Cannock Chase) (Con): Next month, I will be jointly hosting an event with UKTI to encourage more local Cannock Chase businesses to consider exporting. Will my right hon. Friend outline what the Government are doing to encourage new businesses to export?

**Sajid Javid:** I can talk about a number of initiatives, including the Exporting is GREAT website and the roadshow that will visit constituencies up and down the country. There is obviously also the work that UKTI is doing. Most recently, I helped to launch the midlands engine scheme, which I know my hon. Friend will welcome. We released more money to help that region with exports, including a midlands engine roadshow.

**Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): As part of the work of the export implementation group, will the Secretary of State explore with the Secretary of

State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs all options to access new markets for all our farm produce in north America and south-east Asia?

**Sajid Javid:** Absolutely. The hon. Lady makes an important point. I know that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has been taking this matter very seriously. One thing we have done recently is to move some of the UKTI resources into my right hon. Friend's Department so that there is better co-ordination.

**Mr Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): I recently talked to a senior Indian businessman and asked him how we could increase trade with India. He said that the one thing we could do was to leave the EU because of the restrictions. Will the Secretary of State, either as Secretary of State or personally, endorse his comment?

**Sajid Javid:** I spoke to a lot of Indian businessmen and women and many Indian students last week. There is certainly one area in respect of which we could certainly increase our exports to India, and that is education.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): It is all very well, but it is not working, is it? The UK's latest balance of trade deficit is widening. It was up to £2.4 billion in the last quarter. Exports of goods—[*Interruption.*] Perhaps the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise should have a little listen to this. Exports of goods from the UK actually fell last month by £700 million. It is a pity we cannot export spin, because the Government are very good at that. The "march of the makers" was very good, and now we have the "midlands engine". What is the Secretary of State's excuse for the Government's dismal record on the trade deficit?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Gentleman should not do down our world-class exporters. They are doing a fantastic job. Let me give him a few examples of what they can export. They can export wine to France, chocolate to Belgium and even boomerangs to Australia, although I fear that it is sometimes the same boomerang that keeps coming back.

### Apprenticeships

4. **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve standards in apprenticeships. [902701]

**The Minister for Skills (Nick Boles):** We have given employers control over apprenticeship standards and require all apprenticeships to last at least 12 months and involve substantial off-the-job training. We will be setting up an independent, employer-led institute for apprenticeships to approve standards and assure quality in future.

**Craig Tracey:** I thank the Minister for that response, and I welcome the fact that there have been nearly 1,100 apprenticeship starts in north Warwickshire and Bedworth over the last 12 months. However, I know that local businesses are concerned that the focus might be on quantity rather than quality. What assurances can the Minister give to my constituents, especially those in highly skilled engineering, that that will not be the case?

**Nick Boles:** There is, in fact, no innate tension between quantity and quality. We want better quality, because that will mean more employers wanting to offer apprenticeships, such as BMW in my hon. Friend's constituency. I strongly welcome the very high-quality apprenticeships that it is creating.

**Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): As the Minister will know, Ofsted has said that apprenticeships are not good enough at present, and many people in industry believe that the only way to hit the 3 million target is to water down quality further. What reassurance can the Minister provide?

**Nick Boles:** I welcome that question, because while it is true that Ofsted has highlighted some bad practice, that bad practice has been familiar to us all for a long time, and has inspired the reforms that we are introducing. All apprenticeship frameworks will be replaced by standards developed by employers. Training must last for more than 12 months, and at least 20% of it must be off-the-job training. We will also ensure that quality improves at all levels. I disagree slightly with the chief inspector's implication that a level 2 apprenticeship is somehow not of high quality. Apprenticeships should be of high quality at all levels, and the existing level 2 apprenticeships increase people's incomes by an average of 11% three to five years later.

23. [902722] **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): There were 970 new starts in my constituency last year, many of them in engineering and technology. That was an increase of 24% on the number of starts in the previous year. Will my hon. Friend join me in congratulating the new apprentices, and does he agree that those figures show that the Government are committed to high-quality apprenticeship places, such as those that are provided at Prospects college of advanced technology?

**Nick Boles:** That was a stunning achievement in my hon. Friend's constituency. I know that it was largely due to PROCAT, which is an excellent institution, and one of the first institutions to become a college for a long time. My visit to PROCAT was my first visit to a college in my current job, and if my hon. Friend invites me to return, I shall be happy to do so.

**Peter Kyle** (Hove) (Lab): I commend the Minister for establishing an institute for apprenticeships which will put employers at its heart, but may I suggest that he should consult trade unions and find ways of harnessing their insight and experience in this valuable area?

**Nick Boles:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, I greatly value the work that trade unions do in encouraging employees to take up training opportunities, which is why we continue to fund the important work of Unionlearn. I will certainly reflect on his suggestion, and will make some announcements shortly.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Snap-on is a major United States manufacturer, developer and marketer of tools, and its UK headquarters are in Kettering. Given that it is seeking to increase its investment in apprenticeships throughout the country, will my hon. Friend accept an invitation to open its new £2 million facility in Kettering on 15 February?

**Nick Boles:** I am glad to say that Kettering is very close to my own constituency. If the Whips allow me, I will be there.

### Business Support (Exports)

5. **Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to support businesses which export. [902702]

**The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid):** My Department is leading a cross-Whitehall work programme to support exports. For example, UK Trade & Investment connects UK businesses with export opportunities throughout the world. Over the next year, the UKTI export hub will travel around the country to give face-to-face assistance to first-time exporters.

**Mike Kane:** Feedback from businesses in my constituency suggests that there needs to be more support for small and medium-sized enterprises that export less than half a million pounds' worth of goods. It suggests that once they are in the bracket of Government support, that support is short-lived, and is complicated by red tape. How would the Secretary of State respond to those businesses?

**Sajid Javid:** I agree that we should always try to do more to help small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular, to export more. The hon. Gentleman may know that I recently led one of our first regional trade missions, the northern powerhouse trade mission, to the far east. It included not only the Greater Manchester chamber of commerce, but companies such as Televic Education, which is in his constituency.

**Tom Pursglove** (Corby) (Con): Fairline has a long history of exporting luxury boats across the world, but last week we heard the devastating news of 380 redundancies. While I hope that the administrator can identify a buyer, many of those employees have been laid off for significant periods with reduced pay. Will the Secretary of State do all that he can to ensure that the redundancy payments are expedited, especially given that Christmas is just around the corner?

**Sajid Javid:** This is, of course, a very difficult time for the employees who have been affected. I will certainly look into the position, and, during discussions with any potential buyer, I will ensure that export opportunities are highlighted.

**David Simpson** (Upper Bann) (DUP): Do the Government foresee any long-term difficulties with the transatlantic trade agreement with the United States if the Americans decide to export agri-food products into the UK?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Gentleman will know that these discussions are still going on. By their very nature, they are complex, as two huge economic areas are involved, and so they will still take some time. Agri-products and all products of that nature need to be carefully looked at, so we have not reached a final point. It is worth remembering that once this deal is done, it can be worth up to £400 for every household in the UK each year.

**Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): In my former career, I exported broadcasting equipment to 48 countries worldwide—no thanks to the EU and its regulations. Is it not the case that people need the chutzpah to export, and although the Department can give as much help as it can, people have actually to get out there and do it, and be confident in doing so?

**Sajid Javid:** One thing we know is that my hon. Friend is not short of chutzpah, and I am glad he deployed it in his former career. He is absolutely right in what he says and he makes a key point: there is only so much the Government can do. We will do that and look for ways to provide even more support, but we want more and more companies to do everything they can, too.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): The Government's so-called support for exports has seen grants converted to loans, and the sudden closure of the business growth service. Businesses supported by that service grew four times faster than other businesses, and the scheme created 83,000 jobs and added more than £3.5 billion to the national economy. As one BGS mentor says, "the service's closure doesn't make sense considering its huge success and may prove detrimental to Britain's economic health." What message does the closure of the BGS send to businesses that want to grow? Given the outstanding record of success, does the closure of the service not show a complete lack of understanding by this Government of what works on support for exports?

**Sajid Javid:** I am glad the hon. Gentleman has raised the issue of the BGS, because although it was a good fee-earner for consultants, there is very little evidence to show that it helped businesses to grow. *[Interruption.]* There is little evidence that it was the best way to help those businesses. The best way to help businesses is to make sure that we continue to have a growing economy—our economy is growing faster than those of all our rivals—so one thing he can do is support our long-term economic plan. We are also providing funding to 39 local enterprise partnerships—all the LEPS—through growth hubs, which they can use for localised support, including export opportunities.

### Apprenticeship Levy

6. **Tommy Sheppard** (Edinburgh East) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential cost to businesses of implementation of the apprenticeships levy. [902703]

**The Minister for Skills (Nick Boles):** Employers with a payroll bill of more than £3 million a year will be required to pay the new apprenticeship levy. It will raise £3 billion in 2019-20 to support apprenticeship training throughout the UK, including in Scotland.

**Tommy Sheppard:** We do, of course, hope that the apprenticeship levy will provide the same opportunities for young people south of the border as the 25,000 who started a modern apprenticeship in Scotland this year have. Is the Minister aware of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers' concerns that the number of small and medium-sized enterprises affected by the levy is likely to be much greater than originally

thought? Will he give an undertaking to provide clear and early guidance to those, well in advance of implementation?

**Nick Boles:** I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman is proud of the 25,000 modern apprenticeship starts in Scotland, just as we are proud of the half a million starts we have had in the past year in England. This would suggest to me that we can both take pride in our commitment to apprenticeships. I hope he will welcome the fact that the apprenticeship levy will be generating resources, some of which will pass to Scotland to enable it to fund what I hope will be a dramatic expansion in the number of its apprenticeships.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): As the Minister will appreciate, the oil and gas industry faces distinct challenges at the moment. I know from my engagement with companies in the sector that there is significant concern that this levy may represent a second charge, with many oil and gas companies already paying levies to industry trading bodies. It also represents an additional cost to these companies at a time when controlling business costs is of paramount importance. Will he commit to meet me, along with my colleagues and a delegation from the industry, to hear their concerns and discuss how the apprenticeship levy scheme can be designed to take account of these circumstances?

**Nick Boles:** Of course I would be delighted to meet the hon. Lady and that delegation, but I will be asking them what they thought of her party's plans for Scotland's economy, which rested on oil prices at \$100 a barrel and would now see an independent Scotland entirely bankrupt and probably scuttling to the International Monetary Fund.

### Adult Skills (Funding)

7. **Barbara Keeley** (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): What steps he plans to take to make the efficiencies and savings in adult skills set out in the "Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015". [902704]

**The Minister for Skills (Nick Boles):** We are protecting funding for adult education at £1.5 billion per year in cash terms. We are extending advanced learner loans to more adult learners and increasing spending on adult apprenticeships to £1.5 billion by 2019-20. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State says, this means that total funding for adult skills training will be 36% higher in the last year of this Parliament than in the first.<sup>1</sup>

**Barbara Keeley:** Salford city college was one of more than 100 further education colleges that wrote to the Prime Minister to protest at repeated year-on-year real-terms funding cuts to adult skills since 2010 amounting to 40%. Despite the promise not to cut adult skills funding for FE colleges, Treasury documents say that there will be £360 million of savings and efficiencies, as my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) mentioned. After years of savage cuts, how can that be achieved?

**Nick Boles:** Like many other colleges, the hon. Lady's college wrote to the Prime Minister before the spending review in response to the shroud waving by the Opposition,

1. *[Official Report, 5 January 2016, Vol. 604, c. 2MC.]*

who predicted a 25% to 40% cut in the adult skills budget. If the hon. Lady had taken the trouble to attend my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's spending review statement, she would have heard that he was protecting it in cash terms while increasing the funding for apprenticeships, which her college and others could bid for. If she spoke to her college, she would discover that, like all other colleges, it is pleasantly surprised by the funding settlement.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Any credible long-term economic plan would recognise the critical importance of adult reskilling, but the Government have systematically cut adult skills by 40% since 2010, including a 24% cut in February this year in non-apprenticeship funding. That is probably why the Chancellor ducked out of making any reference to the further cuts in his autumn statement, leaving it to his Blue Book to talk about £360 million of efficiencies. Will the Minister say precisely what the £1.5 billion of core funding that he talks of is made up of? Does it include loans to over 25-year-olds, 50% of which we know will not be taken up?

**Nick Boles:** No.

#### Further Education College (Sittingbourne)

8. **Gordon Henderson** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to establish a further education college in Sittingbourne. [902705]

**The Minister for Skills (Nick Boles):** The House is making me earn my salary today.

We have launched a process of locally-led area reviews to consider each area's skills needs and plan how further education colleges and sixth form colleges can best organise themselves to meet them. The Kent review is due to start in November 2016.

**Gordon Henderson:** I welcome the review. Sittingbourne is the largest town in Kent without its own FE college. However, we have a unique opportunity to change that. May I invite the Minister to visit the Swale skills centre in my constituency to learn about how, with the right help, it could easily and cheaply be extended into a small college?

**Nick Boles:** I have had a message from the Whips saying that they would be only too delighted for me to do further visits to hon. Members' constituencies, so I would be delighted to visit my hon. Friend's constituency. We do not hear the Opposition celebrating when new institutions open, including the Swale skills centre, which was set up by a very successful academies trust that is already doing a great job of running three local schools.

#### Student Loans

9. **Kate Hollern** (Blackburn) (Lab): What discussions he has had on the effect of freezing the threshold at which graduates repay their student loans. [902706]

**The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid):** I consulted on the proposal to freeze the student loan repayment threshold and received responses from a wide

range of interested parties. I considered those responses, as well as a detailed impact analysis, before deciding to proceed with the freezing of the threshold.

**Kate Hollern:** Does the Secretary of State agree that if a commercial company had made a retrospective change to a contract in this way, costing students £6,000 in the process, there would likely be an investigation? Does he accept that, in doing so, he breached the trust of former, current and future students?

**Sajid Javid:** What I accept is that these were the right set of changes. I considered the responses to the consultation carefully. It is important that we strike the right balance between the interests of the students, making sure that all who have the ability have the opportunity to go to university, and the interests of the taxpayer, ensuring that we have an affordable, sustainable funding system. That is exactly what the changes bring about.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Despite the negative comments from the Opposition, can the Secretary of State confirm that this year record numbers of young people secured places at university, including record numbers of children from disadvantaged backgrounds?

**Sajid Javid:** My hon. Friend is right. That is true of England. We have seen a record increase to 382,000 people in the past year, and the number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds has gone up from 9.5% to 18.2% in the past five years. In Scotland we have seen a fall in the number of students because Scotland does not have a funding system that allows all who want to go to university to do so.

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): Given the report in *The Independent on Sunday* that Ministers in the Cabinet Office are desperately trying to find ways to increase the cap on tuition fees without proper debate and a vote in this House, can the Secretary of State confirm that any attempt to increase the cap on tuition fees will come back to this House for a full debate and vote? Can he also confirm that Government proposals in the autumn statement to extend tuition fees to nurses, midwives and students of allied health subjects will be subject to a proper debate and a vote in this House?

**Sajid Javid:** If the Government do decide to change the caps on tuition fees, there will, of course, be a debate in this House.

**Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State agree that retrospectively changing the terms of a contract is, in effect, mis-selling? Will he guarantee that in this Parliament there will be no further changes to either thresholds or interest rates?

**Sajid Javid:** The changes in question are entirely lawful. That is the advice that I received and it is perfectly consistent with the aims. Hon. Members should remember that the loans that are provided are on significantly better terms than those that are available commercially, and they achieve the objective of allowing all those who wish to go to university and who have the ability to do so.

### Aerospace Industry

10. **Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the aerospace industry. [902707]

14. **Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): What steps he is taking to support the aerospace industry. [902711]

**The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry):** I was delighted that in the spending review the Government committed a further £900 million of funding for aerospace research and development, supported by the Aerospace Technology Institute. That means that this Government will invest almost £2 billion in aerospace research over 13 years to 2025-26, so our world-leading aerospace industry can stay at the forefront of development and capitalise on the estimated £3.6 trillion market for new aircraft that will be needed over the next 20 years.

**Andrew Stephenson:** I recently met Mark Porter and Jon Brough, the trade union representatives at Rolls-Royce's two sites at Barnoldswick in my constituency. They welcome the continuation of Government support for the aerospace growth partnership in the comprehensive spending review. However, they remain concerned about the outsourcing of high-value engineering jobs to low-cost countries. What more can my right hon. Friend do to address this concern?

**Anna Soubry:** I am more than happy to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the concerns of all those he has met with. Rolls-Royce, along with the aerospace sector as a whole, is a major contributor to the United Kingdom economy, so we get how important it is. That is why we have protected and, indeed, extended the investment that we are making in research and development.

**Steve Double:** The recent announcement of the expansion of the Aerohub enterprise zone in Cornwall to include the Goonhilly earth station has been keenly welcomed in Cornwall. Does the Minister agree that this creates a great opportunity for Cornwall to be awarded the location of the UK spaceport, which would provide a huge bonus to the Cornish economy?

**Anna Soubry:** I am sure my hon. Friend will continue to make that case. I have to say that a number of other airports are in the running and we aim to launch the selection process next year. We have heard the great news about the launch today and Major Tim going up into space. Ground control can report that the UK space sector has almost doubled to £11.8 billion—*[Interruption.]* I know it is the festive season, but I think it is most unfortunate that Opposition Members are singing. It is not good. I hope they might cheer the fact that the sector has almost doubled to £11.8 billion in just seven years and employs 37,000 people.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Sing, but no Member of this House can match David Bowie—highly relevant as far as ground control is concerned.

**Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Rolls-Royce is of strategic importance to our aerospace industry, not just in Derby but in Sheffield and Bristol.

What are the Government prepared to do to safeguard that capacity, which is increasingly in the news at the moment, in order to ensure that we not just invest in but safeguard the future of the industry so that the UK stays at the forefront of aerospace manufacturing globally?

**Anna Soubry:** We should of course mention the importance of Rolls-Royce to a great city like Derby; I say that, obviously, as a Nottinghamshire MP. In all seriousness, we are monitoring the situation carefully. We recognise the huge importance of the role that Rolls-Royce plays in our economy. It is really important that we do not talk things down. *[Interruption.]* Forgive me, but there is too often a tendency among Labour Members, not necessarily the hon. Lady, to talk things down. It is really important that we do not do that and that we continue to support Rolls-Royce.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): In order to stop Rolls-Royce falling into the hands of the Chinese, let us say, why do not this Government take Rolls-Royce back into public ownership?

**Anna Soubry:** Because—I know the hon. Gentleman will have trouble in understanding this—this is 2015. We are not back in the '60s and the dark days of the '70s, and we have a long-term economic plan that delivers, unlike his plan, which would be an absolute disaster for our country.

**Yvonne Fovargue** (Makerfield) (Lab): As we have heard from my hon. Friends, we have been watching the recent developments in relation to Rolls-Royce very closely, not only because of the implications for national security but because it is the biggest single employer for Britain's aerospace sector. As the Minister said, the global market for new aircraft is predicted to be worth £3.6 trillion in the next 20 years, so we welcome the investment in the Aerospace Technology Institute. However, is it not about time that Ministers considered developing an industrial strategy instead of continuing the current piecemeal approach?

**Anna Soubry:** I am not going to repeat all the things I have said about our continuing investment. With £900 million of taxpayers' money going into aerospace, we absolutely understand and recognise its significance. It is very easy to put on labels, but it does not matter what label we put on—it is about delivery, and that is what this Government continue to do.

### Energy Sector (Research and Development)

11. **Mike Weir** (Angus) (SNP): What funding his Department plans to allocate to research and development in the energy sector over the next five years. [902708]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (George Freeman):** As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor demonstrated in the autumn statement, the Government put investment in R and D as the top priority in our long-term economic plan. I am delighted, as I am sure that Opposition Members will be, by the announcement on ring-fencing the science budget, with £6.9 billion on science capital and £4.7 billion on revenue. In addition, the Prime Minister recently

announced a 50% increase in our funding of climate finance, with £400 million over this Parliament, and we have just announced £60 million going into the energy research accelerator.

**Mike Weir:** Launching an investment coalition in Paris at the weekend, Bill Gates made the point that if we are to avoid global warming we have to move at full speed in developing new renewable energy technologies. To ensure that the UK plays its part, what progress have Ministers made in ensuring that the UK Green Investment Bank receives the full £3.8 billion of capitalisation and maintains its green mandate, irrespective of the future of the Government's stake in the bank?

**George Freeman:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the Prime Minister's announcement of £400 million extra funding. The Green Investment Bank has played the role that we envisaged in supporting the green economy, which is not an allotment economy—it now constitutes 96,000 businesses with 230,000 employees and a turnover of £45 billion for the British economy and £4.8 billion of exports. By giving the Green Investment Bank the freedom to raise money on the capital markets, we will generate more money for the green economy, which is growing under this Government like never before.

**Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con):** The North sea oil and gas sector faces significant challenges at the current time, with a need for a collegiate approach to research and development to fuel innovation and to drive down costs. To achieve this, will the Minister consider setting up a North sea oil and gas innovation centre similar to the very successful offshore wind catapult?

**George Freeman:** My hon. Friend makes a very interesting point. On the east coast in East Anglia, in the north and in Scotland, this country is leading in the field of offshore energy. We have just funded the offshore energy centre, but I would be happy to look at the specific idea that he recommends.

**Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP):** “Extremely disappointing”, “missed opportunity”, “damaging” and “disgrace” were some of the words and phrases used to describe this Government's decision to withdraw £1 billion of funding from carbon capture and storage. Hundreds of jobs for the communities of the north-east of Scotland, and the opportunity to be at the forefront of low-carbon innovation, have now been lost. The Government will instead spend hundreds of millions of pounds on subsidising research into nuclear energy. In the light of that decision, would the Minister like to take this opportunity to explain to the people of Peterhead and the north-east specifically how he has supported them to be world leaders in innovation?

**George Freeman:** It is a pleasure to follow that speech. I will happily repeat the figure I just gave: the Prime Minister has just announced £400 million of extra funding for energy finance. We have just made announcements on onshore research. One of the lessons for Scotland is to reduce its dependence on public sector funding. The truth is that, under the renewables obligation for offshore wind, 28% of the funding went to Scotland—that is £560 million—when it represents

only 10% of bill payers. We need to support the green economy in Scotland, just like we are doing in the rest of the country.

**David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con):** In the spending review, a major energy investment of £250 million was announced for small modular reactors. That was warmly welcomed in the north-west and it will make a big difference to our ability to meet our climate change targets. It is crucial that the UK owns the intellectual property rights that result from that technology. Will the Minister and his colleagues in the Department of Energy and Climate Change make sure that that is the case?

**George Freeman:** My hon. Friend is something of an expert on those matters and I will happily look into the very important point he makes. One of the benefits of our support for the green economy—which, as I have said, is now a £45 billion sector in this country—is that we are generating the leading technologies in 21st-century green energy. I will happily look into the specific points he makes.

### Small Businesses (Late Payments)

12. **Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con):** What steps he is taking to tackle late payment to small businesses. [902709]

**The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry):** The Enterprise Bill, which is going through the other place, will create a small business commissioner, and one of his or her most important roles will be to make sure, as much as possible, that the continuing problem with late payment is brought to an end. Of course, we have other measures in hand to make sure that there is reporting, but we are making good progress.

**Alex Chalk:** Cheltenham's superb range of shops and small business rely for their success on people getting out from behind their computers and physically visiting local shops. Does my hon. Friend agree that local authorities should promote flexible and, above all, cheap parking wherever possible to support small businesses and shopping hubs such as Cheltenham?

**Anna Soubry:** I fear that, as ever, I am a bit off message. I take a radical approach to parking. As far as is ever possible, I take the view that there should be no parking charges in any towns. The car parks belong to the people—they absolutely do. There are times when a local authority wants to put in car-parking charges—a very good example being in Rushcliffe—to make sure that people do not abuse them, but, as far as possible, we should be supporting our great town centres and our great small businesses. We should not charge people for the luxury of parking in their own hometowns.

**Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op):** In the spirit of Christmas, may I invite the whole ministerial team to come to Huddersfield, where they can learn about spinning and weaving? I can also arrange for them to have a wonderful “Made in Huddersfield” worsted suit, just like the one I am wearing. They can also meet small businesses and the Textile Centre of Excellence and talk about all the pressures on small

business and the problems they face because the Government want to take us out of Europe, which will stop us exporting to the rest of the world.

**Anna Soubry:** It was all going so well—I was going to be a little Christmas fairy. Of course, everybody knows my views, and, indeed, those of my Prime Minister, on the European Union: we want to stay in a reformed Union and make sure that we get those reforms. In the spirit of Christmas, I would be delighted to go to Huddersfield. I could talk about my family's long-standing relationship with Huddersfield. We will do that on the basis that I will go to Huddersfield if the hon. Gentleman will come to Broxtowe, to Beeston in particular.

### Cyber-resilience

15. **Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Minister for the Cabinet Office on supporting the cyber-resilience of UK businesses. [902712]

**The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey):** I am delighted to say that I talk about cyber-resilience a lot with the Minister for the Cabinet Office. Only the other day, we were saying how pleased we were to hear the Chancellor announce the doubling of the cyber-security budget to almost £2 billion.

**Clive Efford:** I am delighted that the Minister has more than doubled the budget, but only 10% of it goes on consumers, the police force and small businesses. What is the Minister doing to encourage small businesses that are time-poor, meaning that they are not able to engage with this sort of administration? What is he going to do for business in Eltham, to ensure that they are safe online?

**Mr Vaizey:** I did not double the budget; it was the Chancellor. It is important—particularly for one's career—to give him credit when he does such things. I take the hon. Gentleman's point very seriously. We have a fantastic scheme called the cyber essentials scheme, which allows small businesses and large businesses to get a certificate to show that they have been through a process to increase their cyber-security.

### Productivity

16. **Richard Arkless** (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): What steps he is taking to improve productivity in the economy. [902713]

**The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid):** The Government are working hard to deliver the ambitious measures outlined in our productivity plan. We will drive productivity growth throughout the UK by encouraging long-term investment and promoting a dynamic economy.

**Richard Arkless:** Productivity has been the Achilles heel of this Government's economic policy. Comparisons with G7 countries are poor, and the figures are even worse when compared with those for smaller to medium-sized and—dare I say?—independent countries. Is it not the case that the Government have been completely

obsessed with austerity, and cuts and have completely neglected productivity, internationalisation and innovation, which is the fairer, more progressive way to raise tax receipts and reduce the deficit?

**Sajid Javid:** No, that is absolutely not the case. The hon. Gentleman is right that there has been a long-running productivity issue in our country under successive Governments. That is why we have published the ambitious productivity plan, dealing with issues such as skills, infrastructure and innovation. In the past year, we have seen a 1.3% year-on-year increase in output per hour, which is very encouraging.

**Rob Marris** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): After five years in charge, it is time the Government took some responsibility. Why has productivity stalled for the past five years?

**Sajid Javid:** Because after 13 years of the Labour party being in charge, we had the biggest recession our country had seen in almost 100 years and it has taken time for the country to recover from that. As I have said, productivity is on the rise.

**Mr Speaker:** Last but not least, I call Diana Johnson.

### Broadband Market (Competition)

17. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on improving competition in the broadband market. [902715]

**The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey):** It is nice to be back, Mr Speaker. We have a very competitive broadband market. I was thinking about that the other day when I went to York to see TalkTalk delivering fibre to premises. I met the chief executive of Virgin Media, which is investing billions in fibre. There has been an announcement from CityFibre about its acquiring some of KCom's holdings. On Friday, I will go to see Gigaclear delivering broadband to homes in Epping Forest. We have a very competitive market.

**Diana Johnson:** Ofcom has confirmed to me that Hull is the only city in the country without competition for small businesses and households, and the only city among the worst 20 areas for superfast broadband access. This is really affecting small businesses in Hull. Will the Minister tell me how much of the £530 million that the Government have allocated for investment in superfast broadband will be allocated to Hull?

**Mr Vaizey:** The hon. Lady knows full well that Hull has traditionally had one, in effect municipal, provider—Kingston Communications, which has been privatised—which is why Hull has white phone boxes, rather than red ones. I am pleased to say that KCom is investing in broadband for the whole of Hull without any need for a public subsidy.

### Topical Questions

T1. [902688] **Kate Hollern** (Blackburn) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid):** The recent spending review delivered a strong settlement for many of the Department's sectors, focusing support on areas that drive up productivity across the UK.

As we have heard, in the past hour Major Tim Peake has successfully blasted into orbit. This morning, the Government launched their space policy, which has achieved lift-off. Launched a short time ago in a museum that is not far, far away, the policy document shows that there are no limits to the UK's ambitions in this area. To mix intergalactic metaphors, we want to boldly go to infinity and beyond, and our new policy will make it so.

**Kate Hollern:** As everyone knows, if we are to improve productivity, we need a good, strong education system. Will the Secretary of State give a categorical assurance that further education institutions, such as Blackburn College in my constituency, will not receive a real-terms funding cut as a result of the cash-terms freeze in adult and 16-to-19 funding?

**Sajid Javid:** I agree with the hon. Lady on the issue of productivity and the need to boost skills. There will be area reviews, so I cannot make a promise about any particular institution. However, as the Minister for Skills has said, there will be an increase in FE funding of more than 35% in real terms over the lifetime of the Parliament. In the hon. Lady's constituency, there has been a 75% increase in apprenticeship starts during the past five years, which I am sure she welcomes.

T3. [902690] **Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): The Eden Project in my constituency has run a successful apprenticeship in horticulture for the past year. Horticulturalists will become more and more important in meeting our increasing demand for food. What support can the Minister provide to promote horticulture as a worthwhile career for young people?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (George Freeman):** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. We are supporting the horticulture industry under the UK agritech strategy. Indeed, I recently opened a horticultural waste reduction facility. The horticulture sector is leading in the UK on low water, low plastic and low energy farming systems, and on novel uses of insects to avoid the use of pesticides and hydroponics. It is an innovative sector that is developing interesting careers and contributing to our growing agritech economy.

**Ms Angela Eagle** (Wallasey) (Lab): May I start by adding our best wishes and congratulations to Major Tim Peake, who will be the first British astronaut to visit the international space station, ahead of his Principia mission? May I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to Helen Sharman, who was the first Briton to go into space? Let us all pledge to do our bit to inspire the next generation of scientists, engineers, mathematicians and explorers, in the same way that the moon landings inspired my generation.

Most businesses understand that nearly half our exports and 3 million jobs are linked to our membership of the European Union, and most believe, like I do, that it is in the interests of the UK to remain a member.

Yesterday, the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) described the Prime Minister's negotiations as "froth and nonsense" and the Prime Minister's approach to his endless renegotiations has been described today as a "shambles". Does the Secretary of State agree with UK business or with the Eurosceptics on his side of the House?

**Sajid Javid:** I associate myself with the hon. Lady's comments about Major Tim Peake's mission. It is an inspiration for us all and will hopefully get more young people interested in science.

On the European Union, I agree with almost all the businesses I have met because they want to see reform. They want to see changes in our relationship with the EU. They want the EU to be more competitive, they want to be able to make easier, quicker and deeper trade deals, they want a deeper single market and they want less bureaucracy. I am sure that the hon. Lady agrees with that too. That is exactly what we are fighting for.

**Ms Eagle:** We all want the UK to remain in a reformed European Union, but the Secretary of State's Eurosceptic interests are well known. It is not like him to be so shy and timid about them, so let ask him more directly: is he prepared to resign from the Cabinet to fight for Brexit in the forthcoming referendum? If he cannot answer that question, how can he claim to be representing the interests of British businesses, which overwhelmingly want to stay in?

**Sajid Javid:** When it comes to divisions and resignations, it is her party that the hon. Lady should be worried about. I am prepared to fight for the reforms that I just outlined. Those are the reforms that everyone wants to see. We will fight for them tooth and nail, and then we will put the question to the British people and let them decide.

T4. [902691] **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): The Worcestershire growth fund will provide grants of up to £100,000 to businesses that are looking to expand and create jobs in Worcestershire. Will the Secretary of State join me in encouraging as many businesses as possible across Worcestershire to apply for the first round before the deadline this Friday?

**Sajid Javid:** In the short time that my hon. Friend has been a Member of Parliament, he has done a lot to champion small businesses in Worcestershire. I have seen that at first hand. The Worcestershire growth fund represents an excellent funding opportunity and I certainly join him in encouraging companies in his constituency and mine to apply.

T2. [902689] **Mr Gavin Shuker** (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): The illegal money lending team has commenced 330 prosecutions against illegal loan sharks and had £63 million written off for the most vulnerable in our communities. The decision to cut a third of its £3.6 million budget may not have crossed the Secretary of State's desk at the time, but he has had plenty of time to review the decision and it will have a big impact, so why does he continue to dodge questions about this short-sighted cut?

**The Minister for Skills (Nick Boles):** We are not dodging any questions. If the hon. Gentleman had attended Prime Minister's questions last week, he would have heard my right hon. Friend the Chancellor say that he was looking at the possibility of introducing a levy to continue to fund this action against loan sharks. That is the Treasury's policy to take forward and the hon. Gentleman will have to ask the Treasury if he wants further details about it.

T5. [902692] **Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): A few days ago in North Devon, I met the new cohort from the Petroc College Care Academy, which has a unique programme providing part-time apprenticeships at the local healthcare trust. Will the Minister join me in congratulating them, and does he agree that it is an important programme for training the next generation of our healthcare professionals locally?

**George Freeman:** I absolutely join my hon. Friend, and I thank him for raising the matter. The Care Academy programme is doing great work, and Petroc College in his constituency is pioneering 18-week placement courses so that young people can discover the interesting range of careers in the health and care sector. It supports the local economy as well as our national skills base.

T6. [902693] **Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): Several organisations, including Electrical Safety First, welcomed the recent product safety review conducted by the Department and headed by Lynn Faulds Wood. We must work to prevent ineffective product safety recalls and improve traceability better to protect customers and business in the UK. When will the Department publish the review?

**The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry):** I have met Lynn Faulds Wood and I thank and commend her for her work. I will have a further meeting with her to see when we can publish the review and make the progress that we all want.

T7. [902694] **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): Will the Secretary of State update the House on the objectives of his recent visit to India, and how best local businesses in my constituency can tap into that market?

**Sajid Javid:** Yes, I will. The recent visit was to build on the momentum generated by Prime Minister Modi's recent visit. Along with the Minister for Universities and Science, I went to India to promote getting more Indian students to come to the UK and study. I took 30 vice chancellors, including two from Dorset. That is just the kind of export that we want.

T8. [902695] **Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Last week, The British Chambers of Commerce downgraded its forecast for overall GDP growth, citing weaker than expected trade. On Thursday, the Office for National Statistics released data, which showed that the gap between imports and exports grew from £3.1 billion in September to £4.1 billion in October. Will the Secretary of State update the House on the measures that he is taking to support export growth, given that his current plans are clearly not working?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. Lady knows that there has been export growth in the past five years, including to some of the fastest growing markets in the world such as India and China, which came up earlier. We obviously need to do more, and that is why we have several measures in place, some of which I have mentioned. Those kinds of changes, such as increases in exports, are leading to falls in unemployment throughout the country and generating jobs, including a 53% decline in jobseekers' allowance claimants in her constituency.

T10. [902697] **Nicola Blackwood** (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): As Tim Peake blasts off today, we are reminded again of the exponential value of science funding well spent. For that reason, the Science and Technology Committee intends to continue our work of testing science spending plans. Will the Business Secretary reassure the House that the welcome increase in science funding will be ring-fenced? Will he accept our invitation to appear before the Committee in January to go over that in detail?

**Sajid Javid:** First, I accept the invitation—thank you very much. I also take the opportunity to commend my hon. Friend for her leadership of the Science and Technology Committee and the way in which has made the case so well for science. I can confirm that the ring fence is protected in real terms, not just cash terms. I also confirm our manifesto commitment to spend £6.9 billion on science infrastructure over the next six years. I am sure that she will agree that, this Christmas, batteries are included.

T9. [902696] **Andy McDonald** (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I previously raised with the Secretary of State the Teesside Collective's industrial carbon capture and storage ambitions, which will not only contribute massively to the climate change agenda, but secure existing industries and attract investment. In the light of the Paris agreement, will he meet me and industrialists leading that key initiative to explore how we might bring that important project to fruition?

**Anna Soubry:** I hope that I do not disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but I am more than happy to have a meeting with him. He knows the terms on which we always have our meetings: not to shout at me. *[Interruption.]* Only in the House. I hope that he will join me in congratulating the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on her outstanding achievement on behalf of our nation in playing a full and important role in securing the excellent way forward to ensure that the planet that we leave for our children will be better than the one that we inherited. Yes, I will have the meeting.

**John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): As the Minister well knows, Carlisle and Cumbria have experienced devastating floods recently. As part of the recovery, it is vital that confidence is restored as quickly as possible, especially in the business community. Will the Minister confirm that she and the Department will do everything to support Cumbrian businesses, and wherever possible, ensure that people know that Carlisle and Cumbria are open for business?

**Anna Soubry:** Yes indeed, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend and all Members of Parliament affected by this issue for their great work. I will go to that area on Tuesday, and I hope to visit Carlisle as well as Cockermouth, Kendal and Keswick if possible. I am delighted that we were able to secure £5 million funding for all businesses affected by the flooding, which will make a huge improvement. We have done that very quickly, and the money will be available quickly and—most importantly—in time for Christmas, so that all those businesses and shops can be open for businesses.

**Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab):** The Secretary of State mentioned simplifying and clarifying the business environment in this country, as well as paring back bureaucracy and identifying a further £10 billion reduction in red tape over this Parliament. Why did the autumn statement propose that small businesses should file tax returns four times a year, rather than annually? Will the Secretary of State outline how that helps small businesses to reduce their costs and burdens? To keep the “Star Wars” quotes going, “I’ve got a bad feeling about this.”

**Sajid Javid:** I have not heard that quote from “Star Wars”. [Interruption.] It is really important that we keep deregulating for small businesses, and that was achieved during the previous Parliament. As Chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, the hon. Gentleman knows that that measure is a net target, and because of the Enterprise Bill, and many other measures, I am confident that we will see huge net deregulation, running into the billions, for businesses over the lifetime of this Parliament.

**Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con):** The Business, Innovation and Skills Committee had a discussion this week about the phrase “industrial strategy”, which seems to mean all sorts of things to different people. I do not know what that phrase means, but I know that if I did, I would be against it. Will the Minister reassure the House that while he is Secretary of State, this Government will not go about picking winners?

**Sajid Javid:** Like my hon. Friend, the Government believe passionately in free enterprise. Free enterprise has motored this economy for decades, and it will continue to lift people out of poverty. We do have a strategy—it is called the long-term economic plan.

**Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op):** I am sure that the space Minister will praise the foresight of the previous Labour Government who established the UK Space Agency. Given that Tim Peake’s incredible mission is launching today, will she say a little more about how she will spread inspiration

from that mission to a budding generation of new space scientists, engineers and astronauts, including in Cardiff South and Penarth?

**Anna Soubry:** Tim Peake is going to the International Space Station, but I mentioned seven years because—as you know, Mr Speaker—I am not prone to partisanship, and I will always give credit where it is due. I wish that Labour Members would do the same.

We have made huge progress to help great industries such as the steel industry, including our announcement on energy intensive industries, but I notice—let me get this point in when I have the opportunity, Mr Speaker—that nobody has mentioned that or said how good it is. The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) are right to say how important it is that we inspire the younger generation—boys and girls—about great future career opportunities, especially in engineering.

**Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con):** Will the Minister update the House about life science clusters as a way to stimulate start-ups, excellence and growth in the sector? Does he have any plans to use devolution city deals for such clusters?

**George Freeman:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, and around the country—not just in Cambridge, Oxford, and London MedCity, but in the Northern Health Science Alliance and the Scottish belt—the UK life science industry is building clusters of excellence and growth for the benefit of our citizens. I am holding discussions with the Chancellor and the Department for Communities and Local Government about how the devolution package could drive and support greater development of those health clusters around the country.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** The Minister referred earlier to moneys that have been set aside by the Government for research and development in the aerospace industry. In my constituency, 6,500 people are directly employed by Magellan and Bombardier, and double that number are subcontracted. What discussions has the Minister had with the Northern Ireland Assembly to ensure that we can be part of that research and development?

**Anna Soubry:** I have not had those discussions, but I am more than happy to hold them with the hon. Gentleman—he knows my door is always open, especially to him. I recognise the huge importance of Bombardier, and the role that it plays in his constituency and the whole of Northern Ireland.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry but we must now move on.

## Point of Order

12.34 pm

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Ah! The day would not be complete without a point of order from the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr MacNeil:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I wonder whether you can help me by telling me what can be done when the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, which is in my view not actually independent but very partial, is obstructing an MP from doing their work? My situation involves complex travel arrangements and IPSA is obstructing my travel movements. Is there anyone who is genuinely independent who I can deal with to get beyond the kangaroo issues of IPSA? I am wasting a lot of time and effort, as are my staff, in dealing with IPSA and getting absolutely nowhere.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am very disturbed to hear that. The hon. Gentleman might be aware—if he was not, he now will be—of the existence of an informal grouping within Parliament, which includes the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), to which he could usefully make representations about the particular situation that he faces. I hope that he will understand that this is not something of which I can treat here and now in the Chamber.

**Mr MacNeil** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** No follow-up would ordinarily be required, but the hon. Gentleman is champing at the bit and I will give him one last chance.

**Mr MacNeil:** I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker. I was on that panel, with the honourable member for Gainsborough, during the last Parliament, but I am not aware of its continued existence in this Parliament.

**Mr Speaker:** My understanding had always been that there was an opportunity for Members to make such informal representations. The Chair cannot deal with specific cases at all, and the Chair is in no position authoritatively to comment on particular circumstances from the Chair, especially when given no advance knowledge of them. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to pursue the matter further, he can usefully do so outside the Chamber.

## Free School Meals (Automatic Registration of Eligible Children)

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

12.36 pm

**Frank Field** (Birkenhead) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to provide local authorities with the duties and powers required to identify and automatically register all children eligible for free school meals; to provide for an opt-out where the family wishes; and for connected purposes.

I grew up, as you did, Mr Speaker, and as did everyone in the House, in a world in which the term “progress” did not need to speak its name. It was the assumption of all of us that things could only get better. That was true not only in this Chamber and in the country but in every western society. I view the world that I grew up in rather like a train journey. The train had different compartments that reflected our social classes, particularly in England. There was a first-class compartment, as well as second, third and fourth-class compartments. The crucial thing about the train journey, however, was that we were all on board and all heading towards a better tomorrow. In the past decade or so, the last carriage, the fourth-class carriage containing the poor, has become detached from the train journey that the rest of us are on. That is happening not only here but in every western country, and it is illustrated by the rise of food banks.

Last night, in each of our constituencies, a large number of children went to bed hungry and took that hunger to school with them today. To her credit, the Secretary of State for Education is concerned about this, and about the number of children who appear to be eligible for free school meals but are getting no hot meal at the beginning of the day. She has a taskforce that is trying to spread good practice, but we all know how long it can sometimes take for good practice to be spread.

Bernard Shaw, being Irish, did not have a great deal of time for us English, except that England gave him a good standard of living. He said that if the English were promoted from inferno to paradise, they would still gather round and talk about the good old days. There is something in our culture that resists the spread of good practice. The reasons why those children go to school hungry are moderately complicated to unravel. Clearly, at the bottom of our society, there is an increase in the number of low-paid jobs, and the wages from those low-paid jobs are uncertain. The all-party parliamentary group on hunger has identified problems with benefit delivery. There are also problems—let’s face it—of families who lead such chaotic lives that they let their children go to school hungry when they have the resources to do otherwise. Some families do not do that, but clearly some families do.

The Bill takes the campaign against hunger a stage further. It will compel local authorities to use their housing benefit data to counter hunger by identifying, first of all, the 160,000 children who are eligible for free school dinners but who, for some reason, do not claim. On average, that means that, in each of our constituencies, 250 children go hungry who probably do not need to do so.

The last Government linked the school premium to eligibility for free school meals. Equally importantly, therefore, the Bill will mean that £211 million follows those 160,000 children into our schools, so schools will be better able to cope with hunger and better able to integrate those children on school trips with other children.

Mr Speaker, your office tells me that, should the House grant me leave to introduce the Bill, Second Reading is not until 22 January, but already a record number of Members—126 Members from both sides of the House with all kinds of opinion—wish the Bill to proceed. Of course, it is in the power of the Secretary of State to beat the Bill and seek the powers herself. That move would not by itself bring a happy and more prosperous Christmas to those children, but it would form a basis so that, come the new year, there will be fewer hungry children in Britain than there are today.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That Frank Field, John Glen, Mr Philip Hollobone, Alison McGovern, Andrew Bridgen, Peter Kyle, Wes Streeting, Sir Nicholas Soames, Ms Karen Buck, Stella Creasy, Heidi Allen and Mr Christopher Chope present the Bill.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 January, and to be printed ( Bill 109).*

## Opposition Day

[13TH ALLOTTED DAY]

### Climate Change and Flooding

12.43 pm

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

That this House applauds the courage and tirelessness of the UK's emergency services, Armed Forces and volunteers who are working day and night to protect people from the damaging floods; condemns the reckless cuts to flood defence funding made by the Government, which have left communities more vulnerable to extreme weather; notes that 600 people were evacuated from their homes in Hawick due to flooding, and hopes the Scottish Government will urgently invest additional funds to enhance flood protection schemes in Scotland; further notes the increasing frequency and intensity of storms in recent years and their consistency with the warnings of Britain's leading climate scientists regarding the impact of climate change; supports the outcome of the UN COP21 conference in Paris, but recognises that international cooperation and ambition to reduce greenhouse gases and invest in clean energy technologies must be increased if global temperature rises are to be limited and the goal of climate safety kept within reach; expresses concern at the Government's decisions to cut investment in carbon capture and storage technology, privatise the Green Investment Bank without protecting its green mandate, reduce funding for energy efficiency and solar energy and block the growth of wind energy, which all jeopardise the future of Britain's important low-carbon industries; and calls on the Government to institute a thorough climate risk assessment that considers the implications of the Paris Summit for future flood risk.

Although the climate deal reached in Paris at the weekend gives cause for optimism that the world is facing up to the global threat of climate change, the recent floods have brought home to us the urgency of the situation here in the UK. Climate change is already happening here, and people need not just warm words from the Government, but action.

**David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Kerry McCarthy:** May I get into my stride a little bit, and then give way? That was a premature intervention.

For the people of Cumbria, these were the third major floods in a decade. In 2009, they were told that the rainfall was unprecedented and that it was a once-in-a-century event, and yet just six years later, rainfall records in the county were again broken, causing devastation and heartbreak in the run-up to Christmas.

Flooding is already rated as the greatest climate change risk to the UK, and the Select Committee on Energy and Climate Change has warned that the frequency and magnitude of severe flooding across the UK is only going to increase. Periods of intense rainfall are projected to increase in frequency by a factor of five in this century. Indeed, the most recent Met Office analysis suggests that global warming of 2°—bear in mind that Paris does not limit us to 2°—would increase the risks of extreme flood events in the UK by a factor of seven. It is not enough to respond to the flood risk simply by focusing on building more flood defences. We need to look at how we can reduce the risk through improved land and river management, and we need to minimise the future risk of floods and other extreme weather events by tackling climate change.

[Kerry McCarthy]

We welcome the Paris accord. Nearly every country around the globe has committed to: reducing carbon emissions, building a carbon-neutral global economy, trying to limit temperature rises to 1.5°, and to reviewing our ambitions every five years. Richer nations are recognising their responsibilities to developing countries with the climate finance provisions. That is all very welcome and will make a positive difference to climate safety, but it would be complacent to suggest that the Paris accord on its own is enough.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The hon. Lady is making a strong case. As she will have heard from Paris, from civil society and from the countries that are most vulnerable to climate impacts, about 80% of known fossil fuel reserves need to stay in the ground if we are to have a hope of avoiding dangerous climate change. We need a global transition to 100% renewables by 2050. I wonder if she could say whether she agrees with that.

**Kerry McCarthy:** It is very important that we make progress on that. As I will come on to later in my speech, the fact that the Government's policies seem to be moving away from encouraging renewables—indeed, harming the renewables sector to a very high degree—makes it very difficult for us to make the transition from fossil fuels, which is something we very much want to see.

**Angela Rayner** (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that cuts to renewable energy threaten both our environment and the economy? In my constituency, Energy Gain UK is a successful local renewables business, which has grown from nothing in four years to having 10 staff and apprenticeships. The drastic cuts to feed-in tariffs mean it may be forced to close, which makes no sense either to the environment or to the economy.

**Kerry McCarthy:** I entirely agree. The renewables sector needs certainty and it has had the rug whisked away from underneath it. There is some incredibly innovative work being done. I visited Ecotricity in Stroud yesterday, to hear about Dale Vince's proposals not just for building on his excellent work in the renewables sector but for going far beyond that. We must encourage the sector. This is where the high-tech, high-skilled, well-paid jobs of the future are and the Government ought to be doing more to encourage them.

We must acknowledge that the individual pledges made at Paris do not add up to a commitment to keep temperature rises below 2°. We must keep asking what more we can do by way of mitigation and consider what further adaptation to climate change is needed. Domestically, it is clear that the UK is not doing enough. Contributing to the global climate fund does not mean the UK can absolve itself of all responsibility, or pass the buck to developing nations.

While the international community is moving forward, the UK has gone backwards. The Government have axed the carbon capture and storage fund, worth billions of pounds. They have blocked new wind farms and cut energy efficiency programmes drastically by 80% and they propose cutting support for solar power by 90%.

They are also selling off the UK Green Investment Bank without protecting its green mandate. They are increasing taxes on our more efficient cars and they are scrapping the zero-carbon standard for new homes. Their preoccupation with fossil fuels and fracking, as I mentioned, means they have threatened the future of our renewable energy industry and we have lost thousands of green jobs.

**David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): The hon. Lady says that the UK is not doing enough. Can she tell the House of one other OECD country that has reduced its carbon emissions by as much as the UK since 1990—just one other OECD country that has done that?

**Kerry McCarthy:** As the hon. Gentleman says, the UK has a proud record on tackling climate change, not least due to the leadership shown by my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) with the groundbreaking Climate Change Act 2008. However, we are now coasting on that historical record and we need to do much more. We are not on course to meet our targets, so we need to do more.

The chairman of the Committee on Climate Change had no alternative but to conclude last month that the Government's existing energy policy was clearly failing, and the CBI has said that British businesses need clarity. Businesses need to know that the Government are serious about climate change and will not make superficial claims about being green, only to U-turn on key environmental policies.

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): On clarity of Government direction and jobs, I understand we have to work together on renewables, but we are setting such a good example with Hinkley Point, on the border with my constituency, which is a low-carbon energy commitment that will generate 25,000 jobs, which will be terrific for the economy and energy production.

**Kerry McCarthy:** I accept that nuclear is part of the mix—that is our policy—but it is not the only solution to green energy in this country, which seems to be the Government's point of view.

**Huw Irranca-Davies** (Ogmore) (Lab): Whatever the solutions, one of the key conclusions from COP 21 is that, in order to drive down from 3.5° to 2.7°, 2° or 1.5°, the UK will have to reset its rest—as it has been phrased. We need to do more faster and with greater urgency, and that is exactly what Lord Deben and the CCC have said. Does she agree that, whatever the solutions, one of the most important things is for the Government to accept the fifth carbon budget and narrow the gap with the fourth carbon budget?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. There is almost a consensus that the UK needs to do more, go faster and introduce stronger targets.

Business needs certainty, but people in Cumbria and other flood zones need it too. Last week, I visited Carlisle and Cockermouth with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. We are grateful to the councillors, business owners and residents who showed us around their communities and homes, and we left

impressed by their resilience and determined that the Government must do all they can to rebuild their communities and reduce their future flood risk. They should never have to go through this again.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): My hon. Friend, who is right about the need for certainty, will understand the concerns of many of the flood-affected communities that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs cannot provide any certainty over future spending on flooding. Was she as shocked as I was to learn that this year's flooding budget was £115 million less than last year's? Is that not short-sighted of the Government?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I agree with my hon. Friend, as I often do. I want to say a little more about what I saw in the constituencies, and then I will answer his point.

Anyone who has been to Carlisle and Cockermouth or seen the television coverage will have been dismayed at the horrific scenes. We have seen people out on the pavements with their entire belongings, people's homes saturated, people in temporary accommodation. There is an issue with the availability of temporary accommodation in the area. Some have been lucky enough to move into holiday cottages, but there is not much in the way of private rented accommodation to move into. We spoke to people about their massive flood insurance bills, and the thing they raised with us time and again was the excess on their policies. Now that more floods have happened, their premiums are going to go up, or they might not be able to insure their homes at all.

**Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the Government's new Flood Re scheme does not cover the insurance costs of businesses, and does she share my regret at the lack of solidarity in that scheme?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I agree with my hon. Friend. Small businesses mentioned that to us. The Government's logic was that businesses could shop around in the market, but those that were hit by flooding in 2005 and 2009 and have been again now will struggle to find insurers. It is enough to put them out of business or at least force them to close for renewal and refurbishment for several months at a time.

**David T. C. Davies:** Does the hon. Lady agree that it would be incorrect to try to link these tragic instances of flooding to global warming because, as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says in its fourth assessment report 2007, it is impossible to link individual examples of bad weather with climate change?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I am not sure that was worth waiting for. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman needs to talk to the Environment Secretary, who acknowledged in last week's statement that there was a risk. Obviously, individual episodes do not make a pattern, but a clear pattern is emerging of extreme weather events in the UK and abroad.

Between 1997 and 2010, flood defence spending increased by three quarters in real terms, but in the 2010 spending review, the coalition Government announced a 20% real-terms cut. Flood spending was slashed by £116 million in 2011-12 and again the next year, and it was lined up

for further cuts in 2013-14, before floods in the Somerset levels forced on the Government the realisation that they had gone too far. After those floods, the Prime Minister assured us that

"there will always be lessons to learn and I'll make sure they are learned."

But he has not shown many signs of having learned those lessons. Last year, flood and coastal erosion risk management expenditure was above £800 million, but this year it has been cut to less than £700 million—a 14% real-terms cut of £115 million. How quickly those images of the Somerset levels faded from his mind.

**Mary Creagh:** My hon. Friend is making an excellent point. Does she share my regret that, although the Prime Minister said money was no object, as soon as the television images of the Great Western main line under water had faded from public consciousness, money actually was an object?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I entirely agree. It seemed that money was no object in the short-term clear-up exercise, although there were delays in people getting the money promised to them. The Government are trying to speed up that process this time, by giving the money to local authorities, but council leaders have raised concerns that they simply do not have the resources and staff for that administration. I hope the Environment Secretary will provide some clarity on that.

Last week, the Environment Secretary was still assuring the people of Cumbria that the Government would learn the lessons, and the Prime Minister, on a fleeting visit up north, told them:

"After every flood, the thing to do is sit down, look at the money you are spending, look at what you are building, look at what you are planning to build in the future and ask: 'Is it enough?'"

I am not convinced that it is enough. In June, the Committee on Climate Change gave flood adaptation a double-red warning, and the Environmental Audit Committee gave the Government a red card for climate adaptation. The Prime Minister did not have to wait for the floods to ask, "Are we doing enough?" The experts had already provided the evidence that we were not.

**Caroline Flint** (Don Valley) (Lab): On learning the lessons, is my hon. Friend as surprised as I am that about half of the Chancellor's fast-track zones to build houses are on floodplains? It is estimated that 9,000 new houses built on these floodplains might not be insurable because of the risk of flooding.

**Kerry McCarthy:** That is certainly an issue. Cockermouth has had planning permission approved for new houses, yet we have seen from the recent floods that the defences, which people thought were safe enough to withstand what was described in 2009 as a once in a lifetime or a once in a century event, were not good enough. The Government need to reassure me, therefore, that any defences around new housing in those areas would be sufficient to protect people and deal with the issue of insurance.

**Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): The hon. Lady is making an eloquent case about Cumbria, but did she take any time to visit Lancashire, because we have had

[Andrew Stephenson]

really bad floods as well? In the same year that Labour-run Lancashire County Council has voted to increase councillors' allowances—they now cost the taxpayer more than £1.2 million a year—it has admitted that the timescale for regular inspections of storm drains has been increased from every 12 months to every 18 months, which undoubtedly contributed to the flooding. Do local councillors not need to get their priorities right?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I have not yet had the opportunity to visit Lancashire, although during the floods I spoke to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) about the situation there. It is a bit cheap to bring in details of councillors' allowances, when we are talking about people's homes being under water and their perhaps being homeless for the next 12 months. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman needs to speak to his Front-Bench team about the massive cuts they are imposing on local government before he starts raising such details.

**Geraint Davies:** Does my hon. Friend agree it would be worth the Government looking at local authorities running insurance systems, because high-risk properties would not be avoided and it might stop them building on floodplains, which they are still doing?

**Kerry McCarthy:** That is probably a question for the Environment Secretary to answer when she responds in a few moments.

The Government have announced and re-announced that they will invest £2.3 billion in flood defences over the next six years. As the EFRA Select Committee has today highlighted, that investment relies on £600 million-worth of external contributions, less than half of which have so far been secured. With the private sector providing just £61 million, DEFRA is looking to local authorities for the additional funding. Clearly, the Government do not get just how hard local councils have already been hit by the cuts. At the moment, just one of the 27 flood and infrastructure projects is currently in construction, and there has been no progress in the past year, while schemes in Cumbria have been delayed.

On maintenance, we have been told that the budget will only be protected, so I ask the Environment Secretary whether she believes that that budget is sufficient, especially given the years of neglect? The Government spent £171 million on maintenance last year. The Environment Agency has recommended that £417 million a year should be spent. It is no wonder that experts at Friends of the Earth are warning that there is a £2.5 billion hole in the Government's flood defence plans.

**Rebecca Pow:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Kerry McCarthy:** I want to make some progress now so that Back Benchers who want to speak about what happened in their constituencies will be able to do so.

Last week, the Environment Secretary agreed with me about the extreme weather patterns and the link with climate change. The Government have conceded that the risks might have been underestimated, yet it has now emerged that they are not even using the most up-to-date information. I hope that the Environment Secretary will be able to tell us why the Environment

Agency's flood risk guidance, published in 2013, is based on forecasts from 2006—despite new research in 2011 indicating that river flows could be much greater due to climate change. Flood defence plans are modelled on the medium climate scenarios rather than the high climate change pathway.

Perhaps the Government want to ignore the high emission scenarios because that would mean spending £300 million more, but the costs associated with ignoring the evidence are potentially so much greater. The national security risk assessment cites flood risk to the UK as a tier 1 priority risk, alongside terrorism and cyberattacks. By focusing on the more optimistic projections, the Government are wilfully neglecting their responsibilities on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

As the rest of the work acknowledged this weekend, simply ignoring climate change will not make it go away, yet for two years the UK was hampered by having a climate change denier as Environment Secretary. It is even rumoured that he sought to replace the words "climate change" with the word "weather" in every single DEFRA document, and that he had to have it explained to him that they were not quite the same thing. What is certainly true is that under his stewardship spending on climate change adaptation halved, even after DEFRA's climate change staffing had dropped from 38 to six people.

Thankfully, the current Environment Secretary is less hostile on this issue, although perhaps not very interested until now, and she will have our full support if her adaptation policies are guided by the scientific evidence and by expert advice. As such, we look forward to hearing more details on the national flood resilience review. I welcome the confirmation that the Cumbrian floods partnership will be looking at upstream options, and I hope these will be included in the resilience review.

A focus on the role of the natural environment in reducing flood risk is, unfortunately, long overdue. I see in his place the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart). His constituency was badly affected, and he did a huge amount of work on the ground in Cumbria over the past few weeks, so I am sure he has very much taken that point on board.

**John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con):** Talking of national resilience, does the hon. Lady think it was a failure of the last Labour Government not to have done exactly the same in 2005? In Carlisle, for example, we have a sub-station in a floodplain area that was flooded in 2005. Fortunately, due to the hard work of the emergency services, it was not flooded in 2015, but should it not have been looked at after 2005 with a view to possibly moving it?

**Kerry McCarthy:** We commissioned the Pitt review. The hon. Gentleman mentions the work of the emergency services, and I would like to take the opportunity to say that when I was in Cumbria I met the Fire Brigades Union and Mountain Rescue, which have done fantastic work. There are calls for the fire brigade's response to flood risk to be put on a statutory footing, rather than just an add-on to its other duties. Mountain rescue teams do wonderful work based on the voluntary contributions and the work of volunteers. I hope that that will be looked at as part of the review.

**Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): On that point, does my hon. Friend agree that this is a timely opportunity to look again at the funding of fire services up and down the country? On Merseyside, we have certainly seen extreme cuts, and the whole model needs revisiting.

**Kerry McCarthy:** That issue was raised with me. I believe that five fire stations in Cumbria are due for closure. The control centre is in Warrington, but the point was made to me that local firefighters have the best local knowledge. People in Warrington were sending firefighters to places where people's fire alarms had gone off because of rising water, but those firefighters knew that the towns and villages were already underwater and that the roads were impassable. A lot can be said for retaining local knowledge and for keeping the local fire stations open. I am sure that constituency MPs would have something to say about that.

Flooding has had a devastating impact on farmers and many in Cumbria have, as the National Farmers Union highlighted, been hit by a double whammy, after being informed that they will not receive their basic payments until February. Given the losses they suffer as a result of flooding and the positive contribution farmers can make to land management, I hope that DEFRA will work closely with farmers to involve them in a long-term strategic approach to flood risk, looking at surface run-off and soil management to maximise absorbency and how the Government can promote agroforestry. Studies have demonstrated, for instance, that reforesting 5% of land reduces flood peaks downstream by 29%. The Government could be looking at sediment management and river restoration, as well as woodland development more generally.

In urban and developed areas, sustainable drainage systems could make a positive difference, but progress has been slow and the scope for local authorities to make progress on flood risk management strategies seems limited, especially given the additional budget cuts. As the Climate Change Committee reported, many authorities are yet to finalise their strategies, despite its having been a legal requirement for the past five years. I hope that the Environment Secretary is co-ordinating cross-departmental work to manage the flood risk and ensure that it is factored into plans, including plans for new house building in areas of high flood risk, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) mentioned.

In light of the agreements reached in Paris, I would urge the Environment Secretary to bring forward the climate change risk assessment and consider whether the national adaptation programme is fit for purpose. As the Committee on Climate Change has said, the next programme needs a "clearer sense of priorities" and "measurable objectives". Even if commitments are met, the Paris agreement means that the Government must prepare for temperature rises of nearly 3°. Will the Secretary of State ensure that the announced national resilience review is only the first step in tackling the problem? It must lead to a realistic resilience plan—and, most importantly, action.

As yet, we do not know what DEFRA needs to adapt to, because we do not know what the Energy and Climate Change Secretary is proposing in order to implement the Paris agreement in the UK. In her statement

on Paris yesterday, there was little sense that the Government had any strategy—let alone a coherent, fully-funded one—to meet the UK's climate change commitments and help the global community to keep temperature rises below 2°.

The UN's chief environment scientist has even had to intervene to challenge this Government's policies on renewable energy. While the rest of the world is investing in renewables, she said:

"What's disappointing is when we see countries such as the United Kingdom that have really been in the lead in terms of getting their renewable energy up and going"

withdrawing subsidies and enhancing the fossil fuel industry. We can only agree with her conclusion:

"It's a very serious signal—a very perverse signal that we do not want to create."

Under the last Labour Administration, the UK had a proud record on climate change—from Lord Prescott's role with the Kyoto protocol and Gordon Brown's work in establishing the Global Climate Fund to the role of my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), and indeed that of his brother before him, in the Climate Change Act 2008, which has now been emulated by about 100 other countries. It was ground-breaking at the time; we were the first.

That legacy is slipping away and future generations will pay the price. Given that the right hon. Lady failed to answer the questions of my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) yesterday, I hope the Energy and Climate Change Secretary will, when winding up the debate this afternoon, be able to confirm the Government will review the recently abandoned green policies and that the UK will continue to support raising European targets on reducing carbon pollution by 2030.

It is not just on energy where we need leadership. Will the right hon. Lady ensure that there is more co-ordination with the Department for Transport, that BIS prioritises green jobs and that our financial services do not keep promoting and investing in fossil fuels? And will she stop the Chancellor from making short-term cuts to energy efficiency and renewables, ignoring the longer-term environmental, financial and human costs?

Expert after expert is warning that the Government are failing on climate change, and failing to protect people from flooding. They are letting down communities who are dreading the next heavy rainfall, and they are letting down future generations who will bear the brunt of climate change. I hope that both Secretaries of State will agree that the Government have run out of excuses, and that now is the time to act.

1.10 pm

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** The exceptional rainfall that we have seen over the past couple of weeks has led to some very distressing situations for families and businesses in the north of England, where serious flooding has occurred. It is right that we in the House use every opportunity we are offered to express our sympathy for those who are most deeply affected. It is also right that we pay tribute to the work of emergency responders—the Environment Agency, and volunteers from around the country—who have worked tirelessly to help to get people to safety, and to clean up quickly so that people can return to their homes as soon as possible.

[Elizabeth Truss]

The Government mobilised a full national emergency response. We deployed the military from day one to protect people's lives. The Cobra civil contingencies committee has met daily to co-ordinate the best possible deployment of resources for affected communities, and the recovery effort continues.

**Margaret Greenwood:** Have the Government considered applying to the European Union solidarity fund to help the people of the north-west, who have suffered so much? If an application were made, how quickly could the additional funds be made available?

**Elizabeth Truss:** Of course that is one of the options that we are considering, but it would take seven months for the money to arrive. What we have done, within a week of these terrible floods occurring, is make £51 million available to give immediate relief to households and businesses in Cumbria and across the north that have been affected. The Chancellor announced last week that we were supporting households and businesses in affected areas.

The hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) asked about accommodation. We are anxious to ensure that accommodation is available to those who have had to leave their homes, and we are working closely with local councils to ensure that they have every resource that they need for that purpose. Divers are assessing the bridges so that they can be opened as soon as possible, and diggers are clearing roads. We are doing all we can to ensure that Cumbria is up and running as soon as possible, and is open for business as soon as possible.

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): The Secretary of State has rightly pointed out that great efforts have been made to clear the roads. As she will know, the A591 connects the north and south lakes at Grasmere and Keswick, and its closure has effectively ruined the tourist industry on both sides of that divide. The Royal Engineers did a great job in clearing up the mess, but they left yesterday. Would the Secretary of State be able to invite them back to rebuild the road quickly?

**Elizabeth Truss:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The A591 is a critical artery for tourism and for local residents to get about. It is now passable in a 4x4 vehicle, but we are working on getting it fully up and running as soon as possible, and the Department for Transport is working closely with the Cobra team to ensure that that happens, because it is a priority. I am pleased to say that the west coast main line was up and running as quickly as possible. Nearly all the 169,000 households and businesses whose power was cut off have been reconnected, although a small group of fewer than 50 need extra work at flooded properties. The Environment Agency has been assessing what more can be done, and has been moving in heavy equipment to clear rivers.

Our priority must continue to be public safety. Although 84 flood warnings have been removed in the last day or so, further flooding could occur as a result of rain

falling on saturated ground. I urge people to keep up to date with the latest situation through the Environment Agency's website and other news sources.

I know that this is of no comfort to those who have suffered, but the flood defences in Carlisle and Kendal successfully defended more than 100,000 households and businesses and prevented them from losing their power supplies. It is important for us now to consider how we can further improve resilience in our country.

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change is working to ensure that we have long-term energy security, and that we tackle dangerous emissions. I think that she has shown massive leadership over the past week. Hers was an historic achievement in Paris, and I think that Opposition Members should applaud her for showing such leadership at an international level. I see that some of them are acknowledging her leadership; that acknowledgement is particularly welcome from the former Climate Change Secretary, the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband).

**Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): I apologise to my right hon. Friend for returning to the subject of flooding when she has—rightly—just moved on to the subject of climate change, but does she agree that it is now time for a radical change in the way in which we fund our flood infrastructure and maintenance? The hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) pointed out that when floods occur, there is investment, there are promises, but the investment then fades. That happened under the Labour Government, and it tends to happen under all Governments. Should we not hand responsibility for a regulated standard to, for instance, the water companies?

**Elizabeth Truss:** We have already made a major change. Rather than allowing a stop-start in flood defence spending, we have, for the first time, laid out a fully funded six-year programme to give communities the certainty they need. I shall say more about that later, but I was in the middle of praising my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. She has done a fantastic job, and I think that that needs to be acknowledged. She has achieved an international climate change deal that will bring about a level playing field—it is very important for countries across the world to contribute—but she is also making sure that we deal with customers' bills at home. It is right for us to improve our economy, achieve economic growth and reduce carbon, and my right hon. Friend is showing how that can be done.

**Tim Farron** *rose*—

**Elizabeth Truss:** I have already given the hon. Gentleman an opportunity to contribute. I want to make a bit of progress now.

Under this Government, there is a long term-plan for economic and energy security, part of which involves improving our resilience and investing in flood defences. Extreme weather events are becoming more common. There have been devastating floods in Cumbria, Lancashire, Northumberland and elsewhere, and there has been record rainfall. Water levels in our rivers have been more than half a metre higher than they have ever been before. Yesterday, during my second visit to Cumbria in a

week, I went to Appleby and Threlkeld, where I met residents, Army volunteers, and others whose work has been tremendous during this rescue effort. I saw the sheer power of the water, which had washed bridges downstream, but I also saw a huge amount of spirit and resilience among the Cumbrian people.

**Caroline Lucas:** May I invite the Secretary of State to return to the question asked by the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) about maintenance grants, and the amount that will be spent on maintaining existing flood defences? Does she accept that there is a shortfall of £2.5 billion between that amount and what the Environment Agency says is needed, and, if so, is she going to fill the gap?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I can confirm that, as the Chancellor said in the autumn statement, we will increase our current maintenance expenditure of £171 million a year in real terms. In a climate in which we are having to reduce Government budgets, we are increasing, in real terms, both flood capital spending and flood maintenance spending. That shows where our priority lies.

**Mary Creagh:** In his report following the devastating 2007 floods, Sir Michael Pitt said that flooding was the greatest risk that our country faced from climate change, and that flood defence spending needed to rise by more than inflation each and every year. Can the Secretary of State explain why, in real terms, we will be spending exactly the same in 2015-16 as we were spending in 2009-10?

**Elizabeth Truss:** The reality is that between 2005 and 2010 Labour spent £1.5 billion on flood capital, whereas between 2010 and 2015 we spent £1.7 billion, which is a real-terms increase and not a cut. In this Parliament, we are investing £2 billion, which is a real-terms increase and not a cut.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): The question is: does the Secretary of State think that that is sufficient, given the recent events, and given the clear and growing link to climate change and its devastating effect?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. The additional funding we are putting into flood defences will mean a reduction in flood risk over the next six years. That is not an elimination of risk, and we also need to make sure that we have the right emergency response in place, but flood risk will be reduced.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Elizabeth Truss:** I just want to answer the point raised by Opposition Members about the spending in recent years. Following the 2013-14 floods, we put in an extra £270 million to repair and rebuild the defences that were destroyed. That is the money that Opposition Members are talking about, but even if we take account of that extra funding, which rebuilt and repaired defences after the winter floods, we are still spending more in real terms in this Parliament on flood defences, and we are laying it out in a six-year programme for the first

time ever. When Labour was in power it never laid out plans for more than one year at a time, whereas we are laying out a six-year plan.

**Caroline Flint:** When the Chancellor was pulling together his fast-track zones for housing, whereby half the houses are going to be built on floodplain areas, did the Secretary of State have sight of that policy? Did she comment on it? If not, why not?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I will be very clear with the right hon. Lady: the Environment Agency is part of the planning process and it does not allow house building on floodplain areas—that is part of the planning process.

**Rebecca Pow:** The Secretary of State will remember not only the floods in Cumbria, but the awful flooding in Somerset. The Government have committed £35 million to Somerset until 2021, but will she comment on the arrangement we are putting in place through the Somerset Rivers Authority, which may become a model for dealing with flooding, funding and the wider catchment area?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention. She is absolutely right to say that Somerset Rivers Authority, which is now established, forms a model that we can use in other parts of the country. It gives local people, who understand the area and the local catchment, the power to make decisions—

**Caroline Flint** *rose*—

**Elizabeth Truss:** I have already given way to the right hon. Lady once and I want to make progress, in order to give the many constituency MPs who are part of the debate an opportunity to speak.

I want to respond to the Opposition's point about local farmers, some of whom I met yesterday. We are helping them to get their land sorted out, as much of it is covered with rubble. We are putting in place a special scheme to help farmers, which will be open from this Friday, and we are also seeing what we can do to prioritise basic farm payments for the worst affected farmers.

I have talked about our £2.3 billion programme—this is the first time ever that a Government have laid out their future flood defence spending. The private sector partnership money that the hon. Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) has been talking about is in addition to the real-terms increase—extra money so that even more flood defence schemes can go ahead. We have already secured £250 million of that money and we have a further £350 million earmarked. We are only six months into the scheme. Let us remember what happened between 2005 and 2010: only £13 million was raised. We raised £134 million in the last Parliament—10 times that raised under the previous Government.

The money we are putting in represents real flood defences across the country. It means that in Boston we are building a new £90 million barrier; in Rossall, Lancashire, we are investing £63 million for a new 2 km sea wall; in Exeter, we are investing £30 million in new flood defences; and on the Thames we are investing £220 million in a 17 km flood relief channel. I am pleased to say that in the constituency of the hon. Member for Bristol East we will invest £1 million in a

[Elizabeth Truss]

scheme for Brislington, and that in Stockton North we are investing £8 million in a scheme at Port Clarence and Greatham South. What this money—this real-terms increase in spending—means is real protection for real families and real businesses across the country, in addition to protection for 420,000 acres of farmland.

**Graham Stuart:** My right hon. Friend knows that local MPs supported a proposal to the Department seeking about £1 billion to help the Humber area, which faces the second greatest strategic risk in the country, after London. What plans does the Department have to work on coming up with a viable programme for our area?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. We are investing £80 million in flood defences for that area, but I am happy to meet him and his colleagues to talk about what more we can do to increase resilience there.

It is very important to note that we are not complacent about our flood defences. We will look at what has happened in recent weeks to make sure we learn lessons and act upon the new evidence that has come to light. We have committed ourselves to two reviews: first, the Cumbria flooding partnership, led by the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), who has responsibility for flooding, will look at how we can improve downstream defences, do more to look at the overall catchment and slow the flow upstream, and more fully involve the community. I saw a fantastic project last week at Stockdalewath, where upstream mitigation is being used to reduce the peaks in river flow. This is already happening, but I want to see more of it, which is why we are launching this new workstream. Secondly, we are putting in place a national resilience review to look at how we model and plan for extreme weather, how we protect our critical assets and how we make future investment decisions—my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) asked about that. With the £2.3 billion programme that we have laid out, we want communities to have certainty that their projects are going ahead, so this review will look at future flooding investment to make sure that the formula is adapted to what we now know.

Let me be clear with Opposition Members that we already have some of the most sophisticated flood modelling in the world. For the first time in Cumbria, during this flooding we used ResilienceDirect, which meant that all the emergency services could communicate with each other in real time and with the Environment Agency, which was very effective at getting early action. We are working to make sure that we keep up to date with the latest trends in climate and in extreme weather, which the hon. Member for Bristol East was talking about.

The Government are completely committed to doing whatever it takes to make sure Cumbria and the other flood affected areas are up and running and more resilient for the future. But the reality is that without a strong economy, under a Conservative Government, we would not have money for these crucial schemes. It is our party that is investing in new power stations and

making sure we have energy supplies, while reducing carbon emissions. It is our party that is investing to make this country more resilient and adapt to climate change and extreme weather. The Labour party has no plan, having shirked these decisions when it was in office and wasted our money. Let us all remember what the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury said:

“I’m afraid there is no money”.

That was the Labour Government’s legacy. The fact is that it is the Conservative party that is protecting our economy, and safeguarding our security and our future.

1.29 pm

**Calum Kerr** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (SNP): Mr Speaker, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to take part in this debate. I should like to urge Opposition Members in particular to pay close attention to what I have to say. Unfortunately, the motion shows a fundamental lack of understanding of the reality on the ground in Hawick and the Scottish borders, which is my constituency and which suffered serious flooding earlier this month.

**Tom Elliott** (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that in my constituency in Northern Ireland there has been serious flooding in the past 10 days, and the motion makes no reference to that? Even today, at least 16 roads are still closed in the constituency.

**Calum Kerr:** That is an excellent point. My constituency is mentioned in the motion, yet it has not been mentioned once in the debate so far, and the hon. Gentleman has had the same experience. It is extremely disappointing that the motion makes a fundamental error in terms of the funding process for flood defences in Scotland. I hope to explain this and say why I make this statement up front.

On 5 December the River Teviot broke its banks and it is true that some 600 people had to be evacuated in Hawick. A total of 333 homes were impacted, as well as 45 local businesses. However, the town reacted magnificently to the crisis. I was among the volunteers, along with the Scottish Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs, Paul Wheelhouse, putting down sandbags under the direction of Hawick flood group, with the police and emergency services, who all did a fantastic job. The reality is that, had it not been for their help and intervention, things would have been a lot worse. I pay tribute to all their efforts, including Scottish Borders Council. We all know that our councils tend to be the whipping boys on occasion, so I pay particular tribute to it for co-ordinating the effort.

The damage and disruption caused by the Hawick flood has been significant. The Scottish Government made it clear from the start that the Bellwin scheme would be implemented to fund repair work. They also emphasised that money was available to fund a full flood prevention scheme. A preferred scheme has been chosen, and we are now moving to detailed design. It is critical to get this right, as a wrongly built scheme can fail or even make things worse. This swift response has eased the worries of people in the town and shown the Scottish Government to be empathetic and fast acting.

**John Woodcock:** Just so that I am following the hon. Gentleman's speech, is he saying that the Scottish Government have been exemplary and wonderful, and there is nothing else that he would ask them to do on behalf of his constituents in this important matter?

**Calum Kerr:** That is a wonderfully glowing tribute to everyone in my constituency. I thank the hon. Gentleman. If he would like to listen a bit more, I will go on to explain the process in more detail. If anyone says that nothing can be learned, they are mistaken. There is always potential to improve the response and do better next time. The flooding that took place will be examined in detail, and will inform the flood defences that are put in place.

Right across Scotland, there was a first-class and highly impressive multi-agency response. However, the stark truth is that we will never be able to stop flooding fully. It has been with us throughout history. Both the Old Testament and the Koran tell us the story of Noah and the Ark. I am afraid that there must have been people in Scotland and indeed in the constituency of the hon. Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) who thought they were extras in the sequel. As we cannot prevent water flows, we must do our best in redirecting them. In Scotland, all the flood defences we had in place held. In Galashiels in my constituency, they stayed in place, and in Selkirk, although only half built, they did their job. This highlights how well-designed schemes can make all the difference.

The Scottish Government regard reduced flood risk as a priority and provide annual funding of £42 million for councils to add to and invest in major flood prevention schemes.

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend accept that there is also an issue of urban flooding, which has perhaps been slightly less reported? Summerston in my constituency has been renamed an island because all the major access roads were blocked by sudden flooding and overflowing drains. It is important that local authorities are able to invest the money appropriately.

**Calum Kerr:** I thank my hon. Friend for that excellent point. It is absolutely not just a rural challenge. The flood damage in urban areas is exacerbated by the concentration of dwellings.

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): I was in charge of flood risk management for Wales, so I know how important devolved Administration is in this respect. Has the hon. Gentleman considered the capture of water on buildings in butts to reduce the amount that goes into sewers or investing in the resilience of particular properties by putting plugs up walls, waterproofing and so on? No defence is 100% reliable.

**Calum Kerr:** The hon. Gentleman displays an admirable knowledge of the subject. If I ever live in a house built on a floodplain by the Conservatives, I will know where to go for advice.

It is important to consider all aspects. The debate is about climate change and flooding, but many other issues such as land use and planning could be covered in a lot more detail. We must always plan to prevent

flooding at a local level and mitigate where we can. The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point, and I thank him.

The Scottish Government enacted their Flood Risk Management (Scotland) Act in 2009. This introduces a sustainable and modern approach to flood risk development which considers the problems of climate change. For instance, it creates a revised and streamlined process for protection schemes as well as a framework for co-ordination between organisations involved in flood risk management. New methods have also been put in place to ensure that stakeholders and the public have an input into this process, as is happening in Hawick now.

Another hugely important piece of legislation is the Climate Change (Scotland) Act, again enacted in 2009. This sets some of the toughest climate change targets in the world, with an interim 42% reduction by 2020 and an 80% reduction target by 2050. Ministers are required to report regularly to the Scottish Parliament on progress and emissions. Earlier this year, the Committee on Climate Change concluded that Scotland had continued to make good progress towards meeting these ambitious greenhouse gas reduction targets. We are on track to meet that 42% target ahead of schedule. In fact, we continue to outperform the UK as a whole.

In western Europe, only one of the EU15 states, Sweden, has achieved greater reductions. The Scottish Government have not hit all their targets, partly because of data format revisions, but they should be applauded for their ambitious vision and for seeking to lead the way. The determination is that Scotland should continue to be a world leader in this area. That, surely, is the right approach. We should acknowledge their ambition and successes so far. I hope that in this Chamber we will recognise that there is a lot to learn from them in terms of best practice. For instance, the Scottish Government have pledged some £1 billion of funding over two years for climate change action and have plenty of reason for optimism.

Last year, renewables overtook nuclear as Scotland's largest source of electricity. Only last month, wind turbines produced 131% of the electrical needs of Scottish households. These are highly encouraging figures. However, no nation can operate in isolation in this area. Only by working together can world leaders properly address this, the greatest global environmental threat of our age. At last week's Paris summit, we finally managed to achieve a universal agreement—one that has been signed up to by rich and poor countries alike. I congratulate the Secretary of State on her role and hard work in securing success at that historic event, which was also attended by Scotland's Environment Minister and First Minister. The deal reached will not by itself solve global warming. It is not a panacea. But Paris finally showed that the will, along with a firm commitment, is there.

**Caroline Lucas:** The hon. Gentleman will know that emissions from aviation and shipping were left out of the Paris agreement. Does he agree that that is a fatal omission and, similarly, that airport expansion, be it at Heathrow, Gatwick or anywhere else, would fatally undermine the UK's ability to make a fair contribution to keep global warming well below 2 °C, let alone the 1.5 °C goal that is a matter of survival for many vulnerable countries?

**Calum Kerr:** The hon. Lady makes an excellent point. It is notable that the recent carbon report made the same point about excluding the contribution of air quality in this regard. We must start looking at the whole picture.

Paris did, however, show that the will exists, along with a firm commitment. As long as the 196 nations which signed up to the declaration are prepared to prove that their word is truly their bond, we can look forward to a future that is bright and a future that is green. In Scotland, as in so many other countries, this agreement could literally reshape our landscape. At present, increasing rainfall and changes in patterns mean that our 50,000 kilometres of rivers are likely to flood more often. That could affect most of our major airports, which are on low-lying land, as well as places such as the petrochemical complex at Grangemouth. Rising sea levels also mean that some of our coastal habitats could be lost entirely.

There is another effect. Climate change affects lungworm, a disease which affects sheep and renders their lungs unusable as food. I hope not to disturb my colleagues but sheep lungs are, of course, a key ingredient in haggis, which is central to Scottish culture. What would Burns night be without haggis? There could be a threat to our very nationhood! Hopefully, though, we can now avoid some of the worst consequences of climate change and the consequent risk to one of our finest native foods.

Since the election in May, the SNP has argued strongly against UK Government moves to roll back support for renewable energy. Subsidies to onshore wind, solar and power station conversion to wood or biomass are being reversed, and green deal funding scrapped. I know that some of my colleagues plan to talk about this in more detail and about the Treasury's decision to cut investment in carbon capture and storage technology, which is unwise and short-sighted.

Some environmentalists say that we are now going through the worst period in green policy for 30 years. The need for positive and dramatic action stares us in the face. Climate change can no longer be denied. After Paris, every nation will have to be bolder. This offers us a real opportunity to change the direction of travel. It is the perfect time for Ministers to reverse their recent negative attitude towards renewables and, like Scotland, turn the UK into a leader. They must walk the walk. This is our moment of choice. We can, literally, turn back the tide. For us, and for our children and grandchildren, while there is still time, I implore this Government to help to do so.

1.43 pm

**Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate, following as it does the excellent news from Paris and the rather more depressing news of recent flooding.

I have just lost two of my favourite Ministers from the Front Bench—although they are staying for a moment—but I have another still on the Front Bench. I am delighted to have their temporary audience. Like my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, I congratulate our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on her part in helping to deliver a deal in Paris.

Colleagues across the Chamber will doubtless debate how important and how effective that deal is and how it contrasts with Copenhagen, from which the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) bears such scars. Despite much of the detail being left for future work, I think we have a framework from Paris which can give us hope for the future. The intended nationally determined contributions provide the building blocks with which we can go forward. We have in place in the agreement the promise of not only a stocktake, but a review and, we hope, a growth in ambition over time.

Following Paris, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change has two things to do. One is to ensure that UK decarbonisation proceeds within the framework provided by the Climate Change Act 2008 and the fourth and fifth carbon budgets—our most current—which have been produced by the Climate Change Committee. We have not always got it all right. For instance, in the case of onshore wind, which is the lowest cost form of renewable energy that we have, there was a misdiagnosis of the problem.

The diagnosis of the problem, which people like me helped to provide over many years on behalf of our constituents, was that our constituents did not like having onshore wind turbines foisted on them, their local councillors ignored and a distant inspectorate insisting on them being built, resulting in our constituents losing any sense of control over the local environment. What local people wanted was to have control over their local environment. In those areas where there was least opposition, or where the recompense was adequate, onshore wind turbines should be allowed, but where local people were set on not having them, they should not go ahead.

That was a mistake that Labour made in government. With various Ministers in place I tried to get them to see that we would ultimately end up with more if we went with the grain of local opinion rather than trying to fight against it, but inevitably those whose local environment would be dominated by those constructions and who had had no say on it would find a political voice and eventually bring the scheme to a halt. We would end up with fewer, rather than more, wind turbines. So it has proved.

The misdiagnosis lay in the fact that my party came to the conclusion that the difficulty was not the planning, but the subsidy, even though it is the lowest subsidy of any form of renewable energy. So we got to the bizarre situation where there is no subsidy for the cheapest form of renewable energy, at the same time as we talk about lowering costs to consumers. We should have removed the right to appeal to the inspectorate and allowed the developers to provide packages which won support in certain parts of the country. Personally, I felt that we would have ended up with more, but somehow we have ended up with the cheapest form of renewable energy in effect receiving no support, which is a bizarre outcome. We do not want to make further such mis-steps.

On the positive side, in my local area we have offshore wind. By next year we should have 6 GW of offshore wind in this country, more than the rest of the world combined. By 2020 we should have 10 GW and, as the Secretary of State laid out recently, as did the Chancellor in the autumn statement, there is every hope that we will see a doubling of that between 2020 and 2030.

So we are making significant progress in offshore wind, and it is only because of the pipeline that we have seen the supply chain and manufacturers able to invest and lower cost.

The big task for the Secretary of State is to work out how we are going to deliver decarbonisation of the UK economy at the lowest possible cost. It became apparent to me 10 years ago at the Montreal COP—conference of the parties—that we had to get the costs down. Sadly, hand-wringing environmental concern is not widely shared among the general populace of this country, among parliamentarians or across the world. We need to get the costs down so that it becomes more politically acceptable to people to do that which is compatible with tackling the risks suggested by the science.

My advice to the Secretary of State is that in every decision she makes in this area, she needs to think about creating a framework which encourages that investment. The state is only a relatively small player. Sometimes Ministers of successive Governments in this country talk as if the state is the key driver. The state is not the key driver; it is a small player. We create the framework, then we get the investment. It is that investment in solar by private companies in China and elsewhere, partly driven by the German market, that has led to the massive reduction in costs for solar. It has been the private sector investment, with the help of the Green Investment Bank, which has helped accelerate the cost curve downwards for offshore wind. That is what we must do—create a consistent environment.

There was a lot of positive rhetoric under the Labour Government about tackling climate change, but remarkably little action. In the end, in 2010, there had not been the progress that we should have seen. In the United States, by comparison, the rhetoric has always been negative but the policy environment for investment has been more positive. That is why there has been a great deal of investment in the United States, as well as more innovation and more jobs created than in this country, even though we, through the Climate Change Act and other things, have tried to be, and appeared to be, world leaders.

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** I cannot let the hon. Gentleman's comments pass without intervening, but I will try to say this on a cross-party basis. The success in offshore wind, which is now quite remarkable and we need to keep it going, was built on the back of the pipeline that was set up during the period of a Labour Government. That Government—I was an Environment Minister at the time—put in place things such as the £60 million investment in the ports facilities that is now allowing Siemens to carry out manufacturing in this country, and gave the go-ahead for the licensing.

**Graham Stuart:** The hon. Gentleman is right to make those points. Quite a lot of the progress that has been made in the past five or six years was built on that, but in the 13 years of Labour Government remarkably little progress was made. If we compare the investment environment in renewable and other green technologies in the United States, despite all the negative rhetoric, with the investment there has been in this country, we do not come out all that strongly.

The second challenge that faces the Government, after UK decarbonisation, is helping others to fulfil their national contributions to the INDCs and to build

confidence at each national level to go further. Thus, when we have the review in five years' time, we will be able to raise the ambition so that we are not heading, as now, for under 3°, but are genuinely able to head for a sub-2° world. There is a tremendous amount to be done in engaging with parliamentarians. I should declare an interest as the chair of GLOBE International. Colleagues from across the Chamber attended the summit of legislators in Paris the weekend before last. We need to engage more with parliamentarians. That is equally true in Parliaments such as ours where, despite today's attendance, there are remarkably few colleagues with much interest in or knowledge of the subject matter. We have to engage more people so that they take more interest and ensure that we get the frameworks that deliver the investment. There is a huge role for the UK to play in developing countries through climate diplomacy and work with GLOBE and others to make sure that we engage with these parliamentarians, who, after all, pass the laws, set the budgets, and hold Governments to account. That is certainly what GLOBE aims to do through its chapters around the world.

I want briefly to say something about flooding, following my earlier intervention on the Environment Secretary. The threat to the Humber is real and growing, with rising sea levels. Last December, we saw a bigger surge than in 1953. If the wind direction and other factors had been slightly different, there would almost certainly have been loss of life. This is a growing issue and we need to find a long-term solution. My personal thought is if we leave it to Governments, who have to decide between investment in schools, hospitals and so on, and long-term investment in flooding, they always have a tendency, when not under the shadow of a recent flooding disaster, to cut back that long-term investment. Would it not be better to set a regulatory standard on which we could rely by handing it over to water companies, whose job is to borrow money from the international markets and invest for the long term at the lowest possible cost, to deliver an agreed standard? If we had a statutory standard with a duty placed on those bodies to deliver, and all the water tax payers of the country picking it up, we would not only save the Chancellor from the cost hitting the Exchequer directly, but could have in place lower-cost intervention, to an agreed standard, for the long term, and stop having these fervent and heated debates every time we have a flood disaster, which, given climate change, is likely to happen more often in future.

1.54 pm

**Edward Miliband** (Doncaster North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), who plays a very important role in the GLOBE organisation of parliamentarians. This debate comes at a timely moment after the Paris agreement, and after the tragedy of the floods that we have seen. I know that many hon. Friends want to talk about the effects on their constituencies, so I will try to keep my remarks reasonably brief.

I want to focus on the question of what the Paris agreement means for UK domestic policy. In doing so, I praise the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, who played an important role in the talks. She was the host of the high ambition coalition between developed and vulnerable countries, and her office was

[*Edward Miliband*]

its headquarters. She deserves credit for the very constructive role that she played. Having said that, when I listened to her statement yesterday, I felt, while I do not want to be unfair to her, that her position was somewhat to say, “Everything has changed and nothing has changed.” In other words, internationally everything has changed, with high ambitions, zero emissions and all that stuff, but for the UK things are the same as before. I want to make the case that that cannot be right, for four reasons, three of which are to do with the agreement itself.

First, on 1.5°, no previous agreement has enshrined a commitment to try to commit to

“efforts to limit temperature increase to 1.5 C.”

This is a higher ambition than there has been in any agreement before. The Secretary of State knows that, because she was one of the people who helped broker the agreement. The reason it was brokered is very interesting: it was because of the case put forward by countries like the Marshall Islands that will disappear with warming of more than 1.5°. Some people fear that the high ambition coalition was a ruse to break up the G77 and China grouping in order to put pressure on the Chinese to get an agreement. I do not believe that it was a ruse. However, we cannot just say, “Our domestic policy will not change,” because if we suggest that our attitude to a 1.5° agreement is the same as to a 2° agreement, countries like the Marshall Islands will conclude, “Hang on a minute—were these people serious after all?”

The Committee on Climate Change picked up on this point in its release yesterday, saying that it would make it even more important—I am paraphrasing somewhat but I do not think I am misrepresenting it—that we met its recommendations on carbon budgets, and that it might be the case that further steps should be taken. It said that it would come back to the Secretary of State on that in early 2016. I would be interested to hear what she thinks are the implications of this more exacting target—because it definitely is more exacting.

**Caroline Lucas:** The right hon. Gentleman is making a very strong case, which I appreciate. Surely the difference that 1.5° makes means that we need to think again about aviation expansion. In yesterday’s aviation statement, which came right after the climate statement, nobody even mentioned climate, and yet aviation is one of the fastest-growing sources of greenhouse gas emissions.

**Edward Miliband:** When we were in government, I played one part in the rather unhappy saga that is Heathrow. In response to the demand that we should approve Heathrow, I pushed for a separate target for aviation emissions. Of course that must also be looked at as part of the 1.5° target. There cannot simply be unconstrained expansion of aviation. The hon. Lady makes a good point.

Secondly, the agreement contains not just the 1.5° aim but a long-term goal of zero emissions. When I asked the Secretary of State about this yesterday, she said that she was happy pursuing the existing targets in the Climate Change Act. I think that those targets are very important, because I helped legislate for them, and I am very happy that she wants to make sure that we meet them. However, when I was Climate Change Secretary

we had not had a global agreement for net zero emissions. We cannot possibly say, “We’ve got this global commitment to zero emissions in the second half of the century but it has no implications for UK domestic policy.” Of course we have to look at what it means for the UK.

My case to the Secretary of State, which I hope she will consider—I am not asking for an answer today—is that when the Energy Bill comes back to this House in the new year she amends it to ask the Committee on Climate Change to do something very simple, which is to look at this issue and make a recommendation to Government about when we should achieve zero emissions. That would do a number of things. It would send a cross-party message that Britain is determined to be a climate leader; the Secretary of State has talked eloquently about the impact that the Climate Change Act had, with cross-party support. It would also reduce, not increase, the costs of transition, because it would provide a clear trajectory to business and, indeed, to future Governments.

I say to Conservative Members, who have understandable concerns, that it would be supported by business. I am not the most radical person on this issue. The most radical people are, believe it or not, Richard Branson, Paul Polman of Unilever and Ratan Tata. They want not just what I am suggesting, but something much more radical—they want zero emissions by 2050. Perhaps that is what the Committee on Climate Change will concede, but my approach is much more pragmatic, as is that of the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart). Let us not pluck a figure out of the air—such as 2050—without having the experts look at it; let us look at what the implications of the global goal of zero emissions are for the UK. That is a very reasonable suggestion.

**Graham Stuart:** I agree with everything the right hon. Gentleman has just said about aiming for zero carbon. Does not the involvement of Unilever, Virgin and other businesses show that, if leadership and certainty is given, the investment conditions will be such that we will be able to get the money flowing, as I said in my speech, and jobs will be created here? If we lag behind with uncertainty, we will not have those jobs, and pioneering businesses will not establish themselves, invest or provide jobs here. If we are going to do it, it must benefit this country to the greatest extent possible.

**Edward Miliband:** The hon. Gentleman makes an eloquent point. Every extra ounce of uncertainty raises the cost of capital. He and I have discussed that many times and that is what business people are saying, because they want that certainty. They are asking, “What are we working towards?” That is why all those leading businesses are putting it forward.

I do not want to say to the Secretary of State that this is easy, because it is a long way off, but it is an easy win for her. She would go down in history as the person who helped legislate for zero emissions, which is the ultimate backstop. When I was Secretary of State, the ultimate backstop was 80% reductions. Now we know from the global agreement that the ultimate backstop must be zero emissions at some point.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I am interested in the right hon. Gentleman’s specific policies to tackle CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. In the US, fracking is credited

by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change as being the principal reason for the reduction in greenhouse gases. Does he support shale gas exploration in the UK?

**Edward Miliband:** I am sceptical that it is the solution, because we have to get to zero carbon. It is true that replacing coal with gas has helped us reduce emissions. One of the reasons that our emissions have fallen as they have is the replacement of coal with gas, and I welcome the Secretary of State saying that she is going to phase out coal, but that is not a long-term solution. This agreement is about the end of fossil fuels. Carbon capture and storage can make a difference, but essentially we are transitioning to a world after fossil fuels.

**David T. C. Davies:** Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that if we are going to use wind power or solar, we have to have CCS, as National Grid has said; otherwise, we will not be able to match grid demand?

**Edward Miliband:** Certainly. While we are on the subject of sorry sagas, I am afraid that one of the other sorry sagas is the CCS competition, which is a recipe for how not to make policy. It was started, believe it or not, nearly 10 years ago by the Labour Government. I think it was started under Alistair Darling. I then pushed it forward before this Government cancelled the competition, then restarted it and then cancelled it again.

**Callum McCaig** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): It has been an incredibly sorry saga, but I do not think that the previous Labour Government can have anything positive to say about CCS, given how badly they treated it when it was going to be introduced at Longannet.

**Edward Miliband:** I am not saying it is glorious from anyone's point of view. What I put in place was a mechanism to provide four projects. At the time, the Conservative Opposition said, as Oppositions do, that four was not enough and that there should have been six. Then they cancelled the mechanism, then they said there would be public funding, then they cancelled that competition and then they restarted it. I think we can all agree that it has not been a glorious episode.

The third reason that I think the world has changed is the five-year ratchet mechanism in the agreement. It is a mechanism to ratchet up ambition so that the pledges that countries make meet the aspiration. At the moment, we are saying 1.5 °C, but the pledges add up to 3 °C. We argued for the mechanism and the EU said before the summit that it wanted its emissions to be reduced by at least 40% by 2030. As I understand it, "at least" meant that if there was a stronger agreement, we would ratchet up the EU ambition. I ask the Secretary of State and the Government: what is the mechanism to make that happen? The world has changed, because we have a strong agreement, and the EU said at least 40%, so how are we going to ratchet it up? In his closing remarks at the summit, President Hollande said that he wanted to raise French ambition. I would be interested to hear the Secretary of State say, either today or in the future, how she thinks we can raise that ambition.

A fourth and final thing has changed since Paris, and it relates to the Secretary of State and her role in Government. I want to say something personal to her about that. I think that the thing that has changed after

Paris is her negotiating power. Anyone who has been a Secretary of State knows that not all the decisions go their way—that was certainly true when I was Secretary of State. I am sure there have been a number of times over the past few months—obviously, the Secretary of State is not going to say this at the Dispatch Box—when she wanted a decision to go one way but it went another way. Successful Secretaries of State, however, recognise their power, and I say to her that she is empowered by the Paris agreement. She is empowered by it to tell the Prime Minister that he cannot just use warm words abroad and then not follow them through with deeds at home. She is empowered to tell the Chancellor that British business is, frankly, furious at the neglect of a crucial and growing sector of the economy. Above all, she is empowered to be the Cabinet champion for tackling climate change. If the Secretary of State does that—if she is that champion—she will get support from those Members on both sides of the House who believe in this cause, as I know that she does, too. They will support her in her endeavours.

In conclusion, whatever the Secretary of State does, we need to match the high ambition coalition in Paris with a high ambition coalition at home. That high ambition coalition has to combine trade unions, business and civil society. I do not see Paris as the end in any sense; it is merely the beginning—it gives us a new beginning on climate change. In the interests of future generations, we have to seize that moment.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. This is a short debate. Lots of people want to speak, so I have to impose a time limit of five minutes.

2.7 pm

**James Heapey** (Wells) (Con): The motion conflates two hugely important issues, both of which are worthy of debate in their own right. I will speak initially about flooding and if time allows I will move on to climate change.

Somerset is affected by both elements. We have very recent and painful experience of flooding, and we have a well developed energy industry, with everything from Hinkley Point to widespread deployment of solar and anaerobic digestion. We also have the opportunity for much more, if we can harness the power of the Severn estuary.

On flooding, after speaking about our experience in Somerset at this year's Flood Expo, I have been visited in Parliament by representatives of the Lincolnshire drainage board and the National Farmers Union, who were keen to discourage a one-size-fits-all approach to flood risk management and its funding. Cumbria has its own circumstances, just as Somerset is different from Lincolnshire, so I stress that, while I fully support the measures being delivered in Somerset, some—perhaps all—will not be applicable elsewhere. That said, the speed of the full spectrum response in Cumbria indicates that lessons have clearly been learned since our floods in 2013-14. I congratulate those on the Government Front Bench on the speed of that response and commend the emergency services, armed forces and volunteer groups that answered the call.

[James Heapey]

I was disappointed to hear the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) reflect in her opening speech that the Government have not delivered on their commitment to Somerset after the floods. Labour does not have many south-west MPs, but she is one, so surely she must know that huge improvements have been made in our region since those floods. Work on the great western mainline at Dawlish was completed within months of the floods, and the peninsula rail taskforce has since made clear, as I am sure she well knows, its plans to improve resilience both on the Somerset levels and with a new line to open north of Dartmoor.

On roads, work to improve culverts underneath the M5 has been completed, and Somerset County Council has also completed widespread improvements to the county's road network. There has also been significant investment in pumping infrastructure, dredging and the sluice network, and Sedgemoor District Council and the county council are pushing on with advanced plans for a Parrett tidal barrier. There was public money for flood relief for the villages impacted, and most importantly, there is the Flood Re scheme, which will provide real peace of mind for those who can now insure their homes. Above all, there is the support for the Somerset Rivers Authority, a very welcome strategic authority which looks after the interests of the county when it comes to flood defences.

All of that is happening just four junctions down the M5 from Bristol East. I am sure that if the shadow Secretary of State would like to come and see me, my fellow Somerset MPs and the leadership of Somerset County Council, we would be delighted to show her how much the Government have achieved in Somerset and how much more they are yet to deliver. None of that has been cheap, so I very much welcome the £2.3 billion that will be invested in flood defences over the next six years.

In the very short time remaining, I want to say that I very much welcome the Paris deal. The Energy and Climate Change Committee, of which I am a member, looks forward to discussing it with the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change tomorrow. The deal is not perfect, but it is a remarkable feat, and I congratulate the Government on the leading role they played in brokering the deal. Meeting the Paris targets will be challenging, especially as we must concurrently ensure the security of supply and the affordability of bills.

The programme for new nuclear power is very welcome, but I also congratulate the Government on their enthusiasm for offshore wind and on their success in growing the solar industry in recent years, although I appreciate that changes in the subsidy later this week may challenge that industry. The solar industry is protesting very loudly, but the Government say that the subsidy has become a crutch and the industry is now ready to go it alone. I very much hope that the Government are right, because there are a great many jobs in the solar industry in the south-west that I want to continue.

Finally, I very much welcome the Paris announcement. The Government have a real challenge in ensuring that we achieve the right domestic policies to achieve the aims, while maintaining our security of supply and keeping bills down. There are plenty of opportunities,

not least on generation, but my personal interest is very much in achieving greater management of demand, which I hope the Government will pursue.

2.12 pm

**Caroline Flint** (Don Valley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wells (James Heapey), although it is saddening how often during the past few years so many Conservative Members have had to stand up to speak about the terrible floods that have impacted on the communities they represent. It would be remiss of us if our discussion did not begin with a thought for the people of Cumbria and for others across the UK who are facing a second flooding in just six years, many of whom will spend Christmas away from their own homes.

In its latest report on adaptation progress, the Committee on Climate Change rated planning for residual flood risk to existing properties at red, both in terms of the plans in place and actual progress. As the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs admitted during her response last week, the models that we currently use need updating. I will make two points about that.

First, many people are sick and tired of being told that the floods that have wrecked their homes are one-in-100-year events, given that the severe floods we have seen during the past 10 years suggest that such erratic weather will be far more frequent than once every century. If the Government and all of us are to learn anything from that—I hope we can work on a cross-party basis on these issues—it is that the patterns of weather in the past century are a poor guide to future risk, so we must ensure that the new models we need take that into account or the public will gain false comfort about their own security.

Secondly, the Government must work across Departments. It is very worrying that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs failed to answer what I thought was a very common-sense question: "Have you had a discussion with the Chancellor about the zones that Ministers are fast-tracking for housing development?" I believe we need more homes—do not get me wrong on that—but we really must have a joined-up policy across the Government if we are to make progress both on housing and on limiting the risk to our communities. I found it very worrying that she failed to answer that question, but perhaps the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change will return to that point in her summing up. On that area, as on climate change, if we can find a better way to work together—this is not to say there should not be scrutiny—I know that Labour Members would want to work not only to make the future better, more secure and brighter for ourselves, but to show leadership in the world.

That brings me to Paris. Many positive things have come out of the Paris agreement. Whatever the importance of using "should" rather than "shall" or "shall" rather than "should", we still have an unprecedented, universally binding deal that aims to limit the temperature rise to beneath 2 °C degrees and to make efforts to stay below a 1.5 °C rise, which is very welcome. Progress has been impressive. I have to commend the Energy and Climate Change Secretary for her work on this; I must also commend our French colleagues, who despite everything

that has happened in France recently, managed to hold a vital conference for the world and to produce such a good result.

As we stand, however, the UK does not have the policies in place to deliver either the UK's 2020 renewables target or its fourth carbon budget. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) said, the Government's recent "reset" contained little to help us get there. I want the UK to develop a credible plan to deliver the 80% reduction in emissions by 2050 that our groundbreaking Climate Change Act 2008 requires. That is important in itself, but it is also a stepping stone or a foundation for moving towards net zero emissions.

In the limited time I have left, I want to say this: net zero is a huge ask. As Paris demonstrated, the world is a long way from that 2050 aspiration of 80%, and even further from that of net zero. We must therefore begin work on what a net zero carbon society should require. We must look at the research and engage scientists and engineers to make this a reality. If I learned one thing during my time as shadow Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change it was that my job was not just to talk to the converted, but to convince those for whom this is not top of their agenda that it is the reality for them, and is something of which they can be a part and from which they can benefit. Let us get down to the practicalities and, across the House, make this happen.

2.16 pm

**David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): I do not have a direct constituency interest in this subject, but I want to talk about Paris. It is a pleasure to follow the last two Labour speakers, the right hon. Members for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and for Don Valley (Caroline Flint). Much as I commend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change for the work she has done, I am afraid that my analysis of Paris is not quite so sanguine as the opinions we have so far heard.

It is not true that the INDCs add up to a 2.7 °C limit. That analysis is somewhat dishonest because it is based only on contributions continuing further on a basis to which countries have not committed themselves. The right hon. Member for Don Valley called Paris a "universally binding" agreement, but it is not binding on anybody. That does not mean it is not a good start, and we have to start somewhere, but the fundamental point is that if the world had adopted the Climate Change Act in the way the shadow Secretary of State said, we would be on track for a rise of 1.5 °C. The United Nations framework convention on climate change says that to get to the limit of a 1.5 °C rise the world must reduce carbon emissions by between 75% and 90%, while the Climate Change Act states 80%. A fair challenge would be that developing countries find it much harder to do than developed countries. I accept that China, India and such countries need more slack, so the implication is that we perhaps need to go further, which is where some of the right hon. Lady's numbers come from.

I want to spend the minutes available to me in analysing the performance of the developed countries at Paris, and particularly of the EU. One of the most startling factors about the INDCs that were put into the mix in Paris is that the EU submission for a 40% reduction over 40 years—1% a year, as it were—is 33% slower

than the reduction demanded by the Climate Change Act and its resulting budgets. That is not all, however, because if we take out the UK bit of that EU INDC, the implication is that the rate of reduction will be between 40% and 45% slower than that for the UK. That is odd: what do other EU countries find so difficult about reducing emissions that we apparently do not find difficult? Parts of the EU are developing, relatively speaking, because they are catching up in terms of GDP. It might be reasonable for countries such as Poland and Romania to be given more slack. However, the truth is that countries such as Romania have made the most rapid reductions, so that is not the issue. Romania has made big reductions, because the 1990 baseline coincided with a period when its industry needed to be sorted out.

The issue is in the developed countries such as Austria, which has increased its emissions by 20% since 1990, and Ireland, Holland, Spain and Portugal, none of which have reduced their emissions since 1990. The House has criticised the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change for a lack of ambition, yet we are part of an EU submission to a global conference that puts up with that kind of thing. I ask her to address why that can happen and what sanctions there are on those countries within the EU aegis that can stop it happening.

There are reasons why it is happening. Some countries have banned nuclear power. Some have banned carbon capture and storage. It is not that they have just not invested in it—it is illegal in some countries. CCS is illegal in Germany and it is building brand new unabated coal power stations. Its emissions are a third higher than ours per capita and per unit of GDP.

**Graham Stuart:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**David Mowat:** Yes, thank you.

**Graham Stuart:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I wonder whether he could expand further on the points he is making, because I am finding them most interesting.

**David Mowat:** My hon. Friend is always a team player. The extra minute will be put to great use.

The EU, taken collectively and not including us, failed abysmally to put forward at Paris anything close to what the right hon. Member for Doncaster North said, probably rightly, would need to be delivered to achieve 1.5°. We have to understand what the sanctions are for that, but the reasons are many and varied.

The EU got completely bogged down, as Members of this House sometimes do, in a fixation with renewables and renewables targets, rather than thinking about a carbon reduction target. Countries have put in place considerable renewables, but continue to burn coal at scale. The truth is that if we replaced coal with gas globally, it would be equivalent to increasing the renewables in the world by a factor of five. There are many points like that.

The fundamental point, which the Secretary of State will have to address in her high ambition coalition, which presumably does not contain Austria, is that we must ensure some fairness. Otherwise, places such as Redcar and Motherwell will have to get used to what has happened to those places, and that really is not right.

2.23 pm

**Tim Farron** (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Colleagues from all parts of the House are rightly praising the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change for her role in Paris. I do not have time to go into that at great length, except to say that she did indeed play a blinder, as did this country as a whole. However, it is very difficult to stack up her signing the agreement in Paris with her slashing subsidies for renewables, ending the green deal and privatising the green investment bank. The Secretary of State is perhaps, if she will forgive me, the José Mourinho of environmental politics—impressive on the international stage, woeful domestically.

Climate change is clearly not an esoteric matter, although some would consider it to be so. The impact on my constituency, throughout my county and on other places is very real. The impact on the families who will be out of their homes at Christmas—the hundreds upon hundreds of children who are not able to look forward to Christmas at home—is utterly heart-breaking. I want us to think, first and foremost, about the human cost. Among the things that I am seeking from the Government is additional support for Cumbria's health and social services to support mental health provision and counselling for people in desperate, desperate need.

I praise the response not just of the emergency services, which have been absolutely fantastic, but of organisations such as Kendal Cares and the churches in the south Lakeland area. The response can absolutely reassure us about human nature, as people who had lost almost everything went next door to help people who had lost absolutely everything.

The scale of the floods needs to be put in a numerical sense. PricewaterhouseCoopers reckons that the cost of the floods to Cumbria is £500 million. Therefore, the Government support of £50 million, although welcome, is clearly nowhere near enough. In the few moments available to me, I will set out why we need additional support and ask for it.

There are some who will dismiss people who are uninsured or underinsured as feckless. They are not feckless; they are penniless. Very often, these are people who could not afford insurance in the first place or who could afford only insurance that was cheap and, therefore, inadequate. There are many people who live in areas that flood regularly and who, therefore, could not get coverage in the first place.

The £500 grants from the Cumbria Community Foundation are utterly welcome and I praise it, but £500 will not get people far if we consider what we would lose if the ground floor of our homes flooded—all the white goods and all the other things we need to make life possible. We need support so that the £500 can be increased significantly.

We need to recognise that the £5,000 per household that the Government are promising is for flood prevention in the future, not to help people who have lost significant amounts of money right now. That money should be delivered to people in Cumbria right away and directly.

I reiterate my comment about the A591. To those who heard the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs say earlier that it was passable in a 4x4, I say that I was there yesterday and it could just about be passed on a bicycle. It is not true.

**John Stevenson:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the priorities in the long run, beyond the work on the A591 and Pooley bridge, must be to invest in and renew our road infrastructure in Cumbria?

**Tim Farron:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. He is doing an excellent job for his constituents in Carlisle. He is right that the investment now will help the county in the long run. I ask the Government to invest in making sure that the A591 is rebuilt and reopened in a matter of weeks, not months, because the current situation is devastating for the local economy.

There is also a plan on the table from Cumbria Tourism that the Government need to provide funding for right now. There is a short-term, immediate strategy—as in, today—to boost the economy up to Christmas through a marketing campaign and a medium-term campaign to make sure we get back on our feet.

Other parts of the Lake district have been hugely hit. The village of Staveley has been cut in two by the closure of its bridge. Again, we need support for that in weeks, not months. Likewise, the bridge that connects the two communities at Backbarrow, which was lost six years ago in 2009, is closed again and needs investment straight away to make sure it is reopened.

It is important that people get the message, and that the Government get out the message that Cumbria is open for business. I was in Grasmere yesterday. I cannot think of a more Christmassy place to be at this moment, but equally I cannot think of a quieter place. People are not going there because they think the place is closed. It is not. Please go there. Please will the Government get the message out that that is what people need to do?

I have a quick note about farmers. I am very concerned that the Government are planning to close the Lyth valley pumps in June. I was there yesterday and we cannot allow that to happen. Will the Government commit to funding the pumps beyond the end of June? Will they also commit to help farmers who have lost stock in tragic circumstances up and down the county? They must recognise that much of the money that goes into keeping the Lyth valley dry is about protecting infrastructure, which the hon. Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) mentioned. The A590 is often flooded as a consequence of that farmland not being drained, so the pumps are important for infrastructure too.

I want to make a final point about the long-termism that is needed. We often hear the phrase “long-term economic plan”. The problem is that we had an autumn statement recently in which the Chancellor pulled out of his hat lots of white rabbits, but none of those white rabbits were for the Department of Energy and Climate Change, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs or the Department for Communities and Local Government. The three Departments that we desperately need to be on the frontline to protect people in Cumbria are massively denuded. We have local authorities—South Lakeland District Council, Cumbria County Council and others—working very hard and doing a very good job, but with about 20% less people and resources than they had six years ago. It is therefore vital that the Government commit to providing the £500 million that PricewaterhouseCoopers has identified so that we can rebuild our communities, support our damaged people and communities, get people back in their homes, and do so quickly.

2.29 pm

**Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am speaking today, first, because we have to praise the historic agreement that was made in Paris. I commend not only my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, but the whole team and Labour Members for all the work they did in the past. We also have to send commiserations to all those poor people suffering from flooding. We are dealing with both those things in today's motion.

I felt I had to speak, coming as I do from Somerset, like my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (James Heapey). Taunton Deane was, sadly, at the heart of the terrible flooding of 11,500 hectares of land from December 2012 right up, really, until January 2014. So I really can sympathise with the poor folk of Cumbria.

In Somerset the impact was enormous. The cost for businesses, with all the knock-on effects, was estimated at £147 million, and it affected half of all the businesses in Somerset, even the ones that were not flooded, because of the road closures and things like that.

It was a once-in-a-hundred-year event, so it was not exactly expected, and it was not just a result of not dredging rivers, although that was one of the things that made a difference. The rivers Parrett and Tone had not been dredged during the 1990s—and I am afraid I level that at our friends in the Labour party because it was under their Government that the dredging stopped.

The flooding was also caused by a combination of many other things, including increased run-off from the urban areas around Taunton. But whether this extreme flooding was to do with climate change—that is still debateable—we clearly do have to be prepared for these events. In Somerset I am very pleased at the programme that has been put in place to set up the Somerset Rivers Authority. This has come with general agreement and much debate. A precept is to be set on everyone in Somerset and legislation will be passed to introduce it. That will then deal with the wider programme of tackling flooding in the future.

I commend the Government. They have spent £15.5 million on flood defences in Somerset, protecting thousands of properties, and have made an overall commitment of £35 million until 2021. They are taking flooding extremely seriously.

**Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): I take my hon. Friend's point about preparations. Will she join me in welcoming the doubling of investment for innovation in low-carbon technology as one of the less talked about outcomes from Paris?

**Rebecca Pow:** I thank my hon. Friend, and I know he was at Paris. I was going to mention that at the end of my speech, but I will mention it now. Nobody has so far mentioned one of the crucial aspects of this debate: the investment in science and technology to enable us to meet all these commitments so that we can get to our zero rating. With our brains and our scientists, I am absolutely sure we can do it.

The investment in flooding is money well spent, because every £1 spent on flood defences gives between £4 and £9 of benefit to the economy. So it is well worth doing.

With my environmental-agricultural hat on, and as the new chairman of the all-party group on ancient woodland and veteran trees, I want to highlight a few areas, and here I have some agreement with the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy). There are many other things we can do to mitigate the effects of climate change and extreme weather in our environment. There is the wider catchment approach. There is working with farmers and landowners to slow the flow of water into the river basins, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) will agree with me on that. There is more tree planting; I applaud the Government's commitment to plant 11 million trees—that is one for every five people. Perhaps we could plant a few more. Those trees will also help to slow the flow of water. Re-wilding is another area we could be looking at, as well as silt traps, ponds, and storage areas higher up in the valley to stop the water coming down quite so quickly.

All of those things can be, and ought to be, included, and I will put in my usual call for more grass. Grass and mixed farming economies are the way forward. Grass holds in the water as well, and sequesters the carbon. I hope that the forestry Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), will look more closely at including grass in our policies. *[Interruption.]* We may laugh at that, but this is a serious way forward and it is great for the management of the countryside.

On climate change, I commend the Government on everything they are doing. We have taken immense steps forward in securing this ambitious global deal, and we are moving in the right direction, but there is much still to do. Zero carbon emissions is a testing ambition.

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Rebecca Pow:** I would be delighted to give way to my hon. Friend from across the hills.

**Neil Parish:** The Opposition are saying that we have not made great progress on renewables, but we only have to see that in Devon and Somerset and across the west country there are huge amounts of solar panels in the fields. That did not happen under the last Government—and in fact many of our constituents complain that there are too many.

**Rebecca Pow:** My hon. Friend raises an extremely good point and we have seen the roll-out of solar renewables. We have made immense progress. Some 16% of our energy is from renewables and that is because of the steps this Government have taken. People are still buying into renewables and it has got cheaper. The cost of the panels has come down, which is why we need to remove the subsidies and put the subsidies where we can have more energy from other sources that need a bit of a boost. So I am right with the Secretary of State on her policy here.

We need to lead by example. We have been doing it, but we need to continue to do so. I am a great environmentalist, but we have to do this within the constraints of the economy, which is something this Government are dealing with at all costs. We have had a debt to deal with. We are still paying off the legacy left

[Rebecca Pow]

over. We have to be realistic about what we are doing, and we have to provide security of energy at the lowest cost to the taxpayer, so whatever we do, there has got to be a balance.

Big applause for the Government for their big step in getting rid of coal-fired power stations. If there was one single thing we could do for low-carbon energy, it was that. Applause also for Hinkley Point, obviously, which is very near my constituency. It is the biggest commitment to low-carbon energy we could possibly think of.

I shall wind up by saying we can all do our own bit at home as well. We can all buy in, like Quantock Eco, Transition Taunton, Transition Athelney, and the Somerset Wildlife Trust. We can cut our air miles, make fewer car journeys, grow our own food. We can buy into it, and we need to buy into this whole situation. We need to do it through every Government Department. We need to do it across the world. We need to do it in our own homes.

2.36 pm

**Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): First, may I apologise for my absence from my place last week? I am sure hon. Members are aware of the devastating floods we have had in Cumbria—it has been discussed during this debate. As my constituency is in Workington in Cumbria, I felt I should stay there to visit and support as many people and businesses as possible who had been affected by the floods. I welcome the Secretary of State's statement during Question Time that she intends to visit Cocker mouth on Tuesday.

I hope Members will indulge me for speaking from the heart about the events of the past 10 days or so. On the Sunday morning—nine days ago—I stood with shopkeepers and residents, shocked and horrified at seeing Cocker mouth main street under water again after only six years. Every Member here will have a high street. I ask them to imagine standing at the end of that high street with the shopkeepers, with that whole high street, from top to bottom, under water. It is shocking. After the water subsided over the coming days, we were able to assess the damage.

Flooding is not just about water. There is a lot talked about water, but water is incredibly powerful and in Cumbria it roars down the fells in the overloaded beck. It carries everything in its path. Drains back up and overflow, and oil tanks get swept away.

Last week in the village of Flimby I stood with a family on their effluent-soaked carpet. I stood inside homes in Cocker mouth that stank of diesel oil. I watched families in Workington throw decorated Christmas trees into skips. I visited the flooded village school in Brigham and went to the town of Aspatria to see more damage.

Parents are now telling me that their children are too frightened to go to sleep in case it happens again. They are frightened of the rain. It is heart-breaking.

Our community is resilient and has pulled together in an extraordinary way. I pay tribute to the local councils, the emergency services, the coastguard, mountain rescue, supermarkets that gave free food, the nuclear industry, the Kirkgate centre and so many volunteers, from Churches Together to Muslims 4 Humanity. I thank everybody throughout the country who has given money to the Cumbria Community Foundation for their generosity.

I want to pay particular tribute to Neil Banks, who works for Allerdale Borough Council. We have some flats where 34 elderly residents were trapped. They could not get out and they had no power, water or food. Neil crawled through with water and torches and gave them the help and support they needed.

One young family told me that they had bought their home because they were reassured that the floods of 2009 were a once in a 100-year or a once in a 1,000-year event. They believed that the floods were unprecedented. We have to stop using that language. The Environment Agency told me that the flood defences worked—that they did what they were designed to do. They made a big difference in some areas and to some families, but that is little comfort to the many people who have been made homeless just before Christmas.

What do we need to do? I welcome the Government's announcement about the Cumbrian floods partnership group. I urge the group to invite Cocker mouth and district chamber of trade to be a member, because it has invaluable experience to offer. I am pleased that the group is to be chaired by the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, whom I thank for coming to Cocker mouth on Sunday.

**Edward Miliband:** My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. She deserves more time to make it, so I thought I would intervene on her.

**Sue Hayman:** I thank my right hon. Friend.

The Government have said that they will fund more defences, but the costs for Cumbria alone are estimated to be £500 million, and the solutions are about so much more than building higher and higher walls. The water has to go somewhere, and if we are not careful, we will build flood defences in one place with the result that protecting one area means that another takes the water and is damaged.

We must look at our design of bridges. The bridge in Cocker mouth ended up being a dam as it became more and more clogged with debris. We need to look at planning—it has already been said that there is simply too much building on floodplains. I fully endorse the appeal that my predecessor, Lord Campbell-Savours, made last week in the other place for a complete ban on housing development on the West Cumbria flood plain.

I want to end by talking about insurance. Time and again, residents told me that, after the floods of 2009, they were either unable to get household insurance or it was offered with huge excesses—most commonly, £10,000. Now they cannot sell their homes.

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for making such a powerful speech. Does she share my concern that insurance problems also affect many small local businesses, which are struggling to make ends meet and often cannot afford the premiums?

**Sue Hayman:** I thank my hon. Friend for making that important point. We are concerned in my constituency that, if we do not do something about the problem of insurance, we will end up with abandoned streets that might as well be demolished. In fact, some local residents are so distressed that they have asked whether the Government would consider buying their houses and knocking them down because it would be cheaper and less stressful than building a flood barrier.

What help will the Government give my constituents in this position? They are honest, hard-working, decent people. Many have lost not just the contents of their homes, but their cars, and some have lost their livelihoods.

We were told that Flood Re was the answer after the previous floods, but it has been a fat lot of good to my constituents today. It is late—it is not expected to come in until next year; it is arbitrary and does not cover properties built after 2009, despite houses continuing to be built on floodplains, and it does not cover businesses. When people have insurance, the insurance companies are refusing to pay for resilience measures.

My constituents need help now. They need it quickly. Climate change is here—its effects can be seen in Cumbria. We need a Government who are serious about having a long-term strategy to prevent this from happening again. We need the money and resources to make that happen.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House that the rules on interventions exist to allow debate to happen. It is right to intervene, and it is great for certain Members to be complimented by extremely senior members of their party—that has happened to some extent on both sides of the House this afternoon—but when the clock adds an extra minute for an intervention, it does not add any more minutes to the day or to the debate. It means that someone less fortunate in their placing on the list will speak for less time. I appreciate that there are many people whom Members would like to speak for less time, and many whom they would prefer to speak for more time, but one has to be careful about how that is managed.

2.45 pm

**David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con):** I am not sure into which category I fall, although I suspect that I know.

First, I express my sympathy to all those victims of floods—Monmouthshire has been affected by flooding in the past, of course—and all those who helped with the clean-up. However, I take issue with the idea that man-made climate change has caused all that. It is unfortunate that the two issues have been mixed up.

We have had few debates about global warming and climate change. Climate change has been with us for millions of years, ever since the Earth was created. I urge the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change to ask a few hard questions of those who are frankly displaying some hysteria about climate change. In the past 2,000 years, there have been periods of warming and cooling. It was warmer during the Roman period; it got cooler in the dark ages; it was probably warmer during the medieval period than it is now, and it got cooler again until about 1680, during the so-called little ice age.

One of the first questions to which the Secretary of State should find an answer is how much of the small amount of warming that has taken place in the past two centuries—about 0.8°—is down to man-made carbon emissions and how much is due to natural factors, such as the warming that must have taken place as a result of coming out of the little ice age.

**Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con) *rose*—**

**David T. C. Davies:** I have asked that question on many occasions and nobody could give me an answer, but I think that a former Minister is about to do so.

**Richard Benyon:** Ninety-five per cent. of climate scientists seem to suggest that man-made climate change is the problem. Many of us would like my hon. Friend to be right in his scepticism because that means that everything will be okay. Unfortunately, 95% of climate scientists, such as those we met at the Royal Society, disagree with him.

**David T. C. Davies:** I take issue with my hon. Friend. The 95% or 97% figure is floated around often, and I have done some research on it. It appears to have come from the Zimmerman/Doran survey, which was sent out to 10,257 potential respondents, who claimed to be climate scientists. Only 77 responded and 75 said, “I’m a climate scientist and it’s all down to man.” [*Interruption.*] If any other hon. Members know where the figure came from, they are welcome to let me know.

The IPCC’s most recent summary for policy makers has also put out some misleading statements. Page 17 of the “Summary for Policymakers 2013” states that it is extremely likely that more than half of the increase in global average temperatures from 1951 was caused by man. However, of that 0.8° figure, only about 0.5° comes from the second half of the 20th century. That means that, if the IPCC is correct, only just over 0.25° out of 0.8° was caused by man. That means that more than half is due to other, more natural factors.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change may also like to ask about the lack of firm correlation between the increases in temperature and those in carbon emissions. Even in the past 200 years, there has been a sharp increase in carbon dioxide, but there has not been a sharp increase in temperatures. They have gone up and down. They were going up between 1910 and 1940 and they were going down markedly between 1940 and 1977, leading many to believe that we were on the brink of another ice age. From the mid-1970s until 1997, temperatures were rising, as were carbon emissions, but from 1997 or 1998 until now, there has been a sharp increase in CO<sub>2</sub> but no increase in temperatures. We may wish to ask why that is.

I have had meetings with the Royal Society and the Met Office, and I recently asked that question of Professor Jim Skea—a lead author on the IPCC—in a public meeting at the House of Commons, chaired by Lord Deben. I asked why there had been no increase in temperatures for the past 17 or 18 years, and he said that that was statistically insignificant. That is a fair comment. He was not trying to say that this is about oceans or because the volcanoes are cooling, or any of the other many theories; he said that it is statistically insignificant, and he may have a point. However, if the past 17 years of no increase in temperature are statistically insignificant, why are the 27 or so years before that when there was an increase in temperature so statistically significant that we have to go ahead with all sorts of policies that will have a massive impact on homeowners and businesses in the UK?

Finally—I do not think anyone will be kind enough to intervene on me, although if someone wishes to, I shall be more than happy—

**Tim Farron** *rose*—

**Rebecca Pow** *rose*—

**David T. C. Davies:** Thank you! I have been waiting. I will give way to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) because I always prefer to give way to the Opposition—it is more fun.

**Tim Farron:** All Members of the House appreciate scepticism, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's scepticism is sincere. The problem is that if he spreads that kind of nonsense, he provides people with an excuse not to take action, and gives comfort to those who want us to do nothing about the biggest challenge facing humanity.

**David T. C. Davies:** I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's kind words—I think—but I am just trying to raise questions. If he wants me to go to my constituents and try to sell policies that will push up their energy bills and make it more likely that some of those in the manufacturing industry will be out of work, I must have answers to questions that have not yet been provided. Why has there been no warming since 1997? Why is there no correlation over the past few hundred years? What percentage of 0.8° is down to natural factors? Those questions are important. Of the CO<sub>2</sub> that has gone into the atmosphere, why has nobody queried the fact that less than 5% is man-made? People talk about CO<sub>2</sub> as some sort of pollutant, but it is a perfectly natural gas and most of it is generated naturally from the earth and the sea.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): We can all talk in different debates about different views on what causes climatic change, but that is no consolation to the people of Cumbria who want to know when their insurance companies will pay up. That is the immediate problem.

**David T. C. Davies:** The people of Cumberland are right to want to know that, but the flooding should not be blamed on something that is unproven when the impact of changes that we make will affect people across the UK. Opposition Members were the first to complain about policies that have pushed up energy prices and made it more difficult for manufacturers such as those in the steel industry to make a profit. Some manufacturers, such as those in Redcar, have recently closed, partly because of those high energy costs. With all due respect, I say to the Secretary of State that Opposition Members will not support her policies if they lead to an increase in energy prices. She will be attacked by the Opposition when steel and other manufacturing plants close, and she will be attacked for causing fuel poverty.

**Rebecca Pow:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**David T. C. Davies:** I cannot at the moment. Aid agencies talk about trying to drive up living standards in the third world, but they are making it harder for African villagers to get access to cheap electricity from coal. Environmentalists talk about the importance of reducing carbon dioxide emissions, but they are totally opposed to nuclear power. They talk about wanting

more wind power, but they are totally opposed to fracking for gas, which is necessary if we want nuclear energy. There is a great deal of inconsistency and many unanswered questions, and I ask the Secretary of State to respond to them.

2.53 pm

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Given recent controversies about the way that I have addressed other hon. Members, I will say only that the speech by the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) was enthusiastic, and I will not refer to its content.

On behalf of my constituents, I want to express solidarity with the people of Cumbria and other areas, and across the bay into Lancaster, because of the dreadful situation that they have been in over the past week. I pay my respects to, and thank, the many agencies that have genuinely pulled out all the stops to help people at this difficult time, from national agencies to community organisations and individual members of the community who have pulled together.

I also give my heartfelt thanks to fellow parliamentarians. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) made a magnificent speech and she is doing a wonderful job for her constituents at this difficult time. Despite really challenging conditions, The Bay radio managed to keep broadcasting and effect an emergency service throughout that period, and I am thankful to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) for reminding me of that.

The debate on responsibility and past fault is valid, and it helps us to understand what has gone wrong in public policy and what has worked. However, it only goes so far, and it is important that the House focuses on what has been deficient and what can be done in future to make it better. In that sense, I hope that Ministers will have the courage to assess the issue dispassionately. Where they identify that the current trajectory is insufficient, I hope they will take the difficult steps of arguing with their colleagues to put those things right for the future. They owe it to the people of Cumbria and the north-west who are suffering so badly, but also to the whole country, to ensure that it is recognised that these floods will not happen only once in 100 years. It makes a mockery of Government science if we cling to that description, given the prevalence of such events in recent years.

In the time I have left I want to push for answers and further action on specific issues in my area regarding what happens next. In 2009 Furness was badly hit by floods, and some homes are still suffering from the six-year process to get back on their feet, and the difficulty of getting insurance. This time we were more fortunate, but transport links were affected when the A roads at both ends of my constituency were flooded and became impassable. That occurrence is all too frequent in that area, not simply because of adverse weather conditions, but because of accidents. I urge the Environment Secretary to speak to the Transport Secretary and agree to reassess the A590 and areas that are flooded such as Levens and Lindale, and to make anti-flooding measures investment priorities. Such measures are really needed and could genuinely be a matter of life or death, given the vital health services that we often have to access across Morecambe bay.

I call on South Lakeland District Council to reopen the issue of building on floodplains in Ulverston and other areas. It has set its face against such a reassessment, but surely these events will give them the courage to think again. Finally, let me add to the message from the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron). I have been contacted by Anita Garnett of the Ulverston Brewing Company, who passed on the huge concern from local pubs because people are not visiting at this vital time. South Cumbria and Furness remains open for business, and that message must go out loud and clear.

2.58 pm

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) asked for evidence for his constituents. A quick check on Google shows that the NASA site states that the five-year average for global temperatures is rising by 0.75% a year, and that the 10 warmest years on record have all occurred since 2000. That may help.

**David T. C. Davies:** Does my hon. Friend think that Jim Skea, an IPCC lead author and world renowned expert on climate change who spoke recently at the House of Commons, is wrong about the hiatus, as is the Met Office?

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I do not know Mr Skea, but I do know of NASA. And I have another minute on the back of that intervention, which I appreciate.

There has been a fourfold increase in extreme weather events since the turn of the 19th century, and we have all seen the terrible scenes affecting homes, businesses and farmers and the devastation as the water recedes. In my constituency, the town of Pickering has suffered devastating floods four times in 10 years. The Secretary of State joined me in opening an innovative scheme there called Slow the Flow, which other Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow), have mentioned. This involves upstream attenuation measures, bunds, the planting of 60,000 trees, dealing with timber debris and the restoration of wetlands, all of which will help matters upstream. I urge the Secretary of State to look at this as a model for future activity.

Our television screens have been dominated in recent weeks by the flow of migrants across continents. Perhaps this is a warning of the much greater population movements ahead if we do not tackle climate change. It is a threat to our lives and our livelihoods and to national, global and economic security. I welcome the Secretary of State's efforts in Paris. She showed great leadership in getting together 190 nations in a single unanimous agreement. There are difficult choices ahead, and I do not envy Ministers who have to make tough decisions many years in advance amid the many voices and choices.

Credit where it is due, the UK has a proud record on climate change. In the climate change performance index, the UK is No. 2, behind only Denmark and way ahead of most other western countries. We had the world's first green investment bank and the world's first tidal lagoon, and we are a world leader in offshore wind. We have trebled renewable energy production to 19%, but we have much more to do. The energy performance of our housing stock needs to be improved. We need to

replace the complex, defunct and ineffective green deal. We also need to invest further in renewables and energy storage.

**Neil Parish:** My hon. Friend talks about the insulation of homes, and we need to do a lot more for solid wall properties. Many of the rural areas in our constituencies have such properties, but a lot of the green deals simply do not stack up as a result of the extra cost involved in the insulation of solid wall properties.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I absolutely agree. We need a new scheme. Owing to the demographic of our housing stock, we have some of the least energy-efficient housing stock in Europe.

We must also be pragmatic. Only 7% of our energy comes from renewables today, and fossil fuels will be part of the mix for the foreseeable future. There is an MI5 maxim that we are only four meals away from anarchy. We are probably only two dark days and nights away from anarchy, too. Natural gas is the cleanest fossil fuel, and we have to keep the lights on.

**Ian Lavery** (Wansbeck) (Lab): There has to be an understanding that shale gas—natural gas—is a fossil fuel, and that if we continue to burn it in ever-increasing amounts to replace the coal-fired power stations without carbon capture and storage, we will never hit the limits that we have just agreed in Paris only a week ago.

**Kevin Hollinrake:** I will come to that point shortly.

Let us look at the situation in the US, which is the second biggest emitter of carbon dioxide. According to the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the US has made great progress on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and an important reason for that is its production of shale gas. Environmental campaigners such as Stephen Tindale of Climate Answers and the Labour shadow energy Minister, Baroness Worthington, have expressed support for fracking as a way to reduce carbon emissions but, crucially, only in conjunction with investment in carbon capture and storage and low-carbon energy generation, storage and distribution.

There is a shale gas application in my constituency. Having heard both sides of the debate over many months, I decided to visit Pennsylvania, where fracking has happened, to see whether it is possible to do it safely and in a way that does not industrialise the countryside. I believe that that is possible, but we need to paint a picture for local people to show them that. At the moment, we are losing the PR war with those who are simply against fossil fuels per se. Fossil fuels are going to remain part of the mix.

Our regulations are strong—they are certainly much stronger than those in the United States—but I believe that we need a lead agency and independent supervision of the regulations. I also believe that we need a local plan, so that residents can see how their area will change or, as I believe, not change. In my constituency, there are already 10 conventional gas well sites, and most of the residents do not even know where they are. The local producers say they will need another 10 more sites and, crucially, 950 wells. That scares people, but 10 more sites are relatively easy to screen. In my

[Kevin Hollinrake]

constituency, there are hundreds of pig and poultry farms whose visual impact is much greater than that of a fracked well site.

We must win the argument publicly, so that people can see that fracking will not change the nature of their countryside and that it can be done safely. We must proceed cautiously. We must produce the evidence, and ensure that the public have full access to that evidence, if we are to win the argument. We are in an age of wonderful technology and we can paint a picture through computer-generated images and time-lapse photography to show people how it is possible to move towards a much cleaner source of fossil fuels and to provide an important bridge to a carbon-free future.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. My prediction about time not standing still during interventions was, I am afraid, correct. I shall now have to reduce the time limit to four minutes.

3.6 pm

**Callum McCaig** (Aberdeen South) (SNP): Floods are clearly devastating at any time, but never more so than at this time of year. We have heard a number of eloquent speeches about the devastation that the floods have wrought, but we also need to remember that we are in a fortunate position, as a rich advanced nation, in that we can afford to rebuild, to rehouse and to protect those who are affected by flooding. Those who are affected by climate change in other parts of the world will not be so fortunate.

For me, the stand-out aspect of the Paris agreement was the \$100 billion for the mitigation of climate change. That will allow the poorest nations access to the finance they need to develop in a way that will allow the planet to be protected. It will also give us the opportunity to lock in low carbon emissions without locking in poverty. That is fundamental to the way in which we deal with what has rightly been described as the greatest threat that humanity is facing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (Calum Kerr) mentioned the Scottish Government's climate justice fund, and we as a party are rightly proud of that. This is not a devolved matter, but we have sought to put our money where our mouth is. That money has to be seen as an additional contribution, however; it cannot be taken out of the pot because of what we have done. That needs to be respected nationally and repeated internationally.

We have had many debates in this place on the changes that have been made to the renewables obligation and to the green economy more widely. It disappoints me to state that our target in Scotland of a 100% renewable electricity generation is under threat because of changes to the renewables obligation and the prevarication over contracts for difference. There has also been much slower progress over heat, which represents a bigger challenge in relation to carbon reduction. It is pleasing that there will still be some form of support through the renewable heat incentive, but in the context of what we are dealing with following Paris, the £700 million that has been taken out seems like yet another short-sighted move.

Speaking of short-sighted approaches, the decision on carbon capture and storage is one of the worst that we have heard, and I will continue to bang the drum about that. There has been prevarication over CCS for a number of years. This process just needs to be done. We are talking about spending billions of pounds to prevent the symptoms, but we are not trying to tackle the cure. If we were to put £1 billion into carbon capture and storage, the reduction in the impact of flooding would be a potential game changer. Using carbon capture and storage is the most straightforward way of dealing with the matter. It also has the least impact on our economic model. It allows us to extract the fossil fuels that we discussed—shale, North sea oil or whatever—without having to invest. We will still have to invest in other technologies, but this gives us an opportunity.

**Barry Gardiner** (Brent North) (Lab): Did the hon. Gentleman share a sense of comedy yesterday when the Secretary of State spoke on this matter? She said:

"I believe that CCS is going to play an important part in decarbonising in the future".—[*Official Report*, 14 December 2015; Vol. 603, c. 1297.]

She then went on to say that, just for now, the Government are cutting the £1 billion subsidy towards it.

**Callum McCaig:** It was comedy of the blackest sort. It is short-sighted and it does not take into account how we can target the reduction at industry, as has been ably suggested.

The action here falls very short of the rhetoric, and very, very short of what is required to deliver and protect those people, both at home and abroad, from the impact of climate change. We need to up our game. It is time that we reset the reset button. I am happy if we in the Scottish National party join the high ambition coalition of the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) here in the UK. The SNP is more than ready and willing to play our part in achieving that ambition.

3.11 pm

**Luke Hall** (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): May I associate myself with those who have expressed their condolences to the victims of the floods? I congratulate the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) on such a powerful speech on behalf of her constituents: I can certainly picture myself at the bottom of my high street in such a situation.

I am one of many MPs across the House who regard climate change as one of the most serious long-term economic and environmental threats that this country and our world face, although I had not quite appreciated the threat it posed to haggis, which was mentioned earlier.

Earlier this month, I, along with other Members, attended the GLOBE conference in Paris, where legislators, leading members of the judiciary, policymakers, the scientific and academic community, and business and civil society gathered to discuss the challenges in Paris and the post-2015 agenda.

We heard contributions from Deputy Jean-Paul Chanteguet, president of GLOBE France, Jacqueline McGlade, chief scientist on the United Nations environment programme, Helen Clark, former President of New Zealand, Senator

Ed Markey, and legislators from around the world. A cross-party delegation of MPs from the UK included members of the Energy and Climate Change Committee and the Environmental Audit Committee. We were ably led by the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies). When the Secretary of State sums up, perhaps he will mention the contribution of the GLOBE conference to the debate.

The feeling that I gauged during the conference was one of cross-party consensus and support for the ambitious deal in Paris. The presence of such a strong delegation from the UK was vital. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), who chaired the conference so ably.

The commitment by 195 nations to attempt to cut greenhouse gas emissions to a level that will limit the global average temperature is truly historic. Inaction on climate change would cost us a great deal more than shifting to a decarbonised, climate-friendly way of life. I particularly welcome the legally binding, regular reviews and submissions of emission reduction targets. It is important that those countries will now have to come together regularly to review their climate plans and collectively ensure that the necessary action is taken to tackle climate change.

Countries being legally obliged to make new post-2030 commitments to reduce emissions every five years from 2025 is a welcome step forward. I also welcome the \$100 billion fund from developed economies to help emerging and developing nations decarbonise their energy mix, which will provide welcome support to aid the transition from burning fossil fuels to clean energy sources.

Decarbonisation will have to be a key part of the UK's fiscal policies—lip service will not be enough. I am confident that the Secretary of State agrees with me on that point.

**Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con):** My hon. Friend is making some powerful points about the importance of the climate change deal in Paris. Bringing it down to a local level, where he and I both live, does he agree that it is incredibly important that, this month, the snappily named “Severn River Basin District: flood risk management plan” is published, which will be on top of local flood resilience plans, because he and I both know the devastating impact that climate change has had on the River Severn and on our local areas?

**Luke Hall:** I thank my hon. Friend for that point. I completely agree with him about the importance of that plan. I will do everything I can to help him work on it in the future.

I also thank the Secretary of State for her assurances during that conference that she would do everything possible to secure an ambitious deal. I commend her for playing such an important role in the successful negotiation. The deal sets out a clear long-term goal of near net zero emissions by the end of the century, and it represents a huge step forward in securing the future of our planet.

3.15 pm

**Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab):** It is a privilege to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall), who is a fellow member of the Environmental Audit Committee.

I will take leadership as my theme today. I am talking about the leadership that has been shown during the negotiations not just by the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change but by the whole team that was out there. I was delighted to meet up with Lord Nick Bourne, an old colleague of mine from Swansea institute, and to urge him to show that leadership. The outcome was good, but I am sure that the Secretary of State and her team will agree when I say that it is as nothing unless we now rise to the challenge that it has set up. We are looking at 3.5° to 3.7° based on our current trajectory of global warming. If all the actions within the current package are delivered, we may be able to achieve 2.5°, or even 1.5° if we ratchet up our actions every year or every five years. The scale of this transition is huge; it is enormous. We cannot base it on our current plans, so the leadership that has been shown should be commended. We now need that leadership to turbo-charge what we do both here within the UK and in our international negotiations.

Once again I applaud the leadership that has been shown on the ground in areas of flooding, including in Hawick in Northern Ireland, in Wales, and in Workington, the scenes from which were described in the remarkable and emotional words of my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman). I was in Workington back in 2009, after what we thought was the worst flooding we had ever seen. That came on the back of the 2005 floods, and here we are again. Back in 2009, more than 2,200 properties and 250 farms were affected, 25 bridges were closed, and 40 waste treatment works were closed—again there is that issue of resilience—and here we are again.

In response to the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies), whom I love dearly, I have to say that he is completely wrong. We are not talking about this one event being down to climate change. It does not matter whether we are talking about the traumatic incidents in Cumbria, Scotland, north Wales, Ireland, Bangladesh, or the Maldives, it is a pattern of climate change that is unarguable and we must deal with it.

In the short time available, I must say to the UK Government that, if we are to make the Paris commitments work and go further, we really need a step change now. We need to go further on the international stage. I strongly urge the Minister and her team to go back and look at what we are doing at an EU level. I suggest that we are not being ambitious enough to meet that 1.5° or 2° target. In terms of this country, the right hon. Lady has admitted that we have a policy vacuum at the moment, specifically in regard to the closure of various schemes. I will not argue the pros and cons of it, but we have a policy vacuum none the less, whether it relates to energy efficiency in homes, the type of clean green energy that we produce, demand reduction, or residential or commercial properties. We are consistently being told by business people and others that there is a policy vacuum in all those areas.

**Neil Parish:** Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that a tidal lagoon in Swansea would be a very good way to produce tidal energy, and that we could use that idea all around the United Kingdom?

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** My admiration for the hon. Gentleman has gone up hugely, because I was not going to be able to get in that point. He is right. We were a

[*Huw Irranca-Davies*]

little frustrated by the lack of announcements on the Swansea Bay lagoon and strike prices in the autumn statement. Let us now see a commitment that will take forward not only the Swansea Bay lagoon, but the Cardiff Bay lagoon and all the ones that come after it. One of my recommendations to the Secretary of State would be this: let us use this as an opportunity to create jobs and to be a world leader so that we can export that technology, that know-how and those jobs. It is there for the taking. When Stern warned us about the challenges of climate change, he told us to make the early investment to save money down the line. That is what we must now do.

**Rebecca Pow:** I have enormous respect for the hon. Gentleman, the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee. I wonder whether you might want to comment on this: with the plan you are suggesting, we need much more—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. I am not suggesting anything. It is “he” or “the hon. Gentlemen”, not “you”.

**Rebecca Pow:** I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Will the hon. Gentleman comment on whether we need more detailed inspection within Government Departments so that we are all doing our bit? We have a green investment strategy in the Department for Transport, but what about all the other Departments? Should we be working together more?

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** The hon. Lady, who is so committed on these issues, is absolutely right. The approach needs to be cross-departmental and rigorous, and it needs a step change. We have been trying to turn the supertanker around slowly, but Paris says that that is not fast enough. Lord Deben, the chair of the Committee on Climate Change, has said that we need to do more. We heard recently from the head of the National Audit Office, who said that we need joined-up thinking and leadership in government. The hon. Lady is absolutely right.

One of the biggest commitments the Government could make—the Secretary of State and her team would have my support—is fully to accept what the Committee on Climate Change says about the outcomes of Paris. It said in its June report that we need to go further and faster. We will now need to go faster again and deliver more. There are opportunities with that. I ask the Secretary of State to accept that—I ask her to do it and get on with it, and in fact go beyond it if she can. She should look at how we can do that. What technologies should we invest in? Where will the private sector put its money? What do we do with the green investment bank? How does it play its part?

The Secretary of State should also fill the current gap from the fourth carbon budget. That is to do with leadership. It is great coming back from Paris with excellent commitments—they are better than many people were expecting. The UK played a leadership role there. We now need to take it to a whole other level. Paris means that it is not business as usual for us or for many other nations. Let us keep on leading and let us go further. I look forward to the Secretary of State saying how we will do that.

3.22 pm

**Tom Elliott** (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): It has been an interesting debate and it is interesting to follow the hon. Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies), who spoke about his views on climate change.

We have talked a lot about the Paris deal. We have that relationship and what will turn out to be an historic agreement. I want to highlight another historic agreement—one made between the Northern Ireland Government and the Republic of Ireland Government back in 1950, which also included the Westminster Government. At that time, there was an agreement between the three Governments to have a hydropower station in the Republic of Ireland using the water that flowed from Lough Erne.

I am disappointed that the motion does not mention Northern Ireland at all. At least 16 roads are closed in my constituency and huge amounts of damage have been done to businesses and homes. Like other constituents in Cumbria, Scotland and other places, a number of my constituents will not be in their homes for Christmas, which is a demoralising situation. Local businesses—family-owned businesses—have lost more than £100,000 of stock and a lot of their Christmas business. That is devastating for them and for me, and it might actually put some of them out of business.

The farmlands, which have been highlighted, are where the agreement between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland come into play. The levels of Lough Erne have not been investigated since 1950. We need that historic agreement to move on and we need a review of it. We need to ensure that some of the actions that took place at that time—in other words, dredging Lough Erne and ensuring that the levels were safe and reasonable—need to be carried out once again.

I appreciate that that is a devolved matter, but I am asking the UK Secretary of State to speak to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Minister in Northern Ireland to see whether there is flexibility and whether another agreement is needed from Westminster, just as there was in 1950. I note that the Secretary of State indicated a special finance scheme or a special scheme for farmers. I wonder whether there will be a knock-on effect, perhaps through the Barnett consequentials, to help farmers in Northern Ireland to clean up. It is important that we get assistance just as people in Cumbria in England and other places in Scotland will get assistance.

My colleagues from Scotland talked about the situation there. Unlike the Departments in Scotland, Departments in Northern Ireland have not dealt with the situation as well. People and staff on the ground have been very effective in helping businesses, domestic homes and farmers, but the Departments have not been effective at the wider aspect of planning. That is a key aspect. We do not want a repeat of what has happened this year. We had the same situation in 2009 that is being repeated six years later. We do not want another repeat in another four or six years.

I am appealing to the Secretary of State and the Government to do all they can to ensure that this does not happen again and, in my case, to liaise with officials and Ministers in the Northern Ireland Departments.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. While we had time limits of four or five minutes, several Members spoke for seven or eight minutes. They know who they are. Those who are still to speak can feel aggrieved—they can take it up with them and not with me. I therefore have to reduce the limit to three minutes.

3.26 pm

**Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab):** I speak as the Member of Parliament for Lancaster and Fleetwood, a constituency that was affected by Storm Desmond and recent flooding. Although we are not in Cumbria, I urge hon. Members to remember that the effects of the flood went beyond those county boundaries.

I pay tribute to the role of The Bay, our local commercial radio station, which continued broadcasting. For many people, it was their only source of communication with the outside world for four days because we lost power. The station managed to get back online despite being flooded and despite power cuts to keep local people informed.

A lot has been said about the effects of the flooding of the city centre in Lancaster, but I want to say something about the impact on the Lune valley, a beautiful part of Lancashire that has a big farming community. I thank Jenny Walmsley, the chair of the Caton-with-Littledale parish council, who helped to introduce me to many more people I did not already know in that area. I welcome the news from the Government today about the support for farmers and look forward to seeing it go online.

The floods in recent weeks are consistent with what we should expect in a warming world. Met Office data show that annual rainfall has increased in the UK since the 1980s. Five out of the six wettest years on record have occurred since the start of the new millennium. That is a warning that I heed.

Businesses in my constituency have been badly affected. I pay tribute to the business people who stepped up and played a role when the water breached and flooded the city centre, including Mark Cutter, the landlord of the Robert Gillow pub. He opened up his pub and allowed people in when they were unable to return across the river after their Saturday nights out because the bridges had been hit by a shipping container. That reminds us of the force of nature. People enjoying the nightlife in Lancaster were stranded in our city centre.

Small businesses are particularly at risk from flooding and 52% of them do not have flood insurance. My fear is that that will increase in my constituency because insurance premiums will certainly increase. The Environment Agency's long-term investment scenarios recommend an optimum overall investment of around £470 million a year more than is currently being spent. Therefore, the Government need to spend £2.5 billion in the period from 2015 to 2021. That might sound like a lot of money but, frankly, the cost of doing nothing is far greater than the cost of investing in protecting our communities from floods. I have seen first hand for the first time the devastation in the area where I live. I call on the Government to support our councils as they do their best to deliver. It should not take another flood for the Government to realise their mistake. I also call on them to take climate change and flood defences seriously.

3.29 pm

**Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP):** UK Government analysis shows that global warming is expected to cause more intensive heavy rainfall events and we have to ask ourselves whether we are prepared for the ramifications of the changes in our weather.

The Government have set up a national flood resilience review in England and a report will be published in summer 2016. I hope the review will look far and wide for innovative, sustainable solutions, because it has rained before, it has flooded before and we have had reviews before. A solution will not be found by more parliamentarians navel-gazing. The cry of, "I want to make things right, just not right now" is how we fail to make things better. I hear the Government promising, over the next six years, £2.3 billion in capital funding on flood defences and I acknowledge that in 2014-15 the Government spent £171 million of taxpayers' money on flood maintenance. But just like the wee boy with his finger stuck in a dam, required as these actions are, they do not solve the problems.

We have two problems facing us. First, we are screwing up our own environment—let us be absolutely clear about that. Turning that around is a massive task that sticking plaster politics will not address, yet the Government have decided to cut investment in carbon capture and storage technology, reduce funding for solar energy and block the growth of wind energy. Secondly, we need to find a way to alleviate the flooding we now see on an annual basis. Every additional instance of flooding means more lost revenue for local businesses or damage to homes. We owe it to our constituents to meet or exceed our targeted timeframes for tackling this issue.

We must also recognise that the way we have changed the environment has left us more exposed to the risks of flooding. We should give serious consideration to reforestation as one method of assisting flood prevention. Trees catch rainfall and take water from the soil. With careful planning, they could be our first line of defence. Managed correctly, trees lead us to the next logical stage: utilising biomass boilers can maintain a closed carbon cycle with no net increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide. If all public buildings used biomass boilers and could source their fuel, primarily wood pellets or wood chips, locally, we would start to see a coherent localised industry employing local people as part of an environmentally friendly solution.

Reforestation is just one of many policies we could implement to improve our catchment management in the longer term. Contour ploughing, restoring upland bogs and reintroducing the meanders in straightened rivers are other measures we may wish to consider as we seek more permanent solutions. One change will not fix the problem, but a series of correct adjustments will help in a number of different ways. Whether it is reforestation or tackling climate change, it is time for us to be bold with our policy making and ensure that no more lives, businesses or homes are ruined by flooding.

3.32 pm

**Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op):** It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan). I speak as a former chair of Flood Risk Management Wales, responsible for adapting Wales

[Geraint Davies]

to climate change in terms of flood defences and investing the Welsh Assembly's money through the Environment Agency and partners. I will be talking about adaptation.

On Paris, I will simply say that the Secretary of State needs to look carefully at the fact that the environmental imperatives agreed in Paris are not enforceable and binding in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, on which the Government are moving ahead.

On adaptation, we took evidence from Kuala Lumpur, which was drowned in water every year until it put in storage lakes upstream and tunnels underneath. In addition to woodland and so on, we need to consider the option of major capture and diversion of rivers upstream to stop flooding. On urban drainage systems, we need to consider the use of water butts. It is not enough just to have a few bits of grass verge for absorption; all public buildings—and, arguably, all new build—should have butts. Butts store water from the roof, which is then leaked down over a period of days, rather than just swept through the sewerage system all at once. The sewerage system, of course, takes floodwater and sewage. When it all comes up through the drains, everything is ruined. We can stop that happening by capture and storage on roofs. That would save enormous amounts of money.

On housing, we have heard that not enough is being spent on defences and maintenance, so defences can give a false sense of security. There needs to be investment not only on defence but on common-sense resilience too. Raising plugs on walls, installing steps on entry into houses and waterproofing downstairs would mean that after flooding, people could get back to their normal lives. Many people die from the trauma of flooding.

On insurance, poor people cannot get insurance. There should be local government schemes for insurance. That would also incentivise local authorities not to build on floodplains, which they do. Regardless of what the Environment Agency says, a lot of local authorities just keep on building. We need to ensure that we have sufficient emergency services, including armed services. Finally, we need to ensure the ratio of cost to value—we have heard some of the ratios today, such as 4:9. We need to ensure that poor people in low-value houses are protected. In Wales, we have changed the system, so it is not just those who live in a rich property area who receive flood defence. Those who are poor are protected and can get insurance. It is vital that we invest in adaption and I wish the Secretary of State the best of luck.

3.35 pm

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in this debate as the Scottish National party spokesperson on climate justice.

The flooding caused by Storm Desmond, which affected large areas of north-west England, southern Scotland, north Wales and Northern Ireland, has had devastating effects. At a time when most of us are looking forward to Christmas and trying to be organised for the forthcoming festivities, those most severely affected by the flooding

are likely to be facing a more bleak festive period away from their homes for the imminent future, with a significant clean-up process ahead of them. Our thoughts are first with those affected and we express our gratitude to all the emergency services involved alongside communities and local councils.

This is not an isolated event, however, and over recent years there have been a number of extreme floods in the UK, both during winter and summer months. Some people have experienced floods on multiple occasions. Extreme floods have a substantial human, emotional and financial toll on the individuals and communities affected, both in the immediate aftermath and over the long term. Flooding leads to homes and businesses having to be evacuated, loss of power, and to public amenities and transport links being closed. Most tragically of all, it has resulted in a number of fatalities.

In Scotland, the Scottish Government are very aware of the impact of climate change, both domestically and globally. They have introduced pioneering policies which aim to alleviate the effects of climate change both in Scotland and in developing countries across the world. In this regard, the Scottish Government have been investing in a number of initiatives to reduce carbon emissions and Scotland is well on its way to meeting its world-leading target of a 42% reduction in emissions by 2020. We have also made significant progress on building renewable energy resources, which, as well as providing a sustainable energy supply, promotes jobs and growth.

**Patrick Grady:** Does my hon. Friend recognise the contribution the Scottish Government have made, with the announcement of the £12 million climate justice fund to be extended over the next four years? Does she agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig) on the importance of climate justice funding, including the \$100 billion a year in addition to existing aid flows?

**Dr Cameron:** My hon. Friend's intervention is timely, as I was just moving on to those very points.

The Scottish Government are aware of the importance of supporting developing countries around the world, and have been encouraging investment in their climate justice fund. In the past five years, the climate justice fund has already invested £6 million in 11 projects in four sub-Saharan African countries. In Malawi, for example, about 30,000 people now have access to safe, clean drinking water and over 100 communities have been trained in natural resource rights and management. The Scottish Government have also announced they will double their climate justice fund by pledging a further £12 million for developing countries to help lessen the impacts of climate change. This is important because it is recognised that richer countries have polluted more and for longer, and that we therefore have a responsibility to ensure developing countries can adapt adequately to climate change.

I applaud the hard work that UK Ministers, Scottish Ministers and Governments across the world put into the COP 21 agreement in Paris. I was honoured to play a small role by attending the legislators summit hosted by GLOBE International. I also had the pleasure of visiting the London Natural History Museum during recess. It got me thinking about global climate change and how it hit the dinosaurs of the past and led to their

extinction. Climate change is not new, but it is once again reaching crisis point. We must learn the lessons of the past, not be the dinosaurs of the present, and protect this world for future generations.

3.39 pm

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a brief contribution to this fascinating debate.

As many hon. Members have pointed out, just six years ago Cumbria was hit by unprecedented floods, and once again, this year, it has been hit by unprecedented rainfall. More than a month's rain fell in one day on Saturday 5 December, and main rivers across Cumbria exceeded the highest levels ever recorded. Storm Desmond led to road closures, rail disruption, school closures and loss of power supply to many homes and businesses owing to unforeseen flood damage at a substation in Lancaster, as a result of which hospitals had to work on emergency generators and Lancaster University had to declare the end of term one week early. I had my own, small experience of this: on Sunday 6 December, we had to drive to Lancaster to rescue our son from the university, which had been without power since Saturday evening. Surely power stations should be protected from flooding to prevent such disruption to our healthcare, education and business institutions. I am pleased that the Secretary of State has announced a national flood resilience review to assess our infrastructure, including electricity substations.

I want to mention the creation of a statutory duty on the fire and rescue service to respond to flooding. The Fire Brigades Union argues that a statutory duty on firefighters to attend floods would help fire and rescue services, other emergency services and the Government to plan effectively and reduce risk to life and property, and indeed such a duty has already been adopted in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The response to the recent floods has shown the emergency services, the military and the British people at their best. Communities have rallied round and helped those in need of shelter, food and clothing—they have been magnificent—but they need action and support from a Government who have failed to take the flood threat seriously.

Not only are better flood defences needed, but cuts to emergency services need to be addressed. Five fire stations in Cumbria are set to close in the latest round of money-saving measures. It sounds like a statement of the obvious, but we cannot go on cutting the fire service, while expecting it to do more and more. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) for quoting the Prime Minister's words:

“After every flood the thing to do is sit down, look at the money you are spending...and ask is it enough.”

Clearly, it is not enough. The Government's “cut first, think later” approach is failing communities blighted by flooding.

3.42 pm

**Lisa Nandy** (Wigan) (Lab): I thank hon. Members on both sides of the House who have given a voice to communities affected by flooding today. We called this debate to give those communities a voice, and Members who have spoken have done those communities proud.

Members have done something else: they have given a voice to all of us who are deeply concerned about the costs of inaction on climate change and what it will mean for the UK. There is a remarkable degree of consensus—with the exception of the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies)—about the clear link between climate change and the emerging trends in flooding. The Met Office analysis suggests that global warming at or above 2° from 1990 levels will increase the risk of extreme floods by a factor of seven. It is becoming increasingly clear that the sort of rainfall and flooding once seen as rare—as once-in-100-years events perhaps—seem to be happening more frequently. It is right that the Government have acknowledged that.

The Government's own adviser on climate change, Lord Deben, said that

“if global greenhouse gas emissions do not peak soon and start to fall, 4 or more degrees of warming could take place this century. This would lead to severe and unavoidable...flood risk”

and result in an extra 1 million homes being exposed. The Committee on Climate Change has warned that the annual cost of flood damage to the UK could increase from £1 billion to £5.6 billion by the 2080s.

In her short but moving contribution, my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) made us understand the human consequences, and as her neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), said, this is about the future. The Committee on Climate Change said that the Government's national adaptation programme lists a range of useful activity, but that it does not amount to a coherent programme. I say to Ministers today that they must urgently rectify that. My right hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) said that we need a real plan—a long-term plan, as the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) also pointed out.

We also need to recognise, as the hon. Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall) made clear in his contribution, that inaction has a cost. These are lives, homes and livelihoods that are on the line. The hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig) said that we are spending billions tackling the symptoms and not the cause. Quite frankly, we cannot go on like that.

Last week, my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) and I called for a new flood risk assessment, and I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Environment Secretary for agreeing to that. What that will not be able to do, however—given that we have to wait until 2017 for the national climate risk assessment—is fully account for the latest understanding of climate change impacts on UK flooding. I therefore ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change today whether she will bring that forward. Will there be a new national climate adaptation plan to follow those reviews?

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) said, the leadership shown in Paris must be followed by leadership at home, so I take this opportunity to ask the Secretary of State the following again. Will she take the chance presented by the Paris accord and stop the sell-off of the Green Investment Bank, and stop blocking onshore wind where there is strong local support for it? Will she take this chance to make real progress on the Swansea bay tidal lagoon,

[Lisa Nandy]

and will she find the money to fulfil the promise made by successive Governments to coalfield communities to give us carbon capture and storage, so that those communities have the chance to build the future of energy and future jobs? Will she think again, too, about the deep cuts made to the solar industry—just at the moment when it stood on the cusp of becoming economically viable?

Many Members talked about the need to take the public with us on the journey to climate safety. Just as communities such as mine in Wigan helped to build this country's prosperity through dangerous, difficult and dirty work down the coalmines, so young people in communities such as Wigan and across the country should be given the chance to build and power the future through jobs in solar, wind and CCS.

The UK team—the Department for Energy and Climate Change team and officials, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) as chairman of GLOBE International—showed in Paris this weekend just what is possible if we put our minds to something, raise our ambition and work together to build the future. In so doing, they built on a proud record of leadership shown by the UK—from 1997 and Kyoto to the Climate Change Act 2008, led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and David Miliband. Again, in 2015, I was proud to stand with 50 Labour councils around the UK that have pledged to go clean by 2050.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) said, we owe our thanks to the emergency services, the armed forces, the charities, the businesses and the individuals who are doing what they can now to help those families whose homes are under water. We owe it to them to understand the risks and to take action to prevent future flooding.

If the Secretary of State will not listen to me, will she please listen to the powerful and moving speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) about homes under water, children frightened of the rain, shopkeepers devastated and extraordinary acts of courage from members of the public? This is the courage we need now from the Secretary of State. The costs of inaction on climate change are right before us. I ask the right hon. Lady to show the leadership that we so desperately need, because the alternative is unthinkable.

3.49 pm

**The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd):** I thank the Labour party for bringing this issue to the House, and I thank all the Members who have taken part in what has been an animated and energetic debate.

The exceptional rainfall that we have seen over the past couple of weeks has led to some very distressing situations for families and businesses in parts of the country where serious flooding has occurred. The hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) did indeed speak movingly about the impact on her constituency, but the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) reminded us that, despite that devastation, communities were open for business. I thank the hon. Members for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) and for

Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (Calum Kerr) for describing the experience in Scotland. I also thank the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Tom Elliott). He reminded us to liaise closely with our Northern Ireland counterparts, which we will of course do.

Like many other Members, I pay tribute to the work of the emergency responders, including the fire service—especially in view of the example given by the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes)—and the volunteers who have worked tirelessly to return people to safety, to restore power supplies, and to clean up quickly so that people can return to their homes as soon as possible.

**Ian Lavery:** It has been said time and again how valuable and heroic the fire and rescue services have been in cases of flood, including those in not just Cumbria but Northumberland this week. Why is there so much resistance to giving them a statutory duty to carry out floodwater rescues?

**Amber Rudd:** Several other Members have made the same suggestion. All I can say at this stage is that I hope various Ministers will continue to consider it, because I share the hon. Gentleman's admiration for all the effort and work that the fire and rescue services have put into helping people.

Over the next six years, we will invest £2.3 billion in flood defence. That is a real-terms increase on the £1.7 billion that was invested during the last Parliament. The hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) made some helpful suggestions about future spending on mitigation, while the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) called for more support. I remind the hon. Lady that £60 million has already been invested in flood defences to protect Fleetwood. More than 200 schemes are currently being constructed in England, and we will deliver on our manifesto commitment to provide better protection for 300,000 more homes.

**Tim Farron** *rose*—

**Amber Rudd:** I know that the hon. Gentleman recognised the enormous effort that had gone into support for Cumbria, and that he made some additional suggestions, which I will certainly pass on to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

**Tim Farron:** I can help the Secretary of State to find some of the sources of funds that would partly satisfy my requests. Her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said earlier that one reason why a bid might not yet have been made for EU solidarity funds was the fact that they would take seven months to come through. Will she confirm that Commissioner Cretu made clear today that 10% of any award from the solidarity fund could be provided immediately to help us to carry out work such as the rebuilding of the A591?

**Amber Rudd:** I have been reliably informed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that the Department for Transport is already dealing with the matter, so the hon. Gentleman may well see some action in that regard.

**Barry Gardiner:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Amber Rudd:** I am going to make some progress now, because we are very short of time.

There is a link between climate change and an increase in extreme weather events. I do not share the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies), who always speaks with enthusiasm. Let me say to him that, while we cannot attribute every storm, drought or flood directly to climate change, all the evidence from our scientific understanding of weather systems suggests that our changing climate will lead to more intense and more frequent events. Last month, the Met Office released papers from its study of the exceptional rainfall of 2013-14. It found that, given the same weather pattern—a persistent westerly flow—extreme rainfall over 10 consecutive winter days might be about seven times more likely now than it would be in a world without man-made greenhouse gas emissions.

Of course natural influences will still be an important factor, but it is clear that the impact of climate change is already being felt, especially in vulnerable countries, which is why the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) was right to comment on the need to assist developing countries with additional funds. Unless we limit the rise in the global average temperature, we shall have to live with more extremes. That is why the global agreement that was reached in Paris this week is so important. As we heard from the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint), the French played a very important role in ensuring that it all came together.

No single country, acting alone, can hope to limit climate change. Only by acting together can we hope to succeed. With nearly 200 countries coming to an agreement, the Paris conference was a clear turning point towards a sustainable and low-carbon future. If we limit the global average temperature rise, we will limit the intensity and frequency of extreme weather such as the flooding we have seen recently.

**Barry Gardiner:** On limiting that extreme weather, the Secretary of State will recall that the Chancellor mentioned 300,000 properties whose flood risk was being reduced. Is she aware of the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management report, which has said that

“this largely moves properties from a low risk to an even lower one”?

In other words, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has asked officials to achieve the maximum number instead of the most—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order.

**Amber Rudd:** I am jealous of the time the hon. Gentleman is taking off me, and I will allow the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to respond on that point. I wish to make some progress, so that I can cover the interesting comments made by other Members.

With a global agreement, we signal to business that this is a definitive turning point. Business is crucial for delivering on our ambitions, as my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart) ably set out. He was in Paris over the weekend, leading

with GLOBE International, where he was accompanied and supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall). We know that in isolation, cuts to Britain's own greenhouse gas emissions, which comprise just 1.2% of the global total, would do little to limit climate change. Our most important task therefore is to provide a compelling example to the rest of the world on how to cut carbon while controlling costs. The hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Callum McCaig) has many spending commitments to recommend to us, but no more. In a tight spending review, he should welcome at least the increase in the renewable heat incentive budget. We are committed to meeting the UK's 2050 target. We are on track for our next two carbon budgets, and we will be setting out our plans for meeting the fourth and fifth carbon budgets next year. My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (David Mowat) questioned the fairness of the EU target of a 40% reduction by 2030, and I share his concern to ensure that it is fair. I can reassure him that we will be addressing that when we approach the effort sharing decisions next year.

We need to get the right balance between supporting new technologies and being tough on subsidies. When costs come down, as they have for wind and solar, so, too, should support. I share the enthusiasm of my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (James Heapey) for solar, but we will also always look after the bill payer. That is why I have announced that we will support and accelerate the cost reduction also being seen in offshore wind by making funding available for a further three auctions during this Parliament. That and other measures, such as supporting new nuclear and gas-fired power stations to provide a lower carbon base load, could provide us with the energy security we need to close unabated coal. We have also committed to double spending in clean energy research and development, so that by 2020 we will be spending in excess of £400 million. That is in recognition of the fact that we will tackle climate change only if we find technologies that are both clean and cheap.

**Graham Stuart:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Amber Rudd:** I am sorry, but I will not give way. As I was saying, that is the answer to the question put by the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) about ambition and to the question highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow). We will reach this ambition—the 2° is operational; the 1.5° is the aspiration—only through our plans to link with other countries in an international low-carbon energy innovation taskforce called Mission Innovation. That goes back to the leadership to which the hon. Member for Ogmire (Huw Irranca-Davies) referred, and we believe that we can achieve that.

The last Labour Government left behind in 2010 an energy security black hole: no nuclear power plants built; a legacy of under-investment; and low carbon targets and no plan to meet them. The advice of the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) never considers the consumer. In her endless recommendations to increase subsidies, it is unknown what the Opposition actually have in their plan. It is clear to Conservative Members that a responsible national energy policy demands a willingness to take decisions today for the good of

[Amber Rudd]

tomorrow. It is this Government who will not take any risks with our energy security, and that is why we agree with the position set out clearly by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) that shale would provide a low-carbon bridge. We will get on with the job of building a system of new energy infrastructure fit for the 21st century.

*Question put.*

*The House divided: Ayes 214, Noes 296.*

**Division No. 149]**

**[3.59 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane	Eagle, Ms Angela
Alexander, Heidi	Eagle, Maria
Ali, Rushanara	Efford, Clive
Allen, Mr Graham	Elliott, Julie
Anderson, Mr David	Elliott, Tom
Ashworth, Jonathan	Ellman, Mrs Louise
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Esterson, Bill
Barron, rh Kevin	Evans, Chris
Beckett, rh Margaret	Farron, Tim
Berger, Luciana	Field, rh Frank
Betts, Mr Clive	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Fiello, Robert
Blenkinsop, Tom	Fletcher, Colleen
Blomfield, Paul	Flint, rh Caroline
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	Flynn, Paul
Brake, rh Tom	Fovargue, Yvonne
Brennan, Kevin	Gardiner, Barry
Brown, Lyn	Glass, Pat
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Glindon, Mary
Bryant, Chris	Godsiff, Mr Roger
Buck, Ms Karen	Goodman, Helen
Burden, Richard	Green, Kate
Burgon, Richard	Greenwood, Lilian
Burnham, rh Andy	Greenwood, Margaret
Butler, Dawn	Griffith, Nia
Cadbury, Ruth	Gwynne, Andrew
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Hamilton, Fabian
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Hanson, rh Mr David
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair	Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Champion, Sarah	Harris, Carolyn
Chapman, Jenny	Hayes, Helen
Coaker, Vernon	Hayman, Sue
Coffey, Ann	Healey, rh John
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Hendrick, Mr Mark
Cox, Jo	Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Coyle, Neil	Hermon, Lady
Crausby, Mr David	Hillier, Meg
Creagh, Mary	Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Creasy, Stella	Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Cruddas, Jon	Hoey, Kate
Cryer, John	Hollern, Kate
Cummins, Judith	Hopkins, Kelvin
Cunningham, Alex	Howarth, rh Mr George
Cunningham, Mr Jim	Hunt, Tristram
Dakin, Nic	Huq, Dr Rupa
Danczuk, Simon	Hussain, Imran
David, Wayne	Irranca-Davies, Huw
Davies, Geraint	Jarvis, Dan
De Piero, Gloria	Johnson, rh Alan
Dodds, rh Mr Nigel	Jones, Graham
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.	Jones, Mr Kevan
Doughty, Stephen	Jones, Susan Elan
Dowd, Jim	Kane, Mike
Dowd, Peter	Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Dromey, Jack	Keeley, Barbara
Durkan, Mark	Kendall, Liz

Kinahan, Danny	Rayner, Angela
Kinnock, Stephen	Reed, Mr Jamie
Kyle, Peter	Reed, Mr Steve
Lamb, rh Norman	Rees, Christina
Lammy, rh Mr David	Reynolds, Emma
Lavery, Ian	Reynolds, Jonathan
Leslie, Chris	Rimmer, Marie
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma	Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Lewis, Clive	Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Lewis, Mr Ivan	Rotheram, Steve
Long Bailey, Rebecca	Shah, Naz
Lucas, Caroline	Shannon, Jim
Lucas, Ian C.	Sharma, Mr Virendra
Lynch, Holly	Sheerman, Mr Barry
Mactaggart, rh Fiona	Shuker, Mr Gavin
Madders, Justin	Siddiq, Tulip
Mahmood, Mr Khalid	Skinner, Mr Dennis
Mahmood, Shabana	Slaughter, Andy
Malhotra, Seema	Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Mann, John	Smith, Angela
Marris, Rob	Smith, Cat
Marsden, Mr Gordon	Smith, Jeff
Maskell, Rachael	Smith, Nick
Matheson, Christian	Smith, Owen
McCabe, Steve	Smyth, Karin
McCarthy, Kerry	Starmar, Keir
McDonagh, Siobhain	Streeting, Wes
McDonald, Andy	Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
McDonnell, John	Tami, Mark
McFadden, rh Mr Pat	Thomas, Mr Gareth
McGinn, Conor	Thomas-Symonds, Nick
McGovern, Alison	Thornberry, Emily
McInnes, Liz	Timms, rh Stephen
McKinnell, Catherine	Turley, Anna
McMahon, Jim	Turner, Karl
Meale, Sir Alan	Twigg, Derek
Mearns, Ian	Twigg, Stephen
Miliband, rh Edward	Umunna, Mr Chuka
Moon, Mrs Madeleine	Vaz, rh Keith
Morris, Grahame M.	Vaz, Valerie
Murray, Ian	Watson, Mr Tom
Nandy, Lisa	West, Catherine
Onn, Melanie	Whitehead, Dr Alan
Onwurah, Chi	Williams, Mr Mark
Osamor, Kate	Winnick, Mr David
Owen, Albert	Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Pearce, Teresa	Woodcock, John
Pennycook, Matthew	Wright, Mr Iain
Perkins, Toby	Zeichner, Daniel
Phillips, Jess	
Pound, Stephen	
Powell, Lucy	
Pugh, John	

**Tellers for the Ayes:**

**Jessica Morden and  
Vicky Foxcroft**

**NOES**

Adams, Nigel	Benyon, Richard
Afriyie, Adam	Beresford, Sir Paul
Aldous, Peter	Berry, Jake
Allen, Heidi	Berry, James
Amess, Sir David	Bingham, Andrew
Andrew, Stuart	Blackwood, Nicola
Ansell, Caroline	Blunt, Crispin
Argar, Edward	Boles, Nick
Atkins, Victoria	Bone, Mr Peter
Bacon, Mr Richard	Borwick, Victoria
Baker, Mr Steve	Bottomley, Sir Peter
Baldwin, Harriett	Bradley, Karen
Barclay, Stephen	Brady, Mr Graham
Baron, Mr John	Brazier, Mr Julian
Barwell, Gavin	Bridgen, Andrew
Bellingham, Mr Henry	Brine, Steve

Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burns, rh Sir Simon  
 Burrowes, Mr David  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, Alun  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Carswell, Mr Douglas  
 Cartlidge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Colvile, Oliver  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, Byron  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Dinéage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Dorries, Nadine  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, Mr Philip  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Evans, Graham  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evennett, rh Mr David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Michael  
 Fernandes, Suella  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Marcus  
 Gale, Sir Roger  
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, Mr David  
 Ghani, Nusrat  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl  
 Glen, John  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael

Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gummer, Ben  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, rh Mr Philip  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hancock, rh Matthew  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heald, Sir Oliver  
 Heappey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Mr Adam  
 Hopkins, Kris  
 Howarth, Sir Gerald  
 Howell, John  
 Howlett, Ben  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy  
 Hurd, Mr Nick  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, Boris  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 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

Lilley, rh Mr Peter  
 Lord, Jonathan  
 Loughton, Tim  
 Lumley, Karen  
 Mackinlay, Craig  
 Mackintosh, David  
 Main, Mrs Anne  
 Mak, Mr Alan  
 Malthouse, Kit  
 Mann, Scott  
 Mathias, Dr Tania  
 May, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Maynard, Paul  
 McCartney, Jason  
 McCartney, Karl  
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mordaunt, Penny  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mowat, David  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert  
 Nokes, Caroline  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 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, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Sandbach, Antoinette

Scully, Paul  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Shelbrooke, Alec  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 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  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew  
 Vaizey, Mr Edward  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watkinson, Dame Angela  
 Whately, Helen  
 Wheeler, Heather  
 White, Chris  
 Wiggan, Bill  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah  
 Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Simon Kirby and  
 Sarah Newton

*Question accordingly negated.*

## Housing

4.13 pm

**John Healey** (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House notes that the Government's record on housing is one of five years of failure with rising homelessness, falling home-ownership, escalating rents, deep cuts in investment and the lowest level of house-building since the 1920s; further notes that the Spending Review and Autumn Statement will not result in the homes that young people and families on ordinary incomes need being built because it cuts the level of investment from that of 2010 and fails to prioritise genuinely affordable homes to rent and buy; notes Shelter Scotland's report of September 2015, Affordable Housing Need in Scotland, which states that overall house-building levels are well below their peak in 2007 and that the number of new social homes built has fallen by 44 per cent from 2010 to 2014; notes the widespread concern that the Government's Housing and Planning Bill will lead to the severe loss of affordable homes, will be a let-down for aspiring home-owners, and will do nothing to help England's private renters struggling with poor conditions and high renting costs; and calls on the Government to help families who are struggling with the cost of housing, including by building more affordable homes to rent and buy.

Above schools, wages, crime, foreign affairs and terrorism, people now place housing as their most pressing concern. It is fourth in Ipsos MORI's latest long-running "Issues Facing Britain" survey. In all parts of this House, we know of the increasing pressure, frustration and sometimes despair that our constituents feel when a decent, affordable home to rent or buy is totally beyond them.

That is why we have called today's debate on the Government's record on housing. It is a truly shameful record, with five years of failure on every front. For the Housing Minister, who I know is a fan of social media, we could call it #fiveyearsoffailure. There have been five years of failure on homelessness—[*Interruption.*]—which, despite the laughter of Conservative Members, we all feel keenly at Christmas. Rough sleeping has increased by more than half in the past five years, while statutory homelessness is up by more than a third and is rising rapidly.

There have been five years of failure on home ownership. The rate of home ownership has fallen each and every year since 2010, and the total number of home-owning households in this country is now more than 200,000 fewer than when the Tories took control. It is young people who are being hit the hardest, with the number of homeowners under the age of 35 down by a fifth in the past five years.

There have been five years of failure on private rents. While incomes have stagnated, private rents on new lets have soared—up by £1,400 a year—since 2010.

There have been five years of failure on housing benefit costs, which rose by £4.3 billion in the last Parliament, despite punishing cuts such as the bedroom tax, even as housing investment was slashed.

Finally, there have been five years of failure on house building. The House of Commons Library has confirmed to me that the previous Government built fewer new homes than any peacetime Government since David Lloyd George's in the 1920s.

**Chris Philp** (Croydon South) (Con): Speaking of house building, is not the most important statistic that, in the last year of the last Labour Government, on the right hon. Gentleman's watch, there were 124,000 housing

starts across the UK, whereas last year that figure had gone up to 165,000, which is a very impressive record? If he is so concerned about the topic, why did he not—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle)**: Order. I think you intend to speak, don't you?

**Chris Philp**: Yes, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr Deputy Speaker**: In which case, it should be a very short intervention. I do not think we need to hear any more, because I want to get you on the list.

**John Healey**: The statistic that matters most is the number of homes that were actually built. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that 2009 saw the lowest level of house building under 13 years of Labour, but that figure was still higher than that in the best year in the past five years of a Tory Government.

There have been five years of failure on every front, by every measure and in every area. Two weeks ago, the Prime Minister gave a speech in which housing was a central theme. He said—I am not making this up—that "this is a government that delivers".

Well, it does not deliver on housing. The Government spent the last five years blaming Labour, but they have their own track record now—and it is one of five years of failure on housing under Conservative Ministers.

The Chancellor gave his autumn statement and spending review three weeks ago and, again, housing was a central theme.

**Andrew Griffiths** (Burton) (Con): Doubling!

**John Healey**: That is exactly what the Chancellor said:

"We're doubling the money for housing to build 400,000 new affordable homes".

After the Chancellor's autumn statement, the Government's annual investment in housing will be £1.7 billion. Under the money inherited in 2010 from Labour, it was £3.1 billion. That is not an increase, but a cut—it is not a doubling, but a halving—of vital investment in housing in our country for our people.

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman was a long-serving Minister. Will he reflect on the fact that, on his Government's watch, the number of households on the housing waiting list went up from 1 million to 1.8 million and that there were 420,000 fewer social homes to rent at the end of his term in office than before? Is that not 13 years of failure?

**John Healey**: The hon. Gentleman might like to reflect on the fact that, under 13 years of Labour, more than 2 million new homes were built in this country and the number of homeowners rose by more than 1 million, but in the five years under his Government that figure has fallen by more than 200,000. So much for the party of the so-called homeowners.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): We should remind the Government that it was the Conservatives, when they were last in power, who stopped local authorities

building social housing. As a result, rents have gone through the roof and young people cannot get a house today.

**John Healey:** My hon. Friend is right. He probably shares my view of our own Labour record. We are deeply proud of the billions of investment we made to make homes decent again, but we were perhaps too slow to start building new homes. When I was the Minister for Housing in the final year of the previous Labour Government, we got under way the largest council house building programme we had had for more than two decades. For the first time, councils were able to get the support on the same terms as housing associations to build the new affordable homes that were so badly needed in this country.

I want to return to the Chancellor's boast about doubling the money for housing for 400,000 new affordable homes. It was not a doubling, but a halving of the investment under Labour. Most of those 400,000 homes had been announced before, so there is also double counting. Finally, many of the new homes will not be affordable for those on ordinary incomes either to rent or to buy. I would say to the Minister that we perhaps need a new hashtag. How about #fivemoreyearsoffailure?

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): My right hon. Friend makes an important point about just how affordable the new affordable homes are likely to be. The data I have seen show that, in areas such as Stockport, somebody would need an average income of about £53,000 just to have a deposit for one of the new starter homes.

**John Healey:** My hon. Friend is right. I will come on to starter homes and how Tory Ministers try to fiddle the figures by fiddling the definition, but this is not the first time they have redefined what constitutes "affordable". The level of so-called affordable rented homes we are now seeing in many parts of London means that rents are more than £1,000 each month. That may be affordable in their book, but for many people—with ordinary jobs, on ordinary incomes—it is totally beyond their reach. More is required of this Government to help the people who are working hard and struggling most.

**Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is being generous in giving way. He did not attend the Housing and Planning Public Bill Committee, for the reasons he has given us, but will he confirm that it was comprehensively demonstrated by all the witnesses during the evidence sessions that there was no evidence that starter homes would be unaffordable for anyone north of a line between the Bristol channel and the Wash—most of the north-west, the north-east, Yorkshire and Humberside, and the east and west midlands?

**John Healey:** I am not sure how much attention the hon. Gentleman was paying. He should have looked at the reports from Savills and from Shelter, and he should have listened to my hon. Friends who led for Labour so ably and so strongly throughout the many scrutiny sessions in Committee. I want to return to the fact that we have seen such a serious failure during the past five years under Conservative Governments.

**Mr Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. Friend not think that the forced sale of council homes will exacerbate the homelessness crisis? Will he encourage the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) to speak in this debate to set out his view of the potential for extending Help to Buy to pay for the voluntary right to buy for housing associations?

**John Healey:** My hon. Friend led in making those very arguments in Committee, and I hope we will get a chance to make those arguments again when the Bill returns to the House straight after the Christmas recess. He asked for my view about whether the forced sale of council homes, particularly in London, is likely to lead to a rise in homelessness. I agree with him that it will. In some ways, however, it is much more significant that the Conservative-led Local Government Association agrees, which is clearly why it opposes the plan. It has warned of the consequences,

"in particular on council waiting lists, homelessness and housing benefit."

In many ways, these are not simply abstract political arguments or dry statistics, but the lives of our friends, our neighbours and our constituents: the young couple on average income who want to start a family, but are now less, not more, likely to be able to get a home of their own; the family, renting privately, whose kids—like 1.4 million others in the same situation—are less, not more, likely to go through school without being forced out by their landlords and forced to move areas; and the pensioner needing affordable supported accommodation who is now less, not more, likely to find a suitable home and the help they need. These are the human stories of this housing crisis, which has worsened during the past five years.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Do we not need a bit of contrition, rather than laughter and synthetic anger, from Government Members? Is it not a fact that homelessness and rough sleeping have risen 55% since the Prime Minister took office, even though he said they were a public disgrace?

**John Healey:** My hon. Friend is right. He will remember how serious the levels of homelessness and rough sleeping were when Labour came to office in 1997 and how they fell with the policies that we put in place over 13 years. He is right to say that he, like Members on both sides of the House, has seen homelessness and rough sleeping rising again. We should pause ahead of the Christmas period, reflect on that and ask hard questions of the Housing Minister about why it is happening, what he will do about it and, in particular, what he will do over the Christmas period to help.

**Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that homelessness peaked in 2004. He makes the serious point that we should all consider homelessness at Christmas. That peak came under a Labour Government, but I am not making a political point. As he has worked on this issue and will have been involved in part of the solution, perhaps he can tell the House what he believes the solution is.

**John Healey:** I was, indeed, involved in part of the solution. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that part of the solution is not the deep cuts in local council budgets that we will hear the detail of later this week. Part of the solution is not cutting the rents for supported housing, because that will lead to a cut in the provision for many of the most vulnerable people in this country.

Unfortunately, we are still close to the start of a five-year Parliament. This is the most crucial part of the political cycle, when policy direction is set. It should be a time for stock-taking and fresh thinking, but the Budget, the autumn statement and the Housing and Planning Bill do nothing to correct the causes of the five years of failure and, in many areas, will make problems much worse.

**Alberto Costa** (South Leicestershire) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is raising very serious matters. If his facts are correct, why did the property website Zoopla state just before the general election earlier this year:

“A win for the Labour party in the General Election could spell trouble for first-time buyers”?

Why would Zoopla have said that?

**John Healey:** Search me, gov. Ask Zoopla. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman—*[Interruption.]* I'm not sure I'll bother, Mr Deputy Speaker. He is not listening anyway.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. That is a very good point. I am struggling to hear the shadow Minister express his views on housing. Can we please be a bit more tolerant and have less shouting?

**Rob Marris** (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab) *rose*—

**John Healey:** I give way to my hon. Friend.

**Rob Marris:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is time that the Conservatives took some responsibility for their failure in government? Their housing policy has been based on a misunderstanding of capitalism. It has all been focused on helping people to buy one of the insufficient number of houses, rather than on increasing the supply.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** May I also say that a lot of Members want to speak? If we are going to have interventions, let us make them short.

**John Healey:** My hon. Friend makes a really important point that I hope will be a point of debate this afternoon. A serious question that must be asked in respect of the plans before us is whether it is the right use of public money to subsidise the demand for new housing, at a time when the housing market in many parts of the country is already out of control.

**Mrs Anne Main** (St Albans) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**John Healey:** No, I will make some progress. If the hon. Lady really wants to intervene later, I will give way.

At this point in the political cycle, we need to look at what is ahead. Two areas demonstrate the direction that the Tory Government are taking on housing and serve as a warning of what is to come. The first is a systematic

attack on housing opportunity for young people and families on ordinary incomes, the very people the housing market is failing most at the moment. Ministers have launched a full-frontal assault on council and housing association homes which will hit those on low and middle incomes hardest. The Office for Budget Responsibility has said that the result of both the Budget and the autumn statement together will be 34,000 fewer housing association homes built. Meanwhile, the Housing and Planning Bill strangles the ability and obligation of both private and public sectors to build the affordable homes to rent and to buy that are badly needed in both urban and rural areas alike.

In addition there is an extraordinary forced sell-off of council homes to fund an extension of the right to buy, with no prospect or commitment, as Labour has urged, of like-for-like, one-for-one replacements in the local area. I have to say that in many areas of the country, both rural and urban but especially in London, these council homes will go not to families struggling to buy, but to speculators, second homeowners, and buy-to-let landlords—and of course the greater the demand for affordable housing in an area, the higher the value of the houses, and the more the Chancellor will take in his annual levy.

**Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): Does the shadow Minister not agree that council house building is actually at a record 23-year high and that more council housing has been built in the last five years than under the 13 years of the last Labour Government?

**John Healey:** The hon. Lady raises an interesting point. If she looks at the Homes and Communities Agency data, they will confirm—as my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), a member of the Select Committee, said at DCLG questions yesterday—that more than eight in 10 of the social homes and council homes built under the hon. Lady's Government over the last five years were started and funded under the Labour programme.

**Helen Goodman** (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Before my right hon. Friend moves on from the point about speculation, is he aware that the largest amount of foreign money coming into the London property market is from Russia and the average price Russians pay is £6.3 million?

**John Healey:** That detail had escaped me, but I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning it.

**Graham Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): I think my right hon. Friend will agree with me that it is time to kill this myth that the Tories are the people's friend and that they build council houses. The reality is that those council houses were left in a right mess by the previous Tory Government and the last Labour Government had to put a large amount of money into refurbishing them. It was a disgraceful legacy.

**John Healey:** My hon. Friend is right. The last Labour Government invested £22 billion to bring homes that were barely decent up to scratch—some 1.4 million council homes were given new kitchens, central heating, doors that fitted, double-glazing. Those homes were, for the first time, fit to live in, but they had been left as a

legacy from the previous Tory Government. My fear for the future is that when Labour gets back into government, we will be faced with a similar legacy of neglect of our council housing.

Over the next five years, we look ahead to a huge loss of affordable homes to rent and to buy in this country. In total, the Chartered Institute of Housing expects the loss of 195,000 affordable homes for social rent over the next five years.

On top of this, in the very last sitting of the Housing and Planning Bill Committee, Ministers introduced plans to scrap the secure tenancies that Margaret Thatcher herself brought in for council tenants, restricting them instead to fixed-term tenancies of between two and five years. So the message from this Government could not be clearer: “If you’re on a low or middle income and rent a council home, then a stable family home is too good for the likes of you.”

**Wes Streeting** (Ilford North) (Lab): Thanks to years of Tory leadership in Redbridge, we have the lowest amount of social housing stock in London. Does my right hon. Friend also know that one in 27 households in the private rented sector is at risk of eviction because of a whole load of factors, the majority of which are due to the Government’s policies?

**John Healey:** I do indeed, and I say to the Minister, because there is still time for him to think again, that the Housing and Planning Bill is a huge missed opportunity to help 11 million people who live in the private rented sector without the security to start their lives and bring up their families. He could legislate for longer tenancies, better consumer rights, and better and more decent standards and obligations on landlords. He has refused to do that so far. I hope that he will think again.

**Boris Johnson** (Uxbridge and South Ruislip) (Con): I ask the right hon. Gentleman to clear up one point upon which I—and, I am sure, many people—am still in doubt. Is he in favour of giving housing association tenants the right to buy their home? Is he in favour of aspiration for those people to buy homes, in the way that Opposition Members have done? Yes or no?

**John Healey:** I am certainly in favour of aspiration and of home ownership. Under the last Labour Government, the number of homeowners increased by more than 1 million. However, I confirmed on Second Reading that we will oppose right to buy funded by forced sale of council homes because it will lead to a huge loss of affordable homes to rent and buy that people in this country need. That policy will penalise people on ordinary, modest incomes.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend not amazed that, despite the Government’s claim that their policy of selling off high value council homes will fund the replacement of housing association properties and council homes, as well as a contribution towards the remediation of brownfield sites, they still cannot table for hon. Members the figures to justify that?

**John Healey:** My hon. Friend is right. Obviously, the Select Committee is examining those matters. It is not the first time that the sums do not add up, but if the

Government are going to force the sale of council assets to fund the programme to extend the right to buy to housing associations, why do they not start with some of their own assets? Why do they not start by funding their policy with Government support, instead of taking it, like some medieval baron, from councils because their coffers are empty?

Ministers made much of starter homes and there is clearly a need for more affordable homes to buy, especially given that the number has fallen in the past five years by nearly 30%. However, the Government’s starter homes will be a non-starter for families on ordinary incomes. Shelter calculates that, across the country, one would need an annual income of around £50,000 and a deposit of £40,000 to afford a starter home. In London, one would need an income of £77,000 and a deposit of £98,000. That is simply out of reach for most of those on middle incomes—working families, who need help to buy the most. Of course, there are no controls to stop those who can afford to buy without help from the Government taking advantage of the scheme. There is a big risk that those who need it least will benefit most.

**Julian Knight** (Solihull) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman is being most generous in giving way. If right to buy is, as he suggests, such a disaster for housing associations, why have they entered into a voluntary arrangement with the Government to deliver it? Will the right hon. Gentleman explain that?

**John Healey:** Has the hon. Gentleman ever heard the term, “shotgun arrangement”? If he talks to a lot of housing association chief executives, their boards or their tenants, as I have done, he will find that they feel that they are left with no choice. They do not like it, they do not believe it, they do not trust Ministers, but they signed up to it because it is the least worst option for them.

With so many people’s dreams of buying their own home out of reach, Ministers have responded by announcing plans to fiddle the figures again, by changing the definition of affordable homes to include so-called starter homes for sale at up to £450,000. That is an insult to young people and families on ordinary incomes, and a mockery of common sense and sound policy. It is like the Health Minister tackling the GP shortage by reclassifying cashiers at Boots pharmacy as qualified doctors.

The second area that demonstrates the direction that the Government are taking in this Parliament is the systematic side-lining of local people and local decision making. Whatever they say, Ministers’ actions are anti-localist. At every turn since the election, housing policy has been set to undermine the say of local people and override their local representatives. The Housing and Planning Bill puts 33 new centralising powers in the hands of the Secretary of State, from directing starter homes to be built instead of affordable homes, to fixing rents for so-called high-income tenants.

Those powers include a legalised annual cash grab from councils, which totally undermines their ability to plan for housing need in their area. The Bill also rips up the contract of localising local finance for housing, which until this point has been the subject of all-party support. Ministers will have sweeping new powers to award “automatic planning permission”—the so-called

[John Healey]

“permission in principle”. That is not, as the House has been led to believe, simply a policy for dealing with brownfield sites; it is a power and policy for any site allocated for use in a local plan. There will be no need to apply for full planning permission, no limitations on what sort of development can be built, and no planning gain or obligation on developers. Only the technical details will be left for the elected local planning authorities to deal with.

A host of organisations now echo Labour’s concerns about such open-ended powers, including the Campaign to Protect Rural England, Friends of the Earth and the Woodland Trust. There will be deep concern in all parts of the House if the Government’s dramatic failure on housing leads to such drastic steps and denies local communities a voice on development in their areas.

**Robert Neill:** I am following what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, but would his argument have rather more weight if he had not been part of a Government who imposed regional spatial strategies that gave no choice to local communities on how housing was imposed? Is he contradicting his own policy in government?

**John Healey:** The hon. Gentleman is a master of distraction. I am making a point about clause 1 of the Bill, and he has enough experience to know what is at stake. If he reads the Bill, I know he will be worried about the sweeping, open-ended powers that it contains. If the Minister wants those powers, he should justify that in this House and the other place during the passage of the Bill, or tighten them up so that they do what he says he wants them to do. I look forward to the Minister’s response on that point, but I am not holding my breath.

In the housing world the Minister has become known as “Mr Million Homes”. He said:

“By the end of this Parliament success would mean that we have seen a build in total of something like a million homes”.

In other words, an average of 200,000 homes a year. Now we know that the Minister is prone to a bit of bullish bluster, but that is going some. In his first year as Housing Minister, not 200,000, but 115,590 homes were built. Last year—the best year out of the previous Government’s five years—only 117,720 homes were built. The total number of homes built in that Government’s best year was still lower than in the worst year of the Labour Government’s 13 years, which was in the depths of the global banking crisis and recession. Even the Prime Minister has not gone as far as the Minister.

In conclusion, no Government can sit back and see a whole generation priced out of a decent home, and call themselves a “one nation” Government. No political party can say nothing in their manifesto to the 11 million people living in private rented accommodation, and call itself a “party of aspiration”. No party can have a programme that will lead to a huge loss of genuinely affordable housing, and call itself the “party of working people”. This country has seen five years of failure on housing under Conservative Ministers. People desperately need and deserve better, and during this Parliament, this party—the Labour party—will prove itself to be the party of working people, of aspiration, and of one nation.

4.45 pm

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis):** I warmly thank Her Majesty’s Opposition for choosing the subject of today’s debate. It is an important subject, and I am always eager to compare and contrast our records on housing. It is now five months since the previous such debate, and much has changed. In that time, we have announced the largest Government house building programme for 40 years. And of course, we now have a new shadow Housing Minister, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey). He was briefly Minister for Housing at the end of the last Labour Government, so this is rather a “Back to the Future” experience. I think I am now on my third shadow Housing Minister.

If we continue with that “Back to the Future” analogy, I recall that it is the third part of the trilogy—the one about cowboys—that nobody really likes very much. The question is: which “Back to the Future” film are we dealing with here? I hope it is not the cowboy one, but I also hope it is not the Soviet version from 1973. I should warn any hon. Members who do not have this kind of film library at home that that is a terrifying tale, in which Ivan the Terrible is accidentally transported into the future to become the superintendent of an apartment building in Moscow. Who knows? Stranger things are happening in the Labour party.

Shadow Ministers might come and go, but one thing remains the same: the curious phenomenon of Labour Members claiming that their record is preferable to ours. The right hon. Gentleman condemns our plans to support the aspirations of home buyers but, in a speech lasting more than 32 minutes, he did not suggest any alternatives. He talks about a housing crisis yet fails to admit who created it. And he claims that he will take Labour’s record over ours without any rational justification for his preference.

**Mrs Main:** Has my hon. Friend given any thought to the fact that when Labour estimated in 2003-04 that only 5,000 to 13,000 Polish migrants would come in, more than 100,000 actually did so? Where did the Labour Government think those people were going to live? Does my hon. Friend think that might be part of the issue?

**Brandon Lewis:** The right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne has put on record his views on home ownership and house building, certainly going back to 2005. Obviously, we have challenges going right across as our population grows.

Let me remind the House of the situation we inherited in 2010. Perhaps some of my hon. Friends who were not here before then will be interested to know about this. We inherited: a housing bubble that burst with devastating consequences; an industry in debt; sites mothballed; workers laid off; skills lost; a loss of 420,000 affordable homes; rocketing waiting lists; and collapsing right-to-buy sales. In their 13 years in office, the Labour Government built only one home for every 170 that were sold. There was a sustained fall in home ownership. To be fair, the right hon. Gentleman knows that very well, because he himself said,

“I’m not sure that’s such a bad thing”.

It was no coincidence that that disregard for aspiring home owners was matched by chaos in the regulation of lending, a planning system in disarray controlled from the centre, a post-war low in house building by councils and the lowest level of house building since the 1920s.

**Mr Jackson:** Is my hon. Friend as disappointed as I am that in the course of the 32-minute churlish whinge-athon by the Opposition spokesman, he could not even give this Government credit for using the Housing and Planning Bill to tackle slum landlords? The Labour Government did nothing about that in 13 years.

**Brandon Lewis:** Perhaps the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne has not been involved in the Bill's progress in Committee, as I know my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) has been. That might be why, despite what is in the Opposition motion, he has oddly not picked up on the fact that we are going further to crack down on and drive out rogue landlords than any Government have done before. The previous Labour Government oversaw the lowest level of house building since the 1920s, with just 88,000 starts being overseen by the right hon. Members for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) and for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) and, of course, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne. That was their housing crisis, that was their record, and that is the state of affairs that the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne claims the public should prefer.

**Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab):** Does the Minister feel that those people who voted Tory at the last election will be surprised by this Housing and Planning Bill?

**Brandon Lewis:** As it contains two of our key manifesto pledges, on which we are mandated to deliver, I suspect that people will be pleased to see that we are a Government who are getting on and delivering for the people of this country. To take the hon. Lady's very direct question, the public gave their verdict on the performance of the last Government at two general elections. At the last time of asking, the electorate were offered by the Opposition party a reprise of Labour's centrally controlled, top-down housing nightmare—land grabs, the mansion tax, rent controls, red tape and restrictions on right to buy.

**Victoria Borwick (Kensington) (Con):** Is the Minister pleased to see how many people have already expressed their interest in our aspirational policy and are already queuing up to take advantage of it?

**Brandon Lewis:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. The right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne does not seem to want to give housing association tenants the opportunity to buy their home, even though some 11,000 people have already expressed their interest in doing just that.

The public did consider the cocktail of regressive options being put forward by the main Opposition party, and they politely declined to take it up.

**Wes Streeting:** Actually, people in Redbridge were tired of the Conservatives running the council, which is why they elected a Labour council in May 2014. One of our pledges—I am still an unpaid councillor in Redbridge—was to introduce a landlord licensing scheme. When can

we expect to hear from the Minister's Department the go-ahead to deliver the manifesto pledge that so many residents are crying out for?

**Brandon Lewis:** Obviously, we took through selective licensing just before the general election. That cracked down on rogue landlords, which are mentioned in the Bill. I will be coming back to that matter as we make progress with the Bill. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's residents will be delighted to see that we are going further than any Labour Government ever did. Under our watch, the number of first-time buyers doubled, the number of new homes doubled and public support for new house building doubled.

**Steve McCabe** *rose*—

**Brandon Lewis:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is rising to congratulate us on our success.

**Steve McCabe:** Well, actually I do want to congratulate the Minister on his measures to tackle rogue landlords. It is a step forward. Does he think it would be a good idea also to tackle rogue developers, so that we do not have an explosion of rogue landlords?

**Brandon Lewis:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to explain what he means by rogue developers. Certainly, I want to ensure that good quality developers are building the houses that we need across the country for the people who need them.

**Helen Goodman:** I thank the Minister for giving way. May I suggest that he speaks to Mr Toon, the economic director of the National Crime Agency, who says that, "the London property market has been skewed by laundered money."

He said that prices are being artificially driven up through the use of the proceeds of crime. If he wants to do something, he should just pick up the phone.

**Brandon Lewis:** Obviously, I would be happy to support anybody who is looking to crack down on crime in London. Equally, I know that the hon. Lady seems to think that affordable houses in London start at £6 million. That may be so for those on the Labour Benches, but not for those of us on the Government Benches.

**Graham Jones:** I thank the Minister for giving way. In this long list of successes, will he include that wonderful policy, the green deal?

**Brandon Lewis:** One day, the hon. Gentleman or one of his colleagues will intervene to explain the wonders of eco-towns and just how many got built under the Labour Government.

**Robert Neill:** Perhaps I could bring my hon. Friend back to the London housing market. Does he agree that one of the worst things that could happen to the London housing market is the imposition of rent controls on the private sector, as it invariably drives up costs, reduces supply and encourages the bad landlord rather than the good one whom we need to see in the capital?

**Brandon Lewis:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. One lesson we have learned from around the world, in places such as New York, is that rent controls simply drive down supply. They drive a black market and send rents upwards. Certainly, it is not something that we will be seeing under this Government.

**Mr Andrew Smith** (Oxford East) (Lab) *rose*—

**Brandon Lewis:** I will make a little more progress, and then I will take some more interventions.

Since 2010, we have helped more than 270,000 households buy a home through Government schemes. We have provided more than 270,000 affordable homes to rent, which went beyond our target, nearly one third of which were in London. We are the first Government since the 1980s to finish a term of office with a higher stock of affordable homes than we started with.

I gently remind the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne, who has set out his preference for council house building, that twice as many council homes were built in the past five years of our Government than were built during 13 years of the Labour Government. More new council housing was started in London last year than during the whole of the Labour Government, shocking as that may seem. In all, £20 billion was invested over the course of the last Parliament, achieving the same rate of affordable house building with half the rate of grant as under the Labour Government.

In many ways, that is a clear metaphor for our record on housing: building more for less and doing it faster. We were not afraid of difficult decisions and of doing things differently. That has continued. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned our decision to end lifetime tenancies for new tenants to ensure that we make the best use of social housing based on need and income.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): When the Minister introduced that amendment to the Housing and Planning Bill, he referred to 380 households that occupy social housing with two or more spare bedrooms, and cited that as a reason for wanting to manage the stock more efficiently and to move people around social housing. Given that the Government are concerned about under-occupation, is it their policy not to allow people who under-occupy properties the right to buy?

**Brandon Lewis:** On lifetime tenancies, it is only right that tenancies are reviewed after several years to identify whether the circumstances of tenants have changed. Through the voluntary extension of right to buy—it will be for housing associations to decide—we want to extend that opportunity to all 1.3 million people.

**Clive Efford** *rose*—

**Brandon Lewis:** I will give way in just a moment.

Of course, that move was opposed by the Labour party, which prefers renters to remain renters—

**Clive Efford** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. Mr Efford, you have to sit back down. The Minister has given way once and he will give way again, but you can't just stand there—[*Interruption.*] I am sorry, but you just can't hang around stood up.

**Clive Efford:** On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am sorry, but the reason I tried to intervene again is that the Minister, discourteously, completely ignored the point I made, presumably because it was too awkward for him.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. I will make the decisions. That is not a point of order. I hope you are not trying to reflect on the Chair. [*Interruption.*] In which case, you don't need to be stood up waiting for the Minister to give way again. I am sure the Minister will wish to give way on his terms, and not on your terms or mine.

**Brandon Lewis:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. As it happens, I have outlined our intention to extend right to buy to all social housing tenants. I am delighted that housing associations are playing their part.

**Jake Berry:** Will my hon. Friend update the House and say whether he has had any representations from the housing sector or from the Labour party on reintroducing lifetime tenure for those in social housing? If that happened, what will be the effect on the market?

**Brandon Lewis:** My hon. Friend makes a good point—that silence has been very stark.

Our plans for housing are delivering but I will be absolutely up front about this: it is clear that we must do more to meet the housing needs of our nation. If our task during the last Parliament was to rescue the housing market, now we must supercharge it.

**Jo Cox** (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Does the Minister accept the Office for Budget Responsibility estimate that, as a result of the July Budget and the November spending review, the Government will build 34,000 fewer homes by 2020 than previously forecast?

**Brandon Lewis:** I will come to housing associations in a few moments but, as I told the Communities and Local Government Committee this morning, housing associations have an exciting opportunity. I would argue that they will be able to access and realise assets to build more homes than ever before.

**Mr Andrew Smith** *rose*—

**Mr Betts** *rose*—

**Brandon Lewis:** I was going to make progress but I will give way to the Chairman of the Select Committee.

**Mr Betts:** I thank the Minister for giving way. To go back to supercharging, some of us were pleased when the Government made a commitment to build 1 million new homes in this Parliament. Is that still Government policy and a commitment, or has it been downgraded to an aspiration?

**Brandon Lewis:** To be fair to the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne, he quoted me spot on in his opening remarks. It is absolutely still our ambition to build 1 million homes. We need to be ambitious about building new homes, but this is not solely about the number of new homes. We are determined not just to halt but to reverse the slide in home ownership that the

Labour party oversaw. With so many people being kept off the housing ladder for so long, we are determined to deliver on our promises quickly.

**James Cartledge** (South Suffolk) (Con): On the measures to increase home ownership, which contrast with the inaction from the Labour party, is not one of the most radical measures we have introduced to support first-time buyers the levelling of the playing field between them and the people who wish to buy property to rent out to those same frustrated first-time buyers?

**Brandon Lewis:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point—one he has raised a number of times in the House. I am pleased we are able to move forward and deliver on something that will, as he rightly says, level the playing field.

**Mr Andrew Smith:** Will the Minister give way?

**Brandon Lewis:** I will make a bit more progress and then I will take more interventions.

For the reasons that I have given, in the spending review we announced the biggest investment in housing for 40 years. We are determined to invest in what matters most to young people and to British families. We want to pay off Labour's debt and make sure we build the homes our country needs. Both are required to make this the turnaround decade.

In the spending review, the Chancellor said, "We choose housing" and delivered a further £20 billion. Our work will include: major investments in large-scale projects, such as Ebbsfleet garden city, Bicester, Barking Riverside and Northstowe; £7.5 billion to extend the Help to Buy equity loan scheme until 2021; and supporting the purchase of 145,000 new build homes. In London, we are doubling the value of equity loans to 40%, providing the capital's aspiring home owners with a better chance to buy. A new Help to Buy ISA is helping buyers across the country to save for a deposit.

The brand new Help to Buy shared ownership will deliver a further 135,000 homes by removing many of the restrictions that have held back shared ownership. For example, an aspiring home owner in Yorkshire can get on the housing ladder with a deposit of just £1,400. I am sure the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) will be encouraging his constituents to apply. Let me provide the House with some clear examples of why this matters. In the south-east, a deposit could be as low as £2,400, and in London £3,400. Our plans for shared ownership will make 175,000 more people eligible for home ownership. Just last week, the Prime Minister visited a family in Burton and I visited one in Didcot. They were excited for the future and the possibilities home ownership opens up to them. These possibilities will be open to anyone of any occupation as long as they earn under £80,000, or £90,000 in London.

We will provide other opportunities for working people, too: a £1 billion housing delivery fund to support small and custom builders; £8 billion to build 450,000 affordable homes; 100,000 homes for affordable rent; and, yes, 200,000 affordable homes will be starter homes available to young first-time buyers, with a 20% discount. That is the largest affordable housebuilding programme for many decades. Starter homes will be transformational.

Opposition Members may laugh and pour scorn on starter homes, and go against the aspirations of first-time buyers, but I ask Members across the House just to pause and think for a moment. A first-time buyer getting a 20% discount on a new home, linking that with a 5% deposit thanks to Help to Buy, saves thousands. For example, a two-bedroom home in Durham—in the constituency of the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods)—can be bought for just under £150,000. With 20% off, that will be £120,000. If used with Help to Buy, it means a first-time buyer can get a house with a mortgage of £90,000 and a deposit of only £6,000.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): The average price of a property, according to the *Metro* today, is now over £1 million in my constituency. To get a starter home, if one could possibly be found for £450,000, an income of over £101,000 is needed. Is that what the Minister has in mind as affordable housing? Pathetic!

**Brandon Lewis:** That was almost a reasonable attempt by the hon. Gentleman, but let me just give him some facts for London. The average first-time buyer home is less than the cost of an average home generally. For example, in London an average first-time buyer home is £364,000. We recognise that that is a challenge, but with a 20% discount it will cost £291,000. If used with the Help to Buy scheme, a first-time buyer can buy that home for £174,000 with a deposit of just £14,500. I also point the hon. Gentleman to my comments of a few moments ago: shared ownership, even in London, means getting on the home ownership ladder for just under £3,500. We make no apology for our focus on affordable homeownership.

**Boris Johnson:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on his remarks, and here is one more statistic: the massive expansion in "part buy, part rent" schemes, which he is helping us to oversee in London, has already helped 52,000 families, on an average household income of £37,000, into homes they partially own and will own more of in the future. That is the Conservative policy.

**Brandon Lewis:** My hon. Friend highlights the reality and what the ambition should be. London is a shining example of what a city can achieve under the leadership of a powerful Mayor. He has overseen the delivery of more than 67,000 affordable homes since the mess we inherited in 2010, and we want to build on that, which is why we are looking to devolve more powers to mayoral London and enable my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) to take forward my hon. Friend's work. We make no apology for focusing on affordable home ownership, while Labour does everything it can to deny people the chance to own their own home. It is what people want; buying a home is an aspiration shared by the vast majority of the public—86% say they would choose to buy their own property—which might partly explain the result at the general election, when Labour was ignored by the public.

**Robert Neill** (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): The Minister is right to emphasise the importance of delivering on aspiration, but is he not also right to contrast the delivery by my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) with the complete

[Robert Neill]

failure of the top-down dirigiste policies of the former Mayor of London, who I gather now advises the leader of the Labour party?

**Brandon Lewis:** My hon. Friend puts it succinctly and highlights the mess inherited nationally and in London. I hope we can build on our work delivering for our country, following the general election result, by ensuring good governance in London with another Conservative Mayor next year.

**Mr Andrew Smith:** The Minister talks about aspiration, but what about the aspiration of people on low incomes in my constituency for whom the sorts of figures he is talking about are completely out of reach and who are being shunted out of Oxford because the housing allowance will not cover rents in the private rented sector? What about their aspirations and chances of a decent life?

**Brandon Lewis:** And there was I thinking the right hon. Gentleman was going to congratulate my hon. Friend the Mayor of London on his excellent work. It is important that he considers the whole ambit of the Housing and Planning Bill and our policies elsewhere, which are providing a wide offer across all tenures and types of housing and, with those £1,400 deposits to help people into those homes, making sure that, in areas such as his, shared ownership is a real possibility.

For too many people, the aspiration and the reality of home ownership are drifting apart. The decline in home ownership is not just an economic problem but a social failure. We risk creating a generation of young people exiled from home ownership. The right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne might not consider the decline in home ownership since 2005 to be such a bad thing, but we disagree. He might not care, but we do. We care about young people worse off than their parents, compelled to leave the communities they love and grew up in or to decline good job opportunities because local housing is too expensive. That is why we must build more homes. Everyone in the House has a duty to make that case and, along with local authorities, to show good leadership. We have a duty not just to say that we need to build more homes somewhere else, but to build—and to make the case for building—more homes in all our communities. This will be a defining challenge of our generation.

**Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con):** During the election, I received phone calls from people who had been in their homes for some time and were delighted to get the opportunity to buy them. On local plans and Labour's top-down approach, is it not perfectly possible to build good-quality homes with a good local plan?

**Brandon Lewis:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is important that we show good local leadership and deliver good local plans setting out where homes can be built in communities and outlining the aspiration for good-quality homes and good-quality design. That is what local authorities and we in the House have a duty to do and what my hon. Friend has championed in the House over the last few months. This will be a defining challenge for our generation, yet the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne, who spoke for more than

32 minutes, gave not an iota of a start of a Labour policy to tackle this problem. Instead, he fell back on outdated politics. I am afraid it was the Soviet version of “Back to the Future” after all. There is the lazy assumption that there is a contradiction between supporting the dreams of home buyers and ensuring that more affordable homes are built. Nowhere is this clearer seen than in the right hon. Gentleman's opposition to our extension of right to buy for housing association tenants.

In the last Parliament, we dramatically improved the right to buy for council tenants, with 47,000 tenants seizing this opportunity and over 80% of the sales occurring under the reinvigorated scheme, yet 1.3 million social tenants in housing association properties continue to get little or no assistance. That cannot be right. We promised the electorate that we would end this unfairness.

**Andy Slaughter:** Will the Minister give way?

**Brandon Lewis:** No, not at the moment.

Housing associations have recognised this inequality and have signed an offer to the Government that we have accepted—a historic agreement to end it. I thank the housing associations for doing that, and I applaud them for their forward thinking and their eagerness to help tenants own their own property, especially in light of the fact that this has bitterly disappointed the Opposition. Clearly, the housing associations have not followed the Labour party script and fallen obediently into line. Instead, what housing associations are doing is giving tenants what they want. That should not be a surprise, because the mission of housing associations is to deliver for their tenants. They are now passionate about doing that, providing tenants with an option to buy their home and a ladder to opportunity. Every property sold will lead to an extra home being built.

**Julian Knight:** Is the Minister aware that in the Select Committee I asked three leaders of housing associations whether they thought that Government policy would lead to their building more affordable homes to buy, and the majority agreed that it would?

**Brandon Lewis:** As my hon. Friend will know, having given evidence after being quizzed by the Select Committee, I am an avid proponent of what it does, and my hon. Friend makes the very good point that the policy will increase housing supply. The reality is that every property sold brings in money that will mean that extra homes get built—housing supply will go up. So it is time to end the baseless scare story that right to buy reduces the number of homes, particularly in London.

Let me provide hon. Members with some figures. After we reinvigorated the scheme for council tenants in London, 536 additional homes were sold in the first year, and 1,139 were built. Yes, hon. Members heard that correctly: two for one on right to buy homes in London already. We are building even more, and that success will now be repeated on a much grander scale.

**Andrew Gwynne:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, but he will, I hope, forgive my scepticism, given that in the Stockport part of my constituency, there have been 184 sales of council homes under right to buy over the last three years—yet not one single right to buy replacement.

**Brandon Lewis:** The hon. Gentleman's council will want to listen to him and get on with building more homes. There is £2 billion-worth of headroom for all local authorities to build homes, but what I can tell the hon. Gentleman is that right across the scheme, housing associations will build a home for every home sold. Even under the reinvigorated scheme across this country, we are seeing one for one, while in London, as I say, we are already seeing two homes built for every one sold.

**Clive Efford** *rose*—

**Brandon Lewis:** I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman, and I want to make some more progress.

We are building even more, and that success will be repeated on a grander scale. Whether it be through right to buy, starter homes or Help to Buy: when buyers can buy, builders can build. We can support and we will support the aspirations of hard-working people. These plans are at the heart of our ambition to build those 1 million new homes. We are clear that we must go further and faster in all areas of housing supply. The Housing and Planning Bill is part of that, and it will give housebuilders and local decision makers the tools and confidence to deliver more homes.

I know that Members of all parties will want building on brownfield land to be the first choice at all times. Under this Government, brownfield land will be prioritised. New homes will be built near existing residents, so that their green belt and local countryside is protected. Regenerating eyesores and derelict land to create modern homes for the next generation is the opportunity that lies ahead of us. A new statutory register of brownfield land will provide up-to-date and publicly available information on land suitable for housing. Forty brownfield housing zones are being created across the country, including 20 in London. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip, the Mayor of London, for working with us to deliver those homes in London. We want to see planning permissions in place for 90% of these sites by 2020. We will also change the parliamentary process to allow urban development corporations to be established more quickly and get on with delivering new homes at the earliest opportunity. Smaller firms in particular will benefit from quicker and simpler ways of establishing where and what they can build, especially with the new "permission in principle" for sites on the brownfield register.

The Bill will ensure that the planning system helps to drive our increased aims for the supply of houses. During the last Parliament, we reformed and streamlined the failing top-down planning system. We dismantled regional spatial strategies, and as Planning Minister, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was able to oversee the reduction of thousands of pages of planning guidance to just 50, thus creating a system that people can understand and work with. Today, local people are in control.

**Mr Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk) (Con): My hon. Friend mentioned making it easier to establish urban development corporations. Will he also reflect on the possibility of establishing rural development corporations, with powers to make things happen quickly?

**Brandon Lewis:** I am always open to any ideas from local authorities that want to drive forward growth of that kind. We are already talking to authorities that want to be part of delivering for their communities. My hon. Friend has championed that work, because he wants to see local rural areas delivering housing, and I will be happy to work with him on that.

What we are seeing through this local system is that trusting local people and moving away from the top-down days of Labour's past is working. We are seeing people develop their own plans for house building, and the system is faster and more efficient. Since 2010, the number of planning permissions for new homes has increased by 50%, and the number of local plans has more than doubled. Meanwhile, neighbourhood planning has captured the imagination of communities across the country. Following the holding of 125 referendums, each plan was approved by democratic mandate.

I know that not every authority has reached the stage that we would like them all to reach with their local plans, but if plans are not in place by 2017, the Government will work with local people to ensure that that happens, so that all local areas have the plans that they want for the homes that they need.

We have come a long way since the great housing crash of the last decade, when house building was in real danger of stopping altogether. We made the tough decisions to get Britain building again. We are still clearing up the mess that we were left, but now we are moving from rescue to recovery and thence to revival. Our investment in house building during the current Parliament is the largest for 40 years. We are determined to deliver a better housing market that secures our economic recovery, boosts productivity and rebalances the economy. Our plans go far beyond numbers, schemes and timelines; they are about people and their hopes and dreams; they are about supporting their aspirations and giving them the confidence that their hard work can be rewarded with home ownership and a place to raise their families. This is about having one nation, where whoever people are, and wherever they live, they can walk through the doors of opportunity and into a home of their own.

5.17 pm

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The motion is about a scattergun approach to a very important topic. I understand it is aimed mainly at the last five years of the coalition Government and the direction they took. Of course, a standard one-line dig is now levelled at the SNP Scottish Government, as if that is somehow going to transform Labour's fortunes north of the border.

Current policy ties in with decades of housing policy of Governments of all hues. There is no doubt that the roots of the current housing crisis stem from the Housing Act 1980—an Act that Labour contemplated introducing before it lost power—which led to the decimation of housing stock across the UK as a whole, the biggest problem being that those houses were not replaced. The reason they were not replaced was that the moneys from the sale of stock were either used to offset debt or reclaimed by the Treasury, so it was impossible for councils to replace stock.

Fast-forwarding to Scotland now, the SNP has recognised this issue. That is why we scrapped the right to buy. As of this year, the right to buy council houses has been

[Alan Brown]

eliminated in Scotland. We are also opposed to the extension of the right to buy to housing associations. By removing the right to buy and opposing it in housing associations, we preserve stock and allow better targeted new building of social housing to meet local housing needs. Labour had 13 years in power in the UK but did not do that and Labour did not do it in Scotland when it was in power for eight years. Labour could have invested in a council house building programme but, like the Tories, in the main chose to leave affordable housing to the markets and to social landlords. We have heard about the sorry state of affairs whereby the coalition Government actually built more council housing in five years than Labour did in 13.

On the council housing theme, I point out that in Scotland the Scottish National party has now delivered more than 6,000 council houses, which compares to a grand total of six that Labour delivered when it was in power. [Interruption.] I said that right, the figures are 6,000 versus six. There is no doubt that greater council house building just makes more sense. Councils can borrow at a lower rate, they can use their land supply and they can target regeneration. Those were all things I was pleased to be involved with as a councillor for East Ayrshire Council.

Given the increased discounts put in by the coalition Government for right to buy, what council in England is going to invest in council house building in the future, as its stock will be at risk of getting sold off? The same goes for the extended right to buy in respect of housing associations. They will not be able to borrow securely when they no longer know accurately what their future rent projection will be. Clearly, they could build houses but those could then be sold off, which distorts the whole model that housing associations were built on.

Let me now deal with one-to-one replacement. Despite what we heard from the Minister for Housing and Planning, it is a complete sham. It is based on a three-year cycle, and I understand that that is to allow for planning and getting houses coming out of the ground. The Government say that they have already achieved the one-to-one, but they are comparing the first year's right-to-buy sales with the replacements over a three-year period. There has been a massive increase in the right-to-buy sales since then. The Library briefing paper shows that to stay on track against the increased number of right-to-buy sales, 4,650 houses need to be built every six months. In the first six months of this year, there were only 730 starts and acquisitions, so for the first six months of this year the Government have achieved only 15% of that required target. There is therefore no doubt that going forward the one-to-one replacement will not happen. When that is combined with the forced sale of the highest-value council properties, it is clear that this Government are going to create a worse housing situation in the long term, rather than do something to sort it, despite all the bluster we have heard.

There is still no definition of what one-to-one replacement is. The target is a national one, so it does not compel councils and housing associations to replace houses locally. It means that local needs and supply assessments do not govern the replacement strategy or housing strategy, whereas in Scotland the local needs and supply assessments are a prerequisite of Government funding. The SNP Government, when funding social housing and

council housing, are making sure that they take local needs and assessments into account. That is a proper strategic overview, which is the only way in which housing stock can be managed.

Another major issue I have with the right-to-buy policy is that councils are forced to subsidise home ownership through the sales programme as well as fund the rebuild without any Government money being added. Monetary experts agree that this is the time to invest in infrastructure, and clearly housing is integral to infrastructure. If the Government used the £10 billion to £12 billion subsidy that is getting used for right to buy for housing associations, we could create additional housing. That would help to tackle the housing problem, it would create more jobs and it would lead to a more sustainable model. If the Government were actually willing to put money up front, that would also lead to Barnett consequential for Scotland, and I know that the SNP Government would use that wisely.

The right-to-buy measure in effect privatises housing associations. I draw a parallel with what happened during an early reading of the Scotland Bill when a proposal was made to devolve the Crown Estate. The hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) made an impassioned defence of the Crown Estate on the basis of the principle of not imposing a change of ownership. No Conservative Member is willing to come to the defence of housing associations, yet it is the same forced change of ownership.

Under the right to buy, large family houses have all but disappeared from council stock in some areas, and private renting has had to increase to compensate. That drives up housing benefit costs, which is counterproductive for the taxpayer in the long run. Many sold properties end up in the rented sector, especially flatted properties. Someone exercises the right to buy. Then they die; the flat is passed on to family and the family have no need for it. It ends up as a buy-to-let and the taxpayer pays more money for someone to rent that property than for the person in the council house next door. In a study by Glasgow university, this is estimated to have cost the taxpayer an extra £3 million a year in Renfrewshire alone. We also know that 40% of flats in England sold under the right to buy have ended up in the buy-to-let market. Clearly, that will only increase under the extended right to buy for housing association tenants.

We heard in the autumn statement of an additional levy on people who buy additional homes. That is supposed to provide some income to the Treasury and have a balancing effect on the buy-to-let market, but there is no doubt that it will not do anything. It will give the Treasury a wee bit more money, but the returns that buy-to-let landlords get will at least offset that one-off levy. So the taxpayer will still pay more money in the long run in housing benefit. Going forward, it is almost guaranteed that the only way the housing benefit bill will be reduced is if the Government take further punitive measures.

I think I have made it clear that I am against extending the right to buy to housing association tenants. It will lead to social cleansing—to a clearing out of people.

**Jake Berry:** They will still live in the property.

**Alan Brown:** They might do in the short term, but I can guarantee that they will get money from the taxpayer as a discount, then they will sell the property. Property

developers will move in, they will demolish and rebuild and there will be an ongoing moving out of people. The social houses will not be rebuilt in that area so people on lower incomes will not be able to rent in the area that they were staying in. *[Interruption.]* I think I should be pleased. I am getting a wee bit of chunter, and that is maybe a good thing.

Affordable homes clearly need to be truly affordable. The SNP Government have made sure that that is the case, and it is part of our plan going forward. It is not the case here in London. A cursory glance at my local estate agent in Kennington where I have a flat for when I stay down here shows that the costs for one-bedroom flats are truly mind-blowing. I can understand why London has a housing crisis.

In Scotland the SNP Government have delivered 30,000 affordable homes since 2011, backed by £1.7 billion of investment and they are committed to 50,000 affordable homes, of which 70% will be available for social rent, if they are re-elected. Despite what the motion says, I can inform the House that the chief executive of Shelter Scotland has welcomed this commitment. We have had no such commitment from Labour as yet in Scotland.

Although we are against the extended right to buy, we are not against home ownership. I accept that many families welcomed the original right to buy and many people have benefited from it. However, the scheme has had its time and it is time to move on. The rhetoric comes back to whether we are for or against home ownership, but that is not the right message. I have concerns that the UK Government proposals for Help to Buy and right to buy will encourage more people to borrow. At present interest rates are at an all-time low, so homes may be on the cusp of affordability. People can borrow now, but when interest rates go up there will be a risk to the affordability of those homes.

Although the Government talk about reducing borrowing, the one-for-one replacement scheme is funded by additional borrowing by councils and housing associations. As we now know, housing associations are adding to the public debt and are on the public books, so there is no benefit from what the Government are doing. The long-term economic recovery plan appears to give a discount to home owners, but it will increase personal debt and force borrowing elsewhere for replacement housing. All in all, it is not a plan at all.

To meet people's requirements, we need more houses to be built, based on local need and demand. Those must be truly affordable homes that are energy efficient. This would deliver health benefits and reduce the long-term housing benefit bill. A house building programme would create jobs, improve the welfare bill as more people would be working, and improve the Treasury's income. That is the strategic plan that the Government should work to. It is one that the Scottish Government are doing their best to implement and they certainly will do so if re-elected next year.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. Before I call the first Back-Bench speaker, we are going to start with a five-minute limit and see how we get on. If interventions are kept to a minimum, we can keep it to five minutes.

**Jake Berry:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance. Given that housing is completely devolved to Scotland, it does not seem reasonable that the Scottish National party spokesperson should take up about 15 minutes, when there are many Back-Bench colleagues who want to speak. Now, you have imposed a five-minute time limit on an extremely important topic. *[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. That is not a point of order. The SNP is the third party, so its spokesperson has every right to make a speech. We should keep such points of order to a minimum so that we do not eat even more into the time of Back Benchers.

5.31 pm

**Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con):** The right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) opened the debate by referring to five years of failure. By the way, I do not know where he is. He seems to have done a bunk. He spent a little time in the Chamber; he did not turn up to the Committee stage of the Bill at all, which for a shadow housing Minister strikes me as a little odd. What he should have referred to is five years of recovery from the dreadful situation we inherited. I enjoyed his speech.

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab):** Unfortunately, my right hon. Friend has had to go and meet the Minister because of the decimation of the steel industry in his constituency.

**Mr Bacon:** I understand that. It is a very good reason for not being in the Chamber. I enjoyed the right hon. Gentleman's speech, particularly the reference to the money inherited from Labour. There was no money. I do not think he got the memo written by the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Hodge Hill (Liam Byrne) that played a significant part in the general election. The Prime Minister carried it round with him the whole time. The memo said that there was no money.

We have been facing not five, but 50 years of failure from all Governments, who have worked on the flawed assumption that only the Government can solve the problem. For 50 years Government have been part of the problem, getting in the way of the supply of housing being allowed to rise to meet demand. We saw quite a lot of finger-wagging from the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne, but we heard nothing in the way of solutions. I listened to Opposition MPs carefully for many weeks in the Housing and Planning Bill Committee and I heard a lot of whingeing, but no real solutions. It is as if they have never asked themselves why the supply does not rise to meet demand. We do not talk about the shoe crisis, the jeans crisis, the DVD crisis or the chair crisis. Everyone in this Chamber is wearing a pair of shoes—including you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and if I may say so, yours are very nice shoes.

**James Cartlidge:** I cannot see them.

**Mr Bacon:** My hon. Friend should move along a bit. They are very nice.

No one says we need a national shoe service in order to solve the problem. We have a broken model, and it is this Government who are seeking to fix it. What I find

[Mr Bacon]

so depressing from the Labour Benches is the paucity of ideas, the sheer paucity of radicalism. Almost every amendment proposed from the Opposition Benches during the Committee stage of the Housing and Planning Bill would have had the effect of slowing things down—sand in the gears, a spanner in the works. Labour Members do not seem to recognise that they are seeking to make the central problem—the problem of supply—even worse.

Last week Kevin McCloud addressed the all-party self-build, custom-build and independent house building group at our No. 10 summit, and I am very pleased that he was able to do so. He said:

“The consumer has been on the receiving end of a pretty poor deal. We build some of the poorest, most expensive and smallest houses in Europe. That’s not something to celebrate.”

Yet according to Ipsos MORI, 53% of the adult population would like to build a house at some point, 30% would like to do so in the next five years, and more than 1 million people would like to buy a site and start in the next 12 months. This can be done at scale. Adri Duivesteijn in Almere in the Netherlands has proved that it can be done, with serviced plots for over 3,000 dwellings. Cherwell District Council is now doing it in Oxfordshire, with over 1,900 serviced plots. This is the way to help supply rise to meet demand, putting the customer at the centre. Chapter 2 of the Housing and Planning Bill, on self-build and custom house building, will make that happen. The right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne did not mention chapter 2 or self-build and custom house building.

There are very legitimate reasons why local authorities might want to have and maintain affordable housing. In my view, they could and should use some of their £22 billion of reserves to establish, promote and grow mutual housing co-operatives for affordable rent. That is completely normal in Berlin, where it is called *genossenschaften*, and elsewhere on the continent. These arrangements are not relevant in terms of right to buy because they involve people entering into contracts with each other to form part of a co-operative. I thought there was a thing called the Co-operative party, but we heard nothing about this in the Bill Committee; I was the one talking about it. Interestingly, the local authority leader who showed the most interest in it when asked about in-perpetuity social rents in big cities was the Conservative leader of Westminster council, Philippa Roe, who said very seriously, yet with a gleam in her eye, “Yes, we’re looking at that.” From Labour Members, I am afraid we heard nothing.

We need vision and imagination, and the Bill will make that easier to achieve. Instead of building the most poorly performing, most expensive and smallest homes in Europe, we should do things differently. We should use our imagination and our knowledge to make the best places that we can, with the best-performing homes that we know how to build, in the most beautiful surroundings that we know how to create, where people will be able to find an education, find the skills they need for life, find a job they enjoy, perhaps start their own business, put down roots, build a house or have someone build a house to their own design, raise a family, and be part of a community. These are all normal human aspirations. We have to make it normal to achieve them, so that housing supply rises to meet

demand here in this country, just as it does in the rest of Europe. That is the vision that we should pursue, and this Government, with the Housing and Planning Bill, will make it happen.

5.37 pm

**Julie Elliott** (Sunderland Central) (Lab): The Government’s record on housing over the past five years is sadly one of failure, and failure across all parts of the housing sector. It is a failure driven by short-termism, incompetence, and a lack of understanding of how millions of people live their lives. People in my constituency live very different lives from the people the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon) described. Most people in my constituency earn very low wages, often on very short-term contracts. Getting a home of their own—

**Mr Bacon:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Julie Elliott:** No. Getting a home of their own is a dream too far; being able to self-build is absolutely out of the question.

Since 2010 this Government have presided over the lowest level of homes built in peacetime since the 1920s. This fact does not become dulled by repetition. Since May, muddled thinking has given way to contradictory policies. The Government give with one hand and take away with another. The Chancellor’s Office for Budget Responsibility confirmed in November’s “Economic and fiscal outlook” that Government policies since the election will lead to 34,000 fewer housing association homes being built over the next five years.

I share the Government’s desire to create a property-owning democracy for those who want to own their own home. I can therefore only assume that the Secretary of State shares my disappointment that home ownership under this Government has fallen by over 200,000 to the lowest level in 30 years, below the EU average for the first time on record. To choose a period at random, from 1997 to 2010 the number of homeowners rose by more than 1 million. The rise of insecure working practices, such as zero-hours contracts and underemployment, has meant that many people cannot save for a deposit or get a mortgage, because they do not have a permanent contract.

The state of social housing in many parts of the country is close to breaking point, with waiting lists of many years. If the Government are not sure why that might be the case, perhaps they could look back to 2014, when the number of homes built for social rent was at its lowest for at least two decades. The number of affordable homes provided in the past year fell by more than a quarter compared with 2010.

This Government simply do not get social housing. I sat on the Localism Bill Committee in the last Parliament, when a Conservative member of the Committee referred to social housing as “housing of last resort.” I was born in a council house and I grew up in that house and that community—it was my home. Council housing provides a safe, warm place for millions of people to call home. It is not housing of last resort. The proposal in the Housing and Planning Bill, which is currently going through this House, to scrap tenancies for life is a disgrace, and this Government should be ashamed for proposing such a change.

This Government have made it harder to build social homes by choking the planning system. They have consistently watered down section 106 affordable homes requirements, while in his day job as Mayor of London, the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), who is no longer in his place, has banned Labour councils from insisting on the building of genuine social homes through section 106 agreements in his London plan. He did that against the guidance of the planning inspector, but with the approval of the former Communities and Local Government Secretary, the right hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles).

With home ownership an unobtainable ambition for many, and with social housing in short supply, it should come as no surprise that the private rented sector has enjoyed tremendous growth. Although there are many good private landlords who provide decent homes for their tenants, many other tenants endure daily instability and short-term tenancies—typically of six months—as well as poor standards and rent increases at a pace that outstrips wages.

By every metric, and in whatever part of the housing sector, the situation has deteriorated in the past five years. I hope the Government can start to address the differing and diverse needs of families across this country with a comprehensive strategy that does more than simply manage decline.

5.42 pm

**Stephen Hammond** (Wimbledon) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott), but I have to say that my conclusion from looking at every metric is rather different from hers. The right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) opened in his usual way, but, behind his façade of bluster, the only conclusion we can draw from the statistics is that the Labour party left a housing crisis in this country. Under that Government, house building was at its lowest level since the 1920s, while the housing available for social rent decreased and the number of those on the waiting list increased.

There are a huge number of possible solutions to that problem, but Labour Members have offered a paucity of ideas. This Government have delivered for the past five years and they are continuing to do so. They are delivering 753,000 new homes and 260,000 more affordable homes, and council house building is now at its highest level for 23 years. The Mayor of London, who is not in his place but I was pleased to see him here earlier, has a record to be proud of. He is on track to deliver those 100,000 more affordable homes over his two terms.

Being a London Member, I was also pleased that the Chancellor, in both the autumn statement and the Budget, ensured that there was housing news and opportunity across the country. In particular, I was delighted with the extension of the very successful Help to Buy scheme—which in the last Parliament helped 120,000 households to get on the ladder—to London. That will be really important for the other measures the Government are also putting in place in London to work. It is clear that this Government do not lack ambition and that they are not complacent.

I heard the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne ask why the Government do not sell off some of their own land. In London, the London Land Commission

is going to do exactly that, which will be hugely powerful in delivering extra affordable homes during the term of office of my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), when he takes over as Mayor of London. The Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), who is in his place, will know that the London Land Commission will undertake a review in a year's time. When he looks at that review, I hope he might contemplate giving the Mayor the power to impose a duty to co-operate—or, indeed, a power to have a first right of refusal—so that if any public or local authorities drag their feet and hold back the aspiration to provide houses for Londoners, they can very clearly be told that it is their duty to co-operate with the London Land Commission and to get on with the job.

The Budget contained several measures that will be powerful in accelerating the number of houses likely to be built in our country. In particular, in-principle permission for brownfield sites will allow developers to bring forward sites much more quickly. It will enable them to understand what can be achieved in outline. Any number of large projects may benefit from that, but equally, so will any number of small projects. If developers have the confidence to know what they can do, they will invest in the technical detail, which will in turn lead to community support for community infrastructure—it may also create opportunities for self-build property, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon) has reminded us—and that will provide the opportunity for quality developers to bring forward quality developments on brownfield sites. Yet, Opposition Members have told people waiting to move into such homes, “Vote Labour—it won't happen.” It is very clear that there is a real difference between us on such ideas and aspirations.

I know that the Minister is in the mood and has an appetite to deliver even more than the target of 1 million houses, so let me tell him that he could do a few other things. In particular, will he consider introducing a plan to allow small-scale developers—perhaps paying a small extra fee to accelerate the process—to fast-track small developments through the process more quickly? That would give us a real opportunity to bring on some of the smaller sites. We all want big developments, but small ones will help just as much.

This Government are absolutely right to be taking action on housing, which is the most important issue for our country. It was largely ignored during the 13 years of Labour failure, but I know that this Government have the ambition to build the homes in which the people of this country want to live.

5.47 pm

**Ms Karen Buck** (Westminster North) (Lab): I have spent too many years in the trenches of statistical warfare on housing supply, so today I want to use the few minutes available to me to talk about values.

Conservative Members have spoken about one aspiration—the aspiration for home ownership. That is an important and vital aspiration, because most people want to own their home if they can and we should help them to do so. The fact that the Government proposals for starter homes require households in my constituency to have an income of £101,000 does not fill me with

[Ms Karen Buck]

confidence that the need will be met in central London any time soon. None the less, it is an important aspiration. Mobility is another important value, because we want to make the best use of the existing housing stock and we want people to be able to move around this country for work and other purposes.

I want to spend my few minutes talking about another value, which is the value of security. A home is not just based on an economic transaction—people do not just spend rent or mortgage payments to secure a bed for the night—but is where people bring up their family and experience community and neighbourliness, and it therefore means so much more to them. That does not disappear for people on low incomes: a home means as much to someone on a low income as it does to the millionaire who can spend £6 million to buy a home in the London luxury market.

**Mr Bacon:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Buck:** No, I will not give way, because too many Members want to speak.

What we have seen under this Government—although it did not start in 2010, of course—is an erosion of the principle of security. That erosion reached its nadir with the proposal to scrap the security of tenure for social housing. The proposal to scrap secure social tenancies will mean an intrusion into the lives of the poorest, and only the poorest, every few years as they are required to justify their home.

The principle of security is being eroded in many other ways. There has been a doubling in the number of families who are bringing up children in private rented housing, where they can only rely on a 12-month assured shorthold tenancy. The Government refuse to do anything to address the desperate need for longer security for people in the private rented sector. There has been an increase in homelessness. It was coming down for many years from too high a peak under the last Labour Government, but it is soaring again. There has been a fantastic 820% increase in the number of families being held illegally in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Families are living, sometimes for years, in nightly booked temporary accommodation after they have been homeless. That has happened to my constituents. Insecurity is the new normal, but only for the poorest. Far from addressing that crisis, the Government plan to extend it and entrench it even more widely.

The stories of my constituents and the constituents of everybody on the Opposition Benches—and, quite possibly, the stories of the constituents of Government Members that go unheard—are stories of people torn away from their children's schools, torn away from their parents, torn away from the people they have caring responsibilities for, torn away from the volunteering they do, torn away from their part-time or even full-time jobs and torn away from their communities. It is their children, above all, who suffer. The hyper-mobility that is forced on families at the moment is bringing about worse physical health, worse mental health, higher suicide risks and worse educational achievement. We are entrenching that into the lives of the poorest. Sadly, I do not have time to tell some of those stories, although I would love to be able to do so.

We know not just from the anecdotes, but from academic research that has been done in Australia and America, just how damaging this is. Communities suffer as well as individuals when the people who are the building blocks of communities—people who are registered to vote and who are civic participants—can no longer be so because they are forced again and again to move house. They are forced to move house every six months or every year, and now social tenants will be forced to move house every three or four years.

I will finish with a quotation from Professor Steve Hilditch, who for over 40 years has been an academic, a manager and a deliverer of housing. He says in respect of the end of secure social tenancies:

“Social rented housing is our most precious housing asset. Its existence broke the historic inevitability that people on low incomes and vulnerable people would also endure homelessness and dreadful housing conditions. It removed the blight of bad housing from generations of children. In my view it was the strongest mechanism of all to achieve genuine social mobility and to give children born into poor families similar opportunities to those enjoyed by better-off families.”

5.52 pm

**Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con):** I am grateful to the Opposition for calling a debate on affordable housing, because it gives me the opportunity to point out the very different records of Labour and my party in both national and local government in supplying affordable homes in Worcester.

Affordable housing is one of the most pressing and important issues for me, as the MP for Worcester. It is the single most commonly raised concern at my surgeries. Although Worcester has seen nothing like the price inflation that has been seen in the south-east, the price of housing is a major worry for young people, whether they are students and apprentices setting out to rent or young professionals looking to buy their first home.

In our beautiful county town, a city of about 100,000 people, there is rightly pressure to build affordable homes on brownfield rather than greenfield sites, both to protect the stunning Worcestershire countryside, which is such an asset to our county, and to defend the vital floodplains on which we rely each year to keep the River Severn out of homes and businesses. I was pleased to hear in a recent meeting with the Environment Agency that it rates Worcester City Council as one of the best councils in the area at using the planning system to protect its floodplains. Given that we see winter floods almost every year, that is essential.

For as long as anyone can remember, Worcester has been bombarded by Labour leaflets telling people that Labour is the party of affordable housing. I remember fighting local election campaigns as long ago as 2001 in which every Labour leaflet was adorned with messages about affordable housing. In 2003, the Liberal Democrats went into coalition with Labour on the council, with the explicit aim of delivering more affordable houses. If Labour had any track record of success in this area, the leaflets would be understandable. Knowing the importance of affordable housing, I made it my mission to explore how much Labour administrations in the city had delivered.

The figures from Worcester City Council tell a stark story of Labour neglect. From 1997 to 2000, a period in which Worcester had a Labour MP, a Labour-led council

and—oh joy of joys—that things-can-only-get-better Labour Government in Westminster, the council built fewer than 20 affordable homes per year. Very few of these homes, and none after 1997-98, were for affordable ownership, and the abysmal record of Labour when they had complete political control of Worcester was of just 22, then 11, then 19 affordable homes delivered—these figures in a city of 100,000 people.

Unsurprisingly, Labour was turfed out of control of Worcester in 2000 and a Conservative administration took control. What happened to affordable housing delivery when those nasty Tories took over? It rose 47% in the first year, more than doubled in the second year and then ran all the way from 2002 to 2012 at an average of 112 homes per year—five times as many as Labour had delivered. “Ah, yes,” said the Labour party, “but things slowed down after we lost power in 2010,” and yes, they did. Labour left us with the lowest rate of house building since the 1920s. It took years for the housing market to recover from the great recession that began in 2008, but in Worcester we kept on building affordable homes.

In 2012-13 the council delivered a remarkable 117 units of affordable housing, 79% of all new homes delivered in the city that year, under a Conservative administration.

**Mr Bacon:** I joined the Conservative party in Worcester in 1978. Will my hon. Friend accept that it comes as no surprise to me that things are now better—under the Conservatives?

**Mr Walker:** I am delighted with my hon. Friend’s intervention, although he may be less delighted to hear that the year he joined the Conservative party in Worcester was the year I was born.

What happened when Labour and the Liberal Democrats took control? Affordable housing delivery slumped, falling from 117 to 76, a decline of more than 30% in a single year. Worse still, the fall in delivery of housing meant a slowdown in receipts from the new homes bonus, a welcome financial incentive introduced by the coalition Government to support delivery of affordable housing. Not only did Labour’s chaotic year in control mean a more acute housing shortage, but it also meant damage to the city’s capital receipts.

Fortunately, the voters of Worcester, seeing the record of both Labour and the Liberal Democrats—who, alas, are absent from this debate—elected more Conservative councillors in 2014, and those mean old Tories took back control of the council once again. The result: an immediate recovery in the number of new affordable homes. The delivery of affordable homes in Worcester in the last year is the highest on record since 1997, and out of 460 new homes delivered in the city, 260 are rated as affordable. In 2015, new homes bonus income for the city rose to £5 million. The lesson here is stark: Labour always promise affordable homes, but only the Conservatives actually deliver them.

I know very well that there is still a great deal more demand, and the city’s own estimates suggest that this year’s record delivery is only the baseline for what is needed. In debates on building affordable homes it is often as if the only choice is to deliver them and concrete over our green fields or to give up on providing them altogether. That is simply not true. In fact, whereas a fifth of homes delivered in Labour’s one year of

control were delivered on greenfield sites around Worcester, that figure has fallen, even as delivery of homes has increased, to only around 7.5% in the current year. Looking ahead, about 90% of the homes planned for in Worcester’s land supply can be delivered on brownfield sites, and I hope that figure continues to increase.

There is much the Government can do to further support the delivery of affordable homes in brownfield sites, and I am pleased to hear about the new brownfield fund. I hope the Government will look into more mechanisms to support renting above the shop and city centre living, which I believe can both help our high streets and address the desperate need for affordable homes.

I welcome the Government policies on Help to Buy. I have seen that for myself on the streets of Worcester, meeting people who have been able to buy their own home for the first time who would not otherwise have been able to do so. I particularly welcome the Help to Buy ISA. I also welcome the Government’s efforts to crack down on rogue landlords, going further than Labour ever did in their 13 years in office to deal with this very serious issue.

Today’s motion is typical of the relentless negativity we see from today’s Labour party. It says nothing about the aspiration of working families to live in homes they can own, nor the steps that have been taken, greater than under 13 years of Labour, to regulate rogue landlords. I am very proud that in Worcester, under a Conservative Government and with a Conservative council, we are delivering more affordable homes than ever.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, I am going to lower the limit to four minutes with immediate effect.

5.59 pm

**Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate on housing; it is the single biggest area of concern to my constituents. Whatever measure we take, this Government have failed to deliver the homes we need in the areas where they are needed and at the pace which is required to address a housing crisis unprecedented since the second world war. If their own measure of success is home ownership, the Government have presided over a decline in the number of homeowners of 205,000 since 2010. If their measure of success is the housing benefit bill, the current Chancellor has seen an increase of £4.3 million in that bill over the past five years, including a doubling of the number of in-work households in receipt of housing benefit.

If the measure of success is, as it should be, the level of homelessness, there has been an increase of more than 50% in the number of people sleeping rough since 2010, and an increase in homelessness as a whole of more than a third. If the measure of success is the delivery of affordable homes, we see perhaps the Government’s most catastrophic failure: a decline of almost 75% in the delivery of new homes at genuinely affordable social rents since 2010, and a new definition of affordable rents, which makes a mockery of the term “affordable”.

[Helen Hayes]

In response to that failure, the Government appear to be constructing a new set of policies around an entirely arbitrary dividing line. Let us call it the aspiration threshold. Above that line, which quantifies at a house price of £450,000 in London, or an income of £90,000 with savings of close to £100,000, the Government recognise the aspiration of us all to have a stable home for the long term, to put down roots in our community, and to know that our children can attend the same schools for as long as they need to do so. Below that line, the Government do not recognise the legitimacy of people's aspirations. They seem to believe that the most that council tenants deserve is five years' stability at a time. In the private rented sector, it is viewed as entirely acceptable to live with the threat of a no-fault section 21 eviction. For those people, moving their children out of a school where they are settled and away from their friends in search of an affordable home is perceived as an acceptable way to live. For those people who are paying rent so high that they cannot afford to save for a home of their own, the aspiration of home ownership becomes increasingly hard to realise.

I do not understand why the Government are so focused on that arbitrary line. Most people in my constituency want the same thing: an affordable place of their own that is secure, safe, warm and suited to their needs. Most people do not want their aspirations to be achieved at the expense of others. Housing association tenants who would like to buy a home of their own do not want that to be at the expense of a family with two children in a one-bedroom home, whose aspiration to move to a council home big enough for their needs will not be realised if the Government force the council to sell off its larger family homes because they are the homes of highest value. We need to build more homes across all tenures, not one type of home at the expense of another.

The Minister for Housing and Planning came to the Communities and Local Government Committee this morning, and could not give any assurances that the numbers underpinning his proposed radical reform of housing policy add up. Next month, hon. Members will be asked to vote on a set of ideologically driven, uncosted and unproven proposals in the Housing and Planning Bill, which is a pitifully poor response to the biggest housing crisis that this country has faced since the second world war. The Government have a shameful record and are making an inadequate response. I hope that they will listen and introduce a more convincing plan to tackle the crisis.

6.2 pm

**Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): I direct hon. Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak in today's debate. I agreed with much of what the hon. Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) said about housing being largely about security. We must accept in this country that the British housing journey has changed. The private rented sector is now larger than the social housing sector and 11 million people live in privately rented homes. To give Members an idea of the growth in that sector, it increased by 69% between 1993 and 2013. More than 1 million

families with children live in the private rented sector. I hope that the Minister will turn his attention to those families today.

In the mid-1980s, the age of a first-time buyer was about 25. It is now over 30 and, in some parts of London, over 40. The Housing Act 1988 introduced the assured shorthold tenancy for people who rent on a short-term basis while saving for a deposit to buy a home. It was specifically designed—I went back to *Hansard* and had a look—for students, professionals and short-term renters. In an age when people are renting for longer and with families, I believe that the assured shorthold tenancy is no longer fit for purpose for people in the private rented sector with families.

As the figures show, being in the private rented sector means that people move more often. People come to my advice surgery and say that they have struggled all year to save perhaps £100 a month towards a deposit to buy a house, only for those savings to be wiped out by the cost of moving, paying agency fees and a new deposit on a private rented home. That is borne out by Shelter's statistics, which state that 60% of those in the private rented sector have no money left at the end of the month, other than to pay the rent. Santander states that 49% of people in the private rented sector have given up saving for a deposit to buy their own home altogether.

I welcome the Government's Help to Buy ISA, which is hugely encouraging and helps those in the private rented sector to save up a deposit. Will the Minister update the House on his progress with the family-friendly tenancy? I have sent several written questions to his Department, and I would be interested to know how many family-friendly tenancies have been taken up and what reassurance has been given to lenders. When I worked in the Downing Street policy unit on that policy, lenders were reticent to grant longer tenancies because of their nervousness about seeking possession if they went in as mortgagee in possession. If, as I suspect, the number of family-friendly tenancies taken up is low, is it time for the Government to consider legislating in that area? Given that so many houses in the private rented sector now have their rent paid by housing benefit, it is surely not unreasonable for the Government, who are paying the rent, to ask landlords to offer more security to their tenants.

Finally, let me cover something different. As we approach Christmas we will all be thinking of homelessness, and I want to mention Joanne Atkin and Michelle Brindle in my constituency, who saw Carlos Maradona, a salesman of *The Big Issue* who works outside Sainsbury's in Darwen. As well as coming to see me, they set up a crowdfunding page, so that everyone in the town could get behind Carlos at Christmas and help him to find a home. I will tweet the link after this debate, but I thought the House might be interested to know that we have already raised £1,400.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. A three-minute limit must now apply to Back-Bench speeches because otherwise a lot of people will not get in.

6.7 pm

**Karin Smyth** (Bristol South) (Lab): I want to focus on supply and demand in Bristol, where the situation for buyers, and especially renters, is challenging. Information

I have seen shows that property prices in Bristol have risen by between 7% and 9.7% in the past 12 months. Hometrack shows that of the 20 cities it monitors, only London, Cambridge and Oxford recorded a greater percentage increase than Bristol, and the influx of property investors from London and overseas is now a further influence on the Bristol housing sales market. One constituent who phoned my office told me that he was turned down for viewing a property because the estate agent had a queue of interested cash buyers.

The pressure felt by would-be buyers will increase further with the electrification of the London to Bristol line that will reduce travel times by 15 minutes, and effectively put Bristol on the same commuter belt as Oxford. Looking ahead, Halifax estimates that national house prices will rise on average by between 4% and 6%, and in high-demand areas such as Bristol that could be up to 10%. That is possibly good for investors, landlords and those who want to buy to let, but for young people and those looking to get on the housing ladder, it is not a good picture.

Rents have been rising throughout 2015, and they are expected to rise in 2016. This month, a local estate agent in my constituency told our local newspaper:

“If I take our Bedminster branch, there are 15 or 20 enquiries a day for rental properties, and the supply is maybe four or five a week, so the numbers are chilling. I’m pretty sure that the stamp duty rise on second homes will have an effect. It will force people to think twice and it will take a pretty robust person to buy a property to rent out. It is a bad thing for the Government to do because there is a massive shortage of properties to rent in the Bristol area and it will exacerbate the problem.”

Other factors that make the situation even bleaker include average prices of £210,000 and salaries of £22,000—I dispute the assertion by the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) about houses being affordable above a line from the Severn to the Wash. Some 10,000 people in Bristol are waiting for social housing, and thousands of properties are standing empty. Some councils in the south-west are doing good work. A local council in Plymouth has plans for homes, plans for social rent, a plan for empty homes, a charter for private rented housing and a plan for social rented housing. That is a Labour-run council—a small blot of red in the blue that is the south-west of England. Bristol and other local authorities need to learn from each other and share good practice. Also, the Government need to support local authorities that are trying to achieve something. The Government need not only ambition but a better plan.

6.9 pm

**James Cartlidge** (South Suffolk) (Con): I should like to begin by declaring my interest. I am a controlling director in a mortgage broker and property portal dedicated to shared ownership, and chairman of the all-party group on housing and planning.

When we talk about housing at the moment, there is obviously a focus on new build and on supply, but as I said in my intervention on the Minister, I still think that one of this Government’s most radical changes is the one we are making to buy to let. In the last Labour Opposition day debate on housing, in June, I spoke on buy to let and said that I was looking for three changes from the Government, relating to the rate of stamp duty, to tax relief and to mortgages.

Two of those changes have been delivered, including a measure on stamp duty. I said that it was completely unfair that a first-time buyer should pay the same rate of stamp duty as someone buying their 25th portfolio buy-to-let property or a second home as a holiday home. The Chancellor has had the courage to make that change, which no Labour Chancellor ever made. On tax relief, I said that it was wrong that first-time buyers or other home owners, who no longer have mortgage interest relief at source—MIRAS—should not have tax relief when buy-to-let landlords do so. Again, we are addressing that.

Of course the buy-to-let change is controversial, and we are now experiencing a backlash from *The Daily Telegraph* and others against it. In the one minute and 44 seconds remaining, I want to remind hon. Members why it is necessary. The Bank of England’s Financial Policy Committee’s minutes show that the rate of credit loss on buy-to-let mortgages in the UK has been about twice that for residential mortgages, despite the fact that 75% of buy-to-let lending remains interest only. In the past year, there has been £28.5 billion of lending with no repayment of the debt. For me, any area of the economy that requires tax breaks and non-repayment of debt to survive is unsustainable. The buy-to-let sector has not been sustainable.

That does not mean that we have something against those who wish to buy a property to let. I accept that some people use such properties as their pension, and some are saying, “It’s my pension. Why are the Government hitting me?” One change that must come out of this proposal is that we have to talk, as a country, about the fundamental issue of pension reform. If we can do that, it will represent an important gain. Luke Johnson has written in *The Sunday Times*:

“We cannot prosper as a nation of buy-to-let landlords; we must also produce goods and services and export to pay our way in the world.”

That means investment—not just foreign investment but our own investment—as well as a higher savings ratio and a more sustainable economy. I believe that a key part of that will be a more sustainable housing market in which first-time buyers have a reasonable chance of buying the properties which, at the moment, are being taken from them by people who will then rent them out to those same people who want to be first-time buyers. This is a fair move and it is being brought in by this radical Conservative Government.

6.12 pm

**Richard Burgon** (Leeds East) (Lab): In the brief time available, I want to highlight the problem in Leeds, to illustrate the fact that it is indeed a nationwide problem and not one that affects only London and the south-east.

In Leeds, buying a home is increasingly unaffordable, and that includes starter homes. According to the National Housing Federation’s paper, “Home Truths 2014/15: Yorkshire and Humber”, the current average house price in Leeds is £179,000, which is seven to eight times higher than median earnings in the city, depending on whose figures are used. That makes a mortgage unobtainable for vast swathes of the population.

Projections from the Office for National Statistics and the House of Commons Library have suggested that by 2020, starter homes could cost around £162,000

[Richard Burgon]

in Leeds. If that turned out to be the case, that would be significantly below the cap. However, the average income needed for such a property would be £45,000, and the reality is that gross median income in Leeds is currently around £22,000. Unless median income doubles in the next five years, starter homes will remain unaffordable.

Richard Lewis, Leeds City Council's executive member for regeneration, has said that the council's ambitions for a new generation of housing are at risk because of "central government's focus on starter homes above all other types of housing and their attempts to reduce housing mix through extending right to buy and forcing the sale of council homes".

The right to buy sell-off of council homes is resulting in local authority housing stock being diminished, with very little replacement. Over the past three years, 1,159 Leeds local authority properties have been sold, with only 59 replacement starts—a ratio of 20:1.

Renting is increasingly unaffordable for a wide variety of groups. The Leeds Tenants Federation states that, even in council and housing association properties, some people are spending between 40% and 70% on rent. Many in Leeds are also struggling with private rent. Indeed, the council has previously written to the Communities and Local Government Committee to say of the private rental sector that

"rents are now taking a greater proportion of income".

It said:

"There is an increasing issue of affordability across all sectors of the private rental market."

So there is much to do.

The Conservatives spent the last Parliament blaming Labour, but that will not wash any more. They have their own record now, and on housing, both in Leeds and across the country, it is five years of failure on every front, with unaffordable home ownership, rising rents, deep cuts in investment and the lowest level of house building since the 1920s. There is a lot of work to be done. The blame game has to end, and the work must start and then be finished.

6.15 pm

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is as true today as it was 30 years ago that more than 80% of people aspire to buy their own home. On the other side of the equation, house builders make their living by providing as many homes as possible. There is no lack of will to build, or a lack of desire to buy. The problems are due to the supply-side issues in the marketplace. Supply is constrained by a planning process that is not fit for purpose. There is a shortage of viable land, as much of it is locked away in public sector land banks, and a major demand side issue, in that house prices are simply out of reach for far too many people.

Fundamentally, the supply-side issue is the one that we most need to resolve. Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication: build more homes and most of the problems of affordability will fall away. We are building more homes. There has been a 56% rise in housing starts since 2010, and the number is now running at 136,000 a year. Planning consents are at a post-recession high of 240,000 a year, which will inevitably lead to more homes being built.

I welcome the provisions of the Housing and Planning Bill and its objective to increase further house building and home ownership. I welcome, too, the brownfield register, permission in principle, the simplicity of starter homes with a 20% discount, and right to buy.

The hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) may be interested to know that we took evidence from Dr Mary Taylor, the chief executive of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations. She was asked whether, if there had been a one-to-one policy for right to buy, she would have got behind that policy. She said that she might well have had a different view.

One third of all people in relative poverty are there due to housing costs alone. The additional homes created by right to buy, and funded by making greater use of taxpayer-owned assets held by local authorities, will deliver affordable homes to buy, for shared ownership, and to rent. I share the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) that we need longer, family-friendly tenancies and client money protection schemes for letting agents.

Earlier, I mentioned the huge swathes of land held in the public sector. The Government have pledged to bring forward enough public sector land to build 150,000 homes over the next five years. I am concerned that this land will be released and that we may need incentives to ensure that surplus, under-utilised land in our public sector is made available for development for our housing associations and the private sector. I offer strong support for this Government's record on housing, and believe that the new initiatives in the Housing and Planning Bill will help to deliver a housing market that works.

6.18 pm

**Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): Successive Governments have failed to build anywhere near enough houses. The Government's current Housing and Planning Bill at least tries to deal with some of that fallout. However, as with so many of their current policies, we are expecting those with the least resource to pay for our mistakes.

The spare room subsidy was the first assault on the most vulnerable people to right that wrong. I worked with a young woman who, due to violent and persistent domestic abuse, needed to go into hospital to deal with her severe physical and mental health problems. For that period, her child was removed to foster care. When she returned home, she began the process of rebuilding her relations with her daughter. Her daughter remained in foster care to give them both space to recover. The period of time was such that she was considered to be under-occupying her property. She fast built up arrears and debts and was eventually evicted, leaving her with no stable home for her child to return to. That woman lost her home, her health and her daughter, and all she needed was a chance. Was it her fault that houses were not rebuilt when they were sold off? I do not think so, yet she paid the price.

The bedroom tax was an instrument meant to encourage people to move out of properties that could be used for a bigger family, but it does not work like that if there is nowhere for them to go. It just makes money out of those who simply cannot bear it. The blunt-ended policy fails to recognise the realities of people's lives. Some of the proposed elements of the current Housing and Planning Bill will do exactly the same.

The Government's intention to end lifetime and successive tenancies is meant, again, to encourage people to free-up much needed properties. That is all well and good, but similar to the problems faced by bedroom tax victims, life does not work like that. When an adult child has a choice to give up their own tenancy and livelihood to move in and care for an elderly mother or father, they have a very tough choice to make and will be unsure of their own future. When a victim of domestic violence is rehoused with her children, who have probably been through enough, will we say, "Sorry gang, you'll have to move schools pretty much every five years"? Will the Government fund all of the new housing officers that will be needed to ensure that the system works fairly? I wonder whether any of the Ministers have sat in their local housing queue recently. I have; it takes hours to be seen.

I do not want to stand here and moan. I want the Government to do something and have some positive suggestions. If they are going to encourage people to move in and out of social housing more frequently, they need to invest heavily in temporary accommodation. Currently, there is no temporary accommodation. The taxpayer funds bed and breakfast accommodation for families to live in—where used condoms are stuffed into the walls and there are dirty beds—when there is nowhere for them to go. The Government must invest in that. They must also look at models such as the one we have in Birmingham, where we have a social lettings agency with an honest broker, two-year tenancies and help with deposits for tenants coming out of social housing.

The Government should look at those suggestions before they rush into something that will show up in my surgeries in glorious technicolour.

6.21 pm

**Seema Kennedy** (South Ribble) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips). I draw hon. Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Last Friday, I visited a new development in my constituency, Saxon Place in Penwortham. It is a mixture of family homes for rent and for sale under shared ownership. I mention that because I had the great pleasure of serving with many hon. Members on the Housing and Planning Bill Committee. There was a lot of talk about the affordability of starter homes and a lot of the conversation was very London-centric. My point is that, in many parts of the country including Lancashire, the starter and affordable homes really are affordable. On the average income in my constituency, a family could, under the shared ownership scheme, get a deposit of between £2,000 and £5,000 and have an equity stake in that house. I remind hon. Members that the world does not end at Watford Gap.

We agree that most Britons aspire to home ownership, but we have had a problem in getting more houses built. We have a growing population and more and more people live on their own. We need to be flexible about what we build. I was particularly pleased with the measures on automatic planning permission for brownfield sites. I have experience of developing brownfield sites. In the past, remediation works were costly and difficult. The fact is that we are getting better at that and prices are coming down. The provisions will start us on the

way to building more homes. As my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) said, we just need to increase supply. It is not the whole answer, but we absolutely must build more homes.

The important thing about the outline nature of that permission is that it gives reassurance to the developer that he can invest, but leaves the right amount of risk on the business rather than on the taxpayer. If we were to change the outline permission to make it more detailed, winding up in red tape, it would slow down the process, and there would be far too much onus on the taxpayer rather than on the developer. I also greatly welcome the Government's pledge to bring forward more public sector land to build more homes.

The Bill is forward looking. We are tackling rogue landlords, and I welcome the investment in garden cities. We need more homes and the Government are determined to deliver them. The Bill will go a great way to doing that.

6.24 pm

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): It is evident that there are Members in the Chamber, such as the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), who are strong supporters of English votes for English laws and who question why Scottish Members are speaking on a matter that should be fully devolved to the Scottish Parliament. I point out that Scotland is specifically mentioned in the motion we are debating today. The fact is that housing is an area where the headline statement of devolution is seriously undermined by a haphazard split of responsibilities between this place and the devolved Administrations. As a result, many decisions taken in this place can have serious implications for the delivery of housing policy in Scotland, and for the real issues and concerns of so many people.

The UK Government have stated that they want to transform generation rent into generation buy. It is certainly no bad thing to buy a home, but it must be financially sustainable, it must be right for one's circumstances and it must not be at the expense of future housing stock. The UK Government must focus on alternatives, too. We have heard concern from Members on both sides of the House about homelessness, which is a very real and very destructive issue. I gently point out that we should concern ourselves with this issue all year and not just at Christmas.

The UK Parliament has lost its focus on the quality and quantity of housing. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) that this can be traced back to the Housing Act 1980, when the Thatcher Government introduced right to buy. The policy has been popular with beneficiaries, but it has had serious side-effects on the quality of housing in the social rented sector and in entrenching deprivations in the areas of social rented housing that have not been sold off.

This Conservative Government are now going further than Mrs Thatcher. Owner-occupation is seen as the normal tenure for all households, regardless of income. This is exactly the approach that led to the American sub-prime scandal. Dame Kate Barker described the policy as

"people who are just on the cusp of being able to buy" being nudged over the edge. It did not end well.

[Kirsten Oswald]

The Government's thinking is that the social rented sector is a temporary stop-gap, where tenants should not regard their residence as a permanent home. They seem keen to import the deeply damaging and socially divisive concept of welfare housing. These policies are a smash and grab raid by the Chancellor on the assets of the social rented sector. Forcing councils to sell their best assets strengthens the social segregation that scars too many parts of this country and the forced sale of housing association properties represents the abandonment of those forced to wait for years for a decent home. Even *The Daily Telegraph* described the policy as "dumb, economically illiterate...morally wrong...and close to absurd".

The contrast between this shambles and the action being taken by the Scottish Government could not be starker. Instead of viewing housing as a weapon in a political game, the Scottish Government act on the basis that decent, accessible and affordable housing is central to the delivery of many other policy objectives. If we in Scotland had built houses at English rates since 2007, we would have 42,000 fewer homes. In fact, the Scottish Government have committed to something the UK Government no longer do: build both social and affordable housing.

6.27 pm

**Chris Philp** (Croydon South) (Con): I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I would like to start by replying to some of the points the shadow housing Minister, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), made at the beginning of the debate about the respective track records of this Government and the previous Government. In particular, I would like to draw attention to the number of housing starts across the country as a whole in the past year, which was 165,000, compared to the right hon. Gentleman's last year as Housing Minister when the figure was just 124,000—a 33% increase by the current Government, which is an extremely impressive record.

The hon. Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott), who I see is in her place, drew attention to affordable housing. I am similarly pleased to report to the House that, according to House of Commons Library figures, last year 67,000 affordable houses were delivered compared to just 58,000 in the last year of the previous Labour Government. I think there is a record to be proud of.

I was privileged to serve on the Housing and Planning Public Bill Committee for 17 sittings with the hon. Member for City of Durham (Dr Blackman-Woods), but not, I regret, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne, who did not grace us with his presence. I was disappointed by the lack of new ideas in his speech earlier. I thought we might have heard more from a shadow housing Minister.

There is a great deal to welcome in the Bill, not least the idea that every single local authority must have a local plan by 2017; the local development orders to give outlying planning consent on brownfield sites, which my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy) mentioned a few moments ago; and the London Land Commission bringing forward public sector land.

The GLA has done that successfully: 98% of its land is being brought forward. I suggest to the Minister that the London Land Commission be given more powers to take hold of the surplus public sector land identified and make sure that organisations such as the NHS, Network Rail and Transport for London do not shilly-shally or delay.

I have one or two other suggestions. Parts of the planning process can be cumbersome, with reports on things such as bats and newts—

**James Cartlidge:** Ken Livingstone.

**Chris Philp:** Yes, indeed.

If there is any way of lightening the process, it would be welcome. Similarly, many developers would be happy to pay higher planning fees in exchange for guaranteed faster decision making, perhaps with the extra fees being refunded if the service level was not met. I hope the Minister will take those constructive ideas in the spirit they are intended.

In summary, having sat on the Bill Committee for 17 sittings, I am absolutely confident it will increase the supply of new homes and promote homeownership, and I strongly welcome it.

6.30 pm

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): In 1892, Mr Pooter, from "The Diary of a Nobody", was the archetypal suburban London Mr Average, but on current figures he could not afford today to live where he did. In 2009, *The Spectator* said his home would be worth £1 million and that his clerk's salary would be £40,000. In Ealing, a typical suburb, the figures are astronomical and are placing an average suburb out of reach for the average Joe and Josephine, for whom suburbia was intended. Last year, average rents were £1,400. According to this year's Land Registry figures, a terraced house in W5 now costs £781,000.

The Government's housing record is one of abject failure, on homelessness, homeownership, house building, rents and, crucially, supply. Shelter, an objective charity, says that channelling existing public resources to build homes that only those on high incomes can afford will result in 180,000 affordable and low-rent homes not being built or sold. That is as a result of the changes in the Housing and Planning Bill. The goalposts have been moved several times. In respect of rents, "affordable" can now mean up to 80% of market rents, which is just not realistic.

These subsidised starter homes have been trumpeted, but they are a non-starter for people in my constituency. In Ealing, average earnings are about £34,500. If someone wanted a shot at just a one-bedroom starter home in W13, they would have to earn £73,142. In W4, it is even worse: £90,501. At first sight, the 1% rent reduction looks good, but it will have massive unintended consequences. I went recently to the reopening of the YMCA foyer in my constituency. It has sunk all its assets into it, based on a business plan of rising rents, and it now expects to be completely sunk. It was a massive oversight not to have exempted supported housing.

There is so much I could say about the mandatory "pay to stay" policy. The figure of £40,000 means two incomes of £20,000, which is not a princely sum in

London. It is an attack on aspiration, which Conservatives keep talking about. Our capital city is being hollowed out, as we pay ever more for housing yet become ever more insecure at the same time. *The Spectator* says that Holloway is now becoming banker land. I fear that not just Mr Pooter but many others on average and modest incomes are being forced out of London, which is being left to bankers, oligarchs and off-plan buyers, whose playground our capital is becoming.

6.33 pm

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): I welcome the Opposition's choice of motion, but I was disappointed by the shadow Secretary of State's lack of humility when he moved it, given his own underwhelming record in government.

As the shadow Secretary of State correctly said, housing is a top-four issue. I am sure it is towards the top of most of our postbags. The challenges of housing, rent and affordability are among the major challenges we face, and they deserve better than the rehashed diatribe we heard at the start of the debate. What we are seeing from this Government is the largest land building programme in decades, which will help to address the fundamental problem behind both the availability and affordability of housing.

As my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon) correctly said, the elephant in the room is the issue of supply. Why is there this market failure that we do not see in other areas of the economy? Part of the answer is regulatory failure. The Government cannot control all the levers that affect supply, but it is right for them to do what they can to eradicate some of the barriers to that market entry.

There are two elements at the core of addressing supply. The first is action to bring brownfield land back into productive use for housing. That is why I am so pleased that the Government are introducing this assumption of planning consent for developments on brownfield land. Devolution deals around the country are important, too. The devolution deal reached in my west midlands region is a combined authority with the powers of investment to bring brownfield land, and particularly contaminated brownfield land, back into use so that it can be made part of the land supply for our housing market. That is good for the environment—using brownfield instead of green spaces—good for housing and good for the economy.

The second area that needs to be addressed to increase supply is preventing the planning system from becoming a bottleneck to the availability of housing. The Government's action to move away from the regional spatial strategy towards local plans as well as introducing planning in principle is absolutely vital and will hopefully mean that we have the supply to match this record house building programme.

6.37 pm

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Members who picked up the *Metro* this morning on the tube will have seen that Hammersmith features in this week's property page. They will have found out that the average price of property there is just over £1 million, although they managed to find a one-bedroom basement flat for £425,000, which would be just within the starter home bracket,

requiring an income of only just over £100,000 to snaffle that up. The more typical development—the new development with no social housing given permission by the previous Conservative council—sees a two-bedroom flat in Fulham going for £1.2 million or a three-bedroom flat in the Queen's Wharf or Sovereign Court for £2.2 million.

That is why owner-occupation has dropped from over 40% to just over 30%. Local people cannot afford to buy those; they are bought by foreign investors from United Arab Emirates, Malaysia or wherever, and are either left empty or rented out, which is why the private sector has gone up from 30% to 40%, but all properties are unaffordable. I am afraid that I have to include in that list of unaffordable properties the 85% of council right to buys, which are now rented out at market rates, and mainly to local authorities that are now paying three or four times what it would cost to live in council accommodation. We know what the Housing Minister thinks about this because he recently said that

“if people want to live and work in and around London, it's actually making a judgment call about what you can afford”—in other words, “on yer bike”.

One type of housing is affordable—30% of the accommodation in my constituency is still social housing. Most Governments in the past, irrespective of party, would have regarded that as an asset, but not this Government. What are they doing? They are selling off housing association homes so that they in turn can be turned into buy to let at market rates, and they are selling 50% of the remaining 12,000 council stock in order to subsidise that sale.

When voters voted to get rid of the Conservative council that was selling off empty council properties—it sold off 300 and was warehousing and emptying blocks of council flats and constructing zero social homes in new developments—they thought that they had got rid of all that. Now, however, we have a Government who are bringing it all back at the national level through the Housing and Planning Bill. There will be no social homes built in the future—nothing that is affordable to my constituents.

I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck) is sitting next to me. Her speech hit the nail on the head when it comes to the most disgusting thing this Government are doing—removing security from people who live in council homes and telling them that they will have temporary housing as a form of charity rather than a permanent home in which to bring up their families.

The Government have reversed their position on “pay to stay” for housing associations, which is welcome, but they should do the same for everyone. They should let families on modest incomes continue to live in secure homes in London and around the country, and end this appalling business of removing security of tenure from council tenants.

6.39 pm

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): We are simply not building enough to keep up with both the demand and the challenges that are faced by many of our constituents who want to buy homes of their own. Government initiatives are radical and welcome, but I would advocate further action, and I hope that the Government will consider some of the following proposals.

[*Huw Merriman*]

First, there is a need to build on green spaces. Nearly 80% of my constituency is designated as “area of outstanding natural beauty”. There is a shortage of land afforded for local employment, but where there is such land, it is on brownfield sites. If the tens of thousands of houses that my district councils intend to build are allocated to brownfield employment sites, where will our current and next generations of homeowners work?

In one of my parishes, the village petitioned the district council to allow a small housing complex to be built on a green field just outside the building boundary. As a result of the campaign for building to be allowed on that green site, Etchingham now has a new school, a new village hall, and new affordable housing—all of it courtesy of that bold move. I should like the Government to make it easier to allow parish and town councils to make such decisions. When a district council has a plan, parishes and towns are required to conform to it; if they do not do so, their own local plans will not be approved by the district council. I should like to free parishes and towns from the shackles of district plan compliance. If they want to designate a site, then let them do so, and let them override district plans for their own purposes if that is within the planning laws.

Secondly, there is a need to deliver more infrastructure. Although the argument that more housing is required is being won, there is a real fear that communities will not have schools, doctors and other essential public services until the housing has been completed. If authorities could deliver infrastructure at the same time as building began, the public might embrace the building of more housing, and might even ask for more housing than had been scoped if, say, a new secondary school would be built with a few hundred more houses. I should like local authorities to be given the power to borrow money against the receipts from new homes bonuses, although, of course, that would work only if the new homes bonus scheme were extended for as long as the plans.

Thirdly, consent needs to be turned into new homes. The amount of land where planning consent has been granted but work has not begun continues to cause concern. The lack of building not only adds to the problem of a shortage of housing numbers, but also deprives local authorities of the ability to collect receipts from section funding or community infrastructure levies. I would support a policy that required developers to pay a first instalment of section 106 moneys within 12 months of the granting of planning consent, rather than on the completion of developments. Such a policy would not only incentivise house building and increase stock, but would permit local authorities to deliver vital infrastructure in parallel with house building.

The need to tackle our housing shortage is a huge priority. It is a national tragedy that more is not being done, but I support the Government on what is being done.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Mr Zeichner to speak for two minutes.

6.43 pm

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker. My city of Cambridge is in the grip of a housing crisis, and I have 110 seconds in which to speak.

An email that I received from a constituent recently encapsulates the problem. She wrote:

“I live, work and pay my council tax in Cambridge. Housing in Cambridge is almost as expensive as London these days. I was very excited to hear about the help to buy ISA—but Cambridge should have the same threshold as London of £450,000. Looking at rightmove right now, it is disheartening that there are only 4 properties that would meet our criteria of 3 bedrooms and the Government’s criteria of maximum £250,000 within a 5 mile radius of Cambridge...How are we supposed to buy, afford and raise a family in Cambridge?”

There are only four of those properties—four!

Perhaps the Minister will be able to answer my constituent’s question, but I personally doubt it, because I do not think that the Government have a clue about the real problems that face young people in Britain today. If young people such as my constituent cannot afford to buy, they have to rent, and do we hear anything from the Government about helping renters? I do not think so. If they were really listening, they would know that when house prices become unaffordable in areas like mine, the nature of the private rented market changes. Young families who would once have bought are staying longer in the rented sector, but the legislation has not kept up; the Government have not kept up.

Let me skip the points I was going to make about the attack on social housing and conclude by saying a little about the impact on business. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) visited my constituency recently and even he, experienced on these issues as he is, was shocked by the consistency of the message from employers. In every sector, be it the thriving life sciences and tech sector, research and our universities or major public sector employers such as the NHS, the message is clear: we cannot recruit and we cannot retain staff while housing remains so unaffordable. This is therefore not just about housing; it is about social justice and inter-generational justice. At the start of my speech I quoted the question from my constituent and I urge the Minister to answer it:

“how are we supposed to buy, afford and raise a family in Cambridge?”

6.45 pm

**Teresa Pearce** (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): In a wide-ranging debate, we have heard contributions from Members in all parts of the House, including the hon. Members for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond), for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy), for Croydon South (Chris Philp), for Dudley South (Mike Wood), for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) and for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald); my hon. Friends the Member for Ealing Central and Acton (Dr Huq) and for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter); the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman); and my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner). My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) made a passionate speech about the human cost of the housing crisis, and my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott) also spoke with passion about the shortage of social housing. Most interestingly, the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon) spoke of not only his well-known interest in self-build, but his less-known interest in the Deputy Speaker’s shoes.

Clearly, the housing crisis is one of the greatest challenges to face our country in recent times, and Members from across this Chamber know the impact

that housing has on their constituents' lives. The hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) spoke of his casework, which mirrors mine. My advice surgeries are full of people suffering as a result of the housing crisis, and my inbox and telephone line are jammed with their cases. Rent costs are rising, and there are poor standards in the private rented sector. We have ever-increasing homelessness across the country, both in terms of statutory homeless and rough sleeping. The Government are seemingly committed to seeing the end of the social housing sector as we know it. Fewer homes are being built than at any time since the 1920s and we have a generation of young people priced out of the property market. For five years, the Government have had the chance to tackle this housing crisis head on, but they failed.

It has never been more important to tackle the housing crisis, because housing affects everything—it affects our whole lives. Insecure housing affects our whole society. It affects health, education and productivity. Without a secure roof over our heads, we face uncertainty, instability and doubt. Stable homes make stable communities, and without safe, stable and affordable housing we face pressure across our whole society and across our public services. It affects our schools and our children's education, with unsettled classes affected by churn and individual children falling behind as they move school again and again. It affects public health and our doctors, who struggle to co-ordinate health awareness campaigns as a result of instability in the housing sector, as residents constantly move between practices. It affects our communities, where many are unable to set down roots, commit to a local area, and join local organisations, sports teams and religious groups. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North (Ms Buck).

The Government claimed that they would build more affordable homes, but the “affordable rent” is not affordable to many people. House of Commons Library research shows that in London it would swallow up 84% of the earnings of a family on an average income and it requires a salary of up to £74,000. This does not just affect London; the contributions we heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) and for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) showed us that this is a national crisis, not just a London one.

Many of those who cannot afford to buy have to live in the private rented sector, where the Government have failed to increase security and improve standards, and have overseen rents reaching an all-time high. Once the private rented sector was mainly for students and young professionals, but now it is families and the vulnerable who live in the sector. That was spoken about with concern and compassion by the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry). Some 9 million people now rent privately. Almost half of those who rent are over 35. They want the same security and stability that they would have if they owned their home, but they face insecure assured shorthold tenancies, and a Government refusing to encourage long-term tenancies and to tackle rising up-front letting agent fees. While these people pay more, the Government are failing to act to improve standards in the sector. Although the majority of properties in the private rented sector are well maintained and of good quality, there are sadly too many landlords who let properties that are not fit for human habitation. Indeed, the Government's own statistics

say that 16% of private rented sector dwellings are failing the minimum safety standard. When my hon. Friend the Member for Westminster North introduced a private Member's Bill to make sure that homes were fit for human habitation, it was talked out by Conservative Members, who argued that it would put a huge burden on landlords.

**Chris Philp:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Teresa Pearce:** I am afraid we are very short of time, so I cannot.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) also touched on the rising housing benefit bill, which is now £4.4 billion higher than in 2010. The Housing and Planning Bill included an all-out attack on social housing. On the last day of the Committee, the Government added a last-minute amendment to end secure tenancies for social tenants without any consultation or impact assessment.

I would like the Minister to respond to two questions. If home ownership is the only way forward, where are people who cannot get a mortgage meant to live? Can he confirm that starter homes will be for first-time buyers and will not be available to cash buyers?

The Housing and Planning Bill will lead to a loss of affordable homes to rent and buy, but more than anything it is a missed opportunity to tackle the housing crisis head on, to provide greater security, stability and safety to tenants in the private rented sector, to offer a genuine hand-up to those who are trying to get on the property ladder and to build more social housing. We have seen a comprehensive spending review and an autumn statement that have failed to provide for a programme of affordable house building and have attacked many tenants on low incomes due to cuts in housing benefits.

For five years the Conservatives have had the chance to tackle the housing crisis. They have failed. They have their own track record, and it is one of five years of failure. They should and will be judged on it.

6.51 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones):** I thank all Members for taking part in this lively debate. Before I respond to the speeches made by hon. Members, the House will appreciate a reminder of what has been achieved since 2010. Back then, the housing market was broken. We inherited a planning system that was dysfunctional, and levels of house building that were tumbling. The economy and public finances were on the brink of collapse. Enormous progress has been made since. Almost 900,000 new homes have been delivered in England since 2010. In the last Parliament the number of first-time buyers doubled, the number of new homes we built doubled and public support for new house building doubled, and since 2010 we have helped more than 270,000 households buy a home.

We have provided more than 270,000 affordable homes for rent, with almost one third of those in London. We are the first Government since the 1980s to finish their term with a larger stock of affordable homes. A reformed planning system gives far greater weight to the views and needs of local communities, but in this Parliament we want to go much further. The Government's investment is being doubled to £20 billion in the next five years.

[Mr Marcus Jones]

It will support the largest housing programme by any Government since the 1970s. Our ambition is to deliver 1 million more homes and double the number of first-time buyers.

My hon. Friends the Members for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon), for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond), for Worcester (Mr Walker), for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry), for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge), for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), for South Ribble (Seema Kennedy), for Croydon South (Chris Philp), for Dudley South (Mike Wood) and for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) all made fabulous and important contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk explained the importance of self-build and praised the measures in the Housing and Planning Bill to promote it. My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon pointed out that council house building is now at its highest level for 23 years, knocking down the myth promoted by the Labour party.

It was good to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester point out that the Conservatives in local government, not Labour, are providing affordable houses in Worcester. I was also pleased to hear his welcome for our crackdown on rogue landlords. My hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen stated the importance of first-time buyers and the Help to Buy ISA that the Government are introducing. My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk mentioned the measures that the Chancellor is taking to make things fairer for first-time buyers. My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton made a great point about the importance of the additional housing that will be provided by the right-to-buy receipts, and my hon. Friends the Members for South Ribble and for Dudley South made encouraging comments about planning in principle on brownfield sites and the difference that it will make in their constituencies. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South mentioned the London Land Commission and the potential for public sector land to be brought forward for development. My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle was a strong advocate of neighbourhood planning.

That brings me to the points made by Opposition Members. I shall start where my hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning left off. He mentioned “Back to the Future” to describe Labour’s approach and he was right. Labour still has a past which it harks back to, but it has very little of a future to look forward to if today’s debate is anything to go by. Speaking from the Front Bench, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) and the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) spent 40 minutes in total on their opening and winding-up speeches, and did not put forward one idea for tackling one of the biggest issues facing the country. It was all soundbites, empty rhetoric and ideology rather than pragmatism to help people get into their own home. For some reason Opposition Members seem very happy to own homes themselves, but when it comes to other people having the chance to own their home, they do not seem to want it. We want people to have the opportunity to own their home, which 86% of people want.

There were eight speeches from Labour Back-Bench Members that were extremely consistent with those from their Front Bench. In those eight speeches not one idea was suggested to try to deal with the issues that the

country faces. There was one notable exception. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) made several constructive comments and proposed a number of ideas that we will look at in the context of the debate.

Britain has come a long way over the past five years, a journey that has taken us from the brink of bankruptcy to being the fastest-growing advanced economy in the world. Confidence has returned and living standards are rising. More people are buying homes and house building is on the rise. But we must go further, and this Government are under no illusion about the scale of the progress that is required. In the past five years we have pulled house building up from the record lows of the previous decade, and in the next five years we intend to push it up further to levels not sustained since the 1980s. The challenges that we face today have been many decades in the making.

Our focus moves us from rescue to reform. We must address the deep structural weaknesses in the way that this country plans and builds for the future. A better housing market will be vital for raising the productivity of our country and rebalancing the economy. Above all, it will ensure that Britain is a country of opportunity, where everyone who works hard can realise their dream of home ownership—the housing association tenant, the young family who want to settle down, and the retired couple who want to build their own house. They all voted for a better housing market and that is what this Government are determined to deliver.

*Question put.*

*The House divided: Ayes 205, Noes 297.*

**Division No. 150]**

**[6.58 pm**

**AYES**

Abbott, Ms Diane	Crausby, Mr David
Alexander, Heidi	Creagh, Mary
Ali, Rushanara	Creasy, Stella
Allen, Mr Graham	Cruddas, Jon
Ashworth, Jonathan	Cryer, John
Bailey, Mr Adrian	Cummins, Judith
Barron, rh Kevin	Cunningham, Alex
Beckett, rh Margaret	Cunningham, Mr Jim
Berger, Luciana	Dakin, Nic
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta	Danczuk, Simon
Blenkinsop, Tom	David, Wayne
Blomfield, Paul	Davies, Geraint
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben	De Piero, Gloria
Brennan, Kevin	Doughty, Stephen
Brown, Lyn	Dowd, Jim
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas	Dowd, Peter
Bryant, Chris	Durkan, Mark
Buck, Ms Karen	Eagle, Ms Angela
Burden, Richard	Eagle, Maria
Burgon, Richard	Efford, Clive
Butler, Dawn	Elliott, Julie
Byrne, rh Liam	Elliott, Tom
Cadbury, Ruth	Ellman, Mrs Louise
Campbell, rh Mr Alan	Esterson, Bill
Campbell, Mr Ronnie	Evans, Chris
Champion, Sarah	Farrelly, Paul
Chapman, Jenny	Field, rh Frank
Coaker, Vernon	Fitzpatrick, Jim
Coffey, Ann	Flelo, Robert
Cooper, rh Yvette	Fletcher, Colleen
Corbyn, rh Jeremy	Flint, rh Caroline
Cox, Jo	Flynn, Paul
Coyle, Neil	Fovargue, Yvonne

Gardiner, Barry  
 Glass, Pat  
 Glindon, Mary  
 Goodman, Helen  
 Green, Kate  
 Greenwood, Lilian  
 Greenwood, Margaret  
 Griffith, Nia  
 Gwynne, Andrew  
 Hanson, rh Mr David  
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet  
 Harris, Carolyn  
 Hayes, Helen  
 Hayman, Sue  
 Healey, rh John  
 Hendrick, Mr Mark  
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen  
 Hermon, Lady  
 Hillier, Meg  
 Hodge, rh Dame Margaret  
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon  
 Hoey, Kate  
 Hollern, Kate  
 Hopkins, Kelvin  
 Howarth, rh Mr George  
 Hunt, Tristram  
 Huq, Dr Rupa  
 Hussain, Imran  
 Irranca-Davies, Huw  
 Jarvis, Dan  
 Johnson, rh Alan  
 Johnson, Diana  
 Jones, Graham  
 Jones, Mr Kevan  
 Jones, Susan Elan  
 Kane, Mike  
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald  
 Keeley, Barbara  
 Kendall, Liz  
 Kinahan, Danny  
 Kinnock, Stephen  
 Kyle, Peter  
 Lammy, rh Mr David  
 Lavery, Ian  
 Leslie, Chris  
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma  
 Lewis, Clive  
 Lewis, Mr Ivan  
 Long Bailey, Rebecca  
 Lucas, Ian C.  
 Lynch, Holly  
 Mactaggart, rh Fiona  
 Madders, Justin  
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid  
 Mahmood, Shabana  
 Malhotra, Seema  
 Mann, John  
 Marris, Rob  
 Marsden, Mr Gordon  
 Maskell, Rachael  
 Matheson, Christian  
 McCabe, Steve  
 McCarthy, Kerry  
 McDonagh, Siobhain  
 McDonald, Andy  
 McDonnell, John  
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat  
 McGinn, Conor  
 McGovern, Alison  
 McInnes, Liz  
 McKinnell, Catherine  
 McMahan, Jim

Meale, Sir Alan  
 Mearns, Ian  
 Miliband, rh Edward  
 Moon, Mrs Madeleine  
 Morris, Grahame M.  
 Murray, Ian  
 Nandy, Lisa  
 Onn, Melanie  
 Onwurah, Chi  
 Osamor, Kate  
 Owen, Albert  
 Pearce, Teresa  
 Pennycook, Matthew  
 Perkins, Toby  
 Phillips, Jess  
 Pound, Stephen  
 Powell, Lucy  
 Rayner, Angela  
 Reed, Mr Jamie  
 Reed, Mr Steve  
 Rees, Christina  
 Reynolds, Emma  
 Reynolds, Jonathan  
 Rimmer, Marie  
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret  
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey  
 Rotheram, Steve  
 Shah, Naz  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Sharma, Mr Virendra  
 Sheerman, Mr Barry  
 Shuker, Mr Gavin  
 Siddiq, Tulip  
 Skinner, Mr Dennis  
 Slaught, Andy  
 Smeeth, Ruth  
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew  
 Smith, Angela  
 Smith, Cat  
 Smith, Jeff  
 Smith, Nick  
 Smith, Owen  
 Smyth, Karin  
 Starmer, Keir  
 Stevens, Jo  
 Streeting, Wes  
 Stringer, Graham  
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela  
 Tami, Mark  
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick  
 Thornberry, Emily  
 Timms, rh Stephen  
 Turley, Anna  
 Turner, Karl  
 Twigg, Derek  
 Twigg, Stephen  
 Umunna, Mr Chuka  
 Vaz, rh Keith  
 Vaz, Valerie  
 Watson, Mr Tom  
 Whitehead, Dr Alan  
 Wilson, Phil  
 Winnick, Mr David  
 Winterton, rh Ms Rosie  
 Woodcock, John  
 Wright, Mr Iain  
 Zeichner, Daniel

**Tellers for the Ayes:**  
 Jessica Morden and  
 Vicky Foxcroft

## NOES

Adams, Nigel  
 Afriyie, Adam  
 Aldous, Peter  
 Allen, Heidi  
 Amess, Sir David  
 Andrew, Stuart  
 Ansell, Caroline  
 Argar, Edward  
 Atkins, Victoria  
 Bacon, Mr Richard  
 Baker, Mr Steve  
 Baldwin, Harriett  
 Barclay, Stephen  
 Baron, Mr John  
 Barwell, Gavin  
 Bellingham, Mr Henry  
 Benyon, Richard  
 Beresford, Sir Paul  
 Berry, Jake  
 Berry, James  
 Bingham, Andrew  
 Blackwood, Nicola  
 Blunt, Crispin  
 Boles, Nick  
 Bone, Mr Peter  
 Borwick, Victoria  
 Bottomley, Sir Peter  
 Bradley, Karen  
 Brady, Mr Graham  
 Brazier, Mr Julian  
 Bridgen, Andrew  
 Brine, Steve  
 Brokenshire, rh James  
 Bruce, Fiona  
 Buckland, Robert  
 Burns, rh Sir Simon  
 Burrowes, Mr David  
 Burt, rh Alistair  
 Cairns, Alun  
 Campbell, Mr Gregory  
 Carmichael, Neil  
 Cartledge, James  
 Cash, Sir William  
 Caulfield, Maria  
 Chalk, Alex  
 Chishti, Rehman  
 Chope, Mr Christopher  
 Churchill, Jo  
 Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth  
 Cleverly, James  
 Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey  
 Coffey, Dr Thérèse  
 Collins, Damian  
 Colville, Oliver  
 Costa, Alberto  
 Crabb, rh Stephen  
 Crouch, Tracey  
 Davies, Byron  
 Davies, Chris  
 Davies, David T. C.  
 Davies, Glyn  
 Davies, Dr James  
 Davies, Mims  
 Davies, Philip  
 Dinage, Caroline  
 Djanogly, Mr Jonathan  
 Dodds, rh Mr Nigel  
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.  
 Donelan, Michelle  
 Dorries, Nadine  
 Double, Steve  
 Dowden, Oliver  
 Doyle-Price, Jackie  
 Drax, Richard  
 Drummond, Mrs Flick  
 Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain  
 Dunne, Mr Philip  
 Elliott, Tom  
 Ellis, Michael  
 Ellison, Jane  
 Elphicke, Charlie  
 Evans, Graham  
 Evans, Mr Nigel  
 Evens, Mr Philip  
 Evennett, rh Mr David  
 Fabricant, Michael  
 Fallon, rh Michael  
 Fernandes, Suella  
 Foster, Kevin  
 Fox, rh Dr Liam  
 Frazer, Lucy  
 Freeman, George  
 Freer, Mike  
 Fuller, Richard  
 Fysh, Marcus  
 Gale, Sir Roger  
 Garnier, rh Sir Edward  
 Garnier, Mark  
 Gauke, Mr David  
 Ghani, Nusrat  
 Gibb, Mr Nick  
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl  
 Glen, John  
 Goodwill, Mr Robert  
 Gove, rh Michael  
 Graham, Richard  
 Grant, Mrs Helen  
 Gray, Mr James  
 Grayling, rh Chris  
 Green, Chris  
 Green, rh Damian  
 Greening, rh Justine  
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic  
 Griffiths, Andrew  
 Gummer, Ben  
 Gyimah, Mr Sam  
 Halfon, rh Robert  
 Hall, Luke  
 Hammond, Stephen  
 Hands, rh Greg  
 Harrington, Richard  
 Harris, Rebecca  
 Hart, Simon  
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan  
 Hayes, rh Mr John  
 Heald, Sir Oliver  
 Heapey, James  
 Heaton-Harris, Chris  
 Heaton-Jones, Peter  
 Henderson, Gordon  
 Herbert, rh Nick  
 Hinds, Damian  
 Hoare, Simon  
 Hollingbery, George  
 Hollinrake, Kevin  
 Hollobone, Mr Philip  
 Holloway, Mr Adam  
 Hopkins, Kris  
 Howarth, Sir Gerald  
 Howell, John  
 Howlett, Ben  
 Huddleston, Nigel  
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy

Hurd, Mr Nick  
 Jackson, Mr Stewart  
 James, Margot  
 Javid, rh Sajid  
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil  
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard  
 Jenkyns, Andrea  
 Jenrick, Robert  
 Johnson, Boris  
 Johnson, Gareth  
 Johnson, Joseph  
 Jones, Andrew  
 Jones, rh Mr David  
 Jones, Mr Marcus  
 Kawczynski, Daniel  
 Kennedy, Seema  
 Kinahan, Danny  
 Knight, rh Sir Greg  
 Knight, Julian  
 Kwarteng, Kwasi  
 Lancaster, Mark  
 Latham, Pauline  
 Leadsom, Andrea  
 Lee, Dr Phillip  
 Lefroy, Jeremy  
 Leslie, Charlotte  
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver  
 Lewis, Brandon  
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian  
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian  
 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  
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick  
 McPartland, Stephen  
 Menzies, Mark  
 Mercer, Johnny  
 Merriman, Huw  
 Metcalfe, Stephen  
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria  
 Milling, Amanda  
 Mills, Nigel  
 Milton, rh Anne  
 Mordaunt, Penny  
 Morgan, rh Nicky  
 Morris, Anne Marie  
 Morris, James  
 Morton, Wendy  
 Mowat, David  
 Mundell, rh David  
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll  
 Murrison, Dr Andrew  
 Neill, Robert  
 Norman, Jesse  
 Nuttall, Mr David  
 Offord, Dr Matthew  
 Opperman, Guy  
 Parish, Neil  
 Patel, rh Priti  
 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, Mary  
 Rosindell, Andrew  
 Rudd, rh Amber  
 Rutley, David  
 Sandbach, Antoinette  
 Scully, Paul  
 Selous, Andrew  
 Shannon, Jim  
 Shapps, rh Grant  
 Sharma, Alok  
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith  
 Skidmore, Chris  
 Smith, Chloe  
 Smith, Henry  
 Smith, Julian  
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas  
 Solloway, Amanda  
 Soubry, rh Anna  
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline  
 Spencer, Mark  
 Stephenson, Andrew  
 Stevenson, John  
 Stewart, Bob  
 Stewart, Iain  
 Streeter, Mr Gary  
 Stride, Mel  
 Stuart, Graham  
 Sturdy, Julian  
 Sunak, Rishi  
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond  
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo  
 Syms, Mr Robert  
 Thomas, Derek  
 Throup, Maggie  
 Timpson, Edward  
 Tolhurst, Kelly  
 Tomlinson, Justin  
 Tomlinson, Michael  
 Tracey, Craig  
 Tredinnick, David  
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie  
 Truss, rh Elizabeth  
 Tugendhat, Tom  
 Turner, Mr Andrew  
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew  
 Vaizey, Mr Edward  
 Vara, Mr Shailesh  
 Vickers, Martin  
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa  
 Walker, Mr Charles  
 Walker, Mr Robin  
 Wallace, Mr Ben  
 Warburton, David  
 Warman, Matt  
 Watkinson, Dame Angela  
 Whately, Helen

Wheeler, Heather  
 White, Chris  
 Wiggan, Bill  
 Williams, Craig  
 Williamson, rh Gavin  
 Wilson, Mr Rob  
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah

Wood, Mike  
 Wragg, William  
 Wright, rh Jeremy  
 Zahawi, Nadhim

**Tellers for the Noes:**  
 Sarah Newton and  
 Simon Kirby

*Question accordingly negated.*

## Business without Debate

### DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### PETROLEUM

That the draft Onshore Hydraulic Fracturing (Protected Areas) Regulations 2015, which were laid before this House on 16 July, be approved.—(*Guy Opperman.*)

*The Deputy Speaker's opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until tomorrow (Standing Order No. 41A).*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### DEFENCE

That the draft Armed Forces (Service Complaints Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2015, which were laid before this House on 28 October, be approved.—(*Guy Opperman.*)

*Question agreed to.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),*

#### CAPITAL GAINS TAX

That the draft Taxation of Regulatory Capital Securities (Amendment) Regulations 2015, which were laid before this House on 23 November, be approved.—(*Guy Opperman.*)

*Question agreed to.*

### PETITION

#### Divorce proceedings of a UK citizen abroad

7.12 pm

**Gavin Williamson** (South Staffordshire) (Con): My constituent Sian Mitchell moved to the United States last year, following her engagement and marriage to an American citizen. Sadly, shortly after the birth of her son earlier this year, her marriage fell apart. Her multi-millionaire husband, Mr Angus Mitchell, has taken out court orders preventing Sian from taking her child out of the State of California until proceedings have been resolved, making it as difficult as possible for her to bring up her son in the way she wishes. Sian is away from her family and relies on their emotional support during this extremely difficult time. She is desperate to return home to the United Kingdom with her child to allow her family to have the chance to meet this little boy for the first time. I therefore present the petition on behalf of 154 residents of South Staffordshire.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the UK,

Declares that Mrs Sian Mitchell moved to the United States of America where she married a US citizen with whom she has a son; further that divorce proceedings are currently in motion and Mrs Mitchell has been ordered by the courts in California to

remain in the State with her son until proceedings have been resolved; and further that the petitioners believe that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Government should offer as much support and assistance to her as possible so she can return to the United Kingdom.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Government to make representations to the US Government and the State of California to press the issue and get a resolution to the problem at the earliest possible stage so that Mrs Mitchell can return to the United Kingdom with her son as soon as possible.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P001662]

## Transgender Prisoners

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Guy Opperman.*)

7.14 pm

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I am pleased to have secured my first Adjournment debate on the issue of transgender prisoners. It is not a topic that I knew much about before my election in May, but in my seven months in this House it has certainly gained my attention.

As someone who was interested in equalities issues before entering the House, I was keen to be elected to the Women and Equalities Committee. The Committee's first inquiry into transgender equality is expected to be published early next year and we have taken evidence on trans people in the prison system. It was at that evidence session that I first became aware of the issue that is before us in this debate. It struck me that trans people face barriers and complications at pretty much every point in their lives, but there is a particular problem in our prison system. The description that was put to me last week was that

“getting involved in transgender issues is like a reverse onion, the more you look to peel off layers, the bigger it gets!”

Research suggests that trans people are over-represented in the criminal justice system. The proportion of trans people in the prison system may be twice the proportion in the general population. Many of the offences for which trans people are incarcerated apparently involve obtaining money for privately funded gender reassignment surgery. That is an insight into the lengths to which some trans people feel they have to go to live life in their acquired gender. Other possible reasons for the over-representation of trans people in the criminal justice system include the involvement of sections of the trans community in sex working and substance misuse. However, throughout my involvement in this issue, it has been a constant struggle to find any reliable data.

The recent cases, which have been much discussed in the media, have focused attention on the policies of the National Offender Management Service towards transgender prisoners in England and Wales.

**Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): I thank the hon. Lady for calling this important debate. As a former colleague on the Women and Equalities Committee, I know that she is a great champion of trans issues. The Scottish Prison Service has worked closely with the Scottish Transgender Alliance to produce guidance on gender identity and gender reassignment to ensure that prisoners are placed in the estate that reflects their gender identity, regardless of whether they have a gender recognition certificate. Will she join me in calling for the UK Government to follow the Scottish example?

**Cat Smith:** The hon. Lady has pre-empted the next part of my speech. There are huge differences in the placement of transgender prisoners between the Scottish prison estate and the English and Welsh prison estate. The policy guidelines for England and Wales state that prisoners should normally be located in the prison estate of their gender, as recognised by UK law. For transgender prisoners, that is normally decided by the

[Cat Smith]

gender stated on their gender recognition certificate. There is some flexibility to allow transgender prisoners who do not have a GRC to be located in the estate of their acquired gender, where a case conference and multidisciplinary risk assessment determine that it is appropriate.

**Iain Stewart** (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important and sensitive debate. Joanne Latham was found hanged in her cell at HMP Woodhill in my constituency. She was at the very early stages of changing gender and, therefore, would probably not have been covered by the regulations. Does her case not highlight the need for a case conference to be convened at an earlier point in the person's journey?

**Cat Smith:** The hon. Gentleman makes a pertinent point and highlights the difficulties. A great number of people who have transitioned gender do not have a gender recognition certificate, so this does not just affect those who are at the beginning of their transition. Many trans people do not seek a gender recognition certificate for a great number of reasons, including financial reasons such as access to pensions. That puts them at risk, were they to enter the prison estate in England and Wales, of not being assigned to the prison estate of their acquired gender.

I welcome the Government's review of the policy guidelines for England and Wales. The scope of the review was broadened recently to ensure that the care and management of transgender prisoners are fit for purpose.

**Rebecca Long Bailey** (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): There is a clear danger when trans people are placed in all-male prisons, as has been highlighted in this debate. In the light of that, does my hon. Friend agree that, as well as issuing the much-needed guidance, the Government should impose a legal responsibility on prison governors to ensure that there is safe housing for trans people, no matter what stage of the reassignment process they are at?

**Cat Smith:** All prisoners should be safe on the prison estate. As a state, we have a responsibility to keep all prisoners safe.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I asked beforehand whether the hon. Lady would give way. Today in Northern Ireland it has been announced that a prisoner is alleging sexual abuse in Maghaberry prison. This is a devolved matter, I understand. He is taking action against the Prison Service. Does the hon. Lady feel that, while the Minister will answer for England, there is a need for legislation for human rights in prison for all prisoners across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland?

**Cat Smith:** I believe it is clear that the whole of the UK has a responsibility to safeguard trans people in all walks of life and that no part of the UK has got this issue absolutely correct.

As I mentioned earlier, the guidelines state that the social gender in which the prisoner is living should be fully respected, regardless of whether they have a GRC.

I would be interested to know whether the review will be comparing the experience of trans prisoners in Scotland with those of trans prisoners in the England and Wales model.

Evidence presented to the Women and Equalities Committee suggested that there are problems with the way trans people are treated when they appear in court—well before they enter custody, therefore—with discriminatory behaviour such as misnaming and mis-gendering. The Gender Identity Research and Education Society stated in evidence to the Committee:

“Trans people are frequently ‘outed’ in court situations to create, deliberately, a negative view of them, whether their trans history is relevant or not. The Gender Recognition Act s22(4)(e) has been misused to achieve this.”

It also appears that a lack of understanding of trans experiences can lead to assumption, bias, potential breaches of confidentiality and other issues in the process of writing pre-sentence reports, which is undertaken by members of the national probation service.

In response to my taking up of this issue in the House on several previous occasions, I have received contact from prisoners, both trans and cisgendered. I want to share with the House some of the accounts I have heard.

From my contact with a trans woman prisoner currently held in a men's prison, I was alarmed to learn that as well as feeling insecure and being a victim of rape and sexual assault, she is being denied the ability to continue the healthcare and medical appointments that she is having as part of her transition. Prior to entering custody, she had privately arranged final stages of reconstruction surgery to further progress her transition, and the National Offender Management Service is refusing to allow her access to this surgery and to the hormonal medication she has been taking to assist the process.

It is difficult to express how difficult that is making her life, so I will quote from her letter to me:

“The Governor's blocked all my medical letters to my surgeons, the prison have no right to strip me of my care/hormone treatment. This is killing me as I am now in reversal.”

For any Members who are unclear, reversing is someone transitioning from male to female potentially growing a beard, for instance, while living as a woman, which would be distressing for any prisoner, I suspect.

She is a very vulnerable prisoner, with recorded serious attempts of self-harm, and attempts at suicide. She began the transition process in 2008, and formalised her intention to remain living as a woman for the remainder of her lifetime in 2012, via the making of a “statutory declaration” under the Gender Recognition Act 2004. Yet she tells me:

“There is no knowledge of how suicidal I am because they don't care what impact”

their

“choices have on me physically and psychologically. I'm totally destroyed, not the woman I was. I feel I will kill myself soon. I cannot do this now. Please will you help me?”

She has told me that during her time in custody in a male prison she was raped twice and sexually assaulted. She told me:

“I cannot take no more—I'm a woman in a male prison. This is not right.”

Despite being successful on 29 October at county court in obtaining a judgment in her favour that the Ministry of Justice has responsibility for providing access to private medication and treatment outside of prison, and that that is a decision for the prison governor following a multidisciplinary meeting, this is yet to be facilitated, even though she contacted his office on 10 December 2015. While she continues to be denied the right to surgery and to be moved to a female prison establishment, she remains extremely vulnerable and at a very high risk of harm. Examples of her self-harm have included injecting bleach into her testicles and attempting self-surgery to remove her scrotum.

I will now make my last quote from this prisoner's letter to me:

"I hope you can help me and get me out of this hell of a prison that's not fit for transgender people or cares for them."

I can reassure the House that her constituency MP is taking her case very seriously and doing her best to assist this prisoner.

Interestingly, NOMS has agreed that when she is released from custody, it will support her continuing supervision in the community in a female "approved premises". There is no consistency in this case, and her story seems typical of that of many trans prisoners. Journalist and LGBT campaigner Jane Fae told the BBC:

"My serious concern is this is blowing the lid off something that is going on—that for a very long time trans prisoners have not been treated well within the system, that the rules that exist are being overridden... And this is leading to a massive, massive amount of depression and potentially, in some cases, suicidal feelings."

**Jenny Chapman** (Darlington) (Lab): I am sorry to have to agree with my hon. Friend and to point out that, at the moment, once every four days, somebody takes their own life in our prisons.

**Cat Smith:** I thank my hon. Friend for sharing that upsetting statistic with the House.

In concluding, I will look for some optimism. Public opinion and awareness of this issue seem to be improving. BBC "Look North", *PinkNews*, and many others have done a great job of holding the Government to account on it, as has *The Huffington Post*. It has launched the "TransBritain" campaign, which aims to raise awareness of transgender rights in Britain today. I urge the Minister to take a look at some of the work that it is doing.

My hon. Friend the shadow prisons Minister wrote to the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) last week to welcome the announcement that his Department's review into trans prisoners will now be widened to consider what improvements can be made across prisons, probation services and youth justice services.

**Martin John Docherty** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way because I am very conscious of the time. Reflecting what happens in Scotland might affect the debate, in terms of the additional access to care within a prison framework, such as access to items that may be necessary to relieve gender dysphoria and facilitate gender expression such as chest binders and prosthetics. That may add to what the hon. Lady is discussing.

**Cat Smith:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that helpful intervention.

Will the Minister confirm exactly when she estimates that the review that I mentioned will conclude? In answer to my urgent question last month, and in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), the prisons Minister confirmed that, although the Government do not currently hold data centrally on the number of transgender people in prisons, they will start publishing them in future, and that they plan to introduce a self-assessment declaration at pre-sentence report stage. Does the Minister have a timetable for the introduction of those measures? Could she let us know what steps the Government are taking while the review is under way to ensure that recent tragedies are not repeated?

I want to finish with a brief point about the prison estate in general. We know that the right conditions need to be in place to allow prisoners the space to rehabilitate themselves and play a role in society. The outgoing prisons inspector's latest report revealed that our prisons are in the worst state for 10 years. Overcrowding is up. Violence, against staff and prisoners, has increased, and self-harm and suicides are also up.

My noble Friend Lord Falconer has warned:

"Violent, under-staffed prisons will never be able to rehabilitate prisoners, challenge re-offending behaviour or protect victims of crime."

That is especially true for trans prisoners.

7.28 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice (Caroline Dinenage):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) on securing the debate. She made some powerful and important observations in her speech, and I will be more than happy to look into any individual cases if she would be kind enough to forward them to me.

As the hon. Lady will understand, the care and management of transgender people in prison is not only a complex but a sensitive issue, which the Government and I take very seriously. As she knows, I hold not only a role in the Ministry of Justice, but the Women and Equalities portfolio. The subject therefore affects me in both roles.

We are committed to incorporating equality and diversity into everything we do and ensuring that we treat all offenders with decency and respect. Current policy and guidance on the care and management of prisoners who live or propose to live in a gender other than the one assigned at birth are set out in Prison Service Instruction 07/2011. The instruction states that all prisoners are normally placed according to their legally recognised gender. Legal gender is determined by the individual's birth certificate or gender recognition certificate, if they have one. When someone has obtained a gender recognition certificate, they are entitled to a new birth certificate in their acquired gender. The guidelines allow some room for discretion, and senior prison staff will review the circumstances of each case in consultation with medical and other experts, in order to protect the physical and emotional wellbeing of the person concerned, along with the safety and wellbeing of other prisoners.

[*Caroline Dinenage*]

The prison estate, and the intervention and support it provides to all offenders, is highly complex. Offenders are more likely to suffer poor mental health, to have issues with substance misuse, or perhaps to have suffered domestic abuse or sexual violence than the general population. All those considerations must be taken into account when we decide on the most appropriate place for an offender to receive the right care and rehabilitation.

As the House will appreciate, the circumstances of individual transgender prisoners vary widely. It is therefore right that NOMS should take a case-by-case approach that is informed by advice from the relevant professionals. Under current arrangements, prisons must produce a management care plan that outlines how the individual will be managed safely and decently within the prison environment. That plan will have oversight from psychologists, healthcare professionals, and prison staff.

Where a lack of clarity about the most appropriate location for a prisoner is associated with their gender identity, the instruction states that a multi-agency case conference must be convened. That will determine the best way forward consistent with the policy, taking into account the individual's protection and wellbeing, as well as that of other prisoners, and any other risk factors that are of paramount importance.

As the hon. Lady will know, we have received a number of representations that express concern that the current system may not sufficiently address the needs of transgender prisoners. As has already been announced, NOMS is undertaking a review of the relevant prison service instruction to ensure that it is fit for purpose. That must provide an appropriate balance between respecting the needs of the individual, and the responsibility to manage risk and safeguard the wellbeing of all prisoners.

**Barry Gardiner** (Brent North) (Lab): In cases where the care management plan has obviously failed, what action has been taken against those responsible?

**Caroline Dinenage:** If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me I will come to that point soon, and I will be more than happy to communicate with him after the debate if I do not cover everything.

Last week I announced during Justice questions that that review will now be widened to consider what improvements we can make across prisons, probation services and youth justice services. The review will develop recommendations for revised guidelines that cover the future shape of prison and probation services for transgender prisoners and offenders in the community. It will be co-ordinated by a senior official from the Ministry of Justice, who will engage with relevant stakeholders—including from the trans community—to ensure that we provide staff in prisons and the probation service with the best possible guidance.

**Angela Crawley:** Has any consideration been given to those who identify as non-binary or non-gendered in that review and guidance?

**Caroline Dinenage:** The hon. Lady makes an excellent point. The terms of reference for the review have been published, and that refers back to the point made by the

hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood about the evidence learned from experience in Scotland. The review will ask for evidence and submissions in the new year, and we want that to be an open and engaging process. Everything and anything will be taken into consideration at that point.

We want to ensure that we provide staff in prisons and probation with the best possible guidance. NOMS, the Youth Justice Board, the national health service and the Government Equalities Office have already started to provide the professional and operational expertise necessary to get this right. In addition, Peter Dawson and Dr Jay Stewart will act as independent advisers to the review. Peter Dawson is deputy director of the Prison Reform Trust and has served as deputy governor of HMP Brixton and governor of HMP Downview and HMP High Down. Dr Jay Stewart is a director of Gendered Intelligence, an organisation that aims to increase the understanding of gender diversity.

An aspect of the review to which the Government have given a firm commitment is defining how we can properly record the number of transgender prisoners and offenders in the community. There are a number of sensitivities associated with this, of which the hon. Lady, who has served on the Select Committee, will be aware. The Gender Recognition Act 2004 places constraints on the recording of information about individuals who have applied for or been issued with a gender recognition certificate. Individual prisons are of course aware of those prisoners in their care who live or propose to live in the gender other than the one assigned at birth, in order properly to provide a care management plan for them that is consistent with the policy guidelines.

NOMS is currently looking at ways to facilitate the recording of information relating to transgender status through the introduction of an equality self-declaration form—to which the hon. Lady referred—to be completed by all defendants as part of their pre-sentence report. As well as obtaining other equality-related information, the use of such a form as standard would enable us to monitor the amount of self-declared transgender individuals who have received a custodial or community sentence. The resourcing and operational impact of introducing the form is being looked at right now, and I hope we will have more news on that shortly.

There has recently been considerable media interest in a number of individual cases, the reporting of which has, sadly, been rather wide of the mark in some parts. As the House will appreciate, operational issues relating to the effective management of risk and the protection of offenders mean that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on individual cases. A key issue is the privacy of individual offenders and their families. An individual's history of offending constitutes "sensitive personal data" for the purpose of the Data Protection Act 1988, as can information on their possible transgender status. Such information can therefore be released only when it is fair and lawful to do so. The threshold is high and requires a strong countervailing public interest for the information to be disclosed. Factors relevant to that assessment will include whether the individual has given their consent for the information to be released.

In addition, under section 22 of the Gender Recognition Act 2004, it is a criminal offence for someone who has acquired information in an official capacity—including civil servants, holders of public office and employers—to

disclose information about a person's application for a gender recognition certificate or where the certificate has been issued that discloses the person's previous gender.

Section 22 of the Gender Recognition Act also defines any information relating to a person's application for a gender recognition certificate or to a successful applicant's gender history as "protected information". In most instances, it is a strict liability offence to disclose protected information to any other person if the information has been acquired in an official capacity. The exemptions to when it is an offence to disclose protected information listed in section 22 are very tightly drawn to avoid abuse and protect individual privacy. If the hon. Lady has examples of where that has not been upheld, I would be keen to know about it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) raised the death of his constituent. I have explained why there are limits to what I can say about individual cases. None the less, I wish to place it on public record that both myself in a personal capacity and the Government consider each self-inflicted death in custody a tragedy. We are committed to reducing the number of deaths in prisons, and every death is the

subject of investigations by the police and the independent Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, as well as a coroner's inquest. The safety and well-being of all prisoners in our care is of the highest priority.

I am mindful of the wide-ranging evidence put to the Women and Equalities Committee inquiry into transgender equality. It has taken some fascinating and really valuable evidence and I very much look forward to hearing its recommendations in due course.

I wish to reassure the hon. Lady of my utmost commitment to the care and management of transgender prisoners. The planned review will allow us the opportunity to focus on their needs and their well-being against the backdrop of social reform, and as part of our wider investment in the rehabilitation of all prisoners in our care.

I thank the hon. Lady for giving us the opportunity to debate this very important subject and look forward to discussing it further with her in due course.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.41 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

Tuesday 15 December 2015

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

## Transport for London Funding

9.30 am

**Mr Gareth Thomas** (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Transport for London funding.

I wish to express concerns about the impact of the cuts to Transport for London's funding that were announced in the spending review. I am especially concerned that a future Mayor, or even the sitting Mayor, might want to raise fares, which will hit my constituents particularly hard. I also want to suggest possible solutions to help plug the holes in TfL's books.

Let me give the context to the Chancellor's decision. Transport for London runs the public transport services and manages the major road network in the most important city in Britain. London is the gateway to the rest of the United Kingdom. TfL's work is critical to Londoners' ability to work and play, and to get to school and hospital; to business's ability to get its workforce to work and its goods and services to and from customs; and to London's many visitors' ability to arrive, leave and travel to other parts of the UK.

London's population is growing and is projected to rise from some 8.6 million today to about 10 million by 2030 and 11 million by 2050. London is seeing the fastest urban growth of any city in the European Union. Only a relatively small proportion of my fellow Londoners enjoy the luxury of being able to walk or cycle to work. In short, the vast majority of new and existing Londoners will be reliant on public transport.

The pace of the growth in the number of journeys on the tube is rising fast as well, from a growth of 8.7 million in 2010-11 to an expected 11.7 million this year, which is an increase of 26% in only five years. The docklands light railway has seen an even faster rate of growth in usage, up from a growth of some 6.3 million journeys five years ago to an expected 9.6 million this year—an increase of 52%. In only four years, the number of passengers served by TfL has increased by almost 0.5 billion a year; eight out of 10 of the busiest days in tube history were in the past two months alone; and, indeed, the busiest day ever on the tube was 4 December, when almost 5 million passengers travelled on TfL trains.

The need for further investment in London's tube, rail and bus networks and in its roads is widely recognised. There are already problems safely managing passenger flows. At some locations, peak-time travel is not only uncomfortable, but close to unsafe.

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the increased use of all public transport. Does he therefore share my concern that TfL, without any genuine consultation—just its normal, old, rubbishy questionnaires that ask the questions it wants the answers to, rather than the questions that should be asked—is to demolish Vauxhall bus station, the second biggest

interchange in London, to get development that will include tower blocks? Does he understand the importance of the bus station to local people and its users, none of whom have been asked anything?

**Mr Thomas:** I bow to my hon. Friend's much better knowledge of Vauxhall station. If she is concerned, I am sure that her constituents are concerned. She mentions Vauxhall; I was about to say that it expects a 40% increase in the number of passengers in the coming years. I agree that it seems odd for such a crucial interchange station to lose its bus station.

**Kate Hoey:** May I add a tiny point? The importance of Vauxhall bus station is that people are able to transfer from train to tube to bus without getting wet, because of a cover that cost £10 million and was put in only about 11 years ago. It is a travesty for TfL to be thinking of demolition.

**Mr Thomas:** My hon. Friend has made her point, and I stand with her on her concerns about Vauxhall station.

Also in south London, Waterloo's overall passenger numbers have rocketed from 62 million 10 years ago to 100 million now. At some locations, peak-time travel is already close to unsafe, as I have said, and, for example, closure of Oxford Circus tube station due to overcrowding is now routine.

It is not just the rail and tube networks that TfL manages that are under pressure; its own estimates suggest that London's roads are coming under greater pressure from increasing car usage, at a time when there is pressure to allocate more space to achieve safer cycling and good walking routes. If nothing else changes, by 2031 an increase in congestion of at least 60% is expected in central London; for the rest of inner London, congestion is set to rise by some 25%; and even in outer London, we expect to see a 15% increase in congestion. Traffic speeds are coming down and car journeys are taking longer. Congestion is already bad for ordinary car users, who face the nuisance of longer journeys, and it is bad for business, too.

As an aside, I hope the rumours that the Government are trying to ease air pollution controls are false, because in London the scale of air pollution, much of it diesel-related, is already extremely worrying. Perhaps the Minister will comment on that. The continuing need for TfL to invest in greener, less polluting vehicles is widely accepted, but such investment is a not insignificant future cost. However, from 2010-11 to 2014-15, TfL income from the Department for Transport fell by more than a third. In the coming year, Government grants will amount to only a little more than 20% of TfL's annual budget. The transport systems of major competitor cities in Europe receive a considerably higher percentage of their funding from central Government sources. In Paris, for example, transport gets more than 40% of its funding from a Government transport tax.

Transport for London receives two types of grant from central Government: resource grants and infrastructure grants. The Department for Transport was hit particularly hard in the spending round, so it is perhaps no surprise that TfL has been significantly affected, with a 34% cut in funding overall in 2016-17.

[*Mr Gareth Thomas*]

In the spending review, the Government said that they would phase out the resource grant to TfL, claiming that that

“will save £700 million...which could be achieved through further efficiency savings...or through generating additional income from...land TfL owns”.

It would be more accurate to say that TfL will, as a result of the Chancellor’s decisions, lose about £3 billion over the business plan period of 2015-16 to 2020-21. Inevitably, the loss of grant funding will have an adverse impact on the quality of service that my constituents can expect. The resource grant is to be axed—crucially, earlier than TfL had been led to believe.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill):** The hon. Gentleman has outlined the massive increase in usage of the underground and other TfL transport. Congestion charge takings have also increased, because of more vehicles. Does he not therefore agree that any resource funding needs to be viewed in the context of fares, which are coming in in larger numbers?

**Mr Thomas:** I will talk about fares in a little while, and of course one has to look at TfL income in the round. Nevertheless, I hope that the Minister accepts that the loss of £3 billion over the current five-year business plan period is a huge reduction in funding.

Before the spending review announcement a couple of weeks ago, TfL had still expected to receive almost £800 million in revenue funding until as late as 2019-20. Any surplus in resource spending—there has consistently been a substantial surplus in the operating budget—has been reinvested to help fund TfL’s capital programme. Any loss in that funding will therefore inevitably have an impact on capital investment.

The announcement of those huge cuts comes at a time when TfL has had to announce a five-year delay to the wonderfully named sub-surface upgrade programme: a plan to increase by 40% the number of people who could travel on the District, Circle, Hammersmith and City, and—crucially for my constituents—Metropolitan lines. New trains and better signalling were to be delivered by 2018, but following the failure of the contract with Bombardier Transportation, the expected completion date has been shifted back to 2023. Will the Minister confirm that the cut in funding to TfL will not further exacerbate the delay in modernising the Metropolitan line and those other lines that were initially part of the sub-surface upgrade programme? TfL has estimated that the knock-on impact of the delay on London’s economy is £900 million. That is income and jobs that Londoners, some of them in my constituency, are set to miss out on.

TfL now claims that the cost of completing the modernisation of the Metropolitan line and the other routes under the sub-surface upgrade programme has increased by £1.15 billion since previous forecasts. To put that into context, TfL’s planned capital expenditure for 2016-17 alone is about £3.3 billion. Inevitably, the extra costs from the failure of the Bombardier Transportation contract, plus the huge cut in grant funding, call into question other investment projects and the speed at which they will be completed.

**Kate Hoey:** My hon. Friend is giving us a really good review of what is happening. Does he not think that TfL should go back to doing what it should be doing, rather than putting £30 million into a project to build a garden bridge that the local community does not want? It is shocking that TfL is putting £30 million into that when it could be spent on other, important issues.

**Mr Thomas:** I share my hon. Friend’s scepticism about the garden bridge. Like her, I wonder whether that money might be better spent. A whole series of projects in my constituency could use that £30 million well, and I want to draw the Minister’s attention to a couple of those.

**Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab):** On the garden bridge, which no one has ever asked me for, TfL intends to build the Silvertown tunnel in south-east London to relieve congestion at the Blackwall tunnel, but it says that local residents will have to pay for it through tolls, though no other river crossing in London has charges. Perhaps the garden bridge should have an entrance fee, so that it can pay for itself instead of taking money away from vital transport links that are needed in the rest of London.

**Mr Thomas:** Rather than getting into the detail of what may happen with the garden bridge, let me say that I would prefer to see that money reallocated to a series of other existing and necessary capital investment projects. If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I think the priority is Harrow, but I am sure that he will be able to make the case for south London well.

I come back to the concern that the £3 billion cut in funding in the spending review and the extra costs from the sub-surface upgrade programme might put other investment projects at risk. The Piccadilly line refurbishment is particularly important for many of my constituents who live in Rayners Lane, South Harrow and Sudbury Hill. Will the refurbishment programme for that line go ahead as planned? There has been much speculation about when, or if, the night tube will go ahead. Perhaps the Minister can give us an indication of whether it is at risk of cancellation or substantial delay as a result of those cuts. In the Minister’s intervention, he raised a point about fares revenue. The upgrade of the four lines in the sub-surface upgrade programme would have generated extra fares revenue that will now be lost, as more passengers will not be able to be carried until much later. Some estimates suggest that that could be as much as £270 million lost.

In the eight years in which the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) has been Mayor of London, fares have rocketed. Some of my constituents, such as those who travel from West Harrow on the Uxbridge branch of the Metropolitan line, have seen a 60% increase in the cost of travelling into central London. My constituents and others who live in outer London and use the tube regularly have been treated as a cash cow by the Mayor of London for too long. I am concerned that the loss of that £3 billion may increase the pressure on the Mayor, and/or future Mayors, to raise fares still further.

I am also concerned that further job cuts on Transport for London’s network, which are now inevitable, will further compromise the safety and security of passengers,

including my constituents. TfL operational staff fulfil crucial operational functions as well as many safety-critical roles such as managing peak flows of passengers and handling emergencies. On the tube, DLR and Overground, adequate numbers of staff are needed to identify and respond to emerging crush situations.

Adequate numbers of staff are required to limit fare evasion, too, which is rocketing—it is up to £61 million a year following a reduction in staffing levels. I pay tribute to Greater London Authority Labour colleagues, led by the excellent Val Shawcross, Navin Shah and Len Duvall, for that information. Visible staff help to deter and detect crime, including people preparing for or engaging in acts of persistent serious crime and even—God forbid—terrorism. Staff also reassure passengers during tense periods such as now, but staffing is at its lowest level in recent history and Government cuts make it look likely that it will drop further.

Under plans for staff cuts at stations, Leytonstone station, which currently has four staff in peak periods, will be reduced to two members of staff—a 50% reduction at a station where there has already been a worrying terrorist incident. That is just a small indication of the worry that further job cuts, driven by the major cut in Government funding, might force on us.

I understand that London Underground Ltd now plans to cut a further 838 front-line staff positions from normal traffic hour operational levels. New staffing levels have apparently been derived from so-called business need schematics formulae, which do not incorporate the need for security checks or other operational needs. As a consequence, staff are required to meet the demands of security checks and will have to be removed from their allocated customer service positions for sizeable portions of their shifts to do so, leaving their areas unstaffed and effectively unmonitored on occasion. That is a concern. Will the Minister be willing to review with Transport for London's managing director whether the loss of those front-line staff is a sensible way forward and whether alternatives might be found?

**Mr Goodwill:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, given Oyster and the introduction of other smart ticketing systems, the move to get staff out of ticket offices and on to stations to assist passengers and help with security is good and something that we wish to see more of?

**Mr Thomas:** I might have been more sympathetic to the Minister's intervention if there were not plans to shut more of the control rooms on the underground, because London Underground Ltd proposes that all but a few control rooms in the largest stations will be de-staffed. Proposed staffing cuts and that emphasis on customer-facing duties will require staff who are normally allocated to control rooms to work in the ticket hall. The result will be that there will be no routine monitoring of CCTV at more than 90% of stations, including some that have high volumes of passenger traffic, when major events are taking place. Will the Minister be willing to meet, with me, a deputation of the workforce who are concerned about the impact of the various job cuts on passenger safety? I look forward to his answer, and hope that he will, in the spirit of his interventions, and the spirit in which I have taken them, be willing to do that.

I want to raise some concerns about the impact of the cut in TfL funding on the accessibility of the London underground network. My constituency has six tube stations—exclusively tube stations—that are inaccessible to people using a wheelchair, and usually inaccessible to people with a pram. I understand that there are no plans for North Harrow, South Harrow, Sudbury Hill, Rayners Lane or West Harrow to be made accessible. There has long been talk of a plan for Harrow on the Hill to be made accessible, but it is not currently included for access to the small amount of funding that is available to make stations more accessible. I worry that the loss of £3 billion will reduce its chances even further. Perhaps the Minister would use his influence with Mike Brown, the head of Transport for London, who I am pleased to say came to North Harrow station to celebrate its centenary earlier this year, and encourage him to take an interest in the accessibility of Harrow on the Hill station.

My last point about the impact of the cuts concerns property income and the pressure on Transport for London to maximise its income from property sales or assets—essentially from the land that it owns. I should think that the whole House would think it a good thing to encourage Transport for London to make its land available for housing. The concern is that it is being put under heavy pressure to extract as much value as possible from selling its land or the housing on the land, with no consideration of Londoners' broader needs for affordable housing. There are also concerns, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) knows well, about the methods being used to encourage Transport for London down the property development route. It has established a commercial development advisory group, which is chaired by Francis Salway, with Richard Cotton, Mike Jones and Richard Jones as the other members, but I worry that none of them has a background in social or affordable housing. I hope that the Minister may be willing to use his good influence to encourage Transport for London to see the bigger picture about housing in London, while at the same time seeking to maximise its income from its land.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): My hon. Friend is right to be suspicious of Transport for London's motives. It is on record as saying that two thirds of its sites will be in zones 1 and 2 and it is not looking for affordable housing in that area; but it is looking for some if it develops in zones 3 to 5. However, that is affordable rather than social rented housing.

**Mr Thomas:** My hon. Friend makes a good point and I look forward to his speech, if he catches your eye later, Mr Hollobone.

There was nothing in the spending review about funding for Crossrail 2. To be fair to the Government, I understand that they have set up a £300 million pot for advanced work on big infrastructure schemes. Will the Minister confirm that Transport for London can bid for money for Crossrail 2 within that pot, and explain whether the Government still support and recognise the need for Crossrail 2?

Of the £687 million in resource funding that Transport for London is getting this year, but which will be axed in future, £63 million is going to the capital programme;

[*Mr Gareth Thomas*]

£137 million is going for borough improvements; £289 million is going on new greener buses; and £198 million is going for tube renewals and other investments. One has to wonder about the future of the investment in green buses, given the loss of resource funding going forward. It is striking that London Councils took the time to provide a brief for this debate, noting the impact of the funding received under TfL's resource funding programme. It has been used to invest in road safety and maintenance, cycle parking and cycle training, car clubs, the installation of electric vehicle charging points, school and workplace travel plans, 20 mph zones and some further effort for accessible transport and pedestrian crossings. London Councils points out that much of that work—particularly that on road safety—has led to a significant reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured on London's roads. The implication is that there is concern about how such work is to continue to be funded.

I want lastly to consider how the gap in Transport for London's books might be filled. I have always been a strong supporter of fiscal devolution to the capital, and having criticised the Mayor of London for big fare hikes I should at least acknowledge the important work that he got Tony Travers to undertake on fiscal devolution. I welcome the Chancellor's decision to devolve business rates to London, but I am sure that the Minister will acknowledge that business rate income is often lumpy, if that is the word, and not always easy to predict. It would be helpful if, as the Tony Travers commission suggested, other property taxes were to be devolved to London. The devolution of stamp duty land tax to the London Mayor might help to unlock new investment in transport development, particularly in relation to the building of new homes that would be enabled by improved transport links. I understand that the vehicle excise duty incurred by Londoners who own cars amounts to about £500 million at the moment, and it might be suitable to invest that in London's transport rather than taking it out of London and investing it in roads in the rest of England. I ask gently of the Minister, whom I saw shaking his head a little earlier, whether it is time for him and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to agree to redirect that £500 million to City Hall, to ensure that London's road network gets the investment it needs.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** Order. I have before me three of London's finest Members and we have half an hour before I call the Front-Bench spokesmen, which I want to do no later than 10.30 am. If all three hon. Gentlemen want to speak, and to be fair to each other, I ask them please to take no more than 10 minutes each.

9.58 am

**Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you presiding over our business, Mr Hollobone. I am not sure where the three finest are, but my hon. Friends the Members for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), for Eltham (Clive Efford) and for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) are here, as am I, and I hope that we can make a contribution to the debate.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas) on an excellent opening speech. He comprehensively covered issues such as funding, resourcing and staff cuts, which saves us having to raise them, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

It is good to see that the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), is here to represent Her Majesty's Opposition. It is also good to see the Minister in the Chamber. I congratulate him on his recent promotion, which will hopefully make him more benevolent towards London. I intend to speak briefly—certainly for no more than 10 minutes—and to raise parochial issues, given that the opening speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West covered all the major funding issues.

I start by thanking Transport for London for its briefing, and its staff for all they do to keep this great city moving, ensuring that my constituents and I can get about. Their work is highly regarded and they do a fantastic job.

I was not going to mention the Silvertown crossing, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham raised it, it will be interesting to hear the Minister's comments about what support the DFT will give TfL for east London river crossings. Half of London's population now lives east of Tower bridge, yet we only have two crossings there, while there are 23 crossings west of Tower bridge. As tolling will be an issue, I would expect at least the same arrangements to apply to local residents in east London as those for residents around the Queen Elizabeth II bridge. Any tolling should be discounted, but I would be quite happy to put up with tolling to ensure that we get the crossing.

East London's air quality is poor, and it is made poorer because of standing traffic and congestion from the Blackwall tunnel. We need to get that traffic moving. When the Blackwall tunnel has difficulties, as it regularly does because of collisions or oversized vehicles, there is gridlock in east London. It will be interesting to hear the Minister's comments about the Silvertown crossing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West talked about VED and support from licensing revenue in London. My understanding—this may be entirely wrong, so the Minister might correct me—is that the vast majority of local authorities across the country get road support grants to deal with potholes, repairs and the like, but London does not receive such grant. That gives the impression that dealing with potholes in London is paid for by tube and bus passengers, who are subsidising the missing grant.

If one thinks about financial pressures, one can draw conclusions that may be entirely erroneous. We have a new franchisee running the docklands light railway: KeolisAmey. When I started in the Commons, the DLR was carrying some 20 million passengers a year. It now carries 100 million passengers a year, including many colleagues from the Scottish National party when they travel to London City airport to fly back to Scotland on a Thursday night or Friday morning. My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West set out the massive increase in journeys on the DLR. That fantastic railway is, of course, a driverless operation, which makes it separate from most of TfL's other rail operations.

The new DLR franchise is only six months old, but its staff have already gone on strike for the first time in 23 years. One has to ask whether the resourcing of the

DLR and pressure on the contract led the new franchisee to put pressure on staff's conditions and wages. That is total speculation on my part, but the fact that we have had the first DLR strike in 23 years is not a good sign. It is certainly a concern for my constituents and a very worrying development indeed.

The final point I want to cover is another parochial one. I see that the Minister is wearing his red ensign badge proudly as shipping Minister—there is nothing wrong with that at all, and I applaud him for it. Yesterday, I attended a Port of London authority presentation at Tower pier at which it outlined its vision for the River Thames for the next 20 to 50 years. The most striking thing about the presentation was that whereas most people think that the Thames's heyday is behind it—we have the visuals of riggers in the past 200 years and merchant vessels in the 20th century being unloaded in the docks—and that it is now much quieter, with Thames Gateway and the port of Tilbury, as the Minister will know, London is now dealing with more tonnage than ever in its history.

With new commuter routes being opened up all the time, there is more commuter traffic than ever. Construction projects such as the Thames Tideway tunnel and, to a certain extent, Crossrail, which require the Thames to be used and that get HGVs off London's roads and traffic on to the Thames, are welcome. The PLA's vision is that the Thames's best days are ahead of it, so it is really disappointing that the proposed cruise terminal at Enderby Wharf, which has been approved by the Royal Borough of Greenwich and the Mayor of London, does not have a ship-to-shore energy supply. That means that when cruise ships start arriving in London, they will have to run their diesel engines 24/7 to power them while they are berthed in the middle of the Thames, which is the equivalent of putting hundreds of lorries' emissions back into London's air. If we provided a ship-to-shore energy supply, which I believe would cost only up to a few million pounds, we could deal a big blow to London's emissions.

Given that background, what funding does the Department for Transport provide for TfL to study air quality? Transport emissions play a big part in air quality, as they account for between 25% and 30% of all emissions. The shipping industry is growing, and we want to ensure as much as possible that its growth is environmentally sustainable and clean. Does the Minister have anything to add to the debate about the cruise terminal at Enderby Wharf? Can he say whether, even at this late stage, ship-to-shore energy supply could be introduced into the plan, given that the situation is a negative dark spot on what ought to be a positive clean bill of health for the Thames?

I again congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West on securing this important debate. I have raised much more parochial points than him, and we will be interested to hear the speeches from the three Front-Bench spokesmen.

10.6 am

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): May I, too congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas) on securing this timely and important debate? This issue is raised frequently in both Houses. Yesterday, during questions in the other place, two of

the points that my hon. Friend mentioned were raised. Lord Tope noted that the £639 million operational grant for this year will decline to nothing within three years, while Lord Dubs raised an important question that I will deal with: if Transport for London is going to become a property developer over the next decade, where and how will it build, and what will it will build? It is particularly important to note that there will be little social housing among the alleged 10,000 homes to be built.

The other place is also shortly to discuss the Transport for London Bill, a private Bill that has been limping through both Houses for five years. It would have been killed off in the main Chamber a couple of weeks ago, had not the Government whipped 140 of their Members to vote for the revival of that rather sad and sagging Bill. If London MPs had their way, the Bill would be put to rest quite quickly. If I have time, I will deal with that issue but, in any event, I have no doubt that we will consider the final stages of that Bill in the new year and discuss at length the problems with it.

Should TfL become a property developer to make up the £2.8 billion that the Government are taking away from it between now and 2021, it will of course need to manage its estate properly. It has not always done that well in the past, and I doubt the capability and competence of transport organisations—even though many very good people work for them—to deal with some of the most rapacious and greedy property developers in London. Somehow the public sector also seems to come off worse when it enters into such deals.

Even what TfL is planning at the moment does not fill me with enthusiasm. It is looking for 75 sites spanning 300 acres, with the aim of raising £1 billion. As I said in my intervention, two thirds of those sites will be in zones 1 and 2, presumably because although there is less land in those zones, it is more profitable. Only when TfL subsequently begins to look at zones 3 to 5 does it expect to include affordable housing in its considerations. It is going to work in joint ventures with private companies, and the model for that is the tragic site at Earls Court, which is one of the largest development sites in London, with two thirds of it owned by TfL. The joint venture with Capital and Counties Properties plc covers 77 acres and includes the Earls Court exhibition centres and the Lillie Bridge depot. The third part of the site—22 acres—consists of two local authority housing estates with 760 affordable and social homes.

The development of that site, which I believe is a template for what TfL will do in the future, will provide 8,000 homes with no additional social homes, even though according to planning targets, and even the targets of the Mayor of London, there should be 2,000 such homes. The 760 existing homes will be demolished, which will affect the entire community. The Earls Court exhibition centres are beautiful and their loss is tragic. Earls Court One, an art deco building that is currently being demolished, provided 30% of London's exhibition space.

I laughed at what TfL told the *Financial Times* when it announced its plans about six weeks ago. It said it was “working with its operations team to ensure that it learns from mistakes made by the national rail network in the past and only ‘develops sites where no transport capacity growth is expected so as not to constrain operations.’”

[*Andy Slaughter*]

The other part of the Earls Court site that is going is the Lillie Bridge depot, which is one of the main manufacturing and servicing depots. It is an ideal place for servicing and provides 500 skilled jobs, which is why the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers has considerable concerns about the development.

If Earls Court is a blueprint, God help us when TfL begins to develop other sites around London. It has already identified three. One, which is in Hammersmith and Fulham but not in my constituency, is the Parsons Green depot site. The very good Labour council there is negotiating hard with TfL to include affordable housing on the site. There will be 120 new homes, but no homes for social rent are planned, although I hope that that will change following negotiation with the local authority.

As I know that area extremely well, I can give an example of what can happen. Almost opposite the proposed site is an almost identical depot site that was owned by the Co-operative Group. That has been developed with 100% affordable housing—50% intermediate and 50% for social renting. If such a target can be reached, TfL's ambitions in an area with a crying need for affordable housing, especially in zones 1 and 2, should be at least a lot greater. I note from the property pages of today's *Metro* that the average price of a property in Hammersmith, let alone Fulham, is more than £1 million, and that is exactly the type of luxury property that TfL is endeavouring to build on its land.

A measure in the Transport for London Bill—during its early stages some four years ago, my constituents petitioned against it—would have given TfL the power to sell land without reference to the Secretary of State or any outside body. I am pleased to say that, following scrutiny, the relevant clause was withdrawn, because otherwise TfL could have done exactly what it liked. Given the Government's housing policy, which we will discuss in the House later today, I have no confidence that the Secretary of State's intervention will represent a proper remedy. In any event, the Bill is deeply flawed because it encourages TfL to enter into limited partnership agreements and allows it to go further even than it went at Earls Court by having unsuitable, voracious partners in the property development market. That may or may not provide a profit for TfL, but it will do nothing for the neighbourhood and interests of ordinary Londoners.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West talked about the upgrading of the sub-surface network, which includes the Hammersmith and City, Circle and District lines. It would be a tragedy if that were postponed for another five years. Those incredibly busy lines have some of the worst signalling on the underground network. I believe the signalling at Earls Court dates from the 1960s, so perhaps the Minister will comment on that today. My constituents would not welcome him saying blithely that the upgrading will be delayed by another five years.

A specific problem is the removal of Olympia station from the timetabled network. I was pleased to have the first newly built station in a century on an existing tube line at Wood Lane as part of the Westfield development. TfL made a big song and dance about that, but less of a song and dance when it took a station off the timetabled network, despite Olympia serving one of the most densely populated communities in London and linking

to the very good overground service at that station. We were told at the time that the reason was congestion at Earls Court—that has been the case for about 40 years—and that TfL wanted to prioritise the Wimbledon branch of the line. That was not popular with my constituents.

When the signalling is upgraded—whether that is in 2019 or 2023—it will relieve the problem. There will be more capacity, longer and more effective trains and better signalling. With that full expectation, I wrote to the new managing director of London Underground to ask for at least a commitment that Olympia would be put on the timetabled network again, but I was told, “No. There is no intention of doing that.” What is the point of investment and of TfL becoming a property developer if the net result is that the investment in its own network does not do what its passengers and fare payers want?

In May 2016, we will have a new Mayor—hopefully a Labour Mayor. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan) has promised to freeze fares, to provide one-hour hopper tickets and to run TfL in the interests of all Londoners, not in the interests of property developers, its own highly paid managers or bailing out the Chancellor. However, we currently face a double whammy of losing central Government investment, which no other civilised country would do to its capital city, while at the same time we do not see any other improvement in Londoners' quality of life because TfL is simply rushing madly into property development.

10.17 am

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to take part in this debate under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas) on securing this important debate. I start by associating myself with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) on the cruise liner. I will not go into detail because I do not intend to speak about that, but I entirely agree with his points.

I, too, want to be parochial and I will talk mainly about the proposed Silvertown tunnel in the context of TfL's funding. I have long called for a solution to the problem of traffic congestion on the approach roads to the Blackwall tunnel. It is a daily environmental disaster and occurs when queues of traffic build up, particularly at peak times, causing a huge environmental problem of air pollution in that part of our borough. The topography of the area means that a lot of pollution collects in the river valley, and having stationary traffic stuck there for long periods just adds to the problem. That traffic will not disappear. It needs to go somewhere and the problem needs some relief. There are no alternatives. We do not have the London Underground in south-east London beyond North Greenwich station and people rely heavily on surface and suburban rail services, which are already at over capacity so we need to increase capacity there. I will come to that later.

In many circumstances, people are forced to drive. That applies particularly to residents of the boroughs of Greenwich, Tower Hamlets and Newham, for which the Blackwall tunnel is the nearest river crossing. People have to use that crossing to get across the river, so we are seeing a significant impact on people's daily routine because quite often they are delayed and cannot predict

when they will be able to get through the tunnel. In addition, many businesses lose time and money because of the traffic congestion. We need to deal with the traffic congestion at the Blackwall tunnel and we need a third bore, but dealing with the issue by building a road crossing alone will not be sufficient.

We have been offered buses by TfL, and we will take the buses. They have buses in other parts of London, and of course we want more buses. However, the equivalent of a small city has been built in Docklands. We have seen massive expansion not just of housing, which will continue to grow, but of businesses and leisure, and more and more people want to go north and south on the eastern part of the Thames corridor, rather than on the traditional route, like the spokes of a wheel, served by suburban rail that goes in and out of central London. Without increasing significantly public transport links that go north and south across that east Thames corridor, we will congest even more the central London transport system, because people have no choice, if they want to use public transport, other than to go in and then out.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is always good to give a Northern Ireland flavour to a debate on London transport. The hon. Gentleman referred to using more buses. I, too, encourage people to use more buses, because if more buses are bought, they will come from Wrightbus in Northern Ireland, so it is always very good to have that.

**Clive Efford:** I cannot think of a better reason to want more buses. To get even more parochial for a minute, I want to put in a plug for TfL finally to deal with the issues with my local services, on which my constituents have been campaigning. I am talking about the B16 and 178 buses through Kidbrooke. Those issues must be resolved; we are not accepting no for an answer, and we welcome the moves that it has made already on the B16.

The 132 bus runs from Eltham to North Greenwich, and when I became a Member of Parliament I campaigned for its introduction. TfL came to my office to meet me and said, "There's no demand for such a service." It was to provide a public transport link along the route corridor of the A102, the Blackwall tunnel approach road. Finally, as the Olympics approached, we got an extension of the 132 bus route down to North Greenwich. It was a single-decker bus and it quickly filled up, so a double-decker service had to be introduced. That service is now often oversubscribed and passengers are left behind at the terminal where the bus starts—at North Greenwich—such is the increasing demand from people for public transport links along the route corridor of the A102, which connects with the A2 and my constituency of Eltham.

A road crossing, therefore, will not be sufficient: we need to have the DLR. If TfL is not going to build a DLR link, there is no point in building the Silvertown link, because it will just become as congested as the Blackwall tunnel is now. People will have no alternative to switch to—in the large numbers that we need them to switch—if we are to protect that route from becoming congested again in the future, just with more cars. As my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West pointed out, the DLR has in recent times increased its usership significantly—by more than 50%. It has gone up from a few million passengers, as my hon. Friend the Member

for Poplar and Limehouse said, to nearly 100 million passengers a year. That shows how effective it can be, so a DLR link from Silvertown to North Greenwich—that is then brought down the route corridor of the A102 to places such as Kidbrooke and Eltham—will have a significant impact by changing people's choices of the transport method that they use to get across the river in that part of the city.

We cannot allow traffic to grow, and I accept that some form of tolling will be needed, but no one else in London pays to cross the river by their local bridge. I do not see why my constituents should have to pay to cross the river when no one else in London does. If TfL says that the only way to fund schemes in the future—because of the cuts to its budget—is to introduce tolling, I say that it has to be fair to my constituents, who in recent years have watched billions of pounds being invested in the London underground, which does not come anywhere near where we live. We accept that it is a major contributor to London's economy and is vital—no one disputes that—but the comparison between the investment in other parts of London and that in outer south-east London does not stand up to scrutiny. We have bus services, but other than that, TfL spends precious little on investment in that part of London, so asking for—no, demanding—a DLR link as part of the scheme is just asking to be compensated for the lack of investment in previous years.

If people in my area are to be asked to pay a toll to pay for the river crossing, we should toll every river crossing in London and make everyone pay to cross the river, because that is the only fair balance that we could strike. I see the Minister's eyebrows going up as he thinks, "Actually, there might be a point there. We might be able to make some money." It is true that we have sat by in south-east London and watched money being spent on the London underground, while getting precious little—

**Mr Goodwill** *rose*—

**Clive Efford:** I have a finishing time in order to allow the Minister time to respond, but if he will be brief, I will give way to him.

**Mr Goodwill:** I just point out that those who pay the congestion charge might argue that they are already paying to use the bridges and perhaps would not be thankful to be double-charged.

**Clive Efford:** They might well, but there are bridges beyond Vauxhall. I can point all the bridges out to the Minister if he needs me to do that; I can name them all. We need the Silvertown link, but it cannot be built without the DLR.

I want to move on to talk about a site in Kidbrooke, Henley Cross that is owned by TfL. TfL is definitely trying to maximise its income from that site, but we need such sites, which are in public ownership, to be used to provide local services and vital affordable housing where possible, not just sold off to the highest bidder. I would like to put in a bid to TfL to consider that site in relation to the Kidbrooke regeneration and the need to identify sites for secondary schools in the borough of Greenwich. Henley Cross is situated between the motorway—well, the approach road to the Blackwall

[Clive Efford]

tunnel—and the railway. The site is unsuitable for people to live on, but it would be suited to other uses. Perhaps some sort of land swap could be arranged with the Kidbrooke Village regeneration and a school could be built where it was intended to build a Sainsbury's supermarket. I urge TfL to sit down with the London borough of Greenwich and with Berkeley Homes, which is doing the development, to consider that option, rather than cramming housing on to the site, which is unsuitable because of its location.

Finally, I want to turn to TfL taking over the running of suburban trains, which are vital for my constituency as it relies entirely on suburban trains as the major route into London because—as I said—we do not have direct links to the London underground. If that is to happen, TfL needs to start planning ahead now. At peak times, trains that run through my constituency—through Eltham, New Eltham, Plumstead and along all those routes—are heavily oversubscribed. They have so many passengers they have PIXCs—people in excess of capacity. We need to increase capacity on those lines. That means that when the Thameslink scheme is completed and the new rolling stock becomes available, the current Thameslink rolling stock must be made available to Southeastern, which wants to purchase it, so that it can increase capacity on those vital services in south-east London.

10.29 am

**Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas) on securing the debate. I also congratulate the Minister of State on his recent promotion, and I know that he will enjoy the additional challenges it brings.

I have been asked to sum up for the third party, and I will try something quite unusual, which is to do so in a third-party way, and to be as apolitical and as helpful as I can. I want to refer to Scotland and what the Scottish Government are doing, because I believe in their approach, and I think it would be helpful to bring it into this discussion.

The hon. Member for Harrow West talked about Transport for London services being crucial to business and to people. He talked about London's urban growth being the fastest in the European Union. I have something in common with him, because Inverness is the fastest-growing city overall in Europe. I know exactly what he is talking about, but perhaps on a different scale.

People coming into London have an interest in this issue as well as those already in London. People need to make internal connections, but external connections cannot be ignored. It is every bit as important to make sure that links such as the Gatwick Express operate properly. I hear again that it is a disaster this morning, incidentally, with two trains cancelled and another stuck for many minutes on the line. The hon. Gentleman talked about roads being under pressure, and the knock-on impact of a failure to invest. That came through in all hon. Members' contributions, as did the point that what may have been missing is a longer-term vision and an overall view of how things should be developed.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) made an important intervention in which she talked about the absolute need to engage people in major decisions. That brings me to my first point about the approach in Scotland, which I feel passionate about. I think there is agreement across parties on an outcomes-based approach to development, where we take things forward towards a longer-term outcome with people in mind, rather than as an afterthought. That came through time and again.

The Minister spoke in an intervention about smart ticketing, and I compliment him on doing so. We have to make it easier for people to use different modes of transport, but it is important—we must mention this early—that smart ticketing be fair. It should be carried forward in such a way as to enable everybody to interact with it. A point was made about fairness later on, and adopting an outcomes-based approach makes a big difference to that.

The hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) rightly mentioned the hard-working staff on the network. Too often, we forget that when we ask people to take charge of new developments and bigger challenges, those involved in their delivery will be put under pressure. The hon. Gentleman was quite right to mention those people. We should reflect in the same way on the people who work in the transport system across the nations of the UK. He made the telling point that the DLR recently had its first strike for 23 years, and that tells us something about the communication that is needed. He also made an important point about the growing need to take shipping into account.

One thing missing from the debate—I am not trying to score points, but I want to take in the context—was any discussion of possible airport expansion. Hon. Members do not know where the pressure will be in London, because the decision has not been made yet, but that must be taken into account in future planning.

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** Some of us, like the hon. Gentleman, listened in the Chamber yesterday afternoon to the statement from the Government, in which they delayed the decision yet again. That was most frustrating for most colleagues right across the Chamber.

**Drew Hendry:** I agree about that frustration. As I have said, I will not try to use this debate to score points, but we must look at making decisions that are connected to others that we make. Other hon. Members brought that out in spades today.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) talked about Transport for London as a property developer. He asked what kind of developer it would be, and what it would do in future. The point about outcomes for people shone through in his questions, and it is important to look at what kind of outcomes there will be. If property development will be a vehicle for investment, he is quite right to say that we should know what kind of investment will be made. He asked what the point was of TfL investments if not to improve transport for people.

The hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) talked about air pollution, having the correct infrastructure requirements, and the need to see what people want to do in the future, which goes back to my point about outcomes. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is unfortunately not in his place, mentioned buses

in an intervention. I want to mention Britain's largest bus manufacturer, Alexander Dennis, in Falkirk. It would, I am sure, be delighted to supply vehicles. What is needed is an outcomes-based approach with a longer-term view. People should not, as the hon. Member for Eltham pointed out, be made to pay more just because of where they live. That should be taken into account when deciding how to take things forward.

I said I would talk about Scotland. Since 2007, more than £15 billion has been invested in transport, and the Scottish Government have adopted an outcomes-based approach to policy, through which they look for a healthier, wealthier, greener approach to development. I believe that that is now considered to be the right approach by those from across the different parties in Scotland. We have looked at sustainable transport options that will encourage people out of their cars, and made sure that we made the investments necessary to connect people.

Our conversation this morning contains a contradictory message, and I will fire back a bit of a warning to hon. Members. They cannot say, "Let's not invest in cycling and walking" while moaning about emissions and congestion. There has to be a balance between those things. In Scotland, since 2011, we have invested in 190 km of cycling and walking routes. We have also made the largest single investment in Scotland's transport history with the £3 billion upgrade of the A9, because it is a vital part of the transport mix, and it is what people asked for and required. I am delighted to say that it connects my constituency with Perth, and that connection is ongoing. That development was vital to the highlands economy, and it was part of our work on a mix of transport options, which included simultaneous investment in the rail links between Aberdeen and Inverness, and Inverness and Perth. Investment is not limited to those lines, however; hon. Members will be aware of the recently opened Borders railway link, with which we threw off the ghost of the railway cutback and built the first new railway in Scotland since the Beeching cuts. In our rounded approach, we take an outcomes-based look at how transport has to be put together.

I will not take much more time. In summary, people's absolute need and right to be connected fluidly to all the different transport options available came through clearly this morning. That is a substantial challenge for an organisation as big as Transport for London, but if it takes an outcomes-based approach—I fundamentally believe that all hon. Members' contributions this morning indicated the need for such an approach—it will start to get somewhere with looking at the wider picture and the longer-term view.

Of course, if greater public investment is to be made, the public need to be involved and feel involved. It would be a good move for Transport for London to look at how it engages with people and how it will take forward conversations with the relevant communities, so that it can ensure that it carries forward in its planning the points made by hon. Members this morning. I hope that it will heed my warning and take an outcomes-based approach to such development.

10.39 am

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas) on securing this debate, and the Minister on his recent

promotion. We have had a fantastic discussion in which hon. Members have spoken with passion and conviction about their local area. It is important that those points are heard.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West gave an excellent account of the whole range of issues. I was struck by his mention of potential delays to the upgrade of the underground system. I hope that the Minister responds positively to my hon. Friend's hope that he might meet a delegation of staff, particularly given the number of staff cuts in the control rooms. My hon. Friend concluded with some interesting suggestions about how the funding gap might be closed, and I am sure that the Communities and Local Government team will listen closely to that.

**Mr Gareth Thomas:** Will my hon. Friend encourage the Minister to clarify—if not today, then shortly—whether the British Transport police will maintain their funding levels and, therefore, the numbers of constables and other police able to operate on the tube? There seems to be some doubt about whether they have benefited from the Government's largesse to other police forces.

**Daniel Zeichner:** I am sure that the Minister will have heard that point. My hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) made some fascinating points. The point about the cruise terminal was new to me, but I hope that others will hear it. My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) continued his fantastic campaign on the Transport for London Bill, reiterating points that were made in a debate a few weeks ago and that, doubtless, will be made again. I will return to those.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) took me back to my childhood: I used to be driven by my parents from south London through the Blackwall tunnel when there was only one tunnel. I remember the pong, which I think was from a dog biscuit factory. Some things do not change, really, and there is clearly much more work to be done. His points about the unfairness of potentially charging his constituents to cross the river were well made.

I want to talk a little more generally about London's transport system. As someone from outside London, I have to say that London's system is widely admired as a model of excellence. There are now more passenger journeys in the capital than in the rest of England combined. In the UK, other metropolitan areas—including Manchester, notably—are keen to bring in Oyster-style, multi-platform, integrated smart ticketing. Indeed, I understand that Singapore's Land Transport Authority last year announced a new Government contracting model after explicitly studying the bus systems of London and Australia; they say that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and that is clearly the case here.

We all know that the Department for Transport took a huge hit in the comprehensive spending review, as did the Department for Communities and Local Government. I fear that the repercussions will reverberate through the quality and connectivity of the transport system across the entire country. I am also sure, regrettably, that the savage reductions in funding and subsequent cuts to transport services will be keenly felt by all those who rely on them to go about their daily life. It is

[Daniel Zeichner]

distressing but simple: cuts to central Government funding and local authority budgets mean that services will suffer.

Let us remember that in 2013 TfL's operational funding was slashed by a quarter, requiring it to identify £16 billion in savings by 2021. Last month it was announced that the grant worth £700 million in 2015-16 will be phased out by the end of the decade. The Department for Transport said that this may be mitigated by "new commercial freedoms" for TfL. The implications of those commercial freedoms are potentially significant, and I will largely focus on them.

Along with funding for cycling nationally, London's dedicated transport funding has been deliberately targeted in the spending review. As of 2014-15, a record 8.6 million people were living in the capital. By 2030, that figure is forecast to reach 10 million, rising again to 11 million by 2050. The pressures on the capital's transport system will only intensify. TfL has already been making fierce and highly controversial cuts, but even it said in its annual budget last year:

"It is becoming progressively more difficult to achieve this without compromising our core services."

I would be grateful if the Minister could offer some assurances about how the cut to TfL's revenue support has been planned. It is well known that before the late 1990s, London Regional Transport was plagued by a pattern of annualised budgets and sudden funding reductions, which in turn created huge inefficiencies. TfL has more long-term financial certainty under Labour's Greater London Authority Act 1999, but can the Minister really guarantee that additional costs will not be created—for example, in variations to TfL's commercial contracts—as a result of this decision? We need further assurances.

Since October 2013, the bus service operators grant, which was previously paid to bus operators that were running bus services under franchise to TfL, has been incorporated into the general grant paid to TfL and the Greater London Authority. Now that TfL's grant is being snatched by the Treasury, so too is this important grant that pays bus operators to keep costs down and helps to subsidise fares for ordinary people. BSOG was already cut by 20% in the previous Parliament, with the total value of the grant across the country falling from £469 million in 2009-10 to £298 million in 2013-14. Now the Government are quietly removing it from TfL entirely. That is unacceptable, and we will not let it go unnoticed. I would greatly appreciate the Minister's assurance that BSOG will again be allocated to the capital on a separate basis; otherwise, this is clear discrimination against London.

TfL passes part of its grant to the boroughs to spend on local road maintenance and improvement. I am sure that those boroughs would be pleased to be told how that will be funded when TfL's operational funding is soon reduced to zero. We have heard about the other possible method that TfL might use to alleviate the loss of the grant and to raise revenue to invest in London's transport network. That method—the so-called commercial freedoms—is proving especially controversial, and many of my hon. Friends have already raised concerns about the wider implications.

The Department for Transport has stated that TfL could save the necessary £700 million a year by generating additional income from the land it owns in London,

or with the "additional financial flexibility" that the Government will provide it with. TfL is one of the largest landowners, owning 5,700 acres of land in the capital and more than 500 potential major development sites. Against this backdrop of cuts, it is only natural that TfL wants to plug at least partially the gap that the grant will leave by selling off existing or underused facilities. We support making good use of assets, but there are certain issues that really must be addressed.

First, we need to be sure that forced sales will not, paradoxically, have an adverse impact on the very transport system that they are trying to fund. Selling off land might seem like a good deal in the short term, but it might not look so bright a few years later, when it transpires that the land is needed to expand transport services to meet increasing demand. If TfL land is to be used for housing, let us at least ensure that it is housing at a price that ordinary Londoners can afford. We need a pledge from the Minister that there will be a strong affordable housing element in such developments—particularly important given the disastrous general housing policies being pursued by the Government. Sadly, I have little confidence that that will be achieved.

We are deeply sceptical of the Government's motives and fear that the asset sell-offs will be all about short-term gain at the expense of securing a future transport system for ordinary Londoners. I do not have time to go into the nitty-gritty of the argument, but the proposed mechanism for property development—namely, the provision allowing limited partnerships—is deeply worrying. I am sure that there will be time enough to discuss that controversial element when the Transport for London Bill wends its way back to us from the other place. Ultimately, a long-term investment strategy aimed at raising money to reinvest in the transport system is one thing, but short-term profiteering on property development is quite another.

In conclusion, TfL's transport system works, and it ought to be protected, but it is at serious risk from a Government who seek short-term savings and do not understand the importance and value of a widely admired but pressured system that keeps our great capital city moving.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair):** It would be appreciated if the Minister would be kind enough to allow Mr Thomas just a few minutes to sum up at the end.

10.49 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas) on securing this debate about Transport for London funding, which is timely following the spending review. I will put the cart before the horse by dealing first with some of the questions that have been raised, meaning that if I do not have time to conclude my remarks, what I want to say will be cut off, rather than what hon. Members might want to hear.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the upgrade of the sub-surface lines will be further delayed by the cuts in Government funding, and I have to point out that the delay was announced before the spending review. Indeed, the delivery of the upgrade is a matter for the Mayor. We have protected TfL's capital funding and expect the

Mayor to prioritise such tube upgrades as part of that process. The hon. Gentleman also asked whether other projects will be delayed; once again, it will be a matter for the Mayor to prioritise such projects. We will be agreeing a settlement letter with the Mayor that makes it clear which infrastructure projects we expect him to deliver, and by when.

**Mr Gareth Thomas:** I gently plead the parochial point that the Minister prioritises in the settlement letter the Metropolitan line upgrade as early as is reasonably possible.

**Mr Goodwill:** I certainly take note of the hon. Gentleman's point; no doubt that issue will be raised during the upcoming mayoral election.

The hon. Gentleman raised the specific point of accessibility at Harrow on the Hill station, and I will ask Mike Brown to provide me with a report as soon as possible about the practicality of addressing that. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, many of our Victorian tube stations do not lend themselves to such upgrades at a reasonable cost, although we have made considerable progress. In particular, the new Crossrail project will vastly increase accessibility for people with mobility problems.

The hon. Gentleman also asked whether there could be further devolution of property taxes, which is, of course, a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who has announced that business rates will be 100% devolved to local authorities from 2020. There will be a consultation on that in 2016, including on how the system will work in practice. Various things will need to be considered, including how the income from London's business rates will be split between the Mayor and the boroughs, and which Government grants that will replace.

The hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) talked about the garden bridge. The Government and the Mayor have each agreed to make a funding contribution, but most of the costs will be met by the private sector. The garden bridge will be an iconic and attractive addition to the capital, and it will be free—there are no plans to charge people who use it.

The hon. Members for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) and for Eltham (Clive Efford) raised the issue of the Silvertown tunnel, which is, again, a matter for the Mayor. Transport for London has recently consulted on the proposal. We agree that the tunnel is an important project and hope that the Mayor can deliver on it quickly. TfL is considering what package of public transport improvements might be needed to complement any new crossings, which might include DLR extensions, but the Mayor will need to take a view on the relative priority of such extensions compared with other schemes.

The hon. Member for Poplar and Limehouse also mentioned the cruise ship terminal. I have visited both London Gateway and the port of Tilbury, and I was impressed by the investment going into those projects. Indeed, London is re-establishing itself as a major port. I pay tribute to Dame Helen Alexander, whose term as chair of the Port of London authority ends at the end of this month. She has been a driving force behind the work that has been going on.

The hon. Gentleman raised in particular the issue of ship-to-shore energy supplies in a number of ports across the country, on which I am keen. Indeed, ports could

derive income from supplying electricity. We will certainly consider how that might be funded, but such sensitive sea areas come under the quality of marine fuel regulations that have been agreed throughout the European Union, so ships will have to use low-sulphur fuel or to be fitted with mitigation equipment to ensure that they at least take care of sulphur. I am aware that ships produce other pollutants when in port.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry), who speaks for the Scottish nationalists, talked about smart ticketing, which has been revolutionary since I arrived in London just over 10 years ago. I was then buying tickets, so the introduction of Oyster has been fantastic. Of course, a new aspect of ticketing, which is already in force on the west coast main line and is an element of the new Northern and TransPennine franchises, is automatic refunds when trains are delayed. I hope that new franchises take that on board. In due course, I hope it becomes the norm that if a train is delayed, a customer, having bought their ticket or season ticket on the train operating company's website, will automatically get a refund, rather than having to apply. Passengers in the north of England are looking forward to that service becoming available.

I think it was the hon. Member for Harrow West who talked about meeting staff at the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. I occasionally meet the RMT, but more through my responsibility for shipping. I suspect that the Mayor of London would primarily be moving forward on that issue, but I hope that, following further discussions, we can soon deliver on the night tube. Many people look forward to some sort of agreement on that, particularly at this time of year when London's night time economy is so vibrant. The hon. Gentleman also raised the issue of manning for British Transport police. Many people were relieved when the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that overall police funding would not be subject to the cuts that many had predicted, but I will look into the specific issue of British Transport police and get back to him.

The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) said that TfL is facing a huge hit to its revenue budget. Actually, in terms of capital funding, this Government will nationally be deploying 50% more than the previous coalition Government, which is good news for people who use our train services and roads. He also mentioned the bus service operators grant, which is indeed a fuel subsidy. One criticism that I get from bus operating companies and bus manufacturers is that the BSOG is a disincentive for the roll-out of environmentally friendly or green buses. For example, electric buses that use no fuel get no BSOG.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the fact that Transport for London will soon no longer need any day-to-day operating subsidy, which is a good news story as that has been made possible by our sustained investment in London in recent years allowing TfL to make significant operational savings. London's growing population and successful economy mean that more and more people are using public transport in London, which in turn, as I pointed out earlier, means that TfL receives more and more income from fares. TfL's commercial development programme is also allowing it to generate more income from the private sector.

[*Mr Goodwill*]

Having not got on to my prepared introductory remarks, I shall conclude by making the point that the spending review settlement shows that we recognise that London today is a city on the move. The capital's economy is moving emphatically in the right direction, and our support is helping to transform London's transport network. I am proud to be part of that transformation together with all our partners, including TfL. The investment that we are making for the next five years will not just keep London mobile, but will equip the city for the challenges of the future so that it can compete and win in the 21st-century global economy.

10.57 am

**Mr Gareth Thomas:** I thank the Minister for his replies to many of my specific questions and the manner in which he approached his winding-up speech. I particularly welcome the fact that he will consider prioritising the Metropolitan line in the letter of agreement that he will sign with Transport for London following the spending review, and I am grateful that he will ask for a report on accessibility issues at Harrow on the Hill station.

I hear what the Minister says about further fiscal devolution being a decision for the Chancellor, but I gently suggest that he might want to use his not inconsiderable influence—he has been promoted—to press the case for the devolution of vehicle excise duty and stamp duty land tax. I heard his gentle sidestep of the request for a meeting with representatives of the workforce so that they could raise concerns about security, so I ask him to reflect on that. There are real concerns about security on the underground, not least as a result of the Leytonstone incident. Whatever he may think about unions in general, the workforce on the tube have reasonable points to make about security, so I encourage him to reconsider being willing to meet them.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Limehouse (Jim Fitzpatrick) in paying tribute to all the staff of Transport for London who do such an important job. I am grateful to their representatives—the Transport Salaried Staffs Association, the RMT and ASLEF—for providing us with briefings ahead of this debate. I am particularly grateful to TfL, London Councils and London First for their briefings, too.

This being the Christmas period, and while we are looking positively to the future of TfL, the last thing to say is I hope that there will soon be a Labour Mayor of London again. I particularly welcome the commitment of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan) to a fares freeze, which gives some hope to my constituents that they will no longer be treated as cash cows for Transport for London.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered Transport for London funding.

## Spending Review and Autumn Statement: Wales

11 am

**Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the effect of the Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015 on Wales.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. Last month's autumn statement was an opportunity for the Government to deliver a fair deal for Wales; to support Welsh families, to invest in skills and infrastructure and to give the Welsh Government the tools that they need to fund the vital public services that we all depend on. Unfortunately, however, the Chancellor of the Exchequer did none of that. Instead, he delivered yet more cuts to the Welsh budget and to the budgets of thousands of families across Wales.

Thanks to Labour's campaign, the Chancellor was forced to abandon his plans to cut tax credits that would have hit 135,000 working families in Wales. However, we now know that those cuts have been delayed, not dropped altogether, and thousands of Welsh families will be hit just as hard through the Government's cuts to universal credit. Families across the UK are expected to lose £1 billion this year and over £3 billion by the end of the Parliament because of the cuts to universal credit. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has predicted losses of £1,600 a year for 2.6 million working families and cuts of £2,500 a year for 1.2 million families who are out of work.

Although fewer than 6,000 Welsh people are currently on universal credit, the number will rise significantly over the next few years, as other benefits such as tax credits and jobseeker's allowance are phased out. In my constituency, 656 people are currently on universal credit, but 14,250 people are claiming one of the main out-of-work benefits.

Working people in Wales will be worse off on universal credit, leaving those who are currently on tax credits with a perverse incentive not to take on a new job or extra hours for fear that it will change their circumstances and cause them to be moved on to universal credit. In Wales, 167,400 working families will feel the impact, 134,600 of whom are families with children.

In Neath, 6,200 families were on tax credits as of April this year; 5,300 of those were families with children, all of whom will be negatively affected by the changes and cuts to universal credit, should they take place. That neither meets the Government's aim of making work pay, nor ensures that those on middle and low incomes are protected. Wales already has the highest level of child poverty of any of the nations of the UK. One in three children lives below the poverty line. Half of the people deemed to be living in poverty are actually working—an unfortunate truth that is often ignored when painting a picture of worklessness and a benefit-claiming culture of poverty and deprivation.

On the autumn statement, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation made it clear:

“There was little in this Statement to tackle the causes of poverty and it was a missed opportunity to support low income families. Without action”—

the foundation warns, our economic recovery will be “built on rising poverty and insecurity.”

In Wales, we are particularly at risk, and the Chancellor's plans are bad news for low and middle-income earners across the country. However, just as we successfully opposed his pernicious cuts to tax credits, we will continue to highlight the fact that the Chancellor's plans will leave Welsh families worse off.

The autumn statement also saw yet another cut to the Welsh budget. Over the next five years, Wales will see a real-terms revenue cut of 4.5% and a cut to its overall budget of 3.6%. When Labour was in government in Westminster, we increased the Welsh budget from £7 billion in 1999 to £16 billion in 2010.

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. In my recollection, going into the last UK election, the Labour party said that it would broadly copy the fiscal policy put forward by the Conservative party. Will she tell us what the cut would have been to the Welsh budget under Labour?

**Christina Rees:** No, we did not actually say that—if the hon. Gentleman checks his facts, he will see that we did not.

As I was saying, by the time this Conservative Government leave office in 2020, we will have seen an 11% cut in the Welsh budget. For all the Government's talk of economic recovery, they have delivered a mountain of cuts since 2010, and their decisions will do further harm to the Welsh economy over the next five years.

**Craig Williams** (Cardiff North) (Con): The hon. Lady talks about 11% cuts to the Welsh budget, but how does that compare to the regions and Departments of England? She has not once mentioned the commitments on the national living wage. Will she welcome that as well as banging on with the diatribe we have heard on universal credit?

**Christina Rees:** The hon. Gentleman may think it is a diatribe but I do not—these are the facts, and the so-called national living wage is yet more rhetoric from the Conservative party.

In Neath Port Talbot, the county borough in which my constituency sits, the local authority has seen a cumulative cut of £65 million to its budget since 2010, not including this coming financial year, with further planned cuts potentially of £37 million over the next three years—a total of £102 million being taken out of its budget in eight years. That has meant its workforce has shrunk by 20%, and it is important to point out that those cuts have come as a direct consequence of UK Government cuts to the Welsh budget. That has hit local services hard, leading to the unwanted but necessary reduction in support for community facilities, such as libraries and leisure centres.

The IFS has estimated that the tax and social security changes introduced in the last Parliament cost the average Welsh family £560 a year and took £700 million out of the Welsh economy each year. According to the IFS, the Chancellor's plans mean that Welsh households will lose a further £500 each year between 2015 and 2019, meaning an annual loss of £660 million to our economy.

The Chancellor made much of implementing a Barnett floor to ensure that the funding gap between Wales and England does not widen further. I welcome that

announcement. Six years on from the Holtham report, which recommended such a floor, I am pleased that the Government have finally pledged to deliver that mechanism, but the simple fact is that the floor makes hardly any difference when spending on Wales is falling. What is unacceptable, and completely at odds with the recommendations of the Holtham report, is that the Barnett floor is only being set at its present level of 115% of spending in England for the duration of this Parliament, with the amount being “reset” at the next spending review

“to take full account of the Welsh Government's new powers and responsibilities.”

**Glyn Davies** (Montgomeryshire) (Con): Will the hon. Lady clarify something? If the 115% level is deemed to be too low, what level would the Labour party want to apply to Wales, in terms of the Barnett formula?

**Christina Rees:** We have to look at this issue. When spending in Wales is falling, that level is too low, so surely the best thing is to generate an economically viable situation in Wales so that spending increases.

**Jonathan Edwards:** Will the hon. Lady take a further intervention?

**Christina Rees:** Not at the moment—I have to make progress.

We are all well aware of the Chancellor's habit of slashing funding from central Government then expecting local government and the devolved Administrations to make up the shortfall. That policy ensures that the poorest areas are hardest hit. If the Chancellor plans to use the devolution of income tax to Wales as a cover to cut Welsh funding further and to lower the Barnett floor, that will understandably be seen by the people of Wales as an unacceptable outcome.

The autumn statement was also largely silent on the vital infrastructure projects that Wales needs. Despite its strategic importance to the Swansea bay city region, of which my constituency is a part, there was not a single mention of the Swansea bay tidal lagoon in the Chancellor's statement. Along with the 22% cuts that the Chancellor announced to the Department of Energy and Climate Change, perhaps that silence signals the Government's lack of commitment to green energy.

In light of the landmark agreement reached in Paris last weekend, we know that projects such as the tidal lagoon are essential if this country is to meet its international obligations to combat climate change. Unfortunately, although important progress was made in Paris, I understand that the pledges will not achieve the aim of limiting global average temperature rise to below 2 °C, so further action is urgently needed.

**Craig Williams:** I thank the hon. Member for giving way again. Will she take the point that there is also the Cardiff lagoon to consider, and that investors around the world are being shaken by what she and other Labour Members are saying about tidal lagoons at a very critical point, when we are negotiating the strike price? They are endangering lagoons, and not just the Swansea lagoon.

**Christina Rees:** I do not quite understand what that intervention means. We are not causing the uncertainty; the Government are.

The Swansea bay tidal project is also of critical importance because of the potential jobs and investment that it will bring across south Wales, as well as the apprenticeships promised to institutions such as the Neath Port Talbot College group. It is estimated that up to 1,900 jobs could be created during the lagoon's construction phase, with many more jobs being created in the supply chains. Local businesses are eagerly anticipating the investment that the project will bring, so it would be a travesty if the UK Government failed to deliver this opportunity. Will the Minister confirm that the Government remain committed to the project and to agreeing a strike price for the tidal lagoon?

Another project that is of vital importance to the whole of south Wales is the electrification of the Great Western line from London to Swansea. Again, the Chancellor paid lip service to the scheme during the autumn statement, but he did not give any further details and now we know why. Since the autumn statement, it has emerged that electrification of the line between Cardiff and Swansea, which was due by 2018, will not be completed until between 2019 and 2024. That is an unacceptable delay and one that has the potential to damage the economies of south-west Wales, which will still be waiting for electrification years after electrification to Cardiff is complete.

**Jonathan Edwards:** Will the hon. Member take another intervention on that point?

**Christina Rees:** I will try it.

**Jonathan Edwards:** I am extremely grateful to the hon. Member; she is being extremely generous in giving way again. I agree with everything she has said about the electrification to Swansea; we have been seriously let down on that particular issue by the UK Government since the election.

The comprehensive spending review came with the statement of funding policy document, which refers to High Speed 2. In that document, Wales gets a 0% rating, which has a drastic effect on the overall comparability percentage when the Barnett formula is applied. Can the hon. Member explain why the Labour Government in Cardiff are accepting the line of the Tory Government here in London that Wales will not lose out on many millions of pounds in the future because of that decision?

**Christina Rees:** That was such a long intervention that I cannot remember now what the beginning was. We also have north Wales to consider and surely—

**Jonathan Edwards:** The south Wales economy is getting blasted.

Sorry, Mr Hollobone.

**Christina Rees:** The news about HS2 comes just weeks after the Public Accounts Committee concluded that the £1.5 billion rise in the cost of electrification to Cardiff was “staggering and unacceptable”. It is now down to the Government to get a grip of the project, to ensure that the upgraded line is delivered quickly and with the maximum value for money for the taxpayer. With that in mind, can the Minister please tell us when he expects the electrification to Swansea to be complete?

The Chancellor was also noticeably lukewarm about proposals to develop city regions in Swansea and Cardiff, which are landmark developments with the capacity to transform transport and economic opportunity across 10 local authorities. The Welsh Government have committed £580 million to the project and the local councils have pledged £120 million, but the autumn statement just confirmed that the Government were committed “in principle” to the proposals. Can the Minister please confirm whether the UK Government will match the funding pledged by the Welsh Government?

Finally, the Chancellor confirmed that highly skilled Welsh workers in Wrexham, Swansea and Porthmadog will lose their jobs with the closure of more tax offices across Wales. We have already suffered through the closure of offices in Carmarthen, Merthyr, Pembroke Dock and Colwyn Bay in 2013, which, for example, forced workers from Colwyn Bay to travel to Wrexham to work. Are those employees now expected to travel to Cardiff to work?

The effects of the autumn statement will soon be felt by families across Wales, many of whom have suffered because of the last five years of cuts. The spending review should have been about delivering a sustainable settlement to boost the Welsh economy. Instead, the Chancellor avoided the big infrastructure challenges facing Wales and delivered another cut to the budget of the Welsh Government, and his cuts to universal credit mean that thousands of Welsh families will begin losing out from next year. What is more, we learned that the Government are removing the requirement of a referendum on devolving tax powers to Wales. I regret that the autumn statement did not have the interests of Wales at its heart, and people in Wales will suffer as a consequence.

11.15 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Alun Cairns):** It is a pleasure, Mr Hollobone, to serve under your chairmanship once again. I thank the hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees) for securing this debate on the Government's spending review and autumn statement. It is an opportunity to try to answer many of the questions that have been put, and to clarify the great opportunities that the autumn statement brings for our nation.

The Chancellor set out in the spending review and the autumn statement how the Government will deliver economic security, national security and opportunity for Welsh families. In Wales, the Government's economic plan will build on the improvements made during the last Parliament. Since 2010, only London has grown more per head than Wales; unemployment in Wales has fallen by 26% since 2010; and in the last year alone, employment in Wales grew by more than 43,000. This investment continues to be made in this Parliament. Hopefully Labour Members will agree that the increase in capital funding for the Welsh Government—an increase of more than £900 million, or 16% in real terms, over five years—will support investment projects that matter to Wales and the Welsh economy.

It is interesting that the hon. Member for Neath focused on revenue expenditure, and at the close of her speech she talked about the lack of infrastructure investment. A 16% increase in capital spending certainly allows any infrastructure deficiency to be fixed by the

Welsh Government. I suggest that all Members focus their attention on delivery, including the delivery by the Welsh Government of many projects, such as the M4 relief road, the electrification of valleys lines and other capital projects around Wales. When the hon. Lady's predecessor, Peter Hain, was the Member for Neath, he cancelled the M4 relief road back in 1997. It is hard to believe that despite there being a Labour Administration in Cardiff Bay since 1999, we are still debating the same project, which is vital for the prosperity of Wales, given the commercial opportunities that it would create.

**Jonathan Edwards:** I am very grateful to the Minister for giving way, and his reply will be very useful to me as somebody who represents the communities in the west of our country. When the borrowing powers were awarded to the Welsh Government, was there a caveat that enhanced borrowing powers would only become available if the money was invested in the M4 relief road, or has that decision been made by the Labour Members in the Welsh Government independently?

**Alun Cairns:** I will happily write to the hon. Gentleman with further details. I can confirm now that the Welsh Government's power to borrow up to £500 million for capital spending was initially due to start wholesale in 2018. The UK Government recognise that those powers are integral to the delivery of the M4 relief road, so early access to the borrowing powers was facilitated. The hon. Gentleman will know that that happened some years ago, but we are yet to see those borrowing powers being exercised to deliver that vital road project.

The hon. Gentleman will also know that during the recent rugby world cup, many demands and calls were made for that relief road. That is why, as I have pointed out, it was sad that that project was cancelled in 1997, following the previous Government's decision to deliver that road.

**Craig Williams:** This is not just about the big projects. Our capital city is still without a ring road, and the eastern bay link has been on the cards for many a year. Even when it comes to smaller capital projects, the Welsh Government just do not get on and deliver.

**Alun Cairns:** My hon. Friend highlights another infrastructure project that has been called for. I can certainly remember that project from before the turn of the century. Businesses would welcome it. Bear in mind the resources available: the 16% increase in capital spend gives the Welsh Government the opportunity and the power. Instead of focusing on some of the issues raised today, this debate should focus on delivery by the Welsh Government, because all the resources have been put in their hands. The spending review saw more than just economic investment in skills and infrastructure.

**Glyn Davies:** On the implications of the autumn statement beyond economic development, one of the consequences that was not, I think, specifically announced in the Chamber on that day was a very big cut to the support for Sianel Pedwar Cymru, the Welsh language channel, from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. Does the Minister share the disappointment that those of us who love the Welsh language—I know that that includes him—feel about that huge reduction in support? It may have an implication for the BBC's

support for S4C. It is particularly disappointing for the Minister and me because of our party's record in stimulating the Welsh language and S4C over the past 30 years.

**Alun Cairns:** My hon. Friend raises an important point. S4C is crucial for the vitality of the language, and it creates social, cultural and economic opportunities. It would be wholly improper for me to provide a running commentary on the charter renewal negotiations. They are ongoing, but I am pleased to hear that Tony Hall said that broadcasting in the nations needs to be protected by the BBC, and I would hope that that would extend to S4C.

**Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab):** The Minister seems to have forgotten a line from his party's general election manifesto, which said that if elected, his party would safeguard the funding and editorial independence of S4C. How does he square that commitment with what happened in the comprehensive spending review?

**Alun Cairns:** The hon. Lady needs to recognise that the amount of funding from DCMS is relatively small. The proposal to cut from £7.6 million to £5 million over an extended period of time provides an opportunity for S4C to make its contribution to the savings. The spending review proposed £400,000 of funding savings from S4C in the first year, but she needs to recognise that negotiations with the BBC are ongoing, and to recognise the statements coming from Tony Hall. We welcome those statements and hope that the BBC will be able to deliver on them.

The Welsh Government's total funding is underpinned by our commitment to introducing a funding floor, as the hon. Member for Neath said. I would have hoped that she would have welcomed the funding floor, because it was only two weeks before the autumn statement that there was a debate in this Chamber about the need for a funding floor. There was doubt that it would be delivered, but a funding floor of 115% will be introduced. That is well within the Holtham commission's fair funding range, and I would have hoped that that would be welcomed by the hon. Lady.

**Christina Rees:** I did welcome it, but there are too many provisos in there.

**Alun Cairns:** The surveyor and architect of fair funding for Wales, Gerry Holtham, analysed the position and came up with a range of solutions. After the autumn statement, he said that it was a fair settlement. That is the fundamental point. There will be political commentary from all around, but the person commissioned by the Welsh Government to provide the assessment and establish the financial relationship between the UK Government and the Welsh Government has said that it is a fair settlement, and that is testament to the strength of the Administration in Westminster, which has delivered on something that has been talked about, but never delivered, by the Opposition.

**Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab):** My apologies, Mr Hollobone, for arriving a minute into the debate. On the 115% Barnett floor, why is it only for the term of the Parliament? What is the Government's thinking behind that? The Minister will be aware of the worry that there is no long-term commitment. I am sure he will say, "Governments can only bind one Parliament", but what is his thinking, long term?

**Alun Cairns:** Having been a Minister, the hon. Gentleman will know that no Government can bind another Government, though I would largely welcome a Government that could bind a Labour Administration, hopefully in the long-term future, to prevent them from pursuing the sorts of policies that they would want to introduce. Clearly, that is not how democracy works. It is obvious that this Administration can only plan for this Administration, and it would be wholly wrong and inappropriate to come up with commitments that bind any future Administration. The hon. Gentleman tried hard to draw something from me, but I hope he will respect the argument that he would be making, were he standing in my position.

I hope that Opposition Members recognise the commitment. The surveyor and architect of fair funding said that this was a “very reasonable” and fair settlement. Any political rhetoric on the issue needs to recognise the comments of that independent commentator.

Another element of the autumn statement enabled the Welsh Government to alter Welsh rates of income tax without a referendum. That offers exciting opportunities to attract new investors, and tax powers to reform the Welsh economy. The Welsh Government can take on more responsibility for how they raise money, as well as how they spend it. The National Assembly will finally take its place alongside other mature legislatures by being accountable to the people it serves. The new tax-raising powers put important fiscal levers in the hands of the Welsh Government, which they can use to grow the Welsh economy, to deliver new opportunities and to attract new investment.

Silk estimated that a 1p cut in the higher rate of tax would equate to a drop in revenue of £12 million. That is only a little more than the Welsh Government reportedly lost selling land in Monmouthshire, for example. Think of the opportunities that the cut of one penny could create: tens of millions of pounds might be spent on business support, or other discrete areas of the Welsh Government. People can now make a comparison: should they pursue one policy, given its cost to the taxpayer, or another, such as reducing the rate of income tax to attract investors and entrepreneurs to Wales?

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** The leader of the Conservative party in Wales has opened up the front on this matter by proposing a 5p drop in the top rate of income tax.

That would equate to £40 million or £50 million, which is not a drop in the ocean in terms of the Welsh budget. It is curious that the leader of the Conservative party in Wales thinks that that is the best way to incentivise entrepreneurship, rather than investment in infrastructure, the innovation funds and everything else. Why does it have to be a cut in the top rate of tax? How many people on the frontline of our public services, including nurses and the police, have already been cut? Have the Conservatives made those calculations when committing to a 5p cut in the top rate of income tax?

**Alun Cairns:** The hon. Gentleman is demonstrating his misunderstanding, because he compares capital projects with revenue projects. The rate of income tax would affect revenue projects only. These are the sorts of policies that could be presented in a manifesto. People can choose whether they want to see money spent on pet projects of the Welsh Government or a cut in income tax. People will make their choices according to their objectives, but it is up to each political party to make its case. The whole point about the autumn statement is that it empowers the Welsh Government to make the case on whether it should be spending more or less.

**Susan Elan Jones:** Does the Minister think that Jobs Growth Wales is a pet project of the Welsh Government?

**Alun Cairns:** It is up to people to make judgments on what are pet projects. The point I am making is that we are in a serious debate. The opportunity to cut income tax rates is an opportunity to attract more investors and entrepreneurs to Wales.

In the 20 seconds that remain of the debate, I want to scotch any concern about the Barnett consequential for HS2 funding in the autumn statement. The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) has misunderstood the tables presented in the statement. We will happily go through it and write to him with the detail.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

11.30 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Specialist Neuromuscular Care and Treatments

[MR GRAHAM BRADY *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered access to specialist neuromuscular care and treatments.

**Mr Graham Brady (in the Chair):** Mrs Gillan, you have the opportunity to speak to the motion.

**Mrs Gillan:** Thank you very much, Mr Brady. I was not sure whether you were going to say something more from the Chair before I spoke again. May I welcome you warmly to the Chair? Perhaps we will get through this debate together without knowing too many details about the procedure.

I also welcome the Minister to his position. When one is a Minister, one sometimes finds oneself in debates where it is déjà vu all over again, as they say. I am afraid that this is probably going to be one of those debates, but it is no less serious than the debate that we had last week on this subject, and I am grateful for the opportunity that the House has given me to reinforce that debate, by allowing this debate today. I see colleagues in the Chamber who were also here last week, and they will know how passionately I feel about this subject; indeed, many of my colleagues, from all parties in the House, feel passionately about it.

I really am delighted to have an opportunity to speak about this subject, because as I think we all know, there are more than 60 different types of muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions. It is now widely accepted that approximately 1,000 children and adults for every 1 million of the population in the UK are affected by these muscle-wasting conditions, and it is estimated that some 70,000 people right across the UK are affected.

I appreciate that there are other areas that we could discuss under this topic, and I am sure that we will hear from colleagues about them. However, I will use this opportunity to concentrate on muscular dystrophies such as Duchenne muscular dystrophy, on which I have been working hard with my constituents, the Hill family, in order to gain access to a drug called Translarna.

Around 2,500 children and adults in the UK have Duchenne and almost all of them are male. The condition is caused by the lack of a vital muscle protein called dystrophin. It leads to muscles weakening and wasting over time, and to increasingly severe disability. The vital heart and breathing muscles are affected, which often causes devastating cardiac and respiratory difficulties. In older patients, assisted ventilation can be required, which necessitates 24-hour care. Some patients have to undergo a tracheostomy procedure and, sadly, few people live with this condition past their 30th birthday.

Duchenne has a huge impact on families and on the individuals who suffer from it. Only about 100 boys are diagnosed with it every year in the UK, but it is hard to overstate the devastation to the individual and the surrounding family that it causes. The diagnosis is really

hard to come to terms with, and the family must deal with huge challenges as the condition progresses and the patient grows older. It usually leads to full-time wheelchair use, surgery for scoliosis, which often involves inserting iron rods into the patient's back, and the use of full-time assisted ventilation.

As the Minister knows, there is a very brave little boy who is my constituent. He is called Archie Hill and his parents, Gary and Louisa Hill, together with his brother, Leyton, have campaigned tirelessly for access to Translarna. To put things in context for my colleagues who are here for this debate, I can do no better than to use the words, once again, of Gary and Louisa Hill, which I hope will help people to understand the devastation that this condition causes:

"Being told your child will probably die before you, has to be the most devastating thing you can tell anyone. Archie was diagnosed in 2008. Over the next couple of years we became very reclusive, barely getting out the car at school drop off, sometimes not even answering the phone...we wanted to grieve on our own (grieving is not too strong a word). We're angry, we look at other families and wonder why us?"

They wonder why it has happened to their beautiful child. They blame themselves, even though they know it is not their fault.

The emotional effect on siblings is really apparent, although I have to say that, having met Leyton, I know he is a fantastic support to his brother and to his mother and father. He is an integral part of this team and should be equally praised for his courage and perseverance. I know that he struggles with his concentration, and that he is deeply affected by his brother's condition, but he is also a very brave little boy coping with this in his family.

Archie faces huge day-to-day challenges. His parents say:

"He is taken out of lessons for physio on a daily basis. He suffers from...mood swings".

I find that hardly surprising. They go on:

"Every so often he will ask us questions about his condition; does it only affect my legs? Do I always have to take this medicine? Why do I have to wear the night splints?"

He asks all the sorts of questions that a child of his age would ask their parents when they knew that they were suffering from this condition.

Despite that, Archie has great stamina, and he has spent whole days here campaigning, marching up to Downing Street and telling the Prime Minister what he wants and what the Prime Minister should do about it. Quite frankly, he is one of the pluckiest little spirits that I have ever met in my life.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences (George Freeman)** *indicated assent.*

**Mrs Gillan:** I see the Minister nodding his head; I know that he agrees; anybody who has met Archie will know that what I am saying is true.

It is not just Archie who is affected by this condition. Sue Barnley, whose son Harry would benefit from Translarna, says:

"If Harry could get Translarna now whilst he is the best he is ever going to get, ie not gaining any more skills, only deteriorating then this will enable us to have more fun on a day to day basis. We gain a lot of support from our family and friends already, this will only increase as time goes on."

[Mrs Gillan]

She goes on to say:

“It seems cruel that the drug is there to make a massive difference in our lives, yet it is totally out of reach. Living with Duchenne is like living under a very dark cloud, we as parents know what Harry’s...future holds, to have some extra time living for the ‘here and now’ would make a BIG BIG difference, time to make and treasure some extra memories before our lives become totally engulfed by this awful disease.”

As the Minister knows, I have worked quite closely with Muscular Dystrophy UK and I have nothing but praise for that organisation, because it goes the extra mile for the people it represents. In my experience, the way that it deals with parliamentarians, offering them briefs and helping them, is second to none. It is an organisation that I trust, and I believe that it gives us the right information at the right time. It says that for older boys and men who have this condition, the respiratory function is compromised and the challenges get even greater for them and their families, because they have to engage with and face what many find to be truly frightening aspects of the condition.

One mother with whom Muscular Dystrophy UK works closely was called out to her son’s residential home at 2 am one weekend in September due to an emergency incident. Although her son was not hospitalised long term, he was experiencing increasing difficulties, and his mother told us that

“he is very conscious of his own mortality.”

Other young men are hospitalised frequently and often for long periods of time due to chest infections, which are very difficult to shift and are life-threatening. The current time of year is a frightening time for young men with Duchenne, because as we all know, respiratory infections abound, but in their case, hospitalisation is much more likely than it is for other people.

The Minister knows that Translarna is available from a company called PTC Therapeutics. We should put the benefits of Translarna in the context of a very short life. The early loss of the ability to walk is associated with a faster progression of the disease, and the later stages, as I have just described, are frightening and absolutely devastating. In a short life, the main goal is to spend as much of that life as possible in the best state of health and with the best quality of life. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence—we are waiting for its decision on Translarna—must apply significant weight to any benefits that can be obtained through the use of Translarna in the context of that short and limited life. A delay in any of the devastating consequences of the disease, no matter how short, contributes to quality of life.

While Translarna is not yet licensed for use as an end-of-life medicine—it is still to be tested in clinical trials with older patients—evidence from existing trials shows that it delays the progression of the disease during a significant stage of a boy’s life. The trials also indicate that it is likely to delay the end of life, as a proxy measure. NICE has to give special consideration to the limited life expectancy of these boys when it is looking at this issue.

Translarna was the first licensed drug to tackle the underlying genetic cause of Duchenne and to keep boys walking for longer. Boys with the specific nonsense mutation of Duchenne, such as my constituent Archie

Hill, have been waiting a year and a half since the European Medicines Agency approval in May 2014 for a decision on whether Translarna will be approved in England. It was a conditional approval, but the rubber stamp with it meant that the drug was then available in such countries as France, Spain, Italy, Germany and Denmark. That prompts the obvious question: if a European citizen can travel to any of those countries and get Translarna, why can they not get Translarna here in England?

I appreciate that there is a process that has to be gone through, and that due process needs to be followed, but it seems a cruel and unusual punishment that we have been waiting for more than a year and a half to see whether the drug can be made available to children in our country. As things stand, families face the prospect of a further agonising delay to NICE’s decision over Christmas. If I have stressed it once, I have stressed it over and over again: every day counts as those boys lose ambulation and become ineligible for Translarna.

Boosting clinical trial capacity for Duchenne muscular dystrophy is important. As Translarna becomes available for treatment, as I hope it will, it will apply only to 10% to 15% of boys with Duchenne. Other treatments are beginning to emerge. With the growth in clinical trials for Duchenne, specialist muscle centres—that is where the studies are conducted—are reporting that they are having to turn studies away due to a lack of resources and capacity. As part of a new initiative by Duchenne charities to address those concerns, Muscular Dystrophy UK has conducted an audit of clinical trial capacity and submitted that to the accelerated access review as evidence confirming that worrying picture. If the issue is not addressed, as the Minister knows—he is nodding his head in agreement—there is a risk that the promising drugs for Duchenne that are in the pipeline and in clinical trial will not continue to improve and meet their potential, hampering the search for effective treatments.

Muscular Dystrophy UK’s audit also found an excessively high clinical workload being placed on small and overstretched teams, which means that they are unable to participate in clinical trials through, for example, recruiting patients. That also means that children affected by Duchenne are unable to enrol in trials where they could access a new therapy. To aid the development of clinical trials, it is important that standards of NHS care for Duchenne patients are high across the country to ensure that patients on clinical trials are generally in the same state of health and physical shape. While there are some centres of excellence, such as Newcastle and Great Ormond Street, other parts of the country have much less developed services, and essential therapies, such as specialist physiotherapy, are not regularly provided.

Centres have also expressed concern that excess treatment costs—the additional costs of treating patients enrolled in research—are not being reimbursed to centres by clinical commissioning groups. That is a clear point of friction, and it limits the centres’ ability to take part in research. NHS England recently issued guidance on the issue, but it is not yet clear whether that will be enforced in practice.

Turning to the NICE guidelines on uncommon neurological conditions, a huge problem faces families and health professionals because there is no NICE guideline for any muscular dystrophies or neuromuscular conditions, which is why NHS England has asked NICE

to develop clinical guidance on the assessment, diagnosis and referral of uncommon neurological problems. Muscular Dystrophy UK attended the initial scoping workshop on 11 November and will be participating in the consultation, which I understand has already started. While muscular dystrophies and neuromuscular conditions were listed as among the many conditions covered by the guideline and despite past assurances from NICE, there is concern that the focus on muscle-wasting conditions might be minimal unless the complexities of the conditions are highlighted. Given the internationally recognised standards of care for Duchenne and spinal muscular atrophy, it is disappointing that the NICE guidelines that are being developed are far more generic than the original guideline proposed by NICE to cover uncommon neuromuscular conditions in a letter to Muscular Dystrophy UK in November 2013.

Muscular Dystrophy UK has proposed that the guidelines should address the following: paediatric neuromuscular services specifically for Duchenne muscular dystrophy, in conjunction with current guidelines; the use of steroids as effective therapy in terms of the age when the optimal effect can be achieved, whether there should be a continuous or intermittent dosing regime, and how to manage the side effects; spinal surgery to correct or prevent scoliosis, with evidence regarding the optimum age and management pre and post surgery; and respiratory support, with a comparison of the evidence regarding invasive and non-invasive interventions, including comparisons with experiences in Denmark, where evidence suggests that men with Duchenne are living into their 40s because of the relatively high standard of respiratory support. So far as adult neuromuscular services are concerned, the guidelines need to address: diagnosis and the importance of GPs recognising the conditions, making early referrals and ensuring effective links from primary into tertiary care; respiratory support, as I have talked about before; and cardiac support, including regular monitoring to detect and address the deterioration of the heart through the progression of muscle-wasting conditions.

High costs can be involved in unplanned emergency admissions due to Duchenne and other muscle-wasting conditions, and in living with such conditions. There is a cost attached to not taking action to implement preventative care. Access to specialist multidisciplinary care, including access to respiratory, cardiac and physiotherapy support, can contribute to reducing avoidable, unplanned emergency admissions to hospital. A clinical audit of emergency hospital admissions that was led by Professor Mike Hanna revealed in June 2012 that 40% of these costly admissions could have been prevented if patients had been able to access expert tertiary care, specialist physiotherapy and—this is the worst finding of all—vital medical equipment. It has been estimated that addressing those issues could save the NHS more than £32 million a year as the appropriate proportion of NHS spending on neuromuscular services.

The cost of living with Duchenne is enormous. In the first study of its kind, academics found that the overall care for each patient with Duchenne cost the UK economy about £71,000 a year, giving a national total of £120 million. That survey was led by Newcastle University and a team in Sweden. Some 770 patients and their primary caregivers in the UK, Germany, Italy and the US were asked to complete a questionnaire on their experience

of living with Duchenne and its impact on their need to access medical care, employment, leisure time and quality of life. The direct cost of the illness across all countries was at least eight times higher than the average health expenditure per person, and the figure for the UK was 16 times higher. The overall figures included medical treatment as well as the cost associated with the loss of employment among caregivers. In the UK, nearly half of caregivers reduced their working hours or stopped working completely owing to their relatives' Duchenne muscular dystrophy. I therefore have several questions that I hope the Minister will answer during his winding-up speech.

When we discussed access to medicines last week in Westminster Hall, the Minister mentioned that he had made contact with NICE about both Translarna and Vimizin. I hope he feels that he may have reached a point with NICE such that he can talk about those drugs. I understand that they are used in similar situations, so if there is good news about Vimizin, we hope there will be good news about Translarna, and vice-versa.

Will the Minister provide more details on ensuring standards of care for muscular dystrophy and neuromuscular conditions? I really hope that clinical trials will be developed, so will he say a little more about that? I also want him to ensure that NICE gives more prominence to muscular dystrophy and neuromuscular conditions in the development of the uncommon neurological conditions guidelines, as was outlined in the original proposal.

Lastly, I hope the Minister will join me in congratulating Muscular Dystrophy UK on its work to develop information and resources for people with muscle-wasting conditions and to support health professionals through its "Bridging the Gap" project. More than 400 GPs and 150 physiotherapists completed the online learning modules about muscular dystrophy. The charity has sent out 4,500 alert cards for specific muscle-wasting conditions and 300 care plans, which is a positive step forward to improve how we treat and look after our patients with Duchenne.

I finish with a plea to the Minister. When I asked for this debate, as he knows, it was entirely based on trying to get Translarna cleared for Archie Hill. The Hill family went on holiday today, I think shortly before the debate began. I do not know what the Minister can do to speed the process along but, for the Hill family and Archie, and for all the other children and their parents at this time of year, if the Minister could ask NICE to bring forward a positive decision on Translarna, it would be the best Christmas present that any parent or child could get.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Graham Brady (in the Chair):** Order. Five or six Members want to participate and I want to get on to the winding-up speeches by no later than 3.35 pm. Although there is no formal time limit on speeches, if Members can keep their remarks to around six or seven minutes, we will be able to accommodate everybody.

2.53 pm

**Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) on speaking with such passion

[*Rachael Maskell*]

once again about her constituent and neuromuscular disorders. Such disorders often do not receive the profile of other medical conditions, yet for each of the 70,000 people affected, they are all-encompassing. I want to talk about a range of services and the challenges within them. I recognise that the conditions affect adults as well as children. I declare my interest as a physiotherapist who has worked in this field in the NHS for 20 years and is registered with the Health and Care Professions Council. I want to examine three themes: specialist services and how they are delivered; transition; and a timely response at the time of need.

I will deal first with specialist services. A multidisciplinary team is essential for delivering services to people with neuromuscular disorders, but access can often be challenging. District hospitals have teams of staff who specialise in paediatrics, neurology or other fields, but those people might not have the specific skills that are needed when dealing with neuromuscular disorders. Practitioners are practised in the principles of such conditions, but might not be as familiar with particular syndromes, given that there are so many—60 or more, as we have heard. This situation is likely to be exacerbated in the community when general practitioners and community physios do not have the specific skills, so it is important to ensure that people with these conditions can access those with the right skills who understand the pathology of the disorder and the specialist treatment that is required.

For instance, there are two specialist centres in London and one in Oxford for the whole of the south-east, so people have to travel vast distances to consult a specialist team. Owing to the nature of their disability, that can be very challenging, and the centres can even prove to be inaccessible, especially as their disease advances. How do we bring specialist services to those with neuromuscular disorders? How do we train staff to provide optimum care in the community, and how do we provide a rapid self-referral service when that is needed?

If I take muscular dystrophy as an example, paediatric patients in York benefit from Leeds general infirmary's outreach service. That provides an opportunity for families to meet specialist practitioners but, obviously, some have to travel to those services. Will the Minister ensure that funding for that outreach hub-and-spoke model of service provision will continue and that clinicians will be able to travel to deliver their services, either individually or as a team?

It is important that services are placed in appropriate locations. For example, if a patient will benefit from hydrotherapy, we need hydrotherapy pools to be available. Anisa Kothia, a member of the York muscle group, has a son, Yusef, who has Duchenne muscular dystrophy, and hydrotherapy is a vital component of his treatment. It relaxes his muscles so that his limbs can be taken through their range of movements, and the buoyancy of the water helps his movement. Will the Minister support a national review between the Department of Health and the Department for Communities and Local Government into hydrotherapy provision and ensure that any deficits are addressed?

Ongoing services rely on clinicians with less of a specialism, however, so that requires professionals to be trained and the provision of regular updates, which is why Gita Ramdharry, associate professor at St George's,

University of London, and Kingston University, has been working with Muscular Dystrophy UK to develop new online physiotherapy training. Will the Minister set aside resources to ensure that we can have specialist online training to equip professionals to provide the optimum treatment? Obviously, more specialist care training is also needed which, for physio, can be very hands-on.

I have had discussions with senior clinicians in other fields about global medical education. I think that that is relevant for neuromuscular disorders, because such disorders often require a global view that enables recruitment from around the world to participate in webinars, to examine case studies and academic papers, and to demonstrate learning by making a submission. We need to take medical training to another level, so will the Minister look at that more deeply, particularly with regard to neuromuscular conditions?

Before I move on, I want to highlight that much of the care for long-term progressive conditions is provided by the family. Good self-management is key, as Labour's expert patient initiative has proven. If the professional knows the patient and their condition, the treatment will be optimal and will provide the best support. For example, a chest infection often accompanies a neuromuscular disorder, and a chest physio who knows the patient will know how best to support sputum clearance with a combination of the best postural drainage, manual support, and expectoration or suction techniques. Knowing exactly what the patient needs is critical, and can be life-saving.

All physios have the competencies required to treat a patient, but knowing the individual can make the difference. Rapid access to services can be transformative, and self-referral is very important, so will the Minister ensure that all services provide rapid-access routes to the appropriate clinicians and that all patients can self-refer, rather than having to go through the normal access channels? In north and west Yorkshire, we have only one neuromuscular care adviser to cover more than 3,500 adults and children. Will the Minister recognise the need to provide additional professionals in that role, including in north Yorkshire?

I have previously talked about the need to review the transition between child and adolescent mental health services, and adult mental health services. We should do the same for neuromuscular disorders, because using someone's age as a measure is arbitrary. The pathology of Duchenne muscular dystrophy is more likely to be understood in paediatric services than adult services, owing to the number of children who, sadly, still do not make it to adulthood. A person's medical team and physios know that individual and know how to progress their treatment. It is entirely arbitrary and nonsensical that someone's birthday should determine that they have to transfer to another team.

Continuity of service provision is important. The condition of those who do reach adulthood is often at an advanced stage, so they need continuity. The findings in the field are that young adults are often lost in the service and then re-emerge later with problems that were preventable. Will the Minister take a serious look at the interface between paediatric and adult services right across the Department of Health, and particularly with regard to neuromuscular disorders, because surely specialism should override age?

We should be making a timely response to need. A worsening situation has been observed across the spectrum of neuromuscular disorders. It has been seen by clinicians in practice, and now constituents are writing to me about it. Orthotics, wheelchairs and equipment must be in place when they are needed. Infants and children grow, and disease processes may degenerate, so the combination of the two means that expediency is important. Patients are waiting far too long for appropriate equipment, and that is essentially an issue of under-resourcing and poor prioritisation.

If someone is measured for a chair, they need that chair, but people are waiting month upon month before their chair arrives. While they are waiting, they will be positioned inappropriately and might not even have enough support for their frame. That can exacerbate pain, as well as compromise a patient's musculoskeletal situation and, dangerously, their respiratory function. There is absolutely no excuse for that. When a chair arrives, a patient needs it, so we need to ensure that we get the right equipment in the right place at the right time.

Planning for what equipment will be required is part of the management process, because people must always be prepared for the next stage, and the outsourcing of services has made the situation far worse. With life-limiting conditions, there is no time to wait. Will the Minister agree to carry out an urgent review of the situation? Will he ensure that, starting on 1 April 2016, there will be a waiting-time marker for the renewal and provision of equipment so that the time between the initial request for an assessment and the patient receiving the equipment is measured?

For someone with a rare condition, their future depends on the whole NHS and care service working around them to provide optimum support. I have not touched on research and pharmaceuticals, nor on advances in science, but there are things that can be done immediately that can really change someone's outcomes. We need the best provision and to give individuals hope to ensure that we can extend their life and improve their quality of life. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

3.4 pm

**Caroline Nokes** (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): As ever, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan), who secured this important debate today. It is on a recurring theme which she brings us back to time and again. Not only does she work tirelessly to highlight the case of her constituent, Archie Hill, but she is extremely knowledgeable, so I will endeavour not to repeat any of her comments because I want to give other Members the chance to contribute.

Like my right hon. Friend, I have a constituent who suffers from Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Jagger Curtis is a pupil at Romsey Abbey primary school and is just eight years old. I have highlighted Jagger's case in this Chamber before and I have raised it twice at Prime Minister's questions, but, like Archie, Jagger is still waiting for an answer on whether he will be allowed to have Translarna. I will focus briefly on the issue of treatment, but mainly I want to echo my right hon.

Friend's calls, asking when families such as Jagger's can expect to be notified of guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence on access to Translarna.

I know the Minister is aware of the time sensitivities of access to this drug—it has to be prescribed while the patient is still mobile—so I ask him to consider meeting me and my constituents, Jules Geary and James Curtis, who are Jagger's parents, to discuss how the process might be accelerated. It might not necessarily be accelerated now, for their son, but it should be for the other hundred boys who will be diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy every single year. We have been waiting many months for a decision on Translarna, and every deadline appears to result in a decision to prolong matters further. There are concerns about the clinical trial capacity for drugs developed to assist neuromuscular conditions; will the Minister please assure me that he is actively promoting the network of specialist muscle centres as a means to overcome that problem?

Other issues associated with Jagger's care have also raised huge concerns. He has had to wait far too long for his specialist wheelchair, and there seems to be little understanding that the chair is a lifeline for Jagger and his parents. Last week he went on holiday to Tenerife, and his wheelchair arrived literally just in time—the very day before he went on holiday—despite the fact that it was ordered back in May. The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) referred to the fact that children grow and change, and their needs change. It seems to be an absolute tragedy that a child can wait all those months, and then by the time the chair arrives the danger is that it will no longer be correct for their condition.

Jagger still has his mobility, but his parents have done an arguably very difficult thing in making sure that he has that chair. Inevitably, as a child with a condition in which his muscles deteriorate, he tires really easily, so that chair is his lifeline and his access to continued mobility now and in future. He is still suitable for treatment with Translarna—he is one of the boys who has the nonsense mutation—but his family feels as though the clock is ticking very quickly.

Muscular Dystrophy UK has highlighted the problems with wheelchair provision throughout the country. Clinical commissioning groups are now responsible for commissioning wheelchair services. I am really conscious that in west Hampshire there have been delays for many people, not just Jagger. For those with neuromuscular conditions, as the hon. Member for York Central said, it is all about getting the right chair at the right time. It can be particularly devastating for children to have to wait for a chair that enhances their freedom.

I recently saw that Jagger's mother had posted on Facebook a picture of him proudly showing off his new chair. However, it also said that the family had launched a GoFundMe page to buy a powered sitting and standing chair to enable Jagger to live his life as fully and actively as possible. It is heartbreaking that they are trying to fund that through GoFundMe because they do not have the confidence that the CCG is going to provide that sort of facility for them.

In the south-east we lag behind the rest of the country in the provision of neuromuscular care and adviser support. As we have heard, there are two specialist treatment centres in London and one in Oxford. That is

[Caroline Nokes]

a two-hour journey for a child in a wheelchair, coming via Waterloo, and his parents tell me that it is incredibly difficult for them to do that whenever Jagger needs to come to London for treatment. There is also a problem with specialist guidance. These families are looking for support—they need support, advice and information.

We are lucky that in Romsey we have brilliant GPs, but Jules Geary told me the tale of trying to get Jagger diagnosed. As a first-time mum, she was often dismissed as a worried mother, when in fact she was the one who knew her son best and knew that there was a problem. I do not blame the GPs at all, because if 100 boys are diagnosed every year, one would not expect a GP in Romsey to see it very often. It was not until James read an article in the *Daily Mail* about Duchenne muscular dystrophy that he pointed his finger and said, “Those are the same symptoms that Jagger has.” They took that article to the GP, and it was only then that the specialist tests were done on Jagger.

I know that we keep returning to this subject, but that is because it is important. It is right that we keep returning to it. Quality of life, especially for children, is crucial. I hope the Minister will look round this Chamber this afternoon and hear the cross-party and apolitical calls for help for those with such conditions, and I hope he will address some of the points that we raise.

3.10 pm

**Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) on securing this debate on a vital issue that affects many young people throughout the UK.

As the right hon. Lady said, neuromuscular diseases come in many different forms. In fact, there are about 60 different types of muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions, which makes it difficult for the NHS to provide clear-cut statistics on the number of people affected by such diseases. However, research undertaken by Muscular Dystrophy UK suggests that out of every 1 million of the UK’s population, approximately 1,000 children and adults are affected by such muscle-wasting conditions. On that basis, we can estimate that some 70,000 of our constituents, of whom approximately 2,000 live in Northern Ireland, are affected by those conditions.

Another way of totalling the scale of the issue is to look at the admission rates of those with neuromuscular diseases to accident and emergency departments. Muscular Dystrophy UK undertook work on that issue and found that in Northern Ireland in 2011, 787 people with a neuromuscular condition were admitted to A&E departments requiring emergency treatment, at an estimated cost of £2.2 million. Those figures are broadly in line with the GB average. There were 28,000 emergency admissions in the UK, at a cost of £81 million. Relying on the emergency services to fill the gaps in treatment for people with such conditions robs people of their independence and costs the NHS much more than a well-designed system that helps people to manage their conditions and avoids emergencies.

I am sure everyone in this Chamber is in agreement on this issue and wants the best possible treatment and care to be provided to people living with the effects of this cruel disease. Unfortunately, we are not there yet. There is still much work to do—in particular, on an issue that the right hon. Lady already referred to: Duchenne muscular dystrophy and the need for Translarna to be commissioned by NICE and approved by its guidelines. It is important that that happens, because Translarna is already in use in France, Germany, Italy and Spain. Families in those countries can use it, but families here are waiting for it.

**Will Quince** (Colchester) (Con): One of my constituents has two sons with Duchenne. Does the hon. Lady agree that it is deeply regrettable that they are considering moving to France and commuting back to work so that their sons have the vital access to those drugs?

**Ms Ritchie:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I agree. His point illustrates that we urgently need a decision from the Minister. I hope the Minister provides us with some welcome information on that issue. It is deeply regrettable that families will go through Christmas not knowing for sure whether the drug will be approved. In the new year, NICE’s decision must not be delayed further. We must end the difficult wait of those families and children.

In Northern Ireland, there has been a commitment for more adult neuromuscular nurse specialists and adult neuromuscular consultants. I share the hope that, when combined with increased care adviser support, the new specialists will begin to improve our currently overstretched services, although there are still valid concerns about how that can be carried out effectively in the context of broader reorganisation and funding scarcity. If we are to achieve the standard of care we all want, much more must be done to co-ordinate better and join up services to ensure patients with muscle-wasting conditions get the help they need efficiently and effectively.

Before I conclude, I want to mention one of my constituents, a lady called Michaela Hollywood, who is wheelchair-bound and was born with spinal muscular atrophy. She was born without ears and is permanently in a wheelchair. She is now 25 years old. She received a Points of Light award, and on Thursday last week she was with the Prime Minister when the Christmas tree lights were turned on in Downing Street. She is on the BBC’s list of the 100 most inspirational women. She received her undergraduate and master’s degrees from Ulster University, and she hopes to go back to do her PhD. She is a lady of immense capacity. She is a campaigner for young people like her with muscle-wasting conditions and, although she spends every day of her life in a wheelchair, she very much enjoys every one of those days because she is a constant campaigner with enormous zeal for life.

Michaela gave evidence to the all-party group on muscular dystrophy in the Northern Ireland Assembly for its report on specialist neuromuscular care. What she said is most important, because it highlights the need for joined-up Government thinking, whether here at Westminster and in the Department for Health or in the devolved Administrations. She said:

“There’s physiotherapy and hydrotherapy, trying just to cover everything. I do receive physiotherapy but it’s a tricky issue because when you’re under 18, with a neuromuscular condition,

you have respiratory physio in the community; when you're over 18 and in the community, with a neuromuscular condition, you're with disability physios, even though you're deemed as having a respiratory problem. So that I think is something that is a prime example of the disjointed care that we're receiving. If we have one specialist multidisciplinary team...that would make things so much easier. If we had a physio that concentrated on neuromuscular diseases but also had experience within respiratory areas, that would make things easier. Also, if we had a cardiologist who pretty much had a good knowledge all round, that would help too."

Michaela's words make the case for a joined-up service better than any of us could, so I will end by simply reiterating her appeal for specialist multidisciplinary teams for the treatment of muscular dystrophy to be established. I call on NICE to make its decision on Translarna with the utmost urgency. I hope the Minister will give us some favourable answers to alleviate the distress that is felt by many people throughout the UK.

3.18 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate. It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie), who made an impassioned plea on behalf of her constituent. Every one of us has constituents who suffer from Duchenne muscular dystrophy and other diseases and problems, so it is always good to make a plea on behalf of them in this Chamber. As always, it is good to see the Minister and the shadow Minister here.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) on setting the scene for us all. She clearly outlined the issues, and asked questions of the Minister that we all endorse and support. I thank all other Members who have spoken. I am my party's spokesperson on health, and I hope to find out about promising developments on the mainland that can be taken back to Northern Ireland, and that thoughts from Northern Ireland can be explained to the Minister. Perhaps the combination of the two can help us to look forward together, in ways that are to our advantage.

As other hon. Members have said, there are some 60 different types of neuromuscular condition, and it is estimated that around 60,000 to 70,000 people in the UK live with neurological conditions that affect their muscle function. Duchenne muscular dystrophy has been mentioned in particular. A couple of my constituents have that condition, and I am aware of the issues. At an event at the Methodist central hall across the way, people with the condition from across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland clearly explained their needs, the issues—such as the massive advances in medical technology—and the best approaches. There are different levels of Duchenne, and what is medicine for one may not be medicine for another; that is the point I am trying to make.

In Northern Ireland, an estimated 1,600 people in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area alone are diagnosed with neurological illnesses each year. That is equivalent to the number diagnosed with a major cancer; the conditions we are debating are of as great a relevance as some better-known ones. An estimated 34,000 people in Northern Ireland suffer from a disabling long-term neurological or neuromuscular condition such as epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, or one of the rare disorders such as motor neurone disease or muscular dystrophy, including Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

Neurological symptoms such as headaches are one of the most common reasons for seeing a general practitioner, and they account for up to 8% of emergency department visits.

Last year, a new dedicated out-patient centre for neurology, with some responsibility for neuromuscular issues, was opened in Northern Ireland. That has been a positive development in the Province, helping with the nationwide momentum for access to treatment, and better treatment, for those living with neurological conditions. The new facility helps us to move towards meeting some of the latest standards in caring for people with long-term neurological and neuromuscular conditions. Since it opened, feedback has been very positive. Improved access to a modernised facility makes life much easier for patients and greatly improves their overall experience of their care.

I understand that the proposed multidisciplinary team will include neuromuscular consultants, neuromuscular physiotherapists and speech and language therapists, along with other care professionals. One of the key service outcomes, which I welcome, is that all patients with long-term neurological conditions have an individual care plan. The hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) commented on access to wheelchairs; it is important for each individual to have a wheelchair that suits them. That might seem a small thing to some people, but to the patients it is massive. With 60,000 to 70,000 people in the UK living with neurological conditions, we must take those conditions seriously and prioritise our responsibility to those living with them.

A landmark decision could end the agonising wait for the delivery of the treatment that we are talking about to all those eligible to benefit in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. For those in Northern Ireland who benefited from the dedicated out-patient service I mentioned, I am sure this would be an additional boost. Nationwide, the momentum is now in favour of those living with neurological conditions. That may not always be how it feels, but there is a step forward, and we have to look at that, and at how to deliver that better. Although the move is very well intentioned and welcome overall, concerns have been raised and reservations expressed.

I know that the Minister will respond to what has been said about the NICE conditions. Lately he seems regularly to make particular reference to NICE in responding to debates in Westminster Hall and the main Chamber, and I think that is what Members are interested in. There is a need for a specific NICE response. It has asked for further clarification from PTC Therapeutics of the degree of benefit that its drug Translarna provides in the treatment of a type of Duchenne muscular dystrophy. DMD is one of a group of muscular dystrophies, which are inherited genetic conditions that cause the body to produce too little dystrophin, a substance crucial for muscle functioning. Seeing some of the young patients who have the condition focuses one's attention quickly on how critical the availability of the medicine is. The condition leads to changes in the muscle fibres, which gradually weaken the muscles, resulting in an increasing level of disability. The decline in physical functioning in DMD leads to respiratory and cardiac failure and eventual death, usually before the age of 30.

[Jim Shannon]

Ataluren is the first licensed treatment for DMD that addresses the loss of dystrophin, the underlying cause of the condition. It has a conditional marketing authorisation in the UK for the treatment of DMD. The families of children affected, and Muscular Dystrophy UK, have campaigned for NHS England to make the drug available, since it became the first EU-approved drug for tackling Duchenne muscular dystrophy last August. The condition affects 2,500 people in the UK, causing increasingly severe disability and cutting lives short. It would be useful if the Minister and his Department could address NICE's concerns, as it has asked questions. The right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham referred to NICE and outlined four or five questions. I think that the focus that will emerge from the debate will be on how to improve the NICE guidelines and improve access to drugs throughout the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Whenever I attend health debates in Westminster Hall, I ask whether we can have not just a regional strategy but a UK-wide one, bringing Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales together. Will the Minister consider that? The four regions can benefit from each other's knowledge. Collectively, we can do better.

3.26 pm

**Mrs Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): I want to speak not so much about Duchenne muscular dystrophy as about Parkinson's disease and motor neurone disease—particularly the latter, which is also a neuromuscular condition. I will consider the problem of getting appropriate diagnosis and in-care support from neurologists. That is critical. We have already heard about the difficulty that those living in the wrong part of the country have in obtaining a quick diagnosis and the right support as they progress through the condition.

Neurological disorders account for up to 20% of acute medical admissions, and there are more than 60 different neuromuscular conditions. I was helped to understand the patchwork problem that people experience in getting access to neurological advice, support and guidance by a report commissioned in 2014 by the Association of British Neurologists. With 60,000 to 70,000 people in the UK living with a neuromuscular condition, there is considerable pressure on neurologists, and on specialist diagnosis and support. In 2011, a joint report of the ABN and the Royal College of Physicians, "Local adult neurology services for the next decade", recommended that all relevant patients be admitted to hospitals that had an acute neurological service led by consultant neurologists. We are nowhere near that position now.

In 2014 a survey by the ABN found that the likelihood of a patient with a neurological problem being seen by a neurologist varies dramatically depending on where they live. The availability of a neurological review varied according to the type of hospital the patient was admitted to—whether it was a neuroscience centre, a neurology centre or a district general hospital, with or without neurological support. It was significantly better to be seen at a neuroscience centre, where there was support on 91% of days. Those who went to a neurological centre got support from a neurologist on only 80% of days. District general hospitals with a neurologist based

at them had access to a neurologist on only 58% of working days. In contrast, access for patients at district general hospitals with no resident neurologist was available on only 32% of days. That is totally unacceptable, when we know that access to such neurological support dramatically changes the impact on a patient; there is an effect on their capacity to continue their life, and on their prospects of being discharged from hospital with a good quality of life.

I am concerned about the fact that access to CT and MRI imaging varies between hospitals. MRI was available 24/7 at only 30% of sites in the UK. The 2014 study identified a wide variation in access to specialist services for patients presenting with acute neurological disorders. As liaison neurology services change the diagnosis and management of a high proportion of patients, improving outcomes and reducing length of stay, there is an opportunity to improve both patient care and cost-effectiveness.

The all-party parliamentary group on motor neurone disease recently heard emotional and dramatic evidence from Mark and Katy Styles. Mark worked in local government and Katy was a secondary school teacher before she gave up work to become Mark's full-time carer. Mark has a form of motor neurone disease called Kennedy's disease, which is slowly progressive and genetic, passed from mothers to sons. He lives in Canterbury, and they have to travel to University College hospital in London to see a neurologist. That is nonsensical. Support should exist locally, because his condition may soon deteriorate to the extent that he cannot access the neurological support that he and his wife need. When Katy was working, she earned £150 a day. She now gets £67 a week to provide the on-duty, 24/7 care that her husband needs. We must recognise the invaluable work of carers and ensure that they get the necessary support.

Some 30% of people with motor neurone disease will die within one year of diagnosis. It is absolutely critical that they get rapid access to help and support for their condition. I will not repeat all the words that have been said about access to wheelchairs, but I stress that if someone with MND has the wrong wheelchair, they may not be able to communicate that. An ill-fitting wheelchair causes acute pain, but MND sufferers rapidly lose their speech and the ability to move their hands and upper limbs. They cannot communicate that they are in pain or distress, so the provision of wheelchairs is critical.

The APPG commissioned a report last year called "Condemned to Silence" about access to communication support. The issue is not money, because the Government have put money in place for communication support; it is poor roll-out, and something must be done to improve it. I look forward to hearing from the Minister what steps are being taken to ensure that people are not condemned to die without access to communication support, which they need to talk to their loved ones and carers about their needs, and to avoid suffering the indignity of being unable to communicate if they are admitted to hospital.

I have two final points. First, access to care support is critical as conditions deteriorate. People cannot wait for further assessments, or be put on waiting lists for care support, when they often need double-handling care support. If people are not to be condemned to lie in beds, support must be available immediately. Access to hoists and high-low hospital beds is often delayed.

We must get faster at providing them. Secondly, access to finance to research such conditions is vital if we are to give families hope, and a sense that time and research will give them—and perhaps family members, who may inherit a condition—a better life in the future.

3.33 pm

**Richard Arkless** (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): I thank the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) for securing a debate on a subject that clearly touches many people for various reasons. It is also of course a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. Those Members who know my background as a lawyer and a businessman may be forgiven for asking, “Why are you here to speak about neuromuscular diseases?” I am not a member of the SNP health team, which is lucky to have the profound experience of my hon. Friends the Members for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) and for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), but I am developing something perhaps even more important and certainly more profound: I am living with motor neurone disease within my family.

If I can declare an interest of sorts, Mr Brady, my mother has motor neurone disease and, if Members will allow me, I will restrict my comments to that experience. I do not mean to sideline the 59 other important neuromuscular diseases; I want to ensure that what I say comes from a real place, not just a bunch of briefing notes. That notwithstanding, I want to add my voice to the calls to the Minister to persuade him to get Translarna approved as quickly as is humanly possible. I know that he looks sympathetically on that cause, and we have heard many vivid stories today about how it would affect people quickly.

Like everybody, I would lay claim to my mother—and indeed my wife—being the best that there is. She is the most selfless, dedicated mother in the world. She has literally lived her life for me, my brother, Nicholas, and my baby sister, Poppy—a baby who is now in her twenties. We have been her life. She has lived her life exclusively for us. My brother and sister and I will always be grateful for that. My mother was diagnosed 20 months ago. She kept it a secret with my dad for 16 of those months—thank goodness that she has my dad, with whom she has an unbreakable bond—so I have only been living with it for a few months. It is difficult and, as may become obvious during this speech, extremely raw.

During those 16 months, we witnessed the deterioration of my mother’s speech and joints. She explained the speech by way of fictional dentures that she had apparently had implanted. She explained the hands with reference to a historical arthritis problem in our family. Both were plausible and not really questioned up until the point that she decided to tell us. She did not tell me, my brother or sister or our extended family until after I was lucky enough to be in this place and make my maiden speech. She was determined that I should pursue my dream, and of course her dream, of making Scotland a better nation. I suspect that what she really wants now is a second referendum before it is too late, but I suppose that you get the point.

I will return to my mother later, but I want to pick up on some points made by other Members in this enlightening

and touching debate. The right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham is right to say that there are 60 different types of neurological disease, and I hope that she will forgive me for indulging myself with only one of them today. She talked about the Hill family, particularly Archie. I have this vivid image in my mind of Archie running up to 10 Downing Street and giving the Prime Minister what for—if only all of us could get that opportunity.

The speech of the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) was touching indeed. She brings a wealth of practical experience, to which the Minister ought to listen carefully. I was particularly captured by her assertion that equipment needs to be made available when needed. It needs to be the right equipment in the right place at the right time, because time moves too quickly with such diseases. I hope that the Minister will pay careful heed to the hon. Lady’s practical experience, which has substantially benefited the debate.

I was particularly touched by the story of Jagger from the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes). I hope that he enjoys his break in Tenerife and that the Minister will listen to calls for Translarna to be approved as soon as possible.

The debate has been consensual so far, and I want to take the politics out of what I am going to say. I want to touch on some things that Scotland is doing well on motor neurone disease, but I do not mean that to be a criticism of the UK Government. I hope that everybody’s ears are open. If we are doing things right, I sincerely hope that the UK can learn. If the UK is doing things right, my ears are open and Scotland can certainly learn. There is no politics in this whatsoever. As an aside, as new Member I have been frankly dismayed at how health services are politicised by both sides of the House. I have become increasingly amenable to the suggestion that perhaps the health service should not be run by politicians at all, but by people who have at heart the interests of the people whom we are here to serve.

Motor neurone disease is a neurological degenerative disease. In simple terms, the mind is fine and continues to operate with full function, but the body gradually gives up. The signals do not go from the mind to the body to make it work: that is how I think of it. Patients are affected differently. My brother-in-law died from it a couple of years ago, and his limbs were affected first. His legs started to give way for no apparent reason. However, my mother’s speech was the first thing to go—this was a lady who liked to talk, who seriously liked to talk! To have that stripped away from her must be incredibly difficult—and I know it is.

Scotland is doing many things well on motor neurone disease. Over the past year we have announced that we will double the number of motor neurone nurses. We are very much in the early stages, but the Scottish Government have provided funding to local authorities to ensure that things happen. At the moment local authorities are recruiting and assessing the need, and I hope that process will be speeded up as we go on.

That funding is a recognition of the difference that specialist nursing can make to motor neurone disease. My mother has to rely on a motor neurone nurse who comes from another region and who can only come on a part-time basis. A very proud woman, she was initially most reluctant to consider any form of help, but she has since come to realise what a benefit the nurse is. She has

[Richard Arkless]

asked me to take up the cause of getting more motor neurone nurses throughout not only Scotland, but the rest of the UK—we are all human beings, despite our political views.

The change in Scotland has been praised in all quarters. Huge thanks are due to people such as Archie and Jagger. In Scotland a gentleman called Gordon Aikman, Christina McKelvie MSP, and all the staff at MND Scotland have done an incredible job of persuading the Government of the immediate need for those services. We have committed to giving a free voice box on the NHS and to paying families directly for support, not as a patronising gesture to pay people to look after their relatives, but to ensure that support is available if needed. We have also increased investment in palliative care.

I live in a town called Stranraer. The UK average is two people with motor neurone disease per 100,000; the Stranraer average is 13 per 10,000—an astronomical figure. I have asked the chief executive of our local health board to figure out exactly why—

**Mr Graham Brady (in the Chair):** Order. I am sorry, the hon. Gentleman must resume his seat. I am loth to interrupt a very personal story, but we need to leave time for both the official Opposition spokesperson and the Minister to wind up. I have allowed more than eight minutes, and I am keen to allow the same to the official Opposition.

3.42 pm

**Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to speak in the debate with you in the Chair, Mr Brady.

As others have done, I congratulate the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) on securing the debate. She gave a moving account of the Hill family in the light of Archie's diagnosis and of the impact on Archie and his family of Duchenne. We have also heard excellent speeches from my hon. Friends the Members for York Central (Rachael Maskell) and for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) and the hon. Members for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes), for South Down (Ms Ritchie), for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless).

The all-party group for muscular dystrophy has carried out essential work to raise awareness and understanding of the needs of people living with muscular dystrophy and other neuromuscular conditions. I congratulate the APG on the quality of its inquiries and reports. The right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham also paid tribute to the work of Muscular Dystrophy UK, and I join her in that tribute.

Providing access to treatment for people with muscular dystrophy is complex, because it is a rare condition. There are challenges in delivering localised, specialised care to people who have multiple, complex needs, but that cannot be an excuse for poor-quality care. As we have heard, some 70,000 people are affected by a neuromuscular condition in the UK. We must ensure that the NHS delivers equal treatment for equal need and that those with complex needs may have access to the treatment and support necessary to help them achieve the best quality of life possible.

In 2009 the APG's Walton report showed clear deficiencies in the provision and planning of, and access to, care for people living with neuromuscular conditions. It found cases where care was "inadequate and not acceptable". Although the report offered many sensible recommendations to improve the quality of care, the potential for progress was limited by the coalition Government's reforms of the NHS under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Given those reforms, the APG undertook a six-month inquiry that considered their impact, releasing another report in March this year. Sadly, the reorganisation of the NHS and other reforms had done little to improve access to and availability of treatment for patients with neuromuscular conditions. Sadly, in fact, the reforms had made it even harder for patients to access support as a result of significant regional variations in the commissioning and funding of services. That is the nub of what I want to say.

There is a failure to join up services, and confusion about responsibilities and processes is a common theme. The hon. Member for South Down gave us an excellent quote on that lack of joined-up services. At the national strategic level there has been no specific mention of neuromuscular conditions in the five-year forward view, nor anything in the consultation document on the draft NHS mandate, which suggests a failure to recognise the specific needs of such patients at the strategic level. In fact, the five-year forward view groups together rare diseases and cancers, but there is a great deal of difference between all the conditions that we have discussed today and rare cancers.

There is a lack of clear guidance on which bodies in the NHS fund certain services and, as we have heard, sometimes people are not even receiving crucial respiratory support. Locally, there were examples of clinical commissioning groups failing to fund sessions of specialist neuromuscular physiotherapy or to provide sufficient funding for people to receive the right wheelchair at the right time. That is clearly so important and was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for York Central and the hon. Member for Romsey and Southampton North. It must be right for a child to have a comfortable chair while growing up.

The coalition Government's reforms have also contributed to a delay in decisions on the availability of drug treatment for Duchenne muscular dystrophy, a life-limiting illness that affects about 2,500 boys and adults. The right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham talked about that so well. To have to wait with a condition such as Duchenne for a decision on the drug Translarna is clearly agonising. It is a shame that the issue has been caused by NHS England halting its assessments to review its processes. I was not present at a Westminster Hall debate last week in which I understand that the Minister present said that he was "hopeful" that access to the drug would become available:

"I am hopeful about Translarna...NICE has been consulting on the process, and I believe the company has been engaging with NICE on pricing. I am hopeful that there will be a decision in the next few months".—[*Official Report*, 8 December 2015; Vol. 603, c. 274WH.]

As he went on to say, however, the decision is not in his gift.

I hope that the Minister's optimism is well founded, because as we have heard today it must be recognised that time is an important factor. The decision is different

from some others, because the timing can affect the benefit that the boys will receive. I wish to ask, as everyone else has done, about that decision, and what he is doing to ensure that delays do not happen again. We must ensure that system of wider support is available for patients and their families and carers. In some cases people need 24-hour support and care; homes must be adapted; physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, and occupational therapy need to be available; and carers need access to the right advice and support, as has been said.

I am concerned, like others, that the Government's failure to protect social care funding and other non-NHS health funding, such as training budgets, will mean that that wider network of support is not available when needed. The Walton report highlighted issues with social care back in 2009, but since then the number of people with access to publicly funded social care has fallen by 25%. The availability of the right support for people with specialist care needs is unlikely unless we have a sustainable funding settlement for both the NHS and social care. The difficulty with recent funding announcements, if the Minister intends to refer to them, is that the 2% social care precept and the better care fund are back-loaded funding mechanisms, with nothing this year and little next year.

We have heard about the regional differences in access to care. The Walton report highlighted that there were only 13 neuromuscular care co-ordinators when 60 were felt to be needed. My hon. Friend the Member for York Central said that there was only a single neuromuscular care adviser in North Yorkshire; in fact, no neuromuscular care adviser support is available for adults living with such conditions in Greater Manchester or the surrounding areas of the north-west. That is in spite of the fact that an estimated 8,100 people with a muscle-wasting condition live in the north-west. There is a need to ensure that clinical commissioning groups and other regional health organisations are aware of their responsibilities. Sadly, the findings of the 2015 APG report suggest little progress in the issue of unequal access.

Given the devolution deals on health and social care in certain parts of the country, will the Minister assure us that the inequalities in specialised services that we have heard about will be addressed and that the relevant bodies will be made aware of their responsibilities, which they do not seem to be at the moment? The debate has highlighted the fact that we have ingrained problems in our health and social care system. The lack of a sustainable funding settlement for social care and other recent reforms have led to fragmentation and instability in services. That means that inequalities in care sadly will continue. I urge the Minister to consider in full the most recent report and recommendations from the APG. We must ensure that people with neuromuscular conditions receive the care that they need, and that those inequalities in care are addressed.

3.49 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences (George Freeman):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Brady. I am left with 10 minutes in which to try to deliver my speech and the answers that I have carefully prepared while listening to colleagues' comments. If I run short of time, I will undertake to write to everyone in the Chamber with answers to the points raised.

I start by paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) for securing the debate. She is a tenacious advocate on this issue, as on others. I join her in paying tribute to Archie and his family. I have met patients who suffer from these diseases and their families, and one's heart goes out to them. One wants to pay tribute to the bravery with which they deal with their conditions. As is so often the case in the history of medical progress, the families, patients and carers are those who advocate and, in the end, win through to make their point heard, with the help of colleagues from across the House. My right hon. Friend eloquently paid tribute to the families of children with these disorders and diseases who, in many ways, suffer every bit as much as the patients who show such incredible fortitude. She asked me last week whether I would give her an A grade for effort and persistence. I will happily give her an A-plus in this end-of-term summary, but the people to whom we really want to give an A-plus are NICE and NHS England.

I want to touch on some of the excellent points that were raised. My right hon. Friend raised Vimizim and Translarna, so I will say something in detail about the timing of those decisions in a minute. She also made an important point about standards of care across the NHS in clinical trials, which was mentioned by numerous colleagues, and the importance of NICE giving more prominence to the time aspect of these conditions, which are unusual because they can deteriorate with every week's delay in getting treatment.

The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) gave us the benefit of her front-line clinical expertise. In case I run short of time, I shall say now that I will happily convene a meeting at the Department of Health with officials from my Department and NHS England, to which I invite colleagues from all parties who want to discuss the issues she and others raised about front-line care, because a range of practical issues about such care has been raised, in addition to access to drugs, and giving colleagues the chance to raise such points on behalf of their constituents would represent a powerful opportunity. The hon. Lady talked in particular about training and the interface of paediatric and specialist services, which I come across in connection with numerous different specialist conditions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romsey and Southampton North (Caroline Nokes) spoke passionately about James, Jules and Jagger Curtis, and the importance of expediting those particular decisions and quicker assessment, as well as adoption in general. That is a passion of mine, which was why I launched the accelerated access review to look systemically at what we can do to expedite getting new medicines into the service. She also touched on the importance of wheelchair access.

The hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie) talked eloquently about Michaela and the importance of specialist, multidisciplinary teams. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who gets the prize for appearing in more debates with me than any other Member of the House, which is a tribute to his activism as the Democratic Unionist party's spokesman on these issues, highlighted the importance of Belfast as a hub of research and regional strategies in Northern Ireland and spoke about his constituents. This is a devolved matter, and while I pay tribute to the work of researchers and medics in Northern Ireland, it is important that the

[George Freeman]

devolved Administration in Northern Ireland put in place a similarly enlightened commissioning process.

The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) raised the broader issues of Parkinson's and neurological disorders, while the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless) spoke passionately about his mother's suffering. Before I came to Parliament, I worked in Scotland and, as he highlighted, in this area, as in several others, Scotland pioneers some of the clinical commissioning work. The supreme irony of the debate was brought to light by his request that we depoliticise the NHS. For me, one of the greatest steps following the Health and Social Care Act 2012 was the separation of the NHS from the Department of Health. NHS England now operates under its own arm's length management, subject to a mandate from Ministers

We do not control the NHS—believe me that if, for one afternoon, I could do that, I wish it was now. I would love nothing more than to pull the lever and give all these children the drugs that we all want them to get before Christmas, but that is not in my gift, and I suggest that it is in all our interests that it is not. It is right that such decisions are taken by NHS England and clinical professionals, advised by the very best people at NICE.

**Barbara Keeley:** It is important that the NHS mandate covers these conditions because at the moment it does not. Something must be done to make sure that they are covered.

**George Freeman:** In the few minutes I have available, let me say a few things about the main issues raised. I pay tribute to Muscular Dystrophy UK, Robert Meadowcroft, Emily Crossley, the Duchenne Children's Trust, Action Duchenne and all the other organisations that work so hard in this area, and specifically on the two or three key drugs.

I remind the House that the decision from NICE on Vimizim is due before the end of the year. Without breaching due process, I have asked that, if that decision is in the pipeline, it can be made as quickly as possible, ideally before we all break up for the Christmas holidays. That is not in my gift, but I made that request. Similarly, I have requested that the Translarna decision, which I believe is due in February, is similarly expedited. However, again, that is not in my gift, and while during the year the Prime Minister and I have urged NICE and NHS England to do everything they can to expedite their decision making on those drugs, we do not have the power—rightly, in my view—to step in and breach process. It is fair to all patients in the NHS that decisions are taken properly.

**Mrs Gillan:** The Minister has given us a sympathetic hearing and I know that he has done everything in his power to try to bring forward that decision. Quite rightly, it is not his decision to make, but, through him, may I appeal to the men and women who are making that decision? If they have any humanity about them, they ought to make a positive announcement before Christmas.

**George Freeman:** My right hon. Friend made the point more powerfully than I could. On Vimizim, I am delighted that BioMarin, the company concerned, has, following exhortation from me and others, sat down with NHS England and gone through pricing flexibilities. I have been able to grant an access agreement. The drugs are incredibly expensive, which is what makes NICE's work difficult, so if anyone from PTC Therapeutics, the company responsible for making Translarna, is watching, I urge them to sit down with NHS England and adopt a similar approach.

On specialist commissioning, we lived through and focused on difficult decisions, and this summer NHS England agreed to 23 new treatments, including Duodopa, which controls the symptoms of patients with Parkinson's disease, wider access to proton beam therapy, and extending treatment with ivacaftor for cystic fibrosis involving G551D mutations.

We live in an age of extraordinary biomedical progress, but budgets struggle to keep up with the rate of progress that our scientists and researchers make. I know that this is of little comfort to my right hon. Friend and to Archie and his family, but I hope that hon. Members agree that, in deciding which treatments should be procured on behalf of us all, due process must apply. However, I share their frustration, which was why I launched the accelerated access review, which will report independently to me in the spring. That substantial piece of work is examining whether we can do more to embrace breakthroughs in genomics and informatics to give NICE and NHS England new flexibilities to speed up how innovations for patients are assessed, as well as to explore new pathways and flexibilities for different models of reimbursement to get innovation through quicker.

I want to pick up the point that was made about specialist neuromuscular care. The truth is that there are few curative treatments for most of these diseases, so we are talking about the importance of routine care for people that is provided by local primary and secondary care services via local CCGs. However, a number of specialist services have been designated among the 146 that NHS England is responsible for commissioning nationally, which are set out in legislation and commissioned directly by NHS England through 10 area teams. Twenty-five specialised neurological treatment centres across England ensure that patients can access high-quality neurological care where they live.

As I said, I will be happy to convene a meeting in the Department with officials and NHS England to talk about how we can address some of the practical issues raised when providing front-line, integrated services. I fear that the clock is against my being able to go through the 22 questions for which I had answers prepared, so I close by saying that while we all would want to pull a lever to make this happen quickly, the truth is that we need a system that is rigorous, robust and evidence-based, but quicker, in recognition of the effects on these patients.

*Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).*

4 pm

*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.*

## Weymouth to Waterloo Rail Line

[MRS MADELEINE MOON *in the Chair*]

4.11 pm

**Richard Drax** (South Dorset) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Weymouth to Waterloo rail line.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon, and a great pleasure to see the Minister here, whom I regaled, for half an hour of her precious time, only about two hours ago, so I thank her for that. It is very nice to see her in her place.

Welcome to a number of colleagues, and to a right hon. colleague, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr Letwin); it is a particular pleasure to see him here. I will talk for about 10 minutes, then another colleague would like to say something, and I think others want to intervene. After that, the Minister will obviously respond.

I start by saying that Dorset is one of the most beautiful and unspoiled counties in the country, with a Jurassic and world heritage coastline that is the envy of the world. That combination of sea, coast and countryside attracts millions of visitors and tourists. At the height of the summer, the road system struggles to cope and frequently does not. That is not to say that we are all crying out for a motorway—indeed, the lack of one is part of the attraction. However, we simply cannot sit back and depend on seasonal jobs, which do not provide a secure enough career and future prospects for many of our constituents. We need to attract investment into the area, and rail connectivity is key. The lack of it already makes things very hard for those who live and work in Dorset, thwarting many ambitious plans.

Take Portland port, which is a growing port: commercial road traffic there is expected to treble in the years ahead, and the number of visiting cruise ships continues to rise, dropping off countless thousands of customers, who then go into all our constituencies. In the centre of my constituency, a newly announced enterprise zone on the outskirts of Wool is expected to generate thousands of jobs—so too, hopefully, are our expanding marine and engineering industries, new museums and tourist attractions.

For all those to work, we need to improve our infrastructure, and with little scope for more roads, for reasons I have explained, rail is the only option. There has been a railway line to Weymouth for 148 years. The terminus, originally designed by one of Brunel's assistants, sits only yards from the resort's golden beaches. The line was decisive in opening up the town, which was first made fashionable by George III and his followers in 1789, hence the façade. It is not hard to imagine the scene as the early tourists enjoyed the waters from their wheeled bathing touts. The same train continued to the Channel Islands ferry terminal at the mouth of Weymouth harbour, winding its way through the town, led by a man waving a red flag to clear the way. Times have changed, but the significance of rail travel has not, and if we are to ensure that both Weymouth and Portland can thrive today as they did back in the 19th century, some imaginative thinking is required.

Two trains an hour serve Weymouth from Waterloo. Typically, they take three hours to travel only 130 miles, so the time is considerable. There is an infrequent and

sporadic service to Yeovil and Bristol. With the aim of speeding up trains to Weymouth, I began to investigate the various possibilities with South West Trains. We came up with three options. The first was to run a faster, third train in each direction on the current route via Bournemouth and Southampton, but that would require substantially more power, platforms and rolling stock, making it expensive and, due to the bottleneck in the New Forest, essentially unworkable. Even if multimillions of pounds were spent on new electricity substations, the increasing number of passengers from projected new housing developments would give any franchisee little flexibility to drop a station in order to generate faster journey times on a line that is already run to capacity.

The second option is to make one of the two hourly London trains “fast” and the other “slow.” However, the negative impact on intermediate stations effectively rules that out. The third option is via Yeovil, and I and many others—not least the colleagues sitting around these tables—believe that that is a goer. With much of the infrastructure in place, it is more affordable and has major advantages. It would: reduce the journey time from Weymouth to London to two hours and 25 minutes; provide more room for passengers on the existing line through Bournemouth and Southampton; expand capacity and business opportunities across a number of south-western constituencies; connect Dorset to Heathrow—I sorely hope that the planned expansion there eventually gets the go-ahead—and take up some of the ample capacity on the Weymouth-to-Bristol line.

The proposal would mean an additional service to Waterloo via Yeovil and Salisbury, with reduced stops, calling at Weymouth, Dorchester West, Yeovil Junction, Salisbury and London.

**Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way and for securing this important debate. Does he agree that if the new route via Yeovil goes ahead, it still has the potential to benefit my constituents, who neighbour his, by increasing capacity on the trains, hopefully thereby increasing rail use and relieving a great deal of pressure on our roads, particularly in and around Wareham?

**Richard Drax:** I entirely agree. As my hon. Friend well knows, the charity railway, which will be linked from Swanage to the main line through Wareham, will also play its part, which is very good news. And yes, that will relieve pressure greatly on the line through his constituency. I have also heard today that he and others are looking at a new metro service running between Christchurch and Wareham, or something of that nature. In itself, that will take up more capacity on the line, which makes my plan less workable, although his constituents will be able to travel backwards and forwards more efficiently and more ably, which is very good for him and others.

The work needed for the third proposal would be relatively minimal—certainly less than would be required on the Bournemouth-to-Southampton line. That work includes some short stretches of new track, enhancements to platforms at Weymouth, Yeovil and Salisbury, an increase in the speed limit on parts of the line, and the extension of a footbridge. I—or we, I should say—believe that none of those is impossible.

**John Glen** (Salisbury) (Con): Does my hon. Friend not recognise the absolute imperative, however, of having clarity about the infrastructure costs required, and particularly the cost of dualling the track between Yeovil and Salisbury, which would be key to unlocking a secure future for his plans?

**Richard Drax:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point. In fact, it is key, as the Minister well knows, because this is a point that we raised with her only an hour or two ago. I say to her gently and humbly that if Network Rail could possibly do the study and come back with some sort of affordability plan, that would help us. We went away from the meeting that the Minister kindly held feeling very positive. At the moment, the local enterprise partnerships all down that line—this is the plan—would be very keen to draw up some sort of business plan and come back to her. What we do not want—my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) mentioned this—is to do all the work, and for Network Rail to come back and say, “That’s not how we did it,” or “They have missed out this or that,” or “They haven’t put this into the equation.” That would be unfortunate, particularly if a great deal of money was spent on the report that the LEPs are considering drawing up. Some clarity from the Minister at the end of the debate would be most helpful.

It is estimated that the plan for a service via Yeovil would take between three and five years to complete; as with all these things, it would not happen immediately, but it chimes with the Dorset local master plan to reconnect the south and north of the county by train for the first time in almost 30 years, and to link Dorchester and Weymouth to Exeter in the west. As the Minister knows, the Members to my west, east and immediate north are all involved in this potential project and would benefit equally. We are all in this together.

I and many others believe that the proposal would have a dramatically beneficial effect on Weymouth and Portland and, as discussed earlier with the Minister, the whole region. Weymouth and Portland would be connected to a vital east-west arterial route, and that would promise better access for businesses, visitors and tourists, and hopefully generate more investment in the resort.

It is lovely to see my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset here. Dorchester would play a key role because it is in a key location. With the housing on the Prince of Wales’s land—this was discussed with the Minister earlier—and other developments across that part of the world in the years ahead, we must have an updated, modern railway system; otherwise, we will simply not cope.

**Mr Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset) (Con): It is absolutely true that my constituents in Dorchester and Sherborne, and indeed those between them, would hugely welcome the plan that my hon. Friend is describing. Does he agree that if we could get the LEPs to co-ordinate with Network Rail on the specifications of the report, we should be able to establish a very strong business case?

**Richard Drax:** I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. It would be useful to have some clarity from the Minister. We are very willing to help out and to do our part, but some guidance from Network Rail would be hugely helpful, so that it does not say that all the work

that we have done does not come up to scratch. Some negotiation between the two parties would be hugely beneficial.

The knock-on effect—all good—would be dramatic for train times. Pending a study, it is estimated that Weymouth to Waterloo would take two hours, 25 minutes; the typical time now is three hours. If there was a direct service from Salisbury to London, that time could be reduced by a further 10 to 15 minutes. That would have a knock-on effect for the rest of the region. Yeovil to Waterloo would take two hours; Honiton to Waterloo would take two hours, 30 minutes; Exeter to Waterloo would take two hours, 50 minutes; and north Devon—a crucial area that is growing and has very little rail network—to Waterloo would take three hours, 55 minutes. If the non-stop Salisbury to London service introduced a third service in the hour, it would greatly reduce the time—by another 10 to 15 minutes. My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury is very keen on that.

I have done the train journey to Weymouth in my constituency; three hours is a long time for visitors and businesses, and is beyond daily commuting. What we need, as I am sure the Minister knows, because she has been to my part of the world many times, is to break away from the seasonal hole. It is important to my constituents; they can have longer-term careers and prospects only if we attract investment. I have said, and will say again, that because of the inability to improve our roads dramatically—we can tinker at the edges—rail connectivity really is the key, just as it was for George III and his team. If it was good enough for him, it is good enough for my constituents.

As the Minister knows, the Yeovil option has the support of the local chamber of commerce and the local enterprise partnerships up and down the line. I know of two that are behind it, and further work has been done. I cannot see them not being involved. Weymouth and Portland Borough Council, North Dorset District Council, bordering LEPs and councils, my right hon. and hon. Friends who are sitting around me, and many others who are not here would benefit. I am sure that those who are not here would have been here, if they could.

Bringing these huge benefits to so many for a relatively modest investment in railway terms—the Minister said how amazing it was that even a little work costs a lot of money, but in railway terms, this would be a fairly modest investment—would be an achievement that we could all be proud of. Dare I say that as Conservatives—I am proud that we have a Conservative Government—we always go on about jobs, prosperity, wealth and the northern powerhouse, which I totally accept and am totally behind, as I am sure are my colleagues, but how about the south and south-west powerhouse? It depends so much on rural activities, and we need all the help we can get.

I have requests for the Minister. First, will she consider commissioning Network Rail, with the LEPs, if indeed that is the way we go, to undertake a study to look at this idea? Secondly, will she instruct the Department to include the scheme in the south-western refranchising specification, if indeed that is possible? I believe this project is innovative, affordable and doable, and has far-reaching benefits for my constituents and those represented by MPs who are here, and those who are not here. Let us not forget that one of them—the right

hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw)—is a Labour MP; I am sure that if he knew this debate was taking place, or could attend, he would be just as keen on the project. I hope that the Government will play their part in making it happen.

**Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair):** Before calling Mr Fysh, I alert him to the fact that he has an allowance of four minutes before the Minister needs to sum up.

4.27 pm

**Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con):** Thank you, Mrs Moon. It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax). Delivering jobs and opportunities to the south-west is at the centre of my mission as an MP and a major focus of our Government. Somerset is a key gateway to the south-west and presents substantial economic opportunities, including in Dorset, as we have heard.

The Government are spending a massive amount on dualling the A303 and A358 corridor, and this scheme would be a perfect complement to that. It would enhance the prospects for jobs as well as networking our centres of economic growth to allow them to grow more rapidly together than would otherwise be the case. Double tracking the line between Templecombe and Salisbury is essential for that and could unlock substantial further growth. Importantly, it would help a great deal while the A303 work is being carried out because that will probably cause serious congestion that might otherwise present a substantial challenge to the area.

It is important that the analysis of the potential upgrade is carried out in a joined-up way with, and at the same time as, the current analysis on double tracking west of Yeovil. Network Rail is undertaking that analysis as part of its investigation into increasing the resilience of the south-west peninsula. It is hard to think about how trains will be scheduled and what enhancements are necessary without looking at capacity over the whole route at the same time.

South Somerset, of which Yeovil is the key town, has ambitious plans for growth in housing and industry, and would be greatly enhanced by the plan for better rail connectivity, which could bring Yeovil closer to London by up to 40 minutes. That would represent a real step change with knock-on benefits for the whole of the south-west, including Devon and the rest of the south-west peninsula. I cannot emphasise the idea of networking enough. Whenever I have looked professionally at economic projects around the world, the element of new public infrastructure to connect places and reduce journey times, thus raising economic potential, has been a major feature. This is a major plan for jobs and opportunities in the south-west, so we must grab it with both hands.

4.30 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) on securing this debate on the important issue of rail services between Weymouth to Waterloo. As he mentioned, we had a very fulfilling and useful working session earlier this afternoon, which was attended by some of our other hon. Friends in the Chamber. It is telling that so many

right hon. and hon. Members are here today, including my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Jonathan Lord), who represents an important constituency on this line. In all such debates, we hear a lot of joined-up support from MPs representing people living in towns, villages and cities right the way along the relevant routes, and I shall go on to address why that is so important.

**Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con):** I join my hon. Friend the Minister in congratulating our hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) on securing this debate and everything that he said, but will the Minister indulge me and reiterate that she supports the large improvements that will be required over the years to come at my station in Woking, which is on the line?

**Claire Perry:** Indeed; I would be happy to support that. I was going to come on to say that the Weymouth and Waterloo termini are at either end of the south west main line. That line has the third-rail system, which is rather old electrified technology, and we know that that is one reason why its trains run more slowly than on lines with overhead technology. My hon. Friend raises an important point. Ultimately, the aspiration is to bring all electrified track up to the state-of-the-art level, which would include the investments that he references.

As we heard, journey times on the line are anywhere from two hours 40 minutes to three hours. My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset came to see me well before the general election to discuss the idea of upgrading the electrical supply along the line to provide a power boost. Some work has been done and, as he rightly said, it is difficult to see the cost-effectiveness—the business case—of those specific investments. As he is a person who does not give up easily, he therefore turned to option 2, which is the idea of connecting that line with the one running through Yeovil, thereby allowing a diversionary route that, of course, would benefit stations in Yeovil and Salisbury, which are represented by hon. Friends in the Chamber. That proposal is interesting, and we had an excellent session this afternoon to run through what would actually need to be done to deliver the journey time improvements that we want. We want to deliver the increased frequency and decreased journey times that would deliver the economic benefits about which we have heard a great deal.

As we know, this is a vital franchise area for the country. Waterloo is the busiest station in the UK. This franchise carries millions of people every year, which was why we announced this year that we would have a franchise competition with a view to getting a new operator in place for 2017. This is a fortuitous time to be discussing infrastructure, because the franchising opportunity gives us a chance to look at what we really want to achieve for the whole of the south-west network. There are proposals to introduce faster trains, and perhaps diesel or bimodal trains, which might be something that bidders come back with to deliver improvements to journey times overall.

There is also the question of how to get investment for infrastructure. My hon. Friend spoke about this, and I am always amazed by how expensive it is to do things on the railway. However, we are talking about a small set of projects—this is not something of the scale of the Great Western electrification. We have clearly signalled our desire not to route all railway investment

[*Claire Perry*]

through Network Rail, but to use the train operating companies as the commissioners, as well as the operators running on the network. We have an example of that, because FirstGroup is already taking the lead role in the Selby to Hull electrification project.

While we are going through the franchise process, there is an opportunity to engage with the bidders and determine their appetite is to deliver improvements. Of course, the question is: what is the cost to them? My hon. Friend is right that one cannot set out the business case without knowing the cost. In all honesty, I do not want to burden Network Rail with any more projects at the moment, given its enormous challenge of delivering the projects that we have already set out, but I will discuss with my officials a way of trying to get a better analysis of at least what the range of costs might be for these improvements. We can then start to build a case that takes account of those costs and examines the benefits that improvements to journey times and greater connectivity could deliver.

What was so refreshing in today's meeting—I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, as well as others who attended—was that we had the local enterprise partnerships and local councils present, as well as MPs assiduously representing their constituents. All were thinking about how this network might look for the region, and that is the way to crack the investment conundrum. I have become aware that it is often surprisingly difficult to generate a business case for transport investment. The Jubilee Line extension, High Speed 1 and the M25 were all things whose benefits people in my position many years ago had to struggle to get recognised.

If we start to bring in the broader benefits, such as the housing that these transport improvements could underpin, the businesses that would move to the area and the local growth that could be unlocked, we could really start to capture the value that transport investment can bring. The right way to do that is to engage from the bottom up with the local enterprise partnerships and

the council, which can then pull through investment for the benefit of their towns, cities and region.

I therefore urge my hon. Friends, working with their LEP and local council colleagues, to get this issue into the consultation for the franchise, which will run until 9 February. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset is not going to come up with a wish list. Any proposal will be targeted, but we could look at that as something that could be put into the franchise competition for the bidders. Then, by the way, we would be starting to get some competition around the bidding process, which could only be to the good.

In the longer term, as I said, there is an aspiration to improve the electrification right along the line, but we need to be in the business of the delivery of infrastructure. For too long, many Governments have been in a “jam tomorrow” place. Now, we have a fully funded list of improvements and projects that Network Rail will deliver over the next four years, after which we can start to bring together the investment horizon for the future.

What is so refreshing about this debate and the amount of work that went into preparing all the documents that my hon. Friend brought to our meeting is that we are not only spending a record amount on the railways—it is the biggest investment programme since Victorian times—but spending it in the way that most benefits local communities. The investment is being not pushed out by the Department for Transport, but pulled out by those in the regions, because without good transport investment, it is not possible to grow a local, regional or national economy.

I commend hon. Members for attending the debate and speaking so passionately for their railways, and I commend my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset for all his work. I undertake to consider whether we can come up with a way of getting the numerical range to which I referred so that we can at least start to have a more detailed conversation as the franchise period progresses.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## Access to Justice: Wales

4.38 pm

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): I beg to move, That this House has considered access to justice in Wales.

It is a pleasure to serve under your excellent chairmanship, Mrs Moon. Access to justice is not a special privilege, but a fundamental right. No one should be denied access to justice because of who they are, where they live or how much they earn. Everyone is equal before the law. The two-nation system is something on which the Secretary of State for Justice and I would possibly agree. When he was appointed, he said:

“There are two nations in our justice system at present. On the one hand, the wealthy, international class...And then everyone else, who has to put up with a creaking, outdated system to see justice done in their own lives.”

What he did not say was that his policies, and those of his Government, have created much of the injustice that we see today. Cuts to legal aid, tribunal fees and court charges have all put a price on justice, and ordinary people across Wales have suffered as a consequence.

The cuts to legal aid implemented by the Conservative and Lib Dem coalition have had a dramatic effect on access to justice in Wales. The number of cases granted funding has dropped by two thirds. Solicitors in my constituency say that cases have “decreased significantly”, and the number of debt cases supported by legal aid fell from 81,000 to just 2,500 over a one-year period. Every one of those cases involves real people, who are being denied the help that they need when they are at their most vulnerable. It is the most vulnerable people in Wales who are being hurt by the changes.

**Jessica Morden** (Newport East) (Lab): Earlier this year, the Select Committee on Justice and the Public Accounts Committee criticised the Government’s civil legal aid changes, saying that they limited access to justice for some of those who need legal aid the most and that, in some cases, they resulted in cases becoming more difficult and therefore costing the taxpayer more. Does my hon. Friend agree that that very much echoes the cases that we see, week on week, in our constituencies?

**Carolyn Harris:** It certainly does. I agree with my hon. Friend, and I will come on to discuss that further. When we put a price on justice, those with the means to pay sky-high legal fees will be fine, but people who are in debt, women experiencing domestic violence and parents seeking custody of their children will not be. Ten law centres have already closed in England and Wales, and many more are unable to cope. We are talking not about legal aid lawyers supposedly raking in millions of pounds in fees, but about centres, staffed by volunteers, that can no longer offer fundamental support to those who need it most. Solicitors’ firms in my constituency have told me of the obstacles facing their clients:

“The evidential requirements are stringent. There are occasionally cost implications for clients in seeking evidence to support their application for public funding which is difficult for them if they are on benefits.”

They say that

“everything the Legal Aid Agency is doing is making it harder for both clients and lawyers to get legal aid.”

The cuts have removed legal aid from nearly all family law cases and led to a sharp increase in the number of litigants in person. In the first quarter of this year, 76% of private family cases involved at least one party who was not represented. The Personal Support Unit, which has an office at Cardiff Crown court and which offers advice to litigants in person, has seen the number of people accessing its services more than double from 20,000 in 2013-14 to an estimated 50,000 this year. The idea that someone who has had their children taken away from them and who may be fighting allegations of domestic abuse is able to defend himself or herself as well as a lawyer could is ridiculous, but that is the reality of the two-nation justice system.

**Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the important subject of litigants in person. I have spoken to court staff and judges who are deeply concerned about the impossible position that they are placed in when they have to make a decision on cases involving, but at the same time end up giving advice to, litigants in person who are desperately unable to cope with the complexities of the legal system in which they have to operate.

**Carolyn Harris:** My hon. Friend refers to the reality that the two-nation justice system has created. Cuts to legal aid are having a significant impact on advice services for those experiencing housing, debt and welfare problems. A report commissioned by the Welsh Government shortly after the first changes were introduced found that cuts had “severely affected advice services” and resulted in

“specialist welfare benefits advice being significantly reduced by Legal Aid funding.”

The Welsh Government have done what they can to mitigate those cuts, investing an extra £1 million a year to support front-line advice services, in addition to the top-up of £2.2 million a year to Citizens Advice Cymru to help it to provide a specialist advice service for those who need it. The reality is that thousands of people in need of support will still lose out because of the Ministry of Justice cuts. In Wales, the number of free, face-to-face welfare law advice sessions provided by the not-for-profit sector is estimated to have fallen from nearly 20,000 to barely 3,000 in just one year.

Last month, in the Chancellor’s autumn statement, the Government snuck in an increase in the small claims court limit, which means that the majority of people injured in road accidents, regardless of how severely they were injured, will lose their access to legal representation. Whether for people injured in accidents, families facing debt proceedings or those of limited means who want legal advice before a court hearing, the Government’s changes have had a profound effect on access to justice in Wales.

Few people are more in need of support than women who are experiencing domestic abuse. I am talking about women who have suffered years and years of physical and sexual violence, who turn to the family court to seek help for themselves and their children. Women who may need legal aid to divorce an abusive partner, or even to apply for a child arrangements order to protect their child from an abuser, now have to convince the Government that they have been abused before they can get any help. Worse, the narrow set of criteria proposed by the Government means that many women are unable to prove that they have been abused.

[Carolyn Harris]

Charities such as Women's Aid expressed serious concerns about the evidence criteria before the law was changed. Women's Aid now says that 54% of women who access services as survivors of domestic violence would not meet the evidence criteria initially proposed. The cuts were railroaded through, however, and in one year the same charities found that 43% of women who had experienced domestic violence did not have the prescribed forms of evidence required to access family law legal aid. The Government have let those women down and, more importantly, let their children down.

In the light of that, it came as no surprise when the Justice Committee concluded last year that the reforms had failed three of the Government's four tests. The reforms have not discouraged unnecessary litigation or targeted help at those who need it the most. On the Government's claim that the changes were necessary to cut costs, the Committee said that the Ministry of Justice

"has failed to prove that it has delivered better overall value for money for the taxpayer because it has no idea at all of the knock-on costs of the legal aid changes to the public purse".

The changes have not delivered value for money. Instead, they have forced vulnerable people to represent themselves in court and taken vital support away from abuse survivors.

The Government are charging ahead with changes to criminal legal aid, and we will face the same problems. From next year, the number of contracts issued to solicitors' firms for criminal legal aid will fall from 1,600 to just over 500. Solicitors' firms in parts of Wales, especially in rural areas, have warned that there simply will not be enough firms left to do all the work.

**Mr Mark Williams** (Ceredigion) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this important debate. She will be aware that in the area that the Ministry of Justice names Dyfed Powys 2, which consists of all of Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and all of Powys—the Opposition Members present will be aware of the geography of the terrain—it is suggested that only four solicitors' practices will offer the reduced legal aid. Does she agree that that is the worst kind of access to justice imaginable?

**Carolyn Harris:** I would go as far as to say that it is almost zero access to justice.

The tendering process has been shown to be a complete shambles—the implementation date has slipped from January to April of next year and possibly into 2017. The president of the Law Society of England and Wales has spoken of a

"serious risk of a knock-on effect on access to justice for clients."

That warning comes just weeks after the Government were forced to drop their criminal courts charges, which led to some 50 magistrates resigning from the profession in protest. In the words of the Justice Committee, the changes were

"having effects which are inimical to the interests of justice",

including the creation of "perverse incentives" for innocent defendants to plead guilty. I am glad that the Government have finally realised that the court charges were not fit for purpose, but it was not before countless people potentially changed their pleas because they could not afford to say that they were not guilty.

**Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): Before my hon. Friend leaves the point of criminal courts charges, I am a member of the Justice Committee and we have just agreed that it was right to change the system. However, of the £5 million that was levied, only around £300,000 has been raised, leaving a debt on a large number of people who should not have had that charge imposed on them in the first place. Through my hon. Friend, I ask the Minister to tell us what will happen to those who have been levied the charge and who have not yet paid.

**Carolyn Harris:** It is clear that, alongside access to justice, the Government's reforms to the criminal courts system have risked another fundamental British principle—the right to a fair trial. One of the most basic attributes that we expect of any justice system is that it is fair. Those who have committed crimes must be punished quickly and effectively, but everyone has the right for their case to be heard and nobody should have to decide how to plead based on whether they can afford to pay the fees—not least because victims of crime deserve better.

Will the Minister agree to an urgent review into how legal aid costs are affecting access to justice in Wales? As court charges—one of the flagship policies—have now been dumped, what confidence does he have that the other changes are not having a similar perverse effect on justice and the right to a fair trial?

Members across the Chamber have serious concerns about the proposal of the Ministry of Justice to close 11 courts and tribunals in Wales. In large parts of the country, it is already hard enough for those attending trials to reach their nearest court in the allotted time, and the decision to close those courts will make that harder still.

The Law Society has found that many people will find it impossible to get to their nearest court within an hour when travelling by public transport. If the Government go ahead with their plan to close, for example, two courts in Carmarthen, just 32% of people taking public transport to my constituency of Swansea for family law cases would be able to get there within 60 minutes. For criminal cases, the figure is 31%. Across Wales, in areas where there is limited or infrequent public transport, it is a very real possibility that defendants and witnesses could end up on the same bus to the court hearing. Members can imagine the distress and legal complications that that will cause.

**Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is quite ridiculous that, at the last Justice questions, the Minister suggested that people could access justice by telephone?

**Carolyn Harris:** I think I referred to it as sentencing by text, if I am not mistaken. It is an absolutely absurd idea.

**Huw Irranca-Davies** (Ogmore) (Lab): The Minister did indeed say that mobile phones would be the way forward for my constituents. We are facing closures in Pontypridd and Bridgend, which are difficult enough to get to at the moment. To tell those constituents to come down the valley and change transport to get to Cardiff will add another impediment to access to justice. Through my hon. Friend, I would say that the Minister really

needs to think this through again and to think about the geography of Wales. We are not flatlands with a huge transport hub; we are valleys. I know that your constituency is affected by the issue as well, Mrs Moon.

**Carolyn Harris:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. The Law Society has expressed “grave concerns” that the proposal to close courts—I agree with this point—could “erode access to justice”. Its worries are shared by many people across the region.

Whether it is closing courts, slashing legal aid or any other reforms that I have not had an opportunity to address—such as employment tribunal fees, changes to judicial review or the plan to scrap the Human Rights Act—Government policies are having a severe impact on access to justice in Wales. It is the responsibility of any Government to ensure that our justice system does not become the preserve of the wealthy and unresponsive to the needs of those who need to use it most. It is vital that the justice system is accessible when we need it and accessible to all. I seriously fear that after another five years of this Government, neither of those opportunities will be open for Wales.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair):** Order. I have before me only two names of Members who have asked to speak. At 5.20 pm, I intend to call the Front-Bench spokesmen for the Labour party and the Scottish National party, who will have five minutes each, and then the Minister, who will have 10 minutes. I will first call Albert Owen, and if other Members wish to speak, they will have to rely on the generosity of the hon. Gentleman and the next Member to be called if they are to get in before 5.20 pm.

4.56 pm

**Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, I think for the first time, Mrs Moon. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on an excellent speech that covered most of the points that need to be considered.

I will actually start by agreeing with the Minister and the Ministry of Justice that access to justice for all is a fundamental aspect of our society. That is what it says in the consultation document on proposals for the provision of the court estate in England and Wales. I totally agree that we all want access to justice for all. Indeed, I would say that local justice and democracy are the pillars of a modern society, but we are moving away from that—I shall develop that argument a little later.

I welcome the Minister to the Chamber, because he was kind enough to acknowledge my submission to the consultation and to meet a delegation that included Citizens Advice and a local solicitor. We were able to outline many of my concerns for my area and, indeed, the periphery area of north-west Wales, including Dwyfor Meirionnydd, because the representative from the solicitor represented the whole old county of Gwynedd. However, it is Christmas, and I am going to subject the Minister to my concerns once more because it is important that they are on the record.

People know the importance of direct access to justice. The Ministry of Justice wants to close the two remaining courts in my area in Llangefni and Holyhead. Llangefni

is the principal and municipal town of Anglesey. Holyhead is the largest town on the island, but also the furthest from Cardiff and London—it is on the periphery area. It is the hub to the Republic of Ireland and has a large transit population, as well as local residents. The proposal to transfer to Caernarfon court is therefore fundamentally flawed. What is more, the alternative that the Minister has talked about—the virtual courts and the digital fines—are equally flawed. Frankly, the one-size-fits-all proposal of the Ministry of Justice does not fit Wales; each part of Wales should be looked at on its merits. I understand, as I think does every Member in the Chamber, the need to modernise the justice system, but denying access is not modernisation. It is a backwards step and the proposal does not take into account people’s distances from court.

The Government talk about courts being 30 miles away and taking about an hour to reach. The journey from Holyhead to Caernarfon is 30 miles, but it can take an hour and a half. It can involve train journeys, two buses and changing. As has been said, many of those who have to travel will be witnesses, not just those who are up in court.

I believe that the proposal is flawed because it is driven by the Treasury. One of the main reasons why the exercise is being carried out now and in such a way is to save money on the estate. Yes, we need to get value for money, but the process is driven by the Treasury, rather than the Ministry of Justice. It is important to put that point on the record and I will be interested to hear the Minister’s response to it.

Access to local justice has to be practical, and people have to be able to have such access. The Minister talks about virtual courts, but they will be virtually impossible to implement. There are very few buildings in my constituency that could accommodate a virtual court. He talks about access via the digital age, but the digital age has not arrived in many rural or peripheral parts of Wales. That is an important point because the superfast broadband roll-out is happening at the exchanges, but not going to many towns and areas that need it. It would be difficult to have a virtual court in north-west Wales, for example, because the information and communications technology systems simply are not there—they are intermittent. I am pleased that the Government have done a U-turn with regard to universal coverage, but that will not come in until 2020, at the earliest, and these proposals are going through now. When will the Minister respond to the consultation exercise and make his recommendations and proposals? I believe that he should wait until we have proper infrastructure if he wants to experiment with the digital age for accessing justice.

I am conscious that other Members wish to speak, so I will not go over most of the issues that I discussed with the Minister. However, I highlight the fact that in the 21st century we still need a court system that individuals can access. The public want individuals to be tried in their area, as has happened historically. If we are to move forward into the digital age, we need the necessary infrastructure in place, and the Ministry of Justice needs joined-up thinking with other Departments.

**Wayne David:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is particularly important that digitalisation is done properly in Wales because we are a bilingual country and people

[Wayne David]

must have access to justice in the language of their birth? If that language is Welsh, they must have access in Welsh.

**Albert Owen:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I was going to make that point in my closing remarks, because when we talk about “local”, we are talking about local culture and local languages as well as the basic principle of access to local courts.

The Government talk about putting in place devolution and decentralisation, yet their record is one of the complete opposite. They are centralising tax offices, for example. If the Government’s proposals go through, the nearest tax office to Anglesey will be in Liverpool, which is nearer to my constituents than Cardiff. We are now talking about courts moving 30 or 40 miles away from their population, which is nothing but centralisation. I urge the Minister to look again at these proposals, to put them on hold, to talk to local communities and to listen to the consultation. He should not rush through the proposals because while I agree with him, ultimately, that we need free and fair access for all, that will not happen if these proposals go through.

5.2 pm

**Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mrs Moon, and I will be brief. I congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on raising this issue. She talks about the emergence of a two-tier system, and there will be a very strong divide between rural and urban communities.

Mercifully, there is one courthouse left in my constituency, in Aberystwyth. That is the only one, as our courthouse in Cardigan was shut down five years ago. I reiterate what the hon. Lady said about the challenges of geography and distance. In the debate that I secured when we tried to stop the closure of Cardigan courthouse, we heard that as Cardigan was only 38 miles from Aberystwyth, all would be well, because there would be ease of access to our court in Aberystwyth, but that is not so. It might be quick and easy to travel 38 miles down the A55 or the M4—or perhaps not—but the situation is a different kettle of fish for people living in rural communities. As she said, the problem is compounded by my constituents’ experience of trying to access public transport in rural areas where no such system exists.

Access to our courts is a very real issue. If I were being parochial, I might say that my underused courthouse in Aberystwyth will gain more work when the courthouse in Dolgellau is shut, but I do not say that because, from experience, I believe that the situation goes to the heart of access to justice for many of our constituents.

Let me talk specifically about the point about which I intervened on the hon. Lady. She alluded to the limitations of legal aid, and I want to talk about the number of practitioners out there in the country. When the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), who is now Leader of the House, was Secretary of State for Justice, he proposed a two-tier system for delivering criminal legal aid. That proposal has continued under the current Secretary of State. The scheme involves a bidding process for the limited number of contracts within each bid zone, and I repeat what I said in my intervention. My vast constituency of Ceredigion falls

into the Dyfed Powys 2 zone, which includes Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire and the whole of Powys, including the towns of Brecon, Llandrindod Wells, Newtown, Welshpool, Machynlleth, Aberystwyth and Cardigan. Incredibly, the Ministry of Justice decided that only four contracts would be made available in that vast area, which is dangerous nonsense.

When I talked to solicitors’ practices about the prospect of bidding, the reality soon emerged that no single firm in Dyfed-Powys would be able to service such a contract because the volume of legal aid work in mid and west Wales is so low that it could not sustain a business undertaking such an endeavour. The characteristic of our model for delivering criminal legal aid in Ceredigion, which is not dissimilar to that in other places in rural Wales, is of one or two solicitors within a high street mixed practice effectively subsidising legal aid work. When the Government made their proposal, the fact that there was no plan B suggested that it was doomed to fail. As of July 2015, there are only five firms undertaking legal aid work in Ceredigion, which suggests that many firms have already decided that such work is not profitable. None of the firms in my constituency felt able to bid for the duty contracts, either on their own or collaboratively. The Government suggested at the time of the announcement that small practices would come together, but that was not going to happen. Such an arrangement is fraught with difficulties.

We are where we are, but I am not quite sure where that is. The hon. Member for Swansea East said that we were led to believe that the bidding process would be concluded in January 2016, but it is now suggested that it will be concluded in April. There are contingency contracts around, which suggests that the situation might not be resolved until 2017. That is causing great concern among solicitors’ practices and a lot of uncertainty. When can we expect a resolution? The spectacle of there being only three or four providers across mid and west Wales makes one shudder, which is why a renewed number of legal aid concerns have been raised in all our surgeries. It is also why there is huge pressure on the very limited citizens advice bureaux across our constituencies, to which I pay tribute.

The other thing that needs to be mentioned is the Welsh language, which is spoken by more than half my constituency’s population. I am concerned about whether the providers, especially if they come from outside my area, or outside the broad expanse of mid and west Wales, will still be able to present their services through the medium of Welsh. That remains a great worry, whatever the Legal Aid Agency suggests, because when these services were being delivered by small solicitors’ practices in high streets throughout the country, we had a guarantee. As those practices were based in Welsh-speaking communities, their services could be provided in the mother tongue, whatever that mother tongue may be. Again, I sadly reflect that the situation illustrates how the Ministry of Justice has scant knowledge of and regard for rurality and, I believe, scant regard for the Welsh language, too.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair):** Order. I have received a number of notes from Members advising me that they notified the Speaker’s Office of their wish to speak. I have not been advised that those requests were

received by the Speaker's Office, but in an attempt to get in everyone who has approached me, I shall set a three-minute time limit on speeches.

5.9 pm

**Nick Thomas-Symonds** (Torfaen) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on securing this important debate on such a crucial issue at such a crucial time. Access to justice in Wales is under threat. In employment tribunals, for example, there were 16,456 single-claim cases in 2014-15, which represented a 52% fall on the number in 2013-14. That fall was due to the introduction of the fees system that has levied up to £1,200 on people who have lost their jobs and are not in a position to spend that amount of cash.

I practised in the Welsh courts as a barrister for 11 years before entering this place, and while I remain a door tenant at Civitas in Cardiff, I no longer practise. I am fully aware of what has been going on, especially in relation to employment matters. The changes mean that literally thousands of people are no longer able to enforce their legal rights before an employment tribunal.

There are 11 scheduled court closures. My hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David) pointed out that the Minister has talked about telephone hearings already happening in court, but let me make the distinction clear. Interlocutory hearings, especially those in the civil courts that last for less than an hour, have for some years been done on the telephone—that is absolutely true. It is also true that in certain trials and certain specific circumstances, witnesses have given evidence by video link. However, extreme care has always been taken with trials, when it is best that the veracity of witnesses is judged face to face. Their demeanour has to be judged; it is not simply a case of what they happen to say through a particular visual medium. It is crucial to realise that there has to be a limit to what is done through the so-called digital revolution in the court system. Certain trials simply cannot be done on the telephone or via such a visual medium, so the Ministry of Justice must take that into account.

Local justice is crucial, because it is important that we do not see justice as distant. Justice should reflect the culture of the area, and I fear that the closure of 11 courts will put that at risk.

I urge the Ministry of Justice to be wary of false economies on civil legal aid. It is one thing to take down the legal aid bill, but it is quite another if one ends up with far more litigants in person in the court system. There is nothing wrong with people representing themselves, but they should not do so simply because they cannot afford to access a lawyer. If that does happen, I am afraid that the court system will be slowed by having so many litigants in person, and the Minister will find that the cuts in civil legal aid are simply counter-productive.

5.13 pm

**Jonathan Edwards** (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): One of my first contributions after being elected to the House of Commons in 2010 was to fight in this Chamber on behalf of the two magistrates courts that remained in my constituency: Ammanford and Llandovery. The Government proposed closing those courts on the

basis that services would be provided in Carmarthen magistrates court, yet here we are debating the future of that court and the state-of-the-art family, tribunal and probate hearing centre that was opened in Carmarthen by the Lord Chief Justice in 2012. That goes to show, to use a famous Welsh political phrase, that centralisation is a process, not an event. I wonder how long it will be, with services being centralised in Llanelli, before we are arguing about the centralisation of services to Swansea, which is only a dozen miles to the east. It is easy for Ministers and their civil servants to sit here in London and draw lines on a map and crosses through budget lines without understanding the full effect of the changes on the communities we represent.

I oppose the proposals for the west of my country for five primary reasons. First, Carmarthen is the legal capital of the west of my country. It was afforded that status by James I in 1604, when he made it a county corporate by charter. I am struggling to understand why the Minister thinks he knows better than James I. Carmarthen is one of only two towns in Wales that still has a town sheriff, and that gives a clear indication of the importance of the role that Carmarthen has played in the legal system in the west of Wales.

Secondly, the Ministry of Justice has spent £1.7 million on the two courts in Carmarthen in the past seven years, so it would be a colossal waste of money to close those courts following such investment. When the family court was opened in 2012 by the Lord Chief Justice, it was seen as a pathfinder for the future of legal services in Wales and England because of all its video-conferencing technology. The Minister says that such technology is the way forward, but I am informed by magistrates that none of that equipment has actually been installed. I therefore find it difficult to understand how the Minister can make the case for closing that court in Carmarthen—it has just been opened—on the basis of a lack of operational capacity. He will argue that the way forward is remote justice but, as the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) said, we are talking about areas that are known to have broadband “not spots” and to lack fast mobile provision. It will be difficult to deliver such a legal system in the areas we represent.

Thirdly, Carmarthen is the natural travel hub for the west, north and east of Carmarthenshire. It could take five hours by public transport for someone from Newcastle Emlyn or Llandovery to make it to Llanelli to attend court. The natural transport hub for Carmarthenshire is the county town, so it does not make any sense to close the courts in Carmarthen. Fourthly, as has been mentioned—

**Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair):** Order. To get all hon. Members in, we will need to move on. I call Liz Saville Roberts.

5.16 pm

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr, Gadeirydd. I congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on securing the debate. It is an important topic, and it is particularly important to my rural constituency of Dwyfor Meirionnydd. Fifteen courts were closed across Wales during the last Parliament, and since the 2015 election, a further 14 have either closed or are being earmarked for closure by the UK Government. The proposed closure of Dolgellau

[Liz Saville Roberts]

magistrates court in my constituency, for example, means cases will need to be transferred to either Caernarfon or Aberystwyth, which, incidentally, is outside the North Wales police region. The issue of inadequate public transport in Wales is well documented, but Members will understand that a journey from Dolgellau to Aberystwyth or Carmarthen is not simply a matter of getting on a tube with an Oyster card. For my constituents in Dwyfor Meirionnydd, and indeed for many people across Wales, it is simply impossible for public transport to get them to a magistrates court for a 9.30 am start.

The Ministry of Justice claims its programme of cuts is necessary to save money, but what will effectively happen is that the cost of providing justice will be passed from the state to the citizen. The cost will still be borne, but by the individual regardless of ability to pay, while the state washes its hands.

I have left out a number of things due to time pressures, which is unfortunate, but I return to the issue of courts. I have a background in teaching through video conferencing, so I welcome the Minister's commitment last month to undertake a Welsh language impact assessment before coming to conclusions about the future of courts in Wales. On the other hand, I am also interested in efforts to increase access to justice through the use of technology, particularly video technology.

Given the swathes of court closures and the particular problems they will cause in rural parts of Wales, allowing hearings to take place remotely may be welcome. I note however the eight conditions set out by Lord Leveson's review of efficiency in criminal proceedings in January 2015. He considered those conditions to be prerequisites for remote hearings. The first of them seems obvious, but is in fact crucial: the equipment used and the audio and visual quality should be of a high standard. Given what fellow Members have said, I wonder what consideration has been given to the quality and reliability of digital infrastructure in those areas where courts are to be closed. I particularly urge that consideration is given to Lord Leveson's recommendation that a committee of criminal justice professionals be charged with identifying best practice for hearings conducted via video link, not only to maintain the gravitas of the court environment, but, more importantly, to ensure that justice outcomes via communications technology are consistent with justice outcomes in a conventional environment.

I also urge the Minister to consider alternative public buildings if a court building—this is understandable—is no longer deemed suitable for 21st-century justice. In the case of Dolgellau, the Meirionnydd council chamber would require little adaptation, and offers such facilities as parking and translation equipment. As an aside, it is also nearer the cells and the police station than the present court—

**Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair):** Order. We need to move on. I call Richard Arkless.

5.19 pm

**Richard Arkless** (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): It is a privilege to serve under your chairpersonship this afternoon, Mrs Moon. I thank the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) for securing a very important debate. It has been amplified by the number

of Welsh Members who have attended this afternoon to put their point across very passionately. It is further amplified by the lack of the 11 Tory MPs who occupy certain sections of Wales. The only thing more surprising is that Wales still has 11 Tory MPs; I hope the people of Wales will deal with that at the next general election.

Scotland is fortunate; we have had a separate legal system since the Act of Union. It was enshrined in the Act, so during the last 300-odd years we have been able to design certain elements of our justice system differently to suit the needs of the people of Scotland. Many of the complaints raised this afternoon would be fixed to a great extent by devolution of justice to Wales. I urge Welsh Members to think about that as a serious concept. Justice decisions made closer to the people that they affect would inevitably be better decisions.

The Government have created several bars to access to justice over the past few years. We have seen criminal court charges, which, thankfully, they have agreed to end. We do not have them in Scotland. Employment tribunal fees have been imposed on employment tribunal cases, as we have heard. We have committed to abolish those in Scotland as soon as the matter is devolved. The slashing of the legal aid budget has impacted on access to justice. We are not immune from such cuts in Scotland, but we feel we have been able to manage resources better so that they do not have the impact that they have had in Wales.

I have been very impressed by some of the submissions that we have heard, particularly from the hon. Member for Swansea East. She gave a passionate speech about the real effects on ordinary people. That is always the story with austerity, which impacts on the most vulnerable in our society first. The Government's austerity agenda impacts on access to justice in Wales. That is undeniable.

The hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) made another fantastically passionate speech and coined the phrase "one size fits all". It goes back to the whole devolution prospect. I do not believe as a matter of principle that a one-size-fits-all approach across the UK is sensible for all the Celtic nations. He is absolutely correct when he says that access to justice is driven by the Treasury. The Ministry of Justice has not come up with a grand plan to increase justice provision, yet reduce costs. The Justice Secretary has rolled over in negotiations with the Treasury, whereas other Departments have not done so.

Given the pressure on time, I will conclude my remarks. I support the proposal that Wales should have more decisions taken by the Welsh Parliament, closer to the Welsh people, to make better decisions for the people of Wales.

5.23 pm

**Susan Elan Jones** (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I am conscious of something that George Bernard Shaw once said. He apologised for writing a long note because he had not had time to write a short note. I fear I have written rather a long note, but I know you will keep me to delivering a short speech.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on securing today's debate and on such a wide-ranging, passionate and practical speech that highlighted some of the real problems with access

to justice in Wales. I really hope the Minister will take these matters on board and make some changes. The debate has been phenomenal. We have had contributions from 10 Back Benchers and a visitor from Scotland, the hon. Member for Dumfries and Galloway (Richard Arkless). We have had contributions from my hon. Friends the Members for Caerphilly (Wayne David) and for Newport East (Jessica Morden), and from my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson), who made a very important point about the Justice Committee and we look forward to a response from the Minister on that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas) talked about the issue of litigants in person. We heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Ogmere (Huw Irranca-Davies), and for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen). The latter referred to many issues relating to his constituency, but he also referred to an issue that really needs highlighting: the prospect of the accused and the defendant travelling on the same bus. Imagine a victim of domestic violence and the perpetrator on the same rural bus. That is a really important point that shows many of the flaws in the current proposals.

We heard a speech from the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) on rural communities, especially in mid and west Wales. My hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) showed his extensive practical experience of legal representation and some of the flaws in the current proposals. The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) rightly complained about centralisation, and the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) raised, among other issues, remote hearings. Labour Members often talk about the importance of being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, but for this Government and their proposals it is tough if you happen to be a victim of crime, which is very different indeed. It is extraordinary that no Conservative Members are here. They had an increase in numbers at the general election and they are still not here representing the interests of the people of Wales.

There are many problems, but I want to focus on two issues. The first relates to the impact on the Welsh language, which several Members mentioned. Few of us ever have to testify in court, and even fewer will testify against an attacker or an abuser, but, for the people who do, being able to communicate effectively and to hear and understand everything that is said is essential. For many first-language Welsh speakers, that means being able to engage with the court in Welsh. That right goes back nearly 70 years to the Welsh Courts Act 1942, which overturned the ban on Welsh in courts that had been in place since the 16th century.

Everyone can surely speak English, but I refer Members to the words of the Labour peer, Viscount Sankey, during the passage of the Welsh Courts Act:

“No doubt many members of this House read French easily and speak it well; many speak it perfectly; yet how should we like to be examined and cross-examined in French? Should we not be rather nervous and embarrassed witnesses and fail to do ourselves justice?”—[*Official Report, House of Lords, 20 October 1942; Vol. 124, c. 662-8.*]

I am not sure Members are quite as proficient in French as they probably were in the 1940s, but the point remains that being able to communicate in one's own language before a court is essential. It is not a nicety. The Ministry

of Justice's own Welsh language scheme admits that the Department has failed to evaluate the linguistic consequences of its policies. Securing the rights of Welsh speakers and promoting the equality of Welsh and English are not optional niceties; they are statutory requirements, and the disregard is positively shameful.

The Welsh Language Commissioner has criticised the way in which the closures have been proposed. As she points out, a

“decision to change the court estate, should aim to promote and facilitate the use of Welsh in Wales.”

We want an answer.

Let us look at the case of Anglesey, or Ynys Môn, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn calls it. Some 70% of people on the island have knowledge of Welsh, with 56% describing themselves as Welsh speakers. If I am allowed, I will refer to the Human Rights Act—

**Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair):** No.

**Susan Elan Jones:** But I am sure the Minister will speak of the grave omissions in his Government's policy.

5.28 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mrs Moon. I commend you on having managed to get through so many speakers in such a short time. I congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) on securing this important debate. I also thank the many colleagues who have turned out for this debate; that demonstrates its importance. Individuals have spoken with passion, both on constituency matters and more generally. Several points have been raised, and I intend to address as many as I can. I ask Members to be patient if I do not instantly respond to their issue in the first minute or two. I will make one thing absolutely clear at the outset: the Government share the hon. Lady's passion for a justice system that works for everyone.

The hon. Lady referred to my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor's eloquent comment that the Government's commitment to one nation justice was fundamental to the rule of law. At the heart of one nation justice is equality, and a justice system that safeguards and protects the vulnerable and works better for victims and witnesses. Our justice system does not always do that, despite the fantastic efforts of those who work in it. That is why the Ministry of Justice is leading a major reform programme. As the hon. Member for Swansea East will know, the MOJ has secured more than £700 million in funding to invest in courts and tribunals in England and Wales. We are working closely with the senior judiciary to deliver a justice system for everyone, at a lower cost for all those who need to access the courts.

There is much agreement that our courts and tribunals need urgent reform, and a high degree of consensus that the current system is not only too slow, but unsustainable. Despite the best efforts of front-line staff, the infrastructure supporting the administration of the service is inefficient and disjointed, and based on technology that is, in some cases, decades old. I hope Members agree that that has to change. That means using up-to-date technology, which I will discuss later in my speech, and modernised working practices, and having a more appropriate and efficient estate. It will also mean victims and witnesses being able to attend some hearings remotely, and not

[*Mr Shailesh Vara*]

having to experience the stress and strain of a personal visit to a court, or, indeed, having to take a day off work.

Mention has been made of victims and witnesses travelling together. Clearly, that is a situation that none of us would want. The beauty of a remote system is that there is no danger of meeting people on the bus to court. The victims will not be travelling with the witnesses and the defendants. They may well be in a local civic building of some kind, in a video-conferencing suite to which people go by appointment at a specific time. They will be far more comfortable there, and will not have the stress and strain of going to court, which would be a strenuous and stressful experience for most people.

We are replacing paper forms, automating much of the administrative process, and allowing defendants to indicate their plea online. The use of telephones was mentioned. Let me make it clear that we are piloting a scheme in Manchester in which pleas can be made online, using either computers or smartphones. That is happening right now, as we speak.

**Nick Thomas-Symonds:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Vara:** If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I will not, but I will address his point. He rightly said earlier that there will be some cases where digitalisation is clearly not appropriate; that is why we will maintain courts. Nevertheless, for many cases, court will not be necessary. The majesty of the court will remain for appropriate cases that deserve to go to court, but it is important to remember that access to justice does not always mean access to a court, with all the time and expense that that entails. Nor does it mean that people should always turn to taxpayer-funded lawyers. Where suitable alternatives are available, we want to see more cases diverted from the courts.

There is no doubt that in many cases court should be the last resort, not the first. Encouraging greater use of mediation has been a key part of our wider reforms to the justice system. Mediation can be quicker, cheaper and certainly less stressful than protracted litigation. For the taxpayer, who would otherwise be paying solicitors, barristers and for time in court, there will be a saving. For the parties involved, it is far better to sit around a table and have constructive engagement than to be in a court scenario, where there is often—I speak as a former solicitor—a destructive environment, rather than one of constructive engagement.

**Susan Elan Jones:** There might be some validity in that, but how does the Minister square it with the rise of litigants in person? We may well see the well-heeled being able to get the best legal advice in the world, while those on the other side of the dock have to represent themselves in person. Surely that is not fair.

**Mr Vara:** I plead with the hon. Lady to be patient; I will turn to litigants in person shortly.

From April last year, the Children and Families Act 2014 made it a legal requirement that anyone considering applying to court for an order about their children or finances should first attend a mediation information

and assessment meeting, which we call a MIAM, unless exemptions such as domestic abuse apply. The requirement was introduced so that parties could consider the benefits of mediation before the start of court proceedings, which can be long, arduous and expensive. From November last year, we have funded the first single session of mediation in cases where one of the parties is already legally aided. In such circumstances, both parties will be funded for the MIAM and the first session of mediation.

I hope Members appreciate that legal aid is only one part of a balanced access-to-justice provision, although of course we recognise that in some cases it can be a vital part. We also recognise that those in greatest hardship at times of real need should have the resources to secure access to justice. When the programme to reform legal aid commenced in 2010, the scale of the financial challenge facing the Government was unprecedented. We had to find significant savings, which meant making difficult choices. Despite that, we have made sure that legal aid remains available when it is most needed: where people's life or liberty is at stake; where they face the loss of their home; in cases of domestic violence; or where their children may be taken into care.

In the case of domestic violence, evidence is required to ensure that the correct cases attract funding, but we have listened and made changes to the amount of evidence required. One of the first things I did when I was appointed Minister in October 2013 was meet certain stakeholders, who told me that the conditions were too stringent. As a consequence, I made the appropriate changes. We will, of course, continue to listen and to make changes where necessary.

The fact remains that even after all the reforms, our legal aid system remains one of the most generous in the world. Last year we spent more than £1.6 billion on legal aid, which is around a quarter of the Department's expenditure. We have also made sure that funding is available through the exceptional funding scheme, where that is required under the European convention on human rights or by European law. We believe that the reforms to the legal aid scheme are sustainable, but we have provided that there will be a review within three to five years of the implementation of part 1 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012.

As far as the Welsh language is concerned, let me make it absolutely clear that Welsh-speaking users can call the Civil Legal Advice Welsh-language operator service, or request an immediate call back from a Welsh-speaking operator. The bilingual site architecture has been designed to ensure that the same service is available in the Welsh language as in English, and that the content can be easily kept up to date. We continue to work with the advice sector to develop sustainable and collaborative ways of working to ensure that people can obtain advice when they need it.

On litigants in person, we have provided £2 million for a strategy led by the advice, voluntary and pro bono sector. It maximises the provision of support to litigants in person, and there is an increase in the provision of face-to-face, phone and online support.

In the few moments I have left, let me address a few of the points raised. The hon. Member for Swansea East said that there has been a reduction in the number of criminal contracts, but there is a far higher number of contracts for own-client work, which means that

people can continue to work for the clients that they already have. The right hon. Member for Delyn (Mr Hanson), who has a distinguished record in government, asked about the criminal court charge. He will know from his time in government that laws change. Until 24 December—the date that the Lord Chancellor gave—the law will apply. I have already touched on the issue of telephone access, but I emphasise that the digitalisation process that we envisage will clearly not apply to all cases. The physical presence of courts, which people will need to go to when appropriate, will always remain.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Swansea East on securing this debate, and I thank all Members for taking the trouble to attend. I hope I have been able to give some comfort to Members, and assure them that we are very keen to ensure that access to justice remains.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered access to justice in Wales.

5.41 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Tuesday 15 December 2015

## TREASURY

### Financial Services

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin):** The Government have today published their response to the consultation on creating a secondary annuity market (CM 9046, March 2015). The response confirms that from 6 April 2017 tax restrictions for people looking to sell their annuity will be removed, giving the 5 million people with an existing annuity, and anyone who purchases an annuity in the future, the freedom to sell their right to future income streams for an upfront cash sum. This will extend the pension freedoms already introduced in April 2015 for those reaching retirement with a pension pot. The consultation sets out further details around how the market will work, including the comprehensive consumer protection regime.

The document has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS396]

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Environment Council: Agenda

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart):** I will attend the EU Environment Council in Brussels on 16 December.

Following adoption of the agenda, the list of “A” items will be approved.

There will next be legislative deliberations on the proposal for a directive on the reduction of national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants (the “National Emissions Ceiling Directive”).

Under non-legislative activities, draft Council conclusions on the mid-term review of the EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 are due to be adopted.

Over lunch Ministers will be invited to discuss the latest proposals on air quality and real driving emissions.

The following items are due to be discussed under Any Other Business:

Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH): challenges and options for improving legislation on chemical products;

Sustainable methods of producing and consuming medicine and managing the resulting waste;

19th ordinary meeting of the Contracting Parties (COP19) to the convention for the protection of the marine environment and the coastal region of the Mediterranean and its protocols (Barcelona convention, Athens, 9-12 February 2016);

Reducing pollution caused by consumption on the move: the case for a European deposit scheme;

Package of proposals aiming to promote the circular economy;

Report on the state of the energy union;

21st session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations framework convention on climate change (UNFCCC) and 11th session of the Meeting of the Parties (CMP11) to the Kyoto protocol (Paris, 30 November to 11 December 2015);

Work programme of the incoming presidency.

[HCWS393]

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

### Law and Order Trust Fund Afghanistan

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** On 4 December 2015 the Foreign and Commonwealth Office fulfilled the promise given by the Prime Minister at the NATO Chicago summit in 2012 to contribute £70 million in 2015 towards the sustainment of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF). This forms part of our commitment, together with international partners, to provide financial support to meet the cost of the ANDSF for each of the calendar years 2015-17.

The UK’s 2015 contribution, funded from the conflict, stability and security fund (CSSF), has been channelled through the United Nations Development Programme run Law and Order Trust Fund Afghanistan (LOTFA) to support the payment of Afghan National Police (ANP) salaries.

The development of an effective, accountable and civilianised ANP and the development of stable, transparent and effective Afghan security ministries are essential to long term stability and security in Afghanistan. The police play a fundamental role in providing security and governance in Afghanistan, as well as in helping to build trust in the legitimacy of the state. Due to the challenging security environment international support for Afghan policing continues to be required.

The UK will continue to support the development of capable and effective civilian security institutions.

[HCWS397]

## OSCE Ministerial Council

**The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington):** I represented the United Kingdom at the 22nd Ministerial Council meeting of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), held in Belgrade, Serbia on 3 and 4 December 2015 and hosted by Serbian Foreign Minister and OSCE Chairman-in-Office Ivica Dacic. The Council is the top decision-making body of the OSCE and was attended by Ministers from across its 57 participating states.

The Council took place in the final month of a year when the OSCE has continued to be at the centre of the international response to the Ukraine crisis. In my intervention in plenary on 3 December, I expressed deep concern at the ongoing situation in eastern Ukraine

and Crimea and repeated our strong support for Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. I underlined the Russian Federation's responsibility for the present situation and stressed that Moscow's illegal annexation of Crimea would not be recognised. I called on Russia to implement its commitments under the Minsk protocols, by withdrawing military personnel, equipment and weapons and using its influence with the separatist leadership. I commended the work of the OSCE's special monitoring mission in the face of considerable challenges to its security and emphasised the need for it to have free and unimpeded access to all areas of Ukraine.

While this subject dominated the Council, a number of other important issues were discussed. In my intervention, I also noted the importance of updating political-military confidence and security building measures, including the Vienna document and the need to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, which remain under challenge in a number of OSCE states.

I agreed the need to address other pressing issues, particularly terrorism and migration, while focusing on areas where the OSCE has a distinct role to play and can add value in co-ordination with other international actors.

Grave concern about Ukraine was expressed in plenary by many participating states including by US Secretary of State Kerry, German Foreign Minister Steinmeier, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Klimkin and EU High Representative Mogherini among others. Deep divisions meant that even a limited declaration on the OSCE's role in, and support to, Ukraine could not be agreed despite the vast majority of OSCE states' desire to do so.

While negotiations before and during the Ministerial Council made progress in a number of areas, divergent approaches limited the scope to reach consensus on a number of proposed declarations. Decisions or declarations were however reached on terrorism, on countering violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism, on drugs and youth and security, as well as a statement on the negotiations in the Transnistrian settlement process. It was disappointing that despite the best efforts of the UK and other states, attempts to make progress on confidence and security-building measures in the OSCE region failed primarily due to further Russian obstructionism.

I and others expressed our strong support for the work of the OSCE's autonomous institutions and I met Michael Link, Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and Dunja Mijatovic, the Representative on Freedom of the Media, during my visit.

In parallel, Wolfgang Ischinger, Chair of the Panel of Eminent Persons, launched under the 2014 Swiss Chairmanship, presented their final report on "European Security as a Common Project" at a side-event during the Ministerial Council.

A copy of the UK intervention can be found online on the gov.uk website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/world-location-news/uk-statement-at-the-plenary-session-of-the-22nd-osce-ministerial-council-3rd-december-2015-belgrade>.

[HCWS398]

## Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge):** I chaired the fourth meeting of the Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council in London on 1 and 2 December. The Council was attended by elected leaders and representatives—Anguilla, Ascension Island, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, Pitcairn, St Helena, Tristan da Cunha and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Key themes of this year's Council were building the prosperity and economic development of the territories and protecting the most vulnerable members of their populations, especially children. UK ministers and overseas territory leaders also discussed pensions, health, education, sports, child safeguarding and the role of the environment in delivering prosperity.

The Council agreed a communiqué which identified priorities and set out a number of important commitments and areas for joint work in the year ahead. On the high priority issue of company transparency, the territories agreed to hold company beneficial ownership information in central registers or similarly effective systems and to work with UK law enforcement authorities to develop timely, safe and secure information exchange processes for the purposes of law enforcement. We also agreed that all territories that have not already done so will undertake child safeguarding reviews by the end of 2016.

The communiqué reflects the commitment of the Governments of the overseas territories and the UK to continue to work in partnership to achieve the vision set out in the June 2012 White Paper: "The Overseas Territories: Security, Success and Sustainability".

In line with our commitment in the White Paper, we will continue to report to Parliament on progress in implementing the commitments in the communiqué by UK Government Departments.

A copy of the communiqué and a report on UK progress in meeting the commitments from the 2014 Joint Ministerial Council has been published on the gov.uk website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overseas-territories-joint-ministerial-council-2015-communiqué>

[HCWS399]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Police Integrity Reform

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May):** The Government take policing integrity very seriously. It is at the heart of public confidence in the police and underpins the model of policing by consent. It is what gives rank and file officers the legitimacy to do their jobs effectively. The Home Office has responded to public confidence in police integrity by introducing a programme of measures to improve standards of conduct in the police. This

follows various high-profile cases on police failures both current and historic, as well as numerous HMIC inspections and IPCC reports relating to corruption.

We are already expanding the IPCC to deal with all sensitive and serious cases involving the police. We have introduced legislation to prevent officers from escaping dismissal by retiring or resigning; we have introduced the holding of disciplinary hearings in public; and we are introducing legally qualified chairs in disciplinary hearings. The college has produced the code of ethics; laid in Parliament (July 2014) as a statutory code of practice.

In 2016 we will go further with an important programme of reform including primary legislation in the upcoming Bill. We will make the police complaints system more independent of the police through an expanded role for PCCs. We will change the definition of a complaint and simplify the system, making it easier for the public. We will introduce a system of super-complaints to enable systemic issues to be raised.

The “Improving police integrity” consultation, and the previous Government’s response to it in March 2015, set out several proposals to strengthen the IPCC. We will bring forward legislation to implement these proposals. They include the following measures: ending managed and supervised investigations; providing the IPCC with the power of initiative to instigate investigations; clarifying the ability of the IPCC to make determinations; giving the IPCC the power of remedy; and ensuring the IPCC can present its case at disciplinary hearings following an IPCC investigation.

The measures the Government have implemented and the further reforms announced will ensure that local communities continue to trust the police to uphold the highest standards of integrity—but that where they do not, the public are able to hold the police to account.

[HCWS400]

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Northern Ireland Security Situation

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers):** This is the first written statement of this Parliament on the security situation in Northern Ireland. It covers the threat from domestic terrorism in Northern Ireland, rather than from international terrorism, which Members will be aware is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, who updates the House separately.

In the nine months since my last update to the House, the same small groups of dissident republican terrorists have continued their attempts to undermine Northern Ireland’s democratic institutions through the use of violence. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and MI5 have worked tirelessly to limit the threat they are able to pose. Because of these efforts the vast majority of Northern Ireland’s population are able to go about their daily lives untroubled by terrorism.

Continued vigilance is essential. The threat level in Northern Ireland from Northern Ireland related terrorism remains SEVERE (an attack is highly likely) and continues

to evolve while the threat to Great Britain is MODERATE (an attack is possible but not likely). There have been 16 national security attacks by violent dissident republicans this year in which they have sought to cause harm and death. The primary targets have been PSNI officers, but prison officers and members of the armed forces have also been targeted.

In May and July two radio-controlled explosive devices were deployed in Belfast and Lurgan in an attempt to target security force personnel and, in June, an under-vehicle improvised explosive device was deployed against two off-duty PSNI officers at their home address in County Londonderry. Fatalities or serious casualties were avoided in these attacks by narrow margins.

In August a device initiated inside a postal van while it was parked in Palace barracks in County Down. No one was injured but there was considerable damage caused by the fire that followed to the vehicle and others nearby. In October a viable improvised explosive device was recovered from the grounds of a Londonderry hotel due to host a PSNI recruitment event, and several days later an under-vehicle device was planted in Belfast. It is fortunate that both devices were discovered before they exploded. The following day a military hand grenade was thrown at PSNI officers responding to reports of anti-social behaviour in Belfast; the grenade landed by the officers’ feet but thankfully did not explode. In November two police officers in their patrol vehicle in Belfast were extremely fortunate to escape uninjured when they were targeted with an automatic rifle.

The callous and reckless nature of these attacks means that there remains a very real threat of harm to members of the public. Even where there is no injury to people or damage to property, it is often the case that members of the public suffer significant disruption. This can include being forced out of their homes overnight while police deal with security alerts, not knowing if the device is real or hoax and always having to assume the worst.

As part of their unsuccessful attempts to prove their relevance to a society that wants to move on, these violent dissident republicans continue to resort to brutal assaults on members of their own communities in an attempt to exert fear and control.

### *Our Strategic Response*

The Government are clear that terrorism will not succeed in Northern Ireland; democracy and consent will always prevail. Tackling terrorism remains a tier one risk, the highest priority for this Government. This approach is demonstrated in the provision of £231 million of additional security funding to the PSNI from 2011-16.

As a result of the strategic approach to tackling the threat from Northern Ireland-related terrorism pursued by this Government, the increase in terrorist activity that emerged in 2008 has been stemmed. There were 22 national security related attacks in 2014 compared with 40 in 2010. But the need for total vigilance in the face of the continuing threat remains.

The recent security and defence review confirmed we will continue to maintain our investment in capabilities to keep the people of Northern Ireland safe. Looking ahead, as the Chancellor confirmed in the spending review and autumn statement, the UK Government are making available £160 million in additional security

funding to the PSNI over the next five years to assist their efforts to tackle terrorism. This is a significant package at a time of constrained spending and recognises the SEVERE threat from NIRT and the exceptional demands it places upon the police.

The PSNI and MI5 have continued to work incredibly hard in the period since my last update to the House, in many cases placing themselves at significant risk in order to keep people safe. The PSNI has made over 100 terrorism-related arrests of violent dissident republicans since the beginning of the year. In the Republic of Ireland, an intelligence-led operation by An Garda Síochána, the Republic of Ireland police force, resulted in a significant arrest and charge, as well as the seizure of a large quantity of bomb-making equipment. Joint working between PSNI, MI5 and the Garda remains crucial in the investigation and disruption of the violent dissident republican threat.

The Government welcome the enactment of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 which was introduced by the Minister of Justice. Its provisions include measures to reform committal proceedings, reduce delay in criminal proceedings and enhance case management, which are important and necessary steps forward. The PSNI and MI5 go to tremendous effort to bring violent dissident republicans before the courts. It is vital, if the threat is to be tackled and people kept safe, that the criminal justice system as a whole is ready and equipped to deal with these cases. The Government welcome the commitment in the Fresh Start agreement by the Executive to further work to ensure cases can be processed through the courts more quickly.

I would like take this opportunity to pay tribute to the hard work of the Northern Ireland Prison Service who conduct themselves with exemplary dedication in what can be a very difficult environment.

#### *Continuing Paramilitary Activity*

On 20 October I published the assessment of structure, roles and purpose of paramilitary groups and made a statement to the House. The assessment stated that structures remain in place for both republican and loyalist groups. It is clear that individuals associated with paramilitary groups remain engaged in serious criminality. The continued existence and activities of these paramilitary groups, albeit much diminished from their peak, undermines the normalisation of our society. Paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland were not justified in the past and they are not justified today. During the recent political talks, the determination of the UK Government, the Northern Ireland Executive, and the Irish Government to achieve a Northern Ireland society free from the malign impact of paramilitarism was clear.

I welcome the commitments contained in the resulting Fresh Start agreement on this issue. These include an enhanced effort to tackle cross-jurisdictional organised crime, a new NI Executive strategy to disband paramilitary groups and the establishment of a monitoring and implementation body on progress towards ending paramilitarism. I look forward to continuing to work with all involved on this serious matter. Active support by members of the community and by political representatives is essential if we are to move towards a Northern Ireland where the legacy of paramilitary crime is no longer felt in our communities.

#### *Parading Season*

I applaud the efforts of all of those who worked together to ensure that the vast majority of parades across Northern Ireland were peaceful this year. While it is encouraging that we have not returned to the level of violence seen in 2013, it remains a matter of significant concern that disorder in Belfast over a three day period in July resulted in the injury of 25 police officers. This is completely unacceptable. In the same month, a rogue group of loyalists made a public statement to the media threatening PSNI officers and the Parades Commission. This too is unacceptable.

This Government will not tolerate acts or threats of violence by any part of the Northern Ireland community. The strain policing the parading season places on PSNI resources should not be ignored, with PSNI figures estimating the total cost to them of this year's season at £6.7 million. There remains much to be done across the community to deal with instability caused by issues such as flags and parades.

#### *Conclusion*

The SEVERE level of threat we face from violent dissident republicans is likely to continue. It is likely that a number of the many attacks planned will continue to materialise but the police, working closely with the Garda, will exert every effort to disrupt this violent criminal activity and prosecute those responsible.

As the Government's Northern Ireland manifesto made clear, there can be no greater responsibility than the safety and security of the people of Northern Ireland and of the whole of the United Kingdom. That is why we will always give the fullest possible backing to the men and women of the PSNI who, working alongside other partners such as MI5 and An Garda Síochána, do such an outstanding job. I would like to thank them all for the work they do. Under this Government there will be no let-up in our efforts to ensure that terrorism never succeeds.

[HCWS394]

## TRANSPORT

### **Rail Franchising: PQQ Passport Award**

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry):** I am pleased to inform the House that today we notified the first transport companies who have been successful in their pre-qualification questionnaire (PQQ) passport application. The PQQ passport is a new approach to the Department's rigorous prequalification process in rail franchising and represents genuine innovation in procurement practice in Government for the passenger and taxpayer.

The following 11 companies will be able to submit their expression of interest for all future franchise competitions—within the lifetime of the passport—as from today, 15 December 2015.

Abellio Transport Group Ltd  
Arriva UK Trains Ltd  
First Rail Holdings Ltd  
Go-Ahead Holding Ltd

Govia Ltd  
 Keolis (UK) Ltd  
 MTR Corporation (UK) Ltd  
 National Express Trains Ltd  
 Stagecoach Group Plc  
 Trenitalia SpA  
 Virgin Holdings Ltd

The quality of the submissions evidenced that we had explicitly sought high standards, integrity and professionalism from the national and international market. During the assessment stages we scrutinised and scored technical ability, strict safety standards and exemplary management practices. Our approach has resulted in a diverse and competitive market bidders from the UK and overseas who now hold the passport.

This brings a number of clear and positive outcomes: the passport is valid for a period of up to four years and in that time, applicants will be able to express their interest in all future franchise competitions without the need to submit the same information each time. This supports the Department's effort to drive innovative customer-focused thinking and delivery from operators. Putting the passenger first is at the heart of all our franchise tenders and I believe this passport will keep the market fresh and dynamic.

The Department is focused on delivering better value for taxpayers and this announcement supports that. We can now focus our efforts on managing and negotiating the life-cycle of future franchises, build the necessary long-term industry relationships and continue to encourage parties from the UK and overseas to participate in our marketplace. This announcement is a hugely positive step and I am looking forward to seeing great results from a healthy, competitive open market.

[HCWS391]

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Automatic Enrolment Annual Thresholds Review

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr Shailesh Vara):** My noble Friend the Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Baroness Altmann) has made the following written statement.

I am today announcing the proposed automatic enrolment thresholds for next year.

It is intended to lay an Order before Parliament in the new year which will include the following: £43,000 for the upper limit of the qualifying earnings band.

The automatic enrolment earnings trigger will be frozen at £10,000. The lower limit of the qualifying earnings band will also remain frozen at £5,824.

I will also be placing a copy of the analysis supporting the proposed revised thresholds in the Library of the House and a copy can be found online at: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

[HCWS392]

## Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council

**The Minister for Employment (Priti Patel):** The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council met on 7 December 2015 in Brussels. Baroness Neville-Rolfe, Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, represented the UK.

The Council held a detailed discussion on the women on company boards directive but was unable to reach an agreement. The UK was part of the blocking group, with Baroness Neville-Rolfe setting out the significant success which had been achieved through the UK's business led, voluntary approach.

The Council reached political agreement on a recommendation on the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market.

The European Commission presented the annual growth survey 2016 and a draft Council recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area, with views invited from member states. The UK intervened to welcome the package presented while raising concerns that issues relating to jobs and growth should continue to be discussed by all 28 member states, not just those in the eurozone.

The Commission presented measures to advance equal treatment of LGBTI people, with the UK highlighting actions it had taken at a national level such as equal marriage. There was an exchange of views on the strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019 and the Council took stock of progress on the equal treatment directive.

The Council adopted conclusions on equality between women and men in the area of decision making, the promotion of the social economy as a key driver of economic and social development in Europe and social governance for an inclusive Europe.

Under any other business, the presidency informed the Council about the successful negotiations with the European Parliament on both the EURES network and the platform against undeclared work.

The Commission set out the Accessibility Act proposal. The UK stated that the draft proposal must be in line with shared objectives on the single market and must have a firm evidence base with an impact assessment, but did welcome the lighter regime for small and micro businesses. The Commission gave a presentation on the youth employment pact which highlighted that the pact had created partnerships between educational organisations and businesses. Finally, the Luxembourg delegation drew attention to the various initiatives and conferences they had undertaken as part of their presidency.

[HCWS395]



# Petition

*Tuesday 15 December 2015*

## OBSERVATIONS

### TRANSPORT

#### Wheelchair access to railway stations

*The petition of residents of the Sherwood constituency,*

Declares that the platform at Kirkby-in-Ashfield train station is not accessible to wheelchair users; further that this is discriminatory and adversely affects the quality of life of those who require a wheelchair to get around as it prevents them from being able to travel in a dignified and independent fashion; further that the platform at Kirkby-in-Ashfield train station should be fully accessible to all train users; and further that another local petition on this matter was signed by 472 individuals.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to put measures in place to ensure that the platform at Kirkby-in-Ashfield train station is accessible to wheelchair users.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mark Spencer, *Official Report*, 24 November 2015; Vol. 602, c. 1329.]

[P001560]

*Observations from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry):*

The Government are committed to improving accessibility at railway stations. However, many of the stations date from a time when the needs of disabled customers were

simply not considered, and at present only around 460 of our 2,500 stations have step free access to and between every platform.

The Government have therefore continued with the Access for All programme, launched in 2006, which by 2019-20 will have provided step free access at more than 200 stations and has already delivered smaller scale access improvements at over 1200 stations.

In 2013, the DfT asked the rail industry to nominate stations for the latest tranche of Access for All funding. Sixty eight stations were chosen from the 278 nominated. The stations were selected according to their annual passenger numbers, weighted by the incidence of disability in the area (using Census data). The preferences of the train operating companies, local factors such as proximity to a hospital and the availability of any third party funding were also taken into account. A number of stations were also chosen to ensure a fair geographical spread across the UK.

East Midlands Trains nominated 11 of their stations, but did not put forward Kirkby-in-Ashfield. It could not therefore be considered for funding. All of the available funding is now allocated until at least 2019. Should further funding become available in the future we will commission new nominations for projects, but it will be for the train operators to prioritise their own nominations.

Where passengers are unable to use a particular station then the train operating company is obliged to provide alternative transport at no additional cost. This obligation is part of their licence to operate issued by the Office of Rail and Roads, as well as helping to meet the Equality Act 2010 requirement to provide reasonable access to their services. In most cases the operator will provide an accessible taxi to the next station that can be used.



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**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

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