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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 17 December 2015

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD REVIEW

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of a Paper, entitled *The Muslim Brotherhood Review: Main Findings*, dated 17 December 2015.—
(*Sarah Newton.*)

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Bovine TB

1. **Maria Caulfield** (Lewes) (Con): What progress her Department is making on implementing its strategy to eradicate bovine TB in England. [902773]

4. **Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): What progress her Department is making on implementing its strategy to eradicate bovine TB in England. [902776]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): Our strategy to eradicate bovine TB is working. I am pleased to report that all three badger control areas—Somerset, Gloucestershire and Dorset—hit their targets this year. The Chief Veterinary Officer has made it clear that the strategy is delivering disease control benefits, and that it will help us to eradicate this terrible disease.

Maria Caulfield: I thank the Secretary of State for acknowledging that bovine TB is a serious issue, but it is a particularly serious issue for farmers in my constituency. Will she agree to meet me to discuss rolling out a badger vaccination programme in the high-risk areas of Sussex, which would enable us to control the disease while also avoiding a badger cull?

Elizabeth Truss: I welcome my hon. Friend's efforts to promote the vaccination of badgers, but unfortunately there is a worldwide shortage of the BCG vaccine, and I have therefore decided to suspend the sourcing of the vaccine for badgers in England in order to prioritise human health. The Welsh Government recently announced

the same decision. However, I shall continue to listen to what my hon. Friend and her local farmers say about this important issue.

Oliver Colvile: I wish both you and the Secretary of State a very merry Christmas, Mr Speaker.

Not only are badgers responsible—as I understand it—for the spread of bovine TB, but they are no friend of the hedgehog. On Monday, our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government rejected my call, and that of *The Times*, for a hedgehog superhighway through back gardens. Would my right hon. Friend be willing to meet me, and members of the British Hedgehog Preservation Society, for a hedgehog summit?

Elizabeth Truss: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his fantastic campaign, and I congratulate *The Times* on raising this vital issue. I, too, want hedgehogs to have a very happy Christmas, and I am very willing to meet my hon. Friend and members of the British Hedgehog Preservation Society to discuss what we can do to ensure that we have a good population of hedgehogs in the future.

Mr Speaker: Hedgehogs of the world, unite and fight!

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I am afraid I cannot follow that, Mr Speaker.

Given that £20 million has been spent on the badger cull so far, and that hundreds, possibly thousands, of badgers have been killed, will the Secretary of State tell the House how many of those that have been killed had been tested for bovine TB?

Elizabeth Truss: If we do not get a grip on this terrible disease, we shall end up spending £1 billion on dealing with it over the next 10 years. The fact is that it was the Labour party, in 2010, that left us with the worst levels of the disease in Europe. That is why we are having to deal with it now, and I am following the advice of the Chief Veterinary Officer, who says that culling is an important part of dealing with it. Why do Labour Members not congratulate the hard-working farmers in Somerset, Gloucestershire and Dorset who have delivered this year, and who are helping us to deal with this terrible disease?

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is very important for us in Northern Ireland to learn from what the Department has done on the mainland, and to benefit from the information, the experience and the lessons of that action. In Northern Ireland, 6% of cattle herds have been affected by bovine TB, and it is on the rise. It has cost the taxpayer £30 million a year, and 17% of the badgers that have been tested have TB. What can the Department do to help us in Northern Ireland to take on the disease, and defeat it?

Elizabeth Truss: We will continue to work closely with Northern Ireland to tackle the disease throughout the United Kingdom.

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile), and wish the Secretary of State and everyone else a happy Christmas.

In Gloucestershire and Somerset, there has been a very beneficial reduction in the number of cattle suffering from TB in the badger culling areas. When will the Secretary of State be able to release the figures that will show what is happening?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is right, and I am pleased to say that, thanks to our strategy, more than half the country is on track to be officially free of the disease by the end of the current Parliament. The Chief Veterinary Officer has made it clear that licensing of future areas is needed to realise the disease control benefits, and I am determined to pursue that recommendation.

Technology in Farming

2. **Lucy Frazer** (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): What assessment she has made of the potential contribution of data and technology to maximising the potential of British food and farming. [902774]

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): Data and technology have a central role to play in maximising the potential of British food and farming. There are huge numbers of datasets in existence relating to issues such as crop yields and disease. In October we launched the first of our centres of excellence under the agri-tech strategy. The AgriMetrics Centre will use £12 million of Government funding to develop computer models to enable us to harness these data.

Lucy Frazer: I thank the Minister for that answer, and will he join me in welcoming the Eastern AgriGate Research Hub, which opened last month in Soham and is developing pioneering technologies to reduce crop waste and food waste and boost production? Does he agree that we need to invest further in agri-tech to grow our industries, such as those in Cambridgeshire?

George Eustice: My hon. and learned Friend makes an important point, and I welcome the Eastern AgriGate Research Hub which she opened recently. Improving productivity and reducing waste requires innovation that works on a commercial scale, and the new hub will develop these solutions. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that technology has a role to play in reducing waste and improving our use of resources.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): First, may I wish the whole of the British countryside, and even the Secretary of State, a very happy Christmas? You will be pleased to know, Mr Speaker, that even though I am the MP for Huddersfield I am not a Luddite. I am absolutely in favour of good management in the rural environment and in our agriculture, and using data and technology, but the other side of that is that much of our countryside is being destroyed for wildlife by industrial farming. That is the truth of the matter. Indeed, even in Cambridgeshire there are whole swathes of the countryside with nothing living to be seen. We must get the balance right between protecting the environment and using technology in agriculture.

George Eustice: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need to get the balance right, but I disagree with his view that we are not getting it right. We have for many years now had very successful countryside stewardship

schemes with billions of pounds invested in creating new habitats for wildlife so that we can see a recovery in farmland bird populations and an improvement in, for instance, the number of pollinators.

Tom Elliott (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): May I also wish you, Mr Speaker, and the Deputy Speakers and those in the Department a merry Christmas, and indeed a peaceful new year, even sometimes in this place? I want to emphasise the issue of online services in the Department. While they are very useful and helpful, not every farming community has good rural broadband and they do not always replace the face-to-face contact that is required by farmers.

George Eustice: We recognise that, which is why we will in future be ensuring that farmers who want to submit their basic payment scheme applications on paper will be able to do so, but the Government are also investing hundreds of millions of pounds to bring broadband to areas that do not currently have it.

Air Pollution

3. **Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): What progress her Department is making on reducing air pollution to within legal limits. [902775]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): Today we have laid out how we plan to tackle air pollution hotspots in our towns and cities while minimising the impact on businesses and families.

Kelvin Hopkins: I thank the Secretary of State for her answer, but she may be aware of the GB freight route scheme, a proposal to build a dedicated freight railway line linking the channel tunnel with all the major economic regions of Britain and with a gauge capable of transporting full-size lorry trailers on trains. The route could take over 5 million lorry journeys off our roads each year and save thousands of tonnes of polluting emissions. The Department for Transport is taking an interest in the scheme. Will the Secretary of State use her good offices to encourage her colleagues in the Department for Transport to support this scheme?

Elizabeth Truss: I am certainly very happy to look at that, and today I have launched plans for clean air zones in five cities outside London to make sure we are in compliance with air quality limits.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): One reason why emissions are so high in this country is the systematic fitting of defeat devices—the cheating software—by Volkswagen. Enforcement action is under way in the United States. Can the Secretary of State update the House on what action the British Government—her Department, the Environment Agency or the Department for Transport—are taking in this area?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady is right to say that the American authorities are taking action. My right hon. Friend the Transport Secretary is looking carefully at this, as well as ensuring that vehicles are appropriately tested. We have reached agreement at European level to

ensure that what is being emitted from cars are the real emissions. That will help us to deal with our air quality issues.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): The Secretary of State will know that many people regard the legal limits for maritime cruise ships berthing in cities as inadequate. Regulations in cities such as Gothenburg, and others in the European Union, place higher requirements on vessels, including a requirement for ship-to-shore energy supplies. Why cannot we have that for London?

Elizabeth Truss: We are certainly looking at the issue that the hon. Gentleman identifies. We are determined to fulfil our environmental obligations, and we will be bringing the whole of the UK into compliance.

Wine Production

5. **Nick Herbert** (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to promote wine production in England. [902778]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): English sparkling wine is a growing industry worth almost £100 million. I note that two sparkling wines—including Nyetimber, which is produced in my right hon. Friend's constituency—recently beat champagne in a wine critics' blind tasting competition. We are promoting the industry through the Great British Food campaign.

Nick Herbert: There has been a remarkable increase in wine production in my constituency in West Sussex, and I believe that I now have more wine producers than any other constituency. Is this not the time for a co-ordinated strategy to promote these excellent wines, which beat others from around the world in wine tastings? Will my right hon. Friend also ensure that English sparkling wine is served at Government events, and that prosecco, cava, champagne and other inferior brands are consigned to the cellars?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my right hon. Friend for his sparkling point. I will be holding a round-table in the new year with representatives of the sparkling wine industry to talk about how we can encourage the industry to grow. I recently held an event in Shanghai, China, with English sparkling wine producers, and I am encouraging all my colleagues right across Government to use English sparkling wine as their drink of choice.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for her support for the English wine industry and for her recent visit to Sussex, the premier area for the production of English sparkling wine. I hope that Breaky Bottom will be her Christmas lunch tippie. May I remind her that 60% of the price of an average bottle of wine in the UK goes on tax, as against 21% in France, for example? How are her discussions going with the Chancellor on getting a better deal for English wine producers?

Elizabeth Truss: As my hon. Friend will know, excise duty is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, but I had a very enjoyable morning in Sussex recently—we started the tour at 9 am, and it was one of my best days in the job.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming Taittinger and Hatch Mansfield's new venture to produce sparkling wine in my constituency, and will she take steps to ensure that policy across Government supports the growth of the English sparkling wine industry?

Elizabeth Truss: It is no surprise that even the French want to get in on the action in the English sparkling wine industry. Using DEFRA's data, we have identified an additional 75,000 acres across the country that are suitable for producing sparkling wine. That is the equivalent of the champagne region, so I am sure that the industry will go from strength to strength.

Flood Defence Schemes

6. **Paul Maynard** (Blackpool North and Cleveleys) (Con): How many new flood defence schemes are planned under her Department's six-year capital settlement. [902779]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): We will be investing in 1,500 flood schemes in the next six years, spending £2.3 billion on providing protection to an extra 300,000 homes.

Paul Maynard: I hope the Minister will join me in thanking the emergency workers in my constituency who went to assist during the flooding in St Michael's on Wyre over the past fortnight. He will also be aware of the great relief in my constituency at the news of the £60 million investment in coastal defences along the Fylde coast, but will he look at the one gap in the armour—namely, the coastal defences at Rossall beach, which are not being renewed? When his Department reviews the frequency of adverse weather events, will it look again at the adequacy of Rossall beach's defences to determine whether they should be included in this scheme?

Rory Stewart: Let me join in paying tribute to the members of the teams in my hon. Friend's constituency. I was in St Michael's on Wyre, where I saw some of the wonderful work they and other volunteers were doing. I am pleased that he is paying tribute to the work along the Fylde coast, which is an investment of almost £80 million in total, and I would be delighted to look in particular at the missing section on Rossall beach.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Has the Minister explained to his Back Benchers that the 300,000 properties he is talking about have been those at low risk and the lowest risk, and not, substantially, those of residents living in areas at the highest risk, as the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management has pointed out? In other words, the money is going to fund those least at risk of flooding, not those most at risk.

Rory Stewart: We disagree strongly on this. I am happy to sit down to talk about it in detail, but along the Fylde coast, the Humber, the Lincolnshire coast and the Thames these defences will have a serious impact on houses that are at serious risk of flooding.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): May I compliment my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the way in which the tragedy for people in the north-west has been dealt with? Some people have a simplistic view about flooding, seeing it as a binary issue and, for example, saying that dredging works in all cases—we know it does not. There are circumstances where capital schemes such as the Minister has outlined are the solution, but in other cases a more nuanced approach is required. Will her team continue to make the point that every different flood event requires a specific solution?

Rory Stewart: First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who was a distinguished floods Minister and is right in what he says. We need to look also at upstream mitigation, which means the planting of trees, the restoration of poached soils, and examining peat bogs and river movement. This is not only about hard defences, and the work that we will be doing over the next few months will focus exactly on those natural measures.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): The devastation of the communities in Keswick, Carlisle and Cockermouth hit by the floods was clear for all to see, but it does not tell the full story. I spent part of my visit to Cumbria meeting people in smaller communities, including Barepot and Hall Park View, near Workington, as well as Flimby and Dearham. Many people were just getting on with the job of clearing up, but they told me that they felt abandoned yet again, with no hope of any schemes to protect their homes, even though most of these schemes would be small and inexpensive. What plans does the Minister have to pay more attention to smaller communities also devastated by floods and to commit to the small schemes, which could make a big difference?

Rory Stewart: First, I pay tribute to the shadow Minister for his visit, which was very much appreciated. It is true that many people feel that the media attention has been on Carlisle and that the number of small villages affected have been ignored. As he says, we can see many communities like that across Cumbria and they will be having a horrifying time. They will have a very difficult winter. We are working to bundle schemes together. One particular example, which I would be very happy to discuss with him, is what is happening at Stockdalewath, where we have an upstream alleviation programme for a small hamlet. We need to extend that to other areas, too.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I send my condolences to those in Cumbria, because in Somerset, where I come from, we, too, experienced terrible flooding in 2013. I applaud the Government's commitment and all the projects that have been put in place. Will the Minister outline the progress being made on future funding for the wider catchment work on trees, river basins and perhaps even ancient trees?

Rory Stewart: My hon. Friend is very interested in the role that ancient woodland can play in flood alleviation. We are looking at that as part of the upstream alleviation programme. Three main initiatives are being undertaken: one by Cumbria County Council; one led by my right

hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster; and one, which I am chairing, through the Cumbria partnership.

Flood Risks

7. **Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the extent of flood risks in the UK. [902780]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): The work done on flood forecasting is carried out by the Flood Forecasting Centre, which involves collaboration between the Environment Agency and the Met Office. It provides daily forecasts, which are communicated to the public through the web and through telephones, providing flood warnings and flood alerts on a real-time basis.

Christian Matheson: May I send Chester's best wishes to the Minister and his constituents, whom I know are overcoming the damage from the flooding so far? Long-term assessments of flooding demonstrate that the risk is becoming greater, and the Government have introduced an insurance scheme to support people in their homes who are affected by insurance issues. Am I right in thinking that the scheme does not include small businesses? In the light of the recent flooding in Cumbria, will the Minister rethink that policy?

Rory Stewart: I am very pleased that the hon. Gentleman has recognised the work of the Flood Re scheme, which will make a considerable difference, particularly to lower income households. He is correct that small businesses are not currently included. The Association of British Insurers believes that there is no systematic problem in providing insurance for small businesses, but should we discover that that is not the case, I am happy to sit down with him and the ABI to resolve the matter.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The Minister has mentioned low-lying Lincolnshire, yet more and more housing schemes—huge housing schemes—are being forced on us to meet a rising population. Will the Minister responsible for defending the people from flooding remind those in the EU, the Home Office and the Treasury that in one of the most rain-sodden, flood-prone countries in Europe there is a cost to the 300,000 net migration to this country every year? Even if we could afford it, we should not be building houses in the wrong places.

Rory Stewart: I do not wish to be drawn into a debate on migration, but I absolutely agree that we should not be building houses on floodplains. The Environment Agency guidance on that is increasingly strict, and we are pushing hard to ensure that councils acknowledge and respect that guidance.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): In considering flood risk, has the Minister assessed the risk of profiteering in relation to services that are required in the clean-up after flooding? I understand that the cost of skip hire and of estate agent services has rocketed in areas affected by flooding.

Rory Stewart: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: there is a serious risk of profiteering and there is even a risk of criminal activity. Unscrupulous people will turn out and push for far more work to be done in a

house than actually needs to be done. The police in Cumbria, Lancashire and Northumberland are focused on that issue. The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that, in moments of crisis, we should absolutely condemn anybody who attempts to exploit misery for gain.

Mr Keith Simpson (Broadland) (Con): My hon. Friend will know that, over a year ago, there was a tidal surge in the North sea that brought flooding to a lot of the east coast, particularly to Norfolk. I understand that there is a tidal surge forecast for Christmas day and Boxing day. Will he update the House on the measures his Department and the Environment Agency are taking in the event of such a surge taking place?

Rory Stewart: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are facing very high spring tides at the moment—some of the highest for 18 years—but we need to take into account the fact that the level of the tides themselves is not the determining factor. The low pressure systems and the wind will also have an impact. We focus very hard on this matter, specifically on that tide on Christmas day. The Flood Forecasting Centre ensures that the forecasts are as accurate as possible, and we have the measures in place to respond.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Flood risk on the Humber remains high following the tidal surge two years ago. With local authorities, the Environment Agency was involved in putting together proposals that it now advises Ministers should be reassessed. Will my hon. Friend confirm that he is committed to strengthening flood defences along the Humber, and that, in the forthcoming meeting with Humber MPs, he will have alternative proposals?

Rory Stewart: I thank my hon. Friend very much for the work that he does for his constituents in arguing for more funding on the Humber. Considerable investment is going to flood defences in the Humber region. Nearly £80 million is going into the Humber—£40 million to the north side of the Humber and £40 million to the south side. Yes, we are looking forward to a round table, where we will discuss every one of those schemes from Grimsby to Hull.

Poultry Sheds

8. **Dr Andrew Murrison** (South West Wiltshire) (Con): If she will issue guidance on siting poultry sheds as close as possible to the place of slaughter. [902782]

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): Decisions on the location of agricultural buildings are a matter for the relevant local authority, which will assess each application on its merits taking into account its local plan. In addition to planning permission, an environmental permit is required for intensive poultry farms, and the Environment Agency will consider impacts such as noise and odour. However, through our food enterprise zones, which we are currently piloting, we are seeking to remove some of the barriers and make it easier for food enterprises to co-locate in the same geographic areas.

Dr Murrison: I am grateful to the Minister for his comprehensive answer. He will of course be aware that the Animal Welfare (Transport) (England) Order 2006

requires operators to minimise the journey time for animals—rightly so—and his departmental guidance reflects that. Does he agree that that should be a material consideration in planning terms to ensure that, in modern animal husbandry, we minimise the distance that animals have to travel to abattoirs?

George Eustice: I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes. As he pointed out, there are robust regulations in place at both a European and a UK level, which specify, for instance, minimum journey times and rest times, and set-down requirements for the lorries carrying out that transport. It is not always possible to co-locate factories close to where poultry are because often the investment requires a large number of poultry farms supplying one abattoir.

EU Recycling Targets

9. **Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to meet EU recycling targets. [902783]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): Recycling is local authority-led. National Government can work through measures such as the landfill tax and harmonisation of the Waste and Resources Action Programme. We are pleased to say that recycling is now at the highest level ever, up in the region of 44%.

Jeff Smith: It looks as though we are going to miss our household recycling targets, and there is a question mark over the municipal recycling target as well. Is it not time for a proper waste strategy for this country to enable us to meet our requirements?

Rory Stewart: I believe we are on track, and the thing that will keep us on track is more harmonisation. One of the problems in England particularly—this is not a problem in Wales or Scotland—is that we have over 300 different types of recycling system, so we are working hard on a voluntary basis with local councils to harmonise that. If we can reduce it to four or five systems, we will drive up recycling rates and reduce costs for councils and ratepayers.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): On the first anniversary of WRAP's creation as a charity, will the Minister join me in encouraging people to recycle their Christmas cards and gift wrap? Apparently, we recycle enough card to wrap the Elizabeth Tower 260,000 times.

Rory Stewart: I confirm my right hon. Friend's comments. I pay tribute to WRAP, which Members on both sides of the House are proud of and which was an initiative led by the Labour Government. It has done an enormous amount of work on harmonisation and particularly the Courtauld agreement.

Mr Speaker: Colleagues will all wish to be on the right hon. Lady's Trivial Pursuit team, I feel sure.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I declare my interest as a member of Kettering Borough Council. Will the Minister congratulate Kettering Borough Council on becoming the best performer in the Association for

Public Service Excellence awards for having the best recycling and refuse service in the country, following the introduction of its enhanced blue bin recycling service?

Rory Stewart: I pay tribute to Kettering, and I invite Kettering please to join us in a taskforce to communicate that best practice to other councils. There is a great deal we can all learn from Kettering.

CAP Delivery Programme

10. **Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the value for money of the CAP delivery programme. [902784]

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): The National Audit Office recently completed an early review of the common agricultural policy delivery programme. Despite difficulties, the programme is on course to realise a positive net present value of £197.7 million over the next eight years. The CAP has been the most complex ever, but despite that the core of the system is working. The Rural Payments Agency has already paid over 40% of farmers their basic payment scheme payment for this year and we are on course to pay the vast majority by the end of January.

Conor McGinn: The National Farmers Union reports that many flood-hit farmers in the north-west have received a double whammy, having been informed by the Rural Payments Agency that they will not receive their payments until February at the earliest. All the Secretary of State could say on Tuesday was that the Government are seeing what they can do. Perhaps the Minister can now outline exactly what they are doing to ensure that those farmers receive payments before Christmas.

George Eustice: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We are very conscious of the plight of farmers in Cumbria. In respect of those with common land, although we had previously said that we would have difficulty paying them before February owing to the complexity of that system, we have identified the 600 affected farms in Cumbria and we will be prioritising them.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): A merry Christmas and a happy new year, Mr Speaker, to you and your staff.

Last week the NFU Scotland confirmed that most farms in Scotland rely on the CAP payments to survive. Without ducking the issue, will the Minister confirm that in the event of Britain leaving the EU, the UK Government will guarantee the same level of payments to farms so that they can survive?

George Eustice: I would simply say that in terms of the current year's BPS, it is a matter for the Scottish Government to ensure that Scottish farmers get their payments on time. We all have a debate to look forward to about Britain's membership of the European Union.

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Alan Brown. Does the hon. Gentleman want to ask a second question? Am I mistaken in that surmise?

Alan Brown: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I understood that I had only one question.

If Britain votes to leave the European Union, will the UK Government guarantee the same level of CAP payments to Scottish farmers? Will the Minister please answer this time?

George Eustice: The Government's position is very clear: we want to renegotiate our relationship with the European Union and see some powers come back to the UK. We will put that to the British public in a referendum and they will decide. Should the UK decide to leave the European Union, at that point the Government would obviously set a national agricultural policy.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): DEFRA's mismanagement of the CAP delivery programme saw very senior managers embroiled in childish squabbling. This flagship IT project then spiralled £60 million over budget. It was so useless that farmers were forced to switch back to pen and paper. With the NAO predicting millions in penalties as a result, why did the Minister not intervene to save farmers and taxpayers from this IT disaster?

George Eustice: I simply point out that we did intervene. We acted in March, once we realised there was going to be difficulty, to ensure that all farmers could get their applications in on time on a paper-based system, and we have worked very hard since then to ensure that we enter it on the core of the system, which has worked well.

Dairy Industry

11. **Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to make the dairy industry more resilient to the volatility of world milk prices. [902785]

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): We understand the pressures facing dairy farmers and have taken action to ease their cash-flow problems. The £26.2 million aid package we secured from the European Commission will provide some immediate relief. In addition to that short-term support, we are introducing a fairer tax system for farmers, pushing for clearer labelling of British dairy products and developing a futures market for dairy.

Andrew Bridgen: I thank the Minister for that answer, but may I press him a little harder on this subject, rather as happened with the Sussex wine? What help is his Department able to offer milk processors so that they can add more value to milk products, enhancing the opportunities to export them around the world?

George Eustice: My hon. Friend makes an important point. DEFRA has previously supported investment in processing, for instance at Davidstow in Cornwall, through the rural development programme. We are investigating the potential to use funds through the European Investment Bank to make loan capital available to invest in new processing capacity.

Topical Questions

T1. [902763] **Rishi Sunak** (Richmond (Yorks)) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): I am sure that the House will wish to join me in expressing our sympathies to all those affected by the recent flooding in the north of England. I would like to express our gratitude to the emergency services, the military, the Environment Agency and volunteers who have worked around the clock to protect people and property. Earlier this week I visited Appleby, Threlkeld and Carlisle to meet local residents and farmers and see the recovery efforts for myself. The Government are doing all we can to ensure that every resource is available to help those areas get back on their feet.

Rishi Sunak: I share the Secretary of State's sentiments with regard to the flooding. British shoppers want to support British dairy farmers, but the current labelling of dairy products is often too complicated to make that a reality. Does my right hon. Friend support the excellent new campaign by the *Yorkshire Post* for clearer and unambiguous labelling of dairy products so that this Christmas we can all buy British with confidence?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is a fantastic champion of Yorkshire farmers, and the *Yorkshire Post* is running a great campaign. I want to see British labelling on British dairy products right across the country. I recently had the pleasure of visiting the Wensleydale Creamery in his constituency, in the newly expanded Yorkshire Dales national park, and I have been eating their Yorkshire yoghurt ever since.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Happy Christmas to you, Mr Speaker.

This week the Paris talks and the devastating floods in the north reminded us of the importance of DEFRA's climate change adaptation work. Also this week, the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee raised serious concerns about the impact of further departmental budget cuts. Will the Secretary of State tell us her top three policies for making our country safer and more resilient to climate change?

Elizabeth Truss: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Climate Change Secretary for the fantastic work she did in achieving the deal in Paris. I work very closely with her to make sure that we are adapting to climate change. Of course, the No. 1 issue on DEFRA's agenda is making sure that we have the flood defences in place. That is why we have seen a real-terms increase in flood defence spending in this Parliament. We are spending £2.3 billion over six years compared with £1.7 billion in the previous Parliament. In the autumn statement, the Chancellor announced that we were protecting flood maintenance spending as well.

Kerry McCarthy: I thank the Secretary of State for that response, but I did ask for three policies, and it is a shame that she could only talk about one. It is little

wonder, though, when her Department's climate change unit has been slashed from 38 to six and expert advice is routinely ignored. The Select Committee warned this week:

"Successful delivery of vital environmental, agricultural and rural services will not be possible without strong leadership and a sharp focus on priority areas."

When will we get that leadership and that sharp focus from the Secretary of State?

Elizabeth Truss: The key point is that we bake climate change into everything we do across DEFRA. Whether it is our programme to plant 11 million trees, our flood defence programme, which we are increasing in real terms, or our activity to make sure that biodiversity is taken into account for climate change, every single team in DEFRA has that as part of its plans.

T2. [902764] **Mr Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): Northney ice cream, produced on Hayling Island in my constituency, is popular across the Solent region. Will the Secretary of State continue to promote local and regional British food plans and encourage our catering trade and supermarkets to do the same?

Elizabeth Truss: I am delighted to be visiting Northney in January to taste the ice cream with my hon. Friend. That might seem unseasonal, but I am sure it will be very nice. I am pleased to say that supermarkets are responding to the massive demand for British dairy. Marks and Spencer is moving from 80% to 100% of its cheddar being British, and Tesco has made a commitment that from early next year 100% of its own-brand yogurt will be sourced in Britain.

T3. [902765] **Drew Hendry** (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): In 2012, the then Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change stated that in addition to the environmental benefit, the UK Government expected carbon capture and storage expertise and products to be worth £6.5 billion to the UK economy by the end of the next decade. What economic analysis has been made of the effect of abandoning the carbon capture and storage competition?

Elizabeth Truss: This is clearly a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. She has a very clear plan to deliver carbon reductions, economic growth and lower bills for bill payers, and she is on track to do that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) should not chunter from a sedentary position in evident disapproval of an answer that he had no right to expect in any case. It is principally a matter for DECC, so he ought to be saying thank you to the Secretary of State for proffering some sort of response. In a seasonal spirit, I am sure that that is what he will now do.

T6. [902769] **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State's emphasis on the promotion of British food here and around the world. When I try to buy lactose-free milk, I notice that it all comes from Denmark. Will she ensure that the British dairy

industry gets a grip on this and starts to produce lactose-free milk for what is probably the biggest market in Europe?

Elizabeth Truss: I thank my hon. Friend for pointing that out. There are also huge opportunities in producing UHT milk here and overseas, which I know the dairy industry is looking at. In January we will establish the Great British food unit, which brings together UK Trade & Investment expertise and DEFRA expertise so that we have a one-stop shop for businesses that want to export their fantastic products.

T4. [902766] **Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): The Forster family in Moss Bank in my constituency have farmed in St Helens for 125 years. In recent years they have opened a shop at their farm selling their own produce. What are the Government doing to help farmers like the Forsters to develop small business potential which not only showcases the best local produce but encourages people to buy local and eat local?

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice): The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. Through our rural development programme, we are supporting farm businesses that want to diversify and start retailing their own produce.

T8. [902771] **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): Trees are a vital and precious feature of our natural environment, nowhere more so than in areas like Cheltenham, where they act as the town's green lungs. Will my right hon. Friend update the House on how many trees the Government plan to plant over the course of this Parliament?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart): The Government have committed to planting 11 million more trees over the course of this Parliament. We hope we may even be able to exceed that target. We are particularly proud of a scheme we are developing with the Woodland Trust to plant trees and to educate primary schoolchildren about them.

T5. [902768] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Given the challenges of adapting to climate change, how will the Department work towards mitigation and emission reductions that match the Paris agreement ambition of limiting global warming to 1.5 °C?

Elizabeth Truss: I am working very closely with my right hon. Friend the Energy and Climate Change Secretary to make sure that we hit our carbon budget, including in areas such as agriculture, biodiversity and tree planting.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I am appalled that the Secretary of State has announced today that she is stopping the vaccination in the edge areas, because it is exceptionally important, particularly when the number of cattle slaughtered has increased by 25% in Wales and by 6% in England. I understand the reasons why she has made that announcement, but will she look at DEFRA test SE3289, which is 95.5% sensitive and 98% specific, so that we can identify TB in infected badger setts?

Elizabeth Truss: The reality is that there is a global shortage of the BCG vaccine. Clearly, human health is the priority and we need to ensure that humans are protected against TB. Believe me, as soon as that vaccine becomes available, we want to restart vaccination in the edge areas.

T7. [902770] **Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): In 2013, the European Food Safety Authority found that neonicotinoids posed a “high acute risk” to honey bees. The e-petition against the use of neonicotinoid pesticides has so far gained more than 90,000 signatures, so what representations will the Government make to the European Commission's review of its control of neonicotinoids?

George Eustice: We had a comprehensive debate on this issue following that petition last week. The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology is doing a comprehensive piece of research fieldwork on the impact of neonicotinoids on bees. We will ensure that that evidence is put to EFSA before it reaches its conclusions on the interim review next summer.

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): To carry on the Christmas spirit, since the Prime Minister was pictured enjoying a pint of Greene King with President Xi, the export of that fine beer from my constituency of Bury St Edmunds has gone up from 3,000 to 50,000 cases. It and other rural exporting businesses in the constituency are keen to learn what work the Department is doing, with the help of UK Trade & Investment, to help fund and organise trade shows and development visits in order to secure such important trade.

Elizabeth Truss: I was in China a few weeks ago, and one of the things we promoted was Greene King in Chongqing. We were accompanied on our visit by the biggest ever delegation of food companies—there were more than 80 companies with us. With the launch of the Great British food unit, which brings together UKTI and DEFRA expertise, I expect us to have even more in the future.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Value for money and efficiency in delivering help is important, but the Government also need to be flexible enough to respond to unforeseen events. Will the Secretary of State look urgently at helping the farmers severely hit by the recent flooding, by making at least partial payments from the basic payment scheme?

Elizabeth Truss: I met farmers in Cumbria earlier this week. We are identifying the 600 farmers and making sure that we get the basic payments out to them as soon as possible. We have also put in place a farming recovery fund, to which farmers will be able to apply from tomorrow, to give them the extra funding needed to get their farms back to normal.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Voting for 16 and 17-year-olds

1. **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): What assessment the Electoral Commission has made of the potential merits of widening the franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds. [902793]

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon): The commission has made clear in its briefings on recent legislation that a change to the franchise is a matter for Parliament, and does not take a view on the merits of widening the franchise to 16 or 17-year-olds. During the passage of the European Union Referendum Bill, the commission advised Parliament on the practical implications of any such change, including the activity that would be required to be carried out by electoral registration officers, central Government and the commission itself.

Dr Whitford: Following the incredible engagement of young people in the Scottish referendum, Scottish National party Members suggested that they should be given the vote in the EU referendum. Although many Conservative Members did not agree with that specific proposal, they expressed support for extending the franchise in the long term. With turnout falling, would not registration and education while young people are still at school increase political engagement in the future?

Mr Streeter: The hon. Lady brings relevant experience to this issue. This is ultimately a matter for the House to decide—the debate continues to rage—and not one for the Electoral Commission. I have no doubt that we will hear much more about this issue over the next two or three years.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does my hon. Friend not agree that we should concentrate on increasing turnout among 18 to 24-year-olds before we start on 16 and 17-year-olds?

Mr Streeter: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. As I understand it, less than 40% of 18 to 24-year-olds vote in general elections. It would be very healthy indeed for that number to increase. It is for all of us to inspire the young people in our constituencies to turn out and vote.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Gentleman know of any political party—SNP, Labour or anyone else—that has looked at the damage we do to the protection of children by making them adults at the age of 16? Has there been any thorough research on how damaging that is for our society and for the protection of our children?

Mr Streeter: I am not aware that the Electoral Commission has carried out any such research. The debate on this important issue will rumble on because there are very strongly opposing views.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Fossil Fuel: Investments

2. **David T. C. Davies** (Monmouth) (Con): What the Church Commissioners' policy is on investing in fossil fuel companies. [902794]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mrs Caroline Spelman): The Church Commissioners published a comprehensive ethical investment strategy in May 2015. They do not invest in fossil fuel companies that derive more than 10% of their revenues from the extraction of thermal coal or the production of oil from oil sands.

David T. C. Davies: I wonder whether the Church Commissioners might reconsider given the enormous exponential increase in living standards during the past 200 years as a result of our exploitation of fossil fuels. Does my right hon. Friend not think that the Church should sometimes put aside the Greenpeace manuals and look at Matthew 25 and the parable of the talents?

Mrs Spelman: My hon. Friend may not agree with me about the underlying causes of climate change, but I think he has to accept that, with the collapse in the oil price and the volatility of oil as a commodity, it makes eminent good sense for the Church Commissioners to diversify their portfolio, particularly away from the extraction of materials that may be detrimental to the environment.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Dr Huq, we will get to you. Your question is different, but we will reach it.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): In people's minds, fossil fuels are obviously a cornerstone of the Paris accord. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the involvement of faith groups was absolutely vital in getting that agreement? Everyone from the Pope to Christian Aid, and many other organisations, was fundamental in making sure that the moral case for tackling climate change was heard.

Mrs Spelman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The engagement of faith leaders in securing a successful agreement in Paris last weekend was very important. I want to commend the work of the Bishop of Salisbury, who led an initiative in which 200 pilgrims from the Church of England walked 200 miles to Paris to show their commitment to reaching an agreement.

Hedgehogs

3. **Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): If the Church Commissioners will provide guidance to dioceses on ensuring that church property is hedgehog-friendly. [902796]

Mrs Spelman: My hon. Friend has pricked all our consciences with his campaign for the protection of the hedgehog. The Church of England recognises that its churchyards are important not only as places of burial and quiet reflection, but for their characteristic habitats and as refuges for wildlife and plants. The conservation movement Caring for God's Acre recognises the hedgehog as a flagship species in need of protection.

Oliver Colvile: The Church of England is one of the largest landowners in the country, so do the dioceses across the country have ecology strategies for the protection of animals and wildlife throughout their churchyards?

Mrs Spelman: The dioceses give proper weight to the conservation of natural heritage. I refer my hon. Friend to the ChurchCare website, which provides guidance on managing churchyards for wildlife, including by carrying out surveys and managing grassland. The aforementioned initiative, Caring for God's Acre, encourages all of us as

MPs to talk to our local churches about leaving some sections of their churchyards in a state that is conducive to the protection of species that are endangered, such as the hedgehog.

Syria

4. **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What support the Church is providing to people in Syria. [902798]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mrs Caroline Spelman): I am very grateful for the hon. Lady's question, which focuses on providing support for people in Syria. International aid agencies, many of which are Christian in origin, always stress that it is important to provide for refugees in situ, so that they can subsequently help with the rebuilding of their country. The Church is working with the Department for International Development to get the aid committed by the UK Government to those in need and is assisting those who remain in the camps with clothing, health and hygiene kits, shelter and education.

Rachael Maskell: York Minster is playing a pivotal role in welcoming refugees to our city. However, Christians in Syria remain at risk and many do not feel safe to go to the UNHCR camps. What steps is the Church taking to ensure that Syrian Christians and other minority groups can find a place of sanctuary?

Mrs Spelman: That excellent point was raised by the Archbishop of Canterbury, when he pointed out that the percentage of Christians in the camps is below the percentage of Christians in the population of Syria before the start of the conflict. Through the ecumenical networks, we are trying to help the Under-Secretary of State for Refugees to reach Syrian Christians who may be fearful of presenting themselves in the camps.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am sure that many hon. Members have received generous offers of accommodation for Syrian refugees. Many of those have come from members of church groups, which are able to offer the support structures that are so necessary to look after refugees when they come to this country. Has my right hon. Friend had any conversations with the Under-Secretary of State for Refugees, because all the offers of accommodation are currently going through local authorities and churches have a real role to play?

Mrs Spelman: I spoke to the Minister as recently as this week, because the Church has made a number of offers of accommodation. The Christian charity, Home for Good, has 8,000 families who are willing to offer accommodation to an unaccompanied asylum-seeking child. He reassured me that he is speaking to faith groups and that 50 local authorities across the length and breadth of the land are taking the offers from the Church very seriously indeed.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): While it is important that we look after the people in Syria, it is also important that we look after the Syrian refugees. Just this week, Northern Ireland has taken in its first Syrian refugees, who have arrived in Belfast and Londonderry. Will the Second Church Estates Commissioner outline the ways in which the commissioners can assist Northern Ireland to settle these first Syrian refugees?

Mrs Spelman: It is true that the first Syrian refugees are coming to our country. I believe that the Prime Minister said yesterday that 1,000 will have arrived before the end of the year. There are many ways in which churches can help. The Under-Secretary of State for Refugees has asked the Church for volunteers to help with learning English and with welcoming the refugees. Many dioceses are preparing themselves to make the refugees feel welcome in our midst.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Postal Votes

5. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What guidance the Electoral Commission issues on the handling of completed and sealed postal votes by political activists. [902799]

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon): The Electoral Commission has developed a code of conduct for campaigners, which makes it clear that:

"Campaigners should never handle or take any completed ballot paper or postal ballot packs from voters."

The code of conduct is non-statutory, but it applies to all campaigners at elections and referendums in Great Britain.

Mr Hollobone: I declare an interest as a member of Kettering Borough Council. Kettering was one of the first authorities in the country to get all local activists to sign up to the code of conduct, which I am pleased to see the Electoral Commission has adopted. Will the Electoral Commission apply the code of conduct to by-elections, because in the recent by-election there were disturbing reports that activists were handling other people's postal votes?

Mr Streeter: Where Kettering leads, other parts of the country will surely follow. My hon. Friend is right to say that this matter is now embraced in the national code produced by the Electoral Commission. The Electoral Commission spoke to members of UKIP recently and, as I understand it, they have still made no formal complaint. Perhaps a lesson for all of us is that if we make allegations, we should back them up and refer matters to the police.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that the Electoral Commission is of the view that electoral fraud cases are few and far between?

Mr Streeter: That is certainly the case, and we are fortunate in this country that there are very few cases of electoral fraud. Of course there are allegations, and the police now have special officers to investigate them, but mercifully at the moment, electoral fraud does not trouble us greatly.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—
Syria

6. **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): What support the Church of England and the diocese in Europe are providing for Syrian migrants in Europe. [902801]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mrs Caroline Spelman): Within the diocese of Europe, the Anglican chaplaincy of Athens and the chaplaincy to Southern Italy are supporting migrants and refugees by providing spiritual and psychological support, clothing and healthcare. Local churches across the diocese of Europe are also acting as a messaging service to try to bring families back together if they have been disunited.

Michael Tomlinson: I am grateful for that answer. Further to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), many churches and other local groups have contacted me in my constituency and the wider county of Dorset, offering help with accommodation. Will my right hon. Friend set out how those offers can be logged, assessed and, where appropriate, taken up?

Mrs Spelman: That is an important point that the Minister responsible will want the House to take on board. We need social landlords who are willing to offer accommodation to refugees, so that if possible we do not add to housing waiting lists and cause cohesion issues in our society. Within the Church of England we are looking for Christian social landlords who will provide accommodation for refugees which the Government will pay for.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Voter Registration Rates

7. **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): What recent steps the Electoral Commission has taken to improve voter registration rates. [902802]

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon): The Electoral Commission provided guidance and resources, and set performance standards for electoral registration officers to improve registration in their local area during the recent autumn canvass. The commission also ran a major public awareness campaign ahead of the May 2015 polls. The campaign resulted in more than 1.5 million additions to the register, which was more than three times the amount achieved during a similar period before the 2010 general election.

Dr Huq: Against the explicit advice of the Electoral Commission, the Government rushed through by a year the individual electoral registration on which the new boundaries will be based. HOPE not hate predicted that 1.9 million people will fall off the register. The hon. Gentleman has said that there has been an increase in registration, but I would like to know the net figures. It is predicted that those who will fall off the register will typically be the young, those in houses of multiple occupation, and students. What was the net result at the end of all this? It sounds like a cynical attempt to make my electors disappear.

Mr Streeter: The decision that the hon. Lady mentions was a matter for the Government and was taken, as she rightly says, against the advice of the Electoral Commission. I will have to write to her about net impact of that decision. The reality is that we must all do whatever we can to encourage our local electoral registration officers to contact as many people as possible, particularly in groups that are hard to reach. I am sure that the public awareness campaign in early 2016 will have great success, as it did in 2015.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that Her Majesty has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

National Insurance Contributions (Rate Ceilings) Act 2015

European Union Referendum Act 2015

European Union (Approvals) Act 2015.

Business of the House

10.33 am

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week, and preferably the recess dates for next year as well?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): The business for next week will be nothing at all, because I hope that everybody will be enjoying a good festive break. The business for the House in the week commencing 4 January 2016 is as follows:

MONDAY 4 JANUARY—The House will not be sitting.

TUESDAY 5 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Housing and Planning Bill (day 1). I remind colleagues that this day will have a Monday timetable and will start at 2.30 pm, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister also expects to make a statement to the House.

WEDNESDAY 6 JANUARY—Opposition day (14th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 7 JANUARY—Debate on a motion relating to the effect of the equalisation of the state pension age on women, followed by a debate on a motion relating to children in care. The subjects for those debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 8 JANUARY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 11 January will include:

MONDAY 11 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Armed Forces Bill, followed by business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

I inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall on Thursday 7 January and Monday 11 January will be :

THURSDAY 7 JANUARY—General debate on the armed forces covenant annual report.

MONDAY 11 JANUARY—Debate on an e-petition relating to the NHS bursary.

Colleagues will wish to know that, subject to the progress of business, the House will rise for the Easter recess at the close of business on Thursday 24 March 2016 and will return on Monday 11 April 2016.

My hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House has a particularly festive air today in aid of charity—I commend her for her work in support of charity. In this festive week, I take this opportunity, Mr Speaker, to wish you, her, the shadow team and all Members of the House a very happy Christmas. I wish those from north of the border a very happy Hogmanay as well.

I am sure the House will join me in recognising the important work that goes on to support the House throughout the year. I thank all the staff working throughout the Palace of Westminster and wish them a restful Christmas and a happy new year. There are always staff on duty in part of the Palace, and I particularly want to wish those who have to work over the Christmas period a pleasant break when they have one, and to express our gratitude to them for the work they do over the festive period.

Chris Bryant: Despite the caterwauling yesterday from the Leader of the House—he seemed to suggest that I would make lame, laboured jokes about “Star Wars”

today, as the Prime Minister did yesterday—I can assure you, Mr Speaker, that I have a complete UK exemption from “Star Wars” related humour. I have some perfectly good lame, laboured jokes of my own without resorting to that.

As you know, Mr Speaker, the panto season is upon us—[HON. MEMBERS: “Oh no it isn’t!”] Oh yes it is. “Cinderella” is on at the Park & Dare in Treorchy. Apparently, auditions were last month, so unfortunately the Rhondda will have to do without my Prince Charming this year. However, I see that the Epsom Playhouse in the constituency of the Leader of the House has “Beauty and the Beast” on at the moment. There is a rumour going around that the Leader of the House and the Deputy Leader of the House will appear in that production on select nights. The only question is which parts they will play. I am pretty certain that the Deputy Leader of the House will be playing Mrs Potts—she would obviously be Mrs Coffey Potts. That is the worst laboured joke today. [Interruption.] It may not be actually.

As for the Leader of the House, he is no beast, but I hear that there was a mystery bidder earlier this week at the sale of Mrs Thatcher’s frocks. There is a rumour that he will be seen waltzing across the stage in that black printed chiffon number as Belle in “Beauty and the Beast” this week.

May we have a debate on food waste? Last year, 1.2 million sausages were sent to landfill in Rhondda Cynon Taff alone, which is why it is great that the local council is signing everybody up to proper food recycling. New figures show that, last year, the House wasted 45,000 meals—they were just tipped in the bin. With 33 Trussell Trust food banks within the M25 and an estimated 70,000 children in London going to bed hungry each night, is it not time for the Leader of the House to institute a new scheme to donate unused food from this Palace to local London food banks?

The Leader of the House announced that the Prime Minister will make a statement on the first day back in the new year. Will the Leader of the House ensure that the statement is on the Prime Minister’s renegotiation of the UK’s relationship with the EU and how that is going? I ask because I gather that his EU counterparts are now so heartily sick of his endless whining that he is finally going to be allowed to speak tonight for a couple of minutes during dinner—while the waiters are clearing away the plates, somewhere between the boeuf en croute and the tarte tatin. He is becoming rather like one of those really irritating relatives who pops round for tea every now and again, casually asks if he can doss down on the sofa for a couple of days, drinks all your whisky while telling you where you’ve gone wrong in life and then, when you finally summon up the courage to ask him to leave, says, “Do you mind if I redecorate the bathroom?”

I ask because there seems something utterly illogical about the whole renegotiation process. The Prime Minister seems to think that EU citizens in Poland and Romania sit around trying to work out which is the most generous benefit system in Europe before they decide where to go to live and work. Is that really what Conservative Members think people do? Do they think that this is the kind of conversation they have? “Hey Bogdan, which do you think is better, the UK’s employment and support allowance or Denmark’s flexicurity?” “Well, Pavel, I’m not so sure,

but I certainly prefer the Scandinavian model to the Rhine capitalism system of contributory benefits.” Honestly, all of this is a complete nonsense!

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): You’re right: it is a complete nonsense.

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

Chris Bryant: And he’s Cleverly enough to know it. Every single one of us knows it. EU citizens come here because we speak English, because there are jobs and because this is a great country. The Government are trying to undermine every single element of that, but even the Work and Pensions Secretary, the Home Secretary and the Justice Secretary have told the Prime Minister his proposal will make absolutely no difference to net migration figures. He is barking up the wrong tree.

So why do we not just get on with the referendum now? It is a simple question: in or out? Remain or leave. As Sir John Major said, flirting with an exit would be dangerous for this country. It is one thing to choose to leave—honourable, but in my mind foolish—but it would be quite another to end up leaving by accident. That would be incompetent and dishonourable.

I am absolutely delighted that the Leader of the House has given us the dates for the Easter recess, but could he extend a little bit to the Whitsun recess? I will give him the date of Whitsun: 15 May. Why can he not give us the recess dates for the whole of next year?

As Boxing day approaches, can I just ask for an assurance from the Leader of the House that the draft Hunting Act 2004 (Exempt Hunting) (Amendment) Order 2015, which was withdrawn earlier this year, is not back on the horizon? It is rumoured to be so in the press. Surely, if the Government want to bring back hunting they should be open and honest about it and not try to sneak it back in through the back door. Let us have primary legislation, not secondary legislation.

With the new year coming up, may I suggest the Leader of the House makes a single resolution? Will he please repeat after me? “I will always...” Come on. “I will always...” Oh dear. “I will always guarantee that all major announcements of Government policy are made to this House first and not leaked to the press. And if that guarantee is breached, I will resign immediately.” I thought the Prime Minister treated the House, and you Mr Speaker, with utter contempt last week when, after you said in this House that any announcement on the decision, the process of the decision, or even the process of the non-decision regarding Heathrow, Gatwick and airport capacity should be made in this House, the Prime Minister, that very afternoon, went out and made statements on the television. That was a gross discourtesy to this House and the Leader of the House knows it perfectly well. He should have excoriated the Prime Minister for that and he should do so every time he tries to do it again.

There are 36 written ministerial statements on the Order Paper today, conveniently on the very last day so as to avoid scrutiny. One of them is on a particularly serious matter, the Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust, where the deaths of 1,000 people with disabilities and mental health problems were not properly investigated. The written statement will be made available only late in

[Chris Bryant]

the day today, long after hon. Members will be able to quiz the Government about it. Again, that is a gross discourtesy to this House.

It is Christmas time—well, Advent—but Christmas is not as snug as it might seem in the adverts or carols. Jerusalem does not lie still. Not the hopes but the fears of all the years are met in her tonight and every night. Age UK points out that more than 1 million old people say they go for over a month without speaking to a friend, neighbour or family member over Christmas. Many people will overeat, but thousands of families will have to choose between heating and eating. The real Christmas story is about an unfair tax, a brutal dictator slaughtering innocents, a young unmarried woman giving birth in a stable and a family harshly forced into exile. All these things have been repeated in Syria in the last week alone, yet Christians dare to believe that in that story lies hope for the world. So I wish you, Mr Speaker, a merry, harmonious and hope-filled Christmas, and through you, to the Clerks, the Doorkeepers, the police, the catering staff, the cleaners and all who work with, in and for Parliament, and to our armed forces, our security services and all those who keep a watchful eye while we are merry, I say, in the words of your favourite Dickensian character, Tiny Tim, God bless us one and all.

Chris Grayling: I didn't think he was going to finish!

I would like to update the House on progress made around the provision of security for Members. You know, Mr Speaker, that this has been a matter of considerable concern to Members in recent weeks, and I have been working along with the Chairman of Ways and Means to identify a way forward for Members. I am pleased to inform the House that the security measures available to all Members are to be standardised in a security package. The package will address MPs' personal security offsite, including at constituency offices and homes, and will include consideration of staff safety.

Chris Bryant: Is this a statement?

Chris Grayling: This has been raised as a concern by many Members, and it is important for us to recognise those concerns.

Many colleagues will already have adequate security arrangements, but the standardised package will provide a consistent approach and accelerate the procurement of security items. The Chairman of Ways and Means, as Chair of the Consultative Panel on Parliamentary Security, will write to colleagues today, and the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority will be in touch with Members in the new year with details of how to access the package. I hope this will serve to allay Members' concerns and create a system that is fair, appropriate and flexible.

This has been an eventful year. The Conservatives won the general election. Labour lost the general election. The Liberal Democrats shrank in number and I think have put on invisibility cloaks since then. There has been a slight change in the numbers on the Scottish National Benches. Then, of course, we all came back to Westminster, and you will remember, Mr Speaker, those happy early-morning sprints, as the Labour left and the SNP rushed for the best seats. But of course they do not need to do that any more, because the Labour left has

moved from those seats to the Front Bench and the leadership of the Labour party. We will see in the new year whether the shadow Leader of the House, who has a proud record on these things, decides to do anything about it.

The shadow Leader of the House asked about food waste. Some 1.4 million sausages were sent to landfill in his constituency alone, so if he is talking about food waste and the need to provide extra resources for food banks, I suggest he considers starting slightly closer to home. I think the produce of Welsh farmers is first rate. I cannot imagine why anyone would want to send it to food banks at all, so perhaps he should start closer to home.

I said that the Prime Minister would be here to make a statement, and he will of course address EU issues, but it is also important that Members get to question him about, for example, progress on the Syrian peace talks, which he will be able to update people on after Christmas as well. Of course, he will answer questions about Europe, but he will also be available to address other issues, if necessary.

The shadow Leader of the House talked about jobs. At the end of the year, one of the things the Conservative party can be proudest of is the unemployment figures we saw yesterday. When I was employment Minister, more than 1.5 million people were claiming unemployment benefit and jobseeker's allowance. That number has almost halved in the past four years. More and more people are in work and finding opportunities in this country. The legacy of unemployment we inherited from Labour has been well and truly turned around, and when it comes to Europe, I will take no lessons from the man who, a decade ago, expressed deep distress that Britain was not joining the euro.

The hon. Gentleman talked about leave dates, and I am glad to be able to announce the recess dates. Further recess dates will, of course, be subject to the progress of business, because we as a party believe that it is more important to ensure that the essential business on the basis of which we were elected last May gets through Parliament and can be enacted to make a difference to this country.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned hunting. Let me say yet again—we get this every week—that he must stop believing everything he reads in the papers. When and if this Government have a new measure, we will announce it. He talks about written ministerial statements. I have stood in this Chamber over the last few weeks and received numerous requests for updates before Christmas. I thus make no apology for the fact that today we are providing the House with plenty of updates before Christmas.

Lastly, the hon. Gentleman made a serious point about lonely people this Christmas, which was also made by one of my hon. Friends last week. I hope everyone in this country will think, "Do I have a lonely person next door who I can invite round for a drink over Christmas and bring a bit of light into what would otherwise be a lonely life?" I hope everyone in this country has a very happy and joyful family Christmas.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): In the absence of the Christmas Adjournment debate, which would have allowed colleagues to raise urgent matters, will my

right hon. Friend find time for a debate on c2c timetable changes, which have unfortunately transformed what used to be the happy line back into the misery line once again?

Chris Grayling: On the Adjournment debate, I see in his place the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee, and I would simply say to my hon. Friend that what has happened is quite clearly the will of the House. I understand the situation this time round, but it is the clear will of the House that we should return for at least part of the last sitting day to the traditional format. A number of Members have made representations to me about it, and I hope that we will return to it next time round. It is, of course, a loss that we will not hear the characteristically eloquent contribution from my hon. Friend. He made his point about c2c very well, and I am pretty sure that, with him on the case, if the happy line has turned into the misery line, it will soon be back to being the happy line again.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing next year's business, and I would like to wish you and your staff, Mr Speaker, all the best for a peaceful and merry Christmas. I extend my good wishes to the Deputy Leader of the House, who I hope has a very enjoyable time. I know that my hon. Friends in the Scottish National party would like to wish all members of staff a merry and peaceful Christmas. We all signed early-day motion 895.

[That this House respects the unrivalled professionalism, skill and commitment of all support staff employed on the House of Commons estate; acknowledges that all hon. Members receive invaluable help from the entire workforce, from doorkeepers and police officers to the library team and postal service, from catering staff to staff of the Department of Chamber and Committee Services; thanks them in particular for the generous support and warmth shown to newly-elected hon. Members in 2015; and wishes each of them a restful and peaceful Christmas and the best of everything in 2016.]

We wanted to congratulate the staff on all the work they have done to make sure that new Members here are accommodated and looked after. A merry Christmas once again to all the staff.

I am quite surprised to see so many of my hon. Friends in their places here today, because last night it was the SNP's Christmas party. There were fine renditions of "500 Miles" and "Loch Lomond", so I am indeed impressed to see so many of SNP colleagues at business questions today. In Perth concert hall, "Beauty and the Beast" is our annual pantomime. Looking at the Labour Benches, however, I thought "Sleeping Beauty" might have been more appropriate for them. I always like a good pantomime horse, so what about a pantomime stalking-horse from Labour colleagues as they go forward into next year?

There is growing concern in Scotland about what is happening in the debate over Europe, with UK opinion polls now showing a majority of people throughout the United Kingdom favouring a Brexit and leaving the European Union. Yet we see the Prime Minister flirting with our exit, as John Major has said, trying to renegotiate our membership terms with European leaders who could not care less. He is appearing there like Chewbacca

without the fur, trying to renegotiate our membership of the European Union to European leaders who could not care less and want to see the back of him.

All recent opinion polls show that the Scottish people remain determined to stay within Europe, yet there is a real growing fear that our nation might be taken out of Europe against our will. That is totally unacceptable to us, and it would be the first time ever that a nation in Europe had been taken out of Europe against its will. During the referendum, we were told that a no vote would secure our place in Europe, and that if we dared to vote yes, it would see us dragged out. So I offer the Leader of the House a solution. I am asking for a debate on a quadruple lock. If we are indeed a family of nations within the United Kingdom, one nation of this Union cannot determine the membership rights of every other nation within the UK. We have an opportunity to resolve this to make sure that no nation is taken out of Europe against its will. I ask the Leader of House to agree to that debate next year.

Yesterday's events on fracking were simply appalling. There is an apt and appropriate Scots word for it—"sleekit". It was a sleekit debate—there was no debate at all but a vote on fracking to desecrate the national parks of this country with the frackers. Thank goodness we have the necessary powers to ensure that our country will not be desecrated by the Tories' fracker friends—and that is a very difficult thing to say after a good night out, Mr Speaker.

We are going into the new year and there is still no agreement about the fiscal framework, the engine that will allow the fiscal arrangements in the Scotland Bill to operate and progress properly. We need that agreement, and we need to know how the Government are approaching the matter. I assume that the Leader of the House will not consent to any sort of debate about it, but will he ensure that Treasury Ministers agree to appear before the Scottish Affairs Committee as we look into the whole issue of the fiscal framework? All that he needs to do is go to the Treasury and ensure that the necessary Ministers appear, so that we can put our points to them.

This has been some year, Mr Speaker. The real news of the year has been the emergence of my hon. Friends in the Scottish National party, which won 56 of the 59 seats in Scotland. We now have just one Conservative Member of Parliament, who barely won his seat. Let me say to you, Mr Speaker, that what you will have here is a determined, united opposition—the real opposition to the Tories. The Tories will get away with nothing for as long as SNP Members are sitting here providing that real opposition. We can no longer rely on this disunited, dispirited, forlorn Labour party; it is the Members on these Benches who will provide the opposition.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman is in his characteristically flamboyant form. Whether that is because he had an abstemious night or because he has been tasting quite a lot of single malts I do not know, but I wish him and all his colleagues a very happy festive period, and I hope that they will have a relaxing and enjoyable time.

I must say to the hon. Gentleman, however, that our nation will not be taken out of Europe against its will. His nation and my nation are the same thing. Let me remind him that if he had had his way—and he did not,

[Chris Grayling]

because the Scottish people voted to remain part of the United Kingdom—the Scottish Government would now be at the doors of Westminster with a begging bowl, because the collapse in the oil price would have shot their financial plans to pieces. I think that the Scottish people made an eminently sensible decision, and one that has proved remarkably prescient. Let me say again that our nation will decide our future in the European Union.

The hon. Gentleman said that fracking would desecrate some of our finest areas. That is nonsense. Fracking is a technology that has existed in the oil and gas industry for years. It has been used in oil exploration in the south-east of England, in some very attractive parts of the country, and people did not notice it for decades. I do not believe—and nor is it the Government's intention—that taking advantage of shale gas, which is an important resource for the future, will in any way desecrate the finest areas in the country.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether a Treasury Minister would appear before the Scottish Affairs Committee. Questions to the Secretary of State for Scotland will take place during the first week after the Christmas recess, and he will be able to ask questions then. However, as the Chair of the Committee, he will know that if a Minister is asked to appear before a Select Committee, it would be almost unprecedented for the Minister to say no, so I suggest that he simply extend the invitation.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned Scottish politics. It is true that the Scottish National party had a very good year, but it is also true that the Conservative party came within a whisker of being the second party at Westminster in Scotland. Our goal is to be the second party of Scotland at Holyrood next year, and I wish all my Conservative colleagues well for the campaigns that they will be fighting in the coming months.

Unlike the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Gentleman dropped a “Star Wars” joke into his speech. I must say to him that, although I have yet to see its members in action, MP4 strikes me as being a class above that famous band in the bar in the movie. However, I was a little disappointed that the shadow Leader of the House did not want to tell any “Star Wars” jokes, because during the last few days a number of people have described him to me—very unfairly, in my view—as the Jar Jar Binks of the Labour party.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con): Season's greetings to everyone.

International Women's Day will be on 8 March 2016, and the theme will be “make it happen”. Will the Leader of the House offer us a chance to focus on opportunities to secure more female representation in the House of Commons—and, of course, all the other Parliaments around the world—on that day, and perhaps allow a debate on the subject shortly beforehand, or even on the day itself?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and getting a much better gender balance in this House has been, should be, and will continue to be a priority. I am delighted to see a really good intake of

new women Members of Parliament on both sides of the House. The House is a better place for it, and long may that continue.

On the question of International Women's Day, there was of course a debate on International Men's Day and I think it would be entirely appropriate if there was one on International Women's Day. The man who will help in taking the decision on that is of course sitting opposite, the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), and will be noting this. The most interesting debate might be one between my hon. Friends the Members for Eastleigh (Mims Davies) and for Shipley (Philip Davies)—a combined debate, perhaps.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): On behalf of the Backbench Business Committee and its staff, may I wish everyone in the House a merry Christmas and a happy and healthy 2016?

I thank the Leader of the House for the business statement and for advance notice that we are to be allocated some time on Monday 11 January following consideration of the remaining stages of the Armed Forces Bill. Will that be protected time, as was the case a number of Mondays ago for a Backbench Business Committee debate? We were given three hours' protected time then, and that would be useful again just in case consideration of the remaining stages of the Armed Forces Bill overruns.

May I also apologise to the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess)? The Backbench Business Committee made a decision about the allocation of time for today in good faith, based on the information provided to us at the time. I have to say to the Leader of the House that I have not been inundated with complaints from other Members about the decision we have made. I was aware of the concern of the hon. Gentleman and my colleague from Leicester, Valerie Vaz, but there are two important debates this afternoon that have a lot of support and it was on that basis that the Backbench Business Committee took this decision.

Chris Grayling: I am aware of the issue of protected time for the Backbench Business Committee and I will give consideration to it, but judging by the speed at which the Armed Forces Bill has made progress so far, there is, I think, consensus on both sides of the House about it, so the likelihood is that on that day the Backbench Business Committee will end up with more time, rather than less, for its debates. I will continue to review the issue, however.

May I thank the hon. Gentleman for the work he is doing? The Backbench Business Committee works well. It has provided an interesting range of topics for debate. It is not for Government to interfere, but my one request to it would be that there have always been a number of points in the calendar for debating how we deal with veterans and the armed forces, and I hope the Committee will always look to maintain that as part of its calendar.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I do not wish to be pedantic, but I would just add that I think the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee had the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) in mind; it is in fact her little brother who represents Leicester East.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): The directors general of both the Royal Armouries Museum and the National Army Museum have warned that significant damage will be done to their collections of firearms, leading to the near destruction of thousands of historic guns, if the proposed changes to the EU firearms directive go ahead. May we have a statement from the Government on what they are doing to stop this happening?

Chris Grayling: We will have questions to the Foreign Secretary shortly after our return in January, but it is important, whether in this place or in Brussels, that new legislation is thought through carefully and any possible unintended consequences are planned for in advance, and dealt with and addressed. My hon. Friend has identified an issue. We understand the policy and, of course, we want dangerous firearms to be removed from Europe, but that should not be at the expense of museums. I am sure the Foreign Secretary will take careful note of what he says.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I call Valerie Vaz. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Lady is not seeking to catch my eye at this time. My mistake; I apologise. She is firmly rooted in her seat.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): On 6 December, my constituent, Kabba Kamara, was tragically stabbed to death while on a night out with friends and family in central London. He was a valued member of the community, the father of a three-year-old boy and a carer of his elderly grandmother. He was warm, intelligent and kind. A few weeks ago, I told the House about two other constituents who had lost their lives to youth violence and I asked the Leader of the House if we could have a debate on the matter. He dodged the question and gave no answer. Today, I ask him this again. Will he honour Kabba Kamara by allowing us time to debate serious youth violence?

Chris Grayling: Let us be clear that any knife crime is tragic. As Secretary of State for Justice, I legislated in the last Parliament—together with the former Member for Enfield North, Nick de Bois—significantly to increase and extend the penalties for carrying a knife and to create a presumption of a mandatory jail sentence for anyone caught carrying a knife for a second time, for which, to my mind, there is little excuse. I will give careful consideration to what time can be made available for such a debate, but a lot of the time that is provided in the House is now in the hands of the Backbench Business Committee, and I encourage the hon. Lady also to talk to the Committee about this.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): Given that the Lord Chancellor has announced that he is undertaking a sentencing review, does the Leader of the House think it would be sensible to find time for a general debate on sentencing, so that the Lord Chancellor can get a sense of the wishes of the House before he introduces any legislation?

Chris Grayling: There is certainly a logic in Members having a chance to express their views as the Lord Chancellor prepares his review, and I will talk to him about how that might best be made possible.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): Yesterday, the National Audit Office published its report on the future of acute hospitals, which showed that 181 of the 240 acute hospital trusts have been in deficit since six months into this financial year. In the autumn statement, the Chancellor unveiled extra money for NHS England, but we now know that this is likely to be swallowed up by those deficits. Given that sleight of hand by the Chancellor, will the Leader of the House ensure that either the Chancellor or the Secretary of State for Health comes to the House to explain how the Government are going to ensure that our hospitals do not close?

Chris Grayling: The reason that health service finances are under pressure is that the health service is doing more today than it has ever done before. It is treating more patients, employing more people and providing more treatment options. It is right and proper that we as a Government should continue to try to do everything we can, which is why we have provided more money for the national health service and will continue to do so. The Health Secretary will be here to answer questions on the day we return, and the hon. Lady will have the opportunity to raise her concerns again then. We take these issues very seriously, but it is because the NHS is doing more that it is facing pressures.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate in the new year to discuss the cherished relationship between the United Kingdom and the other 15 realms of which Her Majesty the Queen is Head of State? Does he share my concern that the Government of Barbados are intending to declare the country a republic without even giving the people of Barbados the right to have a referendum and make their own choice?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes his point with customary eloquence. I would always hope and expect that constitutional change in a Commonwealth country would involve giving its people the opportunity to express a view. I commend my hon. Friend on the work that he does on Commonwealth matters. We derive enormous strength from our ties with the Commonwealth, which provide a real opportunity not only for cultural exchange but for economic development and working together.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): May we have a debate on the UK Border Agency in the new year? This affects one of my constituents in particular, community councillor Michael Affonso. He has lived in the UK for 31 years and is married to a British national, but he is still struggling to achieve permanent residency and the Home Office seems reluctant to engage with his case. Also, Mr Speaker, from west Wales, may I wish you and everyone else *nadolig llawen a blwyddyn newydd dda*?

Chris Grayling: We will see whether the Speaker can respond in kind. I don't think I would be able to! The hon. Gentleman is clearly pursuing his constituency case assiduously. It is difficult for me in this position to comment on the specifics, but I will make sure that his concerns are passed on to the Home Secretary.

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): Earlier this week, the European Commission imposed on fishermen in the south-west a draconian and premature ban on the catching of sea bass. May we have either a policy statement, as used to happen when a fisheries Minister came back from Europe, or a debate in the new year to examine the implications of the Fisheries Council decision on the UK fishing industry? For years we used to have debates after the event and we used to have a statement from the fisheries Minister in the Chamber so that he could be questioned. Could we please have that?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I will discuss this with the fisheries Minister and make sure that her concerns are raised. We have a difficult balance to find; we have a duty to try to ensure that we protect fish stocks, but I do understand the implications of change for communities such as hers. I will make sure that the fisheries Minister gets in touch with her and address her concerns as soon as possible.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House might know that not only is Christmas known for over-indulgence in many ways, but it is also a time when many of our constituents get out to have a wonderful walk over the holiday, often on Boxing day. He will know that many Members believe that children learn best outside the classroom, so may we have an early debate when we get back on the value of out-of-school learning? Will he and other Members join those Members of Parliament who have raised £5,000 in their constituencies to make sure that 10 schools get out into the countryside? If that involves a partnership with the John Clare Trust, we would be happy to help.

Chris Grayling: I would be delighted to find out a bit more about what the hon. Gentleman is doing. I absolutely agree with him about the need to get all of us, our families and our constituents out exercising and taking advantage of some of our beautiful countryside over the coming weeks. That is a necessity after a good Christmas dinner, and he makes an important point. What is also important is something I sought to change in the last Parliament: the unnecessary health and safety rules that put schools off taking young people out on visits. Those need to be eased, so that there is a balance between appropriate safeguards and common sense.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): First, may I extend my best wishes to everybody for Christmas, particularly the team behind the Select Committee on Education? With Christmas in mind, can we spare a thought for the turkey as it is prepared for the oven and completely stuffed? Does the Leader of the House agree that we should have a debate on the consequences of leaving the European Union after a referendum?

Chris Grayling: That was an interesting segue. Many turkeys will be gracing our tables at Christmas time, possibly with pigs in blankets, except in the Rhondda, where the sausages are all thrown away. The consequences of leaving the European Union will be debated and

discussed in the coming months, strong views will be articulated on both sides and then the people of this country will decide.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The Leader of the House will be aware that one of our most eminent conservationists, Chris Patten, talked earlier this week of the 75% decline in butterfly species, saying that it was a final warning to the UK. May we have a debate on the decline in species in this country and the need to take urgent action to meet our Aichi targets?

Chris Grayling: I ought to declare a particular interest in this subject, as not only is the grayling a species of fish, but it is a species of brown butterfly. Like the hon. Gentleman, I would not wish butterflies to disappear from our country, and I share the concerns that he has raised. It is important that in this country we have a balanced policy that ensures that we protect our countryside and protect habitats, as well as providing space for agriculture. The points he makes are well made and I will make sure that they are communicated to the relevant Secretary of State, whom I am sure shares the views that he and I both do.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): As co-chair of the all-party group on mountaineering, which we think is the apex of all-party groups, I welcome the sports strategy presented by the Government today, which goes beyond traditional sport to put further focus on outdoor recreations, such as walking, cycling and mountain sports. Will my right hon. Friend consider holding a further debate to highlight the benefits of outdoor recreation, in terms of physical health, mental wellbeing and benefits to the rural economy?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. The Government's sports strategy sets an appropriate path for the future. Engaging younger children in sport is very important. I pay tribute to the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch) for the work that she has done in assembling the sports strategy. I also wish her all the very best for the next few weeks. As we all know, she is expecting her first child in the new year. We wish her a successful birth and a happy time with her newly born child.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I extend my good wishes and hope that you, Mr Speaker, all the Deputy Speakers, everyone who works in the House and all MPs have a very merry Christmas and a happy new year.

During the Smith commission process, the Scottish Government argued in favour of devolving employment law, including trade union legislation. That was blocked by both the Government and the Labour party. Given that one of the two has had an epiphany and now wishes for the Scottish Parliament to have power over trade union legislation, may we have a debate on further devolution beyond the Scotland Bill?

Chris Grayling: May I simply remind the hon. Lady that there were extensive negotiations and discussions around the Smith commission? Lord Smith himself has said that we fulfilled the terms of the Smith commission. To be honest, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish

Administration would do well to concentrate on using the powers that we are giving them rather than asking for more. So far, there is little evidence that, when we give them powers, they make use of them.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): May we have a debate in Government time on the airport commission's report, particularly in the light of the shambolic performance last week with the non-decision and the manner of its non-announcement to this House, to discuss the unanimous conclusions of the five commissioners that Heathrow was the right site for a new runway? Can the terms of that debate be set widely enough to include consideration of the extraordinary proposition from Gatwick that it can put five times as many passengers up the Brighton main line, particularly in the light of Southern Rail's performance in the past week?

Let me repeat a tweet from my constituent Jonathan Freeman, managing director of a Prince of Wales charity, who was travelling to work. He wrote:

"Really @SouthernRailUK?!Again?!Are you on some sort of sponsored screw up?"

We realise how desperate the situation is, when he says:

"CrispinBluntMP-you are our only hope!"

Mr Speaker: The situation was clearly deeply wretched. I think we are in danger of getting into the detail of the policy. As reference was made earlier to the fact that there was no statement on the day in question—on the Thursday—I should just say that it was a very regrettable state of affairs. The Secretary of State did deliver a statement on the Monday, and there can be no doubt that a Minister was going to have to appear at that Dispatch Box either to deliver a statement or to respond to an urgent question, as the Leader of the House knows. In future, rather than delivering the statement belatedly when it was going to have to be delivered, it should be delivered on time, as courtesy to the House of Commons requires.

Chris Grayling: Mr Speaker, you know that I always endeavour to ensure that announcements are made to the House. No public statements have been made by the Government about the Strathclyde review, which has now been published, and which is the subject of a statement in the Lords. There will also be a statement on it in this House, which I will deliver shortly. However, I must make the point that the Government have to deal with market sensitive information. None the less, I have noted the comments.

The phrase, "Our only hope is Crispin Blunt" is one that I have never heard before in this House. How often it is heard in future I await with interest to see. My hon. Friend makes an important point about the Brighton main line. At a time when there is discussion about reopening the line from the south coast to London via Uckfield, the truth is that the Brighton main line is already heavily congested, and those who have constituencies in and around the area will need to be persuaded about that aspiration substantially to increase the number of passengers on it.

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): To pick up on the previous question, the service that has been provided by Southern trains with Network Rail to hundreds of thousands of commuters in my constituency in London

and the south-east has been an appalling joke—an absolute joke. Southern has admitted that it does not even have enough drivers or enough decent trains, which are basic requirements to provide a service. Will the Leader of the House get the Transport Secretary here to give a statement or at least to write to both the hon. Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) and me explaining what he is going to do to get those companies to sort their act out? They have broken promise after promise. Enough is enough.

Chris Grayling: I understand the pressures on the line that passes through the hon. Gentleman's constituency. Those are affected by the massive investment taking place at London Bridge, which will create a much better infrastructure for the future, as well as the completion of the Thameslink service on what is now the integrated franchise. I take note of the comments of the hon. Gentleman and of my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt) and I will make sure that the Transport Secretary is aware of them. However, in defence of at least part of the Southern service, at present on the line via Epsom the service seems to be working reasonably well.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): My constituents value the right to compensation for certain flight delays of more than three hours. Unfortunately, there is one airline in particular that does not seem to abide by this—Etihad Airways, which has denied my constituent, Mr Hill, compensation for an extremely long delay caused by a connecting flight. Both flights were on Etihad Airways. May we have a debate about airlines fulfilling their obligations under European regulation EC261?

Chris Grayling: That is a legal requirement and any airline that fails to fulfil its duty under the law is subject to legal action. Although it would not be appropriate for us in this House to offer legal advice in such a situation, there are channels, such as the small claims court, available to somebody who wishes to pursue a legal claim against any organisation.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): BT's handling of broadband infrastructure leaves a lot to be desired, and businesses in my constituency constantly complain about the service they receive. Even my constituency office has a problem. We still have no broadband and no phone connection nine weeks after moving into a brand-new building. Given BT's constant failure to deliver in a timely fashion the broadband infrastructure this country so badly needs, may we have a debate on whether it is time to consider separating the infrastructure element and retail element of that badly failing inefficient company?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady makes her point eloquently. If she wants to raise the specific concern with the Department and ask it to put pressure on BT about that, and if she writes to me with the details, I will make sure that that receives attention. I also will make sure that the points she makes are passed on to the Business Department.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Merry Christmas, Mr Speaker.

[*Bob Blackman*]

In previous years there has always been a statement or a debate in the House on the police grant. I note on today's Order Paper that there will be a written statement. Given that we have good news to talk about on the police grant, and that the Mayor of London announced today that the police funding will now ensure at least one police constable and one police community support officer for every ward across London, surely we should have a debate so that we can highlight the proposal from the Opposition to reduce the police grant by 10%?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is a sign of the way in which we have turned the economy of this country around that we have been able to take the kind of decisions that were taken in the spending review to protect police budgets. Although a written statement today sets out what is happening on that, the matter will return to the House in the new year for approval, and my hon. Friend will have the opportunity to make the important points he makes and to put the Opposition to shame over their record.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I join the festive compliments, Mr Speaker, by wishing you Nollaig Shona duit, a Cheann Comhairle!

Will the Leader of the House make arrangements for us to have a debate in Government time on Saudi Arabia—roles, relationships and rights, given that the Government seem to be giving ever more status and influence to that state, and given that serious questions are being raised about whether the UK is in breach of the arms trade treaty? Many of us are concerned that this is a wolf that is increasingly being dressed up in sheepdog's clothing.

Chris Grayling: I say first to the hon. Gentleman that when one wishes people a happy and peaceful Christmas, one particularly stresses the "peaceful" part when wishing it to people in Northern Ireland. It is very much my hope that 2016 will prove to be a productive and peaceful year for Northern Ireland. With regard to Saudi Arabia, we have long had ties with Saudi Arabia. We always raise matters related to human rights with the Saudi Government when the opportunity arises—I have done so myself—but we also have important treaty relationships with that country. If the hon. Gentleman has concerns, he will have the opportunity in the new year to raise them. The Foreign Secretary will be here shortly after the return in January. Saudi Arabia is a nation with which we have a long-standing partnership.

Oliver Colville (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. On Monday the all-party group for excellence in the built environment, which I chair, held our last evidence session on the quality of design for new housing developments. When we publish our report, which we expect will be in the spring, may we please have a debate in Government time on ensuring that we are not building the slums of the future and that we are protecting those people who are investing in new properties?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I suspect that most of us, as constituency MPs,

are contacted from time to time by constituents who have been badly let down when buying a new home. I commend him for the important work he is doing in that area. When his guidance is published, I trust that it will recommend the provision of hedgehog super-highways in all future developments.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): I draw the House's attention to the excellent news that the Home Secretary has agreed to withdraw from legal action and will now lift the ban on the International Sikh Youth Federation, which is a very welcome Christmas present for the Sikh community. Will the Leader of the House urge her to lay before Parliament the necessary order as soon as possible so that it can be voted through speedily by both Houses?

Chris Grayling: I will certainly do that.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): The Leader of the House will be aware of the Government's consultation on proposals to regulate all after-school training environments used for six hours or more in any one week, which would cover thousands of faith and non-faith groups, such as scouts, summer camps and church youth groups, and require them to register with the Government and to be available for Ofsted inspections. Given that the consultation, which is already short, falls over the busy Christmas period, and therefore offends the Government's own published good practice and consultation principles, will he use his influence to seek an extension of the 11 January deadline?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend, as always, makes an important point. She has been a great champion for these issues. I will ensure today that my office passes her request on to the office of the Secretary of State for Education.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I have been made aware that an economic impact assessment was published this week by the fisheries organisation in my constituency, indicating that there will be up to 30 job losses as a consequence of the Ministry of Defence unilaterally taking action to close fishing grounds between the mainland and the island of Raasay. May we have a debate on the MOD's powers, particularly the need for it to conduct an economic impact assessment and recognise the wider community interest as well as the national security interest in the actions it takes?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely understand the hon. Gentleman's point. I am not aware of the details of the situation. Given that we will not have Defence questions for some time after we return in January, I will ensure that his concerns are passed to the Ministry of Defence today and try to get an earlier response for him.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): Merry Christmas, Mr Speaker.

May we have a debate on planning law so that we can discuss rejected applications for fast food takeaways in very close proximity to schools not having a right of appeal? That would have assisted local residents of Shirley in my constituency in their opposition to a KFC just yards from the entrance to a primary school.

Chris Grayling: That is a customary example of the way in which my hon. Friend has campaigned on behalf of his constituents since his election earlier this year, and I commend him for that. He makes an important point. Work is ongoing to try to make our planning system as effective and efficient as possible. Those concerns will undoubtedly be noted, as the Minister for Housing and Planning is sitting beside me on the Front Bench, and I am sure that it will be given due consideration.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): While we leave this place to celebrate the holidays, we must spare a thought for the hundreds of thousands of children who qualify for free school meals and who, from next week, will not have their main hot meal each day. May we have an urgent debate in Government time to discuss the impact on their lives, their health and their long-term aspirations?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady makes an important point. I am proud that since we took power in 2010 there has been a fall of nearly 700,000 in the number of workless households. Of course, the best way we have available to us to ease poverty and to help children is to get their families working and moving up the income scale, and that is a priority for us.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): As you know, Mr Speaker, I was appalled earlier this morning by the announcement by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs that we are no longer vaccinating badgers. May we therefore have a very long debate about the performance of DEFRA? Given that it is a charitable and generous time of year, perhaps my right hon. Friend should not be too generous, because I do not think the debate would be very complimentary?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend, who has been a champion of the farming community, knows full well the impact that bovine TB can have on the farming community and that it is spread by badgers. That is one of the reasons the difficult decisions that we have taken in the past two or three years have been necessary. Another consequence of the growth of the badger population is the impact on the hedgehog population, which is partly why my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colville) has been doing such sterling work in campaigning to try to raise awareness of the plight of the hedgehog.

Jim Fitzpatrick (Poplar and Limehouse) (Lab): Next year, Seafarers UK, one of the leading, if not the leading, maritime charities in the United Kingdom will be getting ready to celebrate its centenary in 2017. May I prevail on the good offices of the Leader of the House to ask whether the Cabinet Office and/or the Department for Transport will be able to help this excellent charity prepare for this historic centenary?

Chris Grayling: I will certainly pass that request on. I think we should celebrate this. We have been a maritime nation for centuries. I would not usually pay tribute to work done by a Labour Government, but I do think that the efforts put into rebuilding the British flag merchant fleet by the former Deputy Prime Minister was a real benefit to this country.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): In the third quarter of this year, turnover of small businesses in my constituency had increased by 20% over the previous year—well ahead of the national average. May we have a debate on the importance of small businesses not just to our national economy but to the future of the northern powerhouse?

Chris Grayling: I thank all the Members—I know my hon. Friend was one of them—who took part in events around small business Saturday. I know his constituency well, and I know what an important role small business plays in the area that he represents. I pay tribute to him for the work he does in championing these efforts and supporting members of his local business community; I have no doubt they will express gratitude to him for doing so.

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): I have been contacted by Ballantine Castings of Bo'ness, a local foundry in my constituency, to highlight its concerns about the severe hike in the energy costs it is facing—some 17% year on year. Can a statement be made about the progress of discussions with the European Commission in relation to further compensation for heavy industries such as the iron and steel industry?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. He knows that this is a matter of ongoing concern for the Government. The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change will be here on the Thursday after we return. I will make sure that her office is aware of his concern so that if he would like to raise it then, she will be better prepared to answer him.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): In the previous session of business questions I raised with my right hon. Friend the subject of the WASPI—Women Against State Pension Inequality—campaign and the problems with the pension equalisation measures. I am glad to say that the Backbench Business Committee has granted a debate in the first week back. The campaign petition by WASPI has now exceeded 70,000 signatures, while my own podcast has now been listened to over 141,000 times. Will he make sure that the Secretary of State himself comes to respond to that debate, particularly given the comment by the former Minister for Pensions, Steve Webb, that the Government got it wrong?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend is clearly making very effective use of social media in his campaigning, and I commend him for that. I will make sure that his request is passed on to the Secretary of State.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The *Manchester Evening News* recently ran a piece highlighting premises in Greater Manchester with poor food hygiene ratings, and featured the Red Lion in Denton. Unfortunately for the *Manchester Evening News*, the Red Lion is under new ownership. The editor has apologised to the proprietors, but they tell me that it got the information from the gov.uk website. May we have a debate in Government time on how up to date the information on Government websites is, and whether, when information is incorrect, it can be corrected promptly?

Chris Grayling: Most importantly, before any newspaper publishes a list of people to name and shame them, it is

[Chris Grayling]

good practice to telephone them first to put it to them. If the newspaper had done that, it would have been able to be corrected. I always want and expect gov.uk to be as up to date as possible, but tracking every change of management in an organisation that has had a poor report would be impossible. It is good journalistic practice to phone up and ask for a comment and then discover that the change has happened.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): The number of off-licences in my constituency has led to a rise in antisocial behaviour and street drinking. May we have a debate on what it means to be a socially responsible business in the 21st century and the cumulative impact of businesses that do not take their social responsibilities seriously?

Chris Grayling: Of course, local authorities have extensive powers, which are not always used, to deal with problem premises. However, if local planning rules are not working, the whole Department for Communities and Local Government team are now sitting on the Front Bench and I am sure they would be very happy to look at specific issues, to see whether the situation can be improved.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): If the Leader of the House is going to get Southern, Network Rail and the Transport Secretary to write to Members on the subject of abysmal train services, may I add my name to the list of people who would like to receive those letters?

Has the Leader of the House had a request from either the Home Office or the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to debate the Disclosure and Barring Service? I am not sure whether he is aware that the DBS has 70,000 outstanding cases at present, which is having a huge impact on people's ability to take up jobs.

Chris Grayling: This issue has come up in some of my constituency cases in the past. I have not had any such cases recently, but it is always a matter of concern to us. We do not want people not to get jobs because the appropriate certification has not come through. I will make sure that the Home Secretary is aware of the concerns raised by the right hon. Gentleman.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Happy Christmas, Mr Speaker. May we have a debate on the access to elected office fund, which supports disabled candidates in elections, given the Government's decision to cut funding?

Chris Grayling: Of course, we have regular Electoral Commission questions—we have just had them—so the hon. Lady has an opportunity to raise such issues. We continue to try to provide support where we can for things that require it. In recent years, however, we have had to take some difficult decisions in order to make sure that we have stable public finances.

Roger Mullin (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Will the Leader of the House arrange for an early

statement in the new year about progress towards the publication of the Chilcot report?

Chris Grayling: Sadly, that is not a matter for Government; otherwise, it would have been published a long time ago. It is entirely in the hands of Sir John, who has set out a timetable to publish the report next year. The Government, the Conservatives and, frankly, the whole House have been very clear that we want the report to be published as quickly as possible. There is absolutely no benefit or incentive for the Government to delay publication, because we were not in power at the time of the events it covers. It is in all our interests that the report is published quickly, and I hope Sir John will be able to do so as soon as possible in the new year.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): We all agree on the importance of the NHS and its staff, yet my constituent Sharmila Chowdhury faces Christmas jobless because, as a radiographer at Ealing hospital, she exposed the malpractice of consultants taking extra financial inducements. May we have a debate on whistleblowers in the NHS? According to the House of Commons Library, there has not been such a debate since 2009, despite the Francis review. Can the Leader of the House not be a Scrooge and at least grant us a debate or, if not, a statement?

Chris Grayling: What I can offer the hon. Lady is the Health Secretary on the first day back. She makes an important point. It is not our Government's policy to see whistleblowers penalised. Obviously, I do not know all the details of the case she raises, but if she writes to the Secretary of State or to me, I will make sure he has the information available to him before he comes to the House on the first day back.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Merry Christmas to you and yours, Mr Speaker. I have received a letter from a constituent—a Mr J. Marley—who confirms that a Government Minister is to receive a visit from three spirits on Christmas eve. Will the Government make a statement in the new year, having confirmed a new and munificent attitude to life, to address the many iniquitous parts of our current social security system, or are the hopes and aspirations of many merely a humbug?

Chris Grayling: If anyone received a visit from the three spirits of Christmas these days, the spirit of Christmas past would show them a country in trouble, in debt and with high unemployment, the spirit of Christmas present would show them a country moving forward, with falling unemployment and a falling deficit, and the spirit of Christmas future would show them a high-tech, exciting country, with opportunities for all.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I warmly endorse the Leader of the House's tributes to the staff of this place. Talking about them, may we have a debate on staffing in Parliament to give the Government an opportunity to explain why, at the same time as they are allowing the number and cost of special advisers to skyrocket unchecked, they are reducing by almost 20% the amount of Short money support given to opposition parties?

Chris Grayling: This Government spend more right now and will carry on spending more on Short money than on special advisers.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I have been contacted by a constituent, Stephen from Newmilns, who thinks Scottish National party Members are doing a great job of providing a real opposition to the Tory Government and wants us to keep asking tough questions. He would like a statement on how we can afford to fund bombs for Syria and nuclear weapons while people in this country have to use food banks. I would add that we do not want to hear any waffle about their use in Germany. How can we afford such things in this country while people are going to food banks?

Chris Grayling: Let me tell the hon. Gentleman that we are affording military support to people who, last year, rescued Yazidi refugees from Mount Sinjar. We are funding support to try to rescue a civilian population who have been through a trauma unlike any experienced almost anywhere on the planet in the past 50 years. The job or goal of our forces in Syria and Iraq is to restore peace to people wandering around the region desperately looking for a home, because we need them to be able to go back to their own homes.

Local Government Finance

11.41 am

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): I believe that our gloriously diverse country will prosper more if the districts, counties, towns and cities that make it up have more power. If we accept that, it follows that we must believe councils to be capable of exercising that power.

Over the past five years, councils have shown great responsibility. Given that local authorities account for a quarter of public spending, it was always going to be the case that they would have to carry their share of the burden of reducing the largest deficit in peacetime history. Not only have they done so, but public satisfaction with their services has been maintained or has improved. I especially want to thank the staff of councils most deeply involved with the recent floods: their commitment to their residents is exemplary. However, I cannot credit councils with acumen and then deny them candour. More savings need to be made as we finish the job of eliminating the remaining deficit.

I listened carefully to councils as I prepared this settlement. Councils asked for the right to spend locally what they raise locally; for help with adult social care costs; for expenditure savings that recognise what has already been achieved by local government; for recognition of the higher costs of providing services to sparsely populated rural areas; for encouragement for cost-saving innovation; for rewards for new homes; for complete transparency with regard to resource allocation; and for a move beyond one-year-at-a-time budgeting. As I will explain, this provisional settlement meets all those objectives.

Local government will be transformed by localism. In 2010, councils were 80%-dependent on central Government grants. By 2020, they will be 100%-funded by council tax, business rates and other local revenues. The retention of 100% of business rates will forge the necessary link between local business success and local civic success. To support that further, we will increase the local growth fund to £12 billion by 2021. This is a Conservative-led revolution, transforming over-centralised Britain into one of the most decentralised countries in the world. Authorities will also be able to spend 100% of capital receipts from asset sales to fund cost-saving reforms. We will publish guidance for local authorities on that matter.

The spending review set out that, based on the forecasts of the Office for Budget Responsibility, overall local government spending would be slightly higher in 2019-20 than in 2015-16. In this settlement, the core spending power for councils will also remain virtually unchanged at £44.5 billion in 2015-16 and £44.3 billion in 2019-20. In real terms, that requires savings of about 6.7% over the spending review period, compared with the 14% required at the beginning of the spending review period in 2010.

The unanimous view across local government is that the biggest cost pressure is care for our growing elderly population. In September, the county councils and the Local Government Association wrote to me, estimating that those costs would require an additional £2.9 billion by 2019-20. Some local government leaders proposed an innovation: a social care council tax precept of 2% a year, guaranteed to be spent on social care. That is

[Greg Clark]

equivalent to £23 per year on an average band D home. In the spending review, the Chancellor and I agreed, and we will ensure that the precept is transparently itemised on residents' bills.

However, we will go further. We know that for some councils, the precept will not raise enough to meet the growing costs, so we have announced a fund of £1.5 billion a year to support councils in working with their local NHS to address the pressures on care. Today, I allocate that £1.5 billion to complement the new precept, so that more goes to councils that raise least from the precept. We recognise in the distribution of resources the particular needs of councils with social care responsibilities.

Local government has asked for £2.9 billion by 2020 as a contribution to the costs of social care. In this settlement, we make up to £3.5 billion available by that year, distributed fairly towards local authorities with social care responsibilities. I applaud the maturity of local government as a whole in telling me that it accepts that this prioritisation implies that, over the next few years, those councils with social care responsibilities should have relatively more resources than those councils which do not have them. Some district councils—those with low council tax bases or those which serve the most rural areas—face particular pressures, so while this settlement maintains the core referendum threshold at 2%, the threshold for the lowest cost district councils will be £5 a year, so that they are not punished for being economical while those who have spent more in the past are allowed to spend more now.

I will increase support for the most sparsely populated rural areas by more than quadrupling the rural services delivery grant from £15.5 million this year to £65 million in 2019-2020, by which time, when 100% business rate retention has been achieved, we will be able to consider what further correction is due. I will also protect, in real terms, the £30 million funding for lead local flood authorities, and the £2 million for those authorities to act as statutory consultees in planning sustainable drainage systems.

The new homes bonus provides valuable funding and, as importantly, encourages house building. I can announce today that I will extend the new homes bonus indefinitely, but with some changes on which I am consulting. All savings will be retained by local government to contribute towards social care.

In a world in which only a small proportion of councils' funding will come from central Government grant, we require transparency on the components of the financial resources available to councils. I have noted the criticism from the Public Accounts Committee and the Communities and Local Government Committee of previous inclusions of the existing better care fund and the public health grant in councils' spending power. I will follow their advice and, henceforth, report only resources over which councils have discretion.

In addition, in all the figures in the settlement, I have chosen to understate the maximum resources available to councils. For example, in line with the OBR, I assume that councils will increase council tax in line with inflation, rather than the referendum threshold of 2%. I expect that, as previously, councils will increase bills by less than their full entitlement. Had I assumed

the maximum figure, more than a quarter of a billion pounds extra in total resources would have been recorded as being available to councils.

The main reason councils keep liquid reserves is as a buffer against unpredictable year-to-year budgets. Local government has consistently told me, and for generations told my predecessors, that greater certainty about their income over the medium term would allow local authorities to organise more efficiently and strategically, and to put some of those safety-net reserves to more productive use.

Therefore, in this settlement, I do something that local leaders have yearned for. For the first time ever, I offer a guaranteed budget to every council that desires one and can demonstrate efficiency savings, for next year, and every year of this Parliament—a four-year budget to give certainty and confidence. It is a settlement that maintains the financial resources available to councils in 2020 at around the same level as they are today, while giving incentives for local government to make significant savings, and it directs up to £3.5 billion to care for our elderly citizens. This historic settlement does what campaigners for devolution thought they would never live to see: local councils answerable to local people, rather than to central Government, and I commend it to the House.

11.50 am

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth) (Lab): I am grateful for advance notice of the statement. That is particularly welcome given that the Secretary of State's predecessor rarely turned up in person on these occasions, and when he did it was often with a snarl, rather than with the Secretary of State's customary smile.

Labour Members join the Secretary of State in rightly paying tribute to local councils and all their staff. The statement contains a number of details that look welcome, and we shall return to them in due course. Sadly, however, the central message is the same as always: cuts, cuts and more cuts.

The Secretary of State admits to a cash decrease of £200 million between now and 2019-20, but he forgets to say that the additional spending pressures amount to at least £6.3 billion, according to the Local Government Association. That is the scale of the cuts that will be inflicted on our communities by this settlement. What calculation has he made of the additional cost to local government caused by inflation? What about demographic change, which means that more elderly people need support than ever before? What about the additional statutory duties that he is giving to local government? How will all that be paid for?

This settlement massively reduces the central Government grant to local government. Does the Secretary of State agree with the House of Commons Library, which has calculated that even if the central Government grant was maintained at its current level throughout this Parliament, the Government would still run an overall surplus on the revenue account of more than £4 billion a year in 2019-2020? Is it not the truth that these cuts are a political choice made in No. 11, rather than an economic necessity?

Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with his Conservative colleague, Lord Porter, chair of the LGA, who said:

“It is wrong that the services our local communities rely on will face deeper cuts than the rest of the public sector yet again and for local taxpayers to be left to pick up the bill for new government policies without any additional funding. Even if councils stopped filling in potholes, maintaining parks, closed all children’s centres, libraries, museums, leisure centres and turned off every street light, they will not have saved enough money to plug the financial black hole they face by 2020.”?

The Government promised not to cut the budget for the NHS, but then they delegated public health functions to councils. Now they have cut that budget. Does the Secretary of State think that anyone is fooled when the Government act in such a way? Is it not a false economy to cut council funding for adult social care and public health? What is his estimate of the impact of those local government cuts on the NHS? Is it not obvious that if there is less care in the community and preventive health action by councils, there will inevitably be more pressure on more expensive acute provision within the NHS? Is that not the worst kind of Osbornomics? It is short-termist and tactical, rather than strategic and long term.

Does the Secretary of State accept that some of the councils facing the greatest needs in social care have the least ability to raise extra funds by levying the 2% precept? What about the northern powerhouse? Does he agree that cuts to northern local councils amount to tens of millions of pounds more than the relatively small sums that constitute the so-called powerhouse? No wonder the latest economic indicators show the north falling further behind.

The Minister mentioned council reserves, as if he thinks that councils are underspending on the revenue account and thereby building them up. What is his estimate of the quantity of the reserves earmarked by the Government for the Government’s specific objectives? What is his estimate of the amount of the reserves that are in schools’ accounts, and therefore inaccessible to councils? In any event, is it not the case that the reserves are often built up from asset sales and should not generally be used to prop up day-to-day spending?

The Secretary of State mentioned business rates. It is right that the money should be directed into town hall budgets—we welcome that—but the question he has failed to answer is this: how will business rates be distributed? Given that that income is notoriously uneven as between one council and another, how does he intend to make an equitable distribution of those funds? Does he accept the wise words of the Institute for Fiscal Studies:

“If you’re somewhere like Westminster, it’s easier to win from this system than if you’re somewhere like Wolverhampton”?

What estimate has he made of the distributional impact of the settlement on different councils? Does it maintain the trend of the past five years, when poorer urban councils lost out relative to more prosperous areas? Does some of his announcement not make the situation worse? The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has said that local authorities in deprived areas have seen cuts of £220 a head while more affluent areas have seen cuts of £40 a head.

Will the Secretary of State agree to look once more at the formula by which the Government distribute support to local government? He was not the author of the formula, but will he now re-examine the patent injustice in the way in which the money is distributed?

Finally, the country needs a new political and democratic settlement. A renaissance of democratic, relatively fiscally autonomous and locally accountable councils needs to be at the heart of a new settlement. The recent floods showed councils and their employees at their best. We welcome any additional funding to help with flooding, and we also welcome the multi-year funding that the right hon. Gentleman talked about—the Opposition proposed it in the Cities and Local Devolution Bill but the Government voted against it. Will he come back to the House with more details as soon as possible?

The Secretary of State pays lip service to local government renaissance, but does not the announcement, with top line cuts of billions of pounds invariably falling on the poorest areas, reveal that the Treasury’s heavy hand means that the Government are unlikely to deliver the renaissance that is so necessary for our country?

Greg Clark: In the spirit of Christmas, I will be charitable to the hon. Gentleman, who understandably wrote his response before hearing the statement. Far from its being a tactical settlement—that is how he put it—there could be nothing more strategic than a settlement that, for the first time ever, gives what local council leaders have long called for: the certainty of a four-year funding settlement, previously denied them, which gives them the chance to manage their affairs in exactly the way they want.

As the hon. Gentleman might have expected from our previous exchanges, during the past few months I have spent a lot of time with local government leaders, listening to them talk about the most important pressures on them and the most important concerns that they would like to see reflected. They communicated very clearly that funding adult social care was the major priority for all kinds of councils, and in this settlement we deliver the extra resources that we promised. The distribution among the authorities reflects that—something I would have thought he would give us credit for.

On the overall settlement, few authorities would even a few months ago have expected the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to be able to announce, in effect, a flat cash settlement for local government for the whole of the spending review period.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned reserves. The fact is that local council reserves have increased over the past five years from £13 billion to more than £22.5 billion—a 71% increase. We do not assume in the settlement that local councils will make use of them, but they have the opportunity to do so because of the four-year settlement we have granted them.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the head of the LGA. I have met all the leading groups in the LGA, including his Labour colleagues. Because we are the biggest party in local government the hon. Gentleman suggests that the LGA is Conservative-controlled, but I have met local government leaders of all sorts. Lord Porter regards our discussions as fruitful and thinks that this is a fair financial settlement for all types of council and addresses the concerns they have put to me during the past few years.

Let me just refer to the expectations and the advice we received from those on the Labour Front Bench. When we had the financial statement last year, the

[Greg Clark]

previous shadow Secretary of State said that what councils needed was help with longer-term funding settlements so they could plan to protect services, and more devolution of power so they could work with other public services locally to get the most out of every pound of public funding, and that nowhere was that needed more than in social care. That is exactly what we deliver in this spending review settlement: prioritising social care, exactly what local government asked for; multi-year settlements, for which local government campaigned for many years; and the devolution of power to councils through the localisation of income, with councils responsible to electors and not to Whitehall.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): May I, too, wish you, Mr Speaker, and other Members a happy Christmas? I wish I could wish a happy Christmas to those on the Opposition Front Bench, but given that they look as flat as a soufflé that has gone off, we need not bother.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend on delivering what is, frankly, the most imaginative local government settlement I have heard in my time in the House, including those that I had to deliver myself. He has listened to local government. I particularly welcome the reflection he has made on the importance, stressed by the London Borough of Bromley and others, of the pressures on adult social care. Will he ensure that the same can-do attitude, which my local authority and all the people he talked to in the LGA have, is reflected in the health sector? Where we have co-terminosity with clinical commissioning groups, we really need the drive of local government, and the accountability of local government, to take those partnerships forward.

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and characteristically self-effacing. During his time as a Minister in the Department, he made an enormous contribution to reforming and driving forward decentralisation.

I can confirm that part of the point of the money we have secured for the better care fund is that local authorities and the NHS work closely together, and to recognise that our elderly people, whether they are cared for in hospital, care homes or at home, are our joint responsibility. This provides the opportunity for councils to work together in the interests of our growing elderly population.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): To show there is some charity, at least on the Labour Benches, I welcome what the Secretary of State says about the ending of double-counting of the Better Care fund. On the four-year settlement, we may have disagreements about the details, but the principle is correct.

May I draw the attention of the Secretary of State to the 6% real cuts figure? According to the LGA, it does not take account of increasing demand from the growing number of elderly people, nor of the extra costs imposed on local government by specific central Government policies. I also draw his attention to two other things: the increase in the minimum wage will have a particular impact on the cost of social care, and the pension changes will have a cost in national insurance. Do the

Government recognise them as new burdens? If they do not fund them as new burdens, does the right hon. Gentleman recognise there will be extra cuts to local government services that are not recognised in his statement?

Greg Clark: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. His Select Committee and its predecessors have long called for four-year settlements and the devolution of powers. We have made a choice, advised by local government, on a flat cash settlement over the spending review period to prioritise adult social care. That is what we have done in this settlement. As I made clear when I talked about candour at the beginning of my statement, that of course means that authorities need to continue to make savings in areas outside those for which we have provided extra funds. That is accepted and understood. We have also agreed that they should be at a lower rate than was necessary at the beginning of the previous Parliament. I think local councils will welcome that.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): Conservative-controlled Leicestershire County Council is one of the best in the country, but its funding is the worst. I am sure the Secretary of State's innovative statement today will be welcomed in the county, not least because it gives additional freedoms. Market Bosworth is now world-famous since the reinterment of Richard III, something my right hon. Friend can check when he goes overseas and asks anybody. The initiatives for rural areas will be very welcome. In the rural parts of my constituency, there is a feeling that they have been neglected. Will my right hon. Friend explain a little more about the social care precept of 2% and how it will affect hard-pressed Leicestershire, which has terrific difficulties in meeting its social care targets at the moment?

Greg Clark: I join my hon. Friend in praising Leicestershire County Council, which was one of those that made representations asking that its substantial social care costs be recognised. As a result of the settlement, by the end of the spending review period, in 2019-20, the resources available to Leicestershire will have increased by 3.5%, which will help to meet the costs he describes. I am certain that a council as well run as Leicestershire will make use of that to the great benefit of his elderly constituents.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): Erdington, which is rich in talent but one of the poorest constituencies in England, lies in a city, Birmingham, suffering the biggest cuts in local government history. The consequences for the city will be serious: for children's safety when travelling to school, with the cutting of school crossing patrols; for vulnerable families, with the end of Home-Start after 25 years; and for vulnerable and disabled people in need of social care. In my experience, the Secretary of State is a decent man, and he said today he was prepared to listen. Will he therefore agree to meet me and my Birmingham colleagues to hear the case for a fair deal for Birmingham?

Greg Clark: Of course I will. I am always delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman and his Birmingham colleagues, as well as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) who shares his commitment to that great city. The spending review recognises the increased

costs faced by social services authorities such as Birmingham; and in recognition of those pressures, by the end of the spending review period, in 2019-20, his city will have a spending power per dwelling £200 higher than the national average.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): Mr Speaker, I wish you and everyone else in the House a very merry Christmas.

I ask the Minister not to penalise councils that are already very efficient. In the £3.5 billion made available for social care, will he please take into account Richmond upon Thames Council, which is efficient but has great needs because of the disproportionate number of over-65s living alone? Will he please meet me and council leaders to discuss next year's budget?

Greg Clark: I think that my colleagues and I are going to be busy after Christmas meeting many hon. Members, but I am certainly happy to meet my hon. Friend. I pay tribute to the efficiency of Richmond upon Thames Borough Council. The two contributions—the proposed precept and the addition to the better care fund—will be allocated in complementary ways, which is what local government leaders across the country have recommended to us.

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab): This is a highly political statement dressed up as localism. Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the distributional effect of his proposal means that every single local authority in the north-east of England will lose out? Will the intervention he announced on social care cover children in care as well as adults?

Greg Clark: The right hon. Gentleman must have second sight to know what the impacts will be before he has looked at the figures for those particular authorities. Of course, by prioritising social care we are directing resources to authorities with responsibility for children's social services as well as adult social services. Compared with what would have happened in the steady state, as it were, authorities such as his own in Newcastle upon Tyne will benefit.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): Conservative-led Hertfordshire County Council and St Albans District Council are among the most efficient councils in the country, but they face a large problem in the form of a sinkhole that is costing millions and will be an ongoing event. This is a big deal in St Albans. Will recognition be given to special events, such as the Cumbria floods, that require from councils a significant ongoing commitment to emergency repairs?

Greg Clark: I understand that every local authority has unique circumstances and faces unique pressures. Part of the responsibility of local government is to anticipate and prepare for them. In the course of the consultation on the settlement, either I or one of my ministerial colleagues would be happy to meet my hon. Friend to understand the particular circumstances of her council.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): I do not know what happens in Tunbridge Wells, but let me tell the Secretary of State that in the real world of the

Walsall borough hardly a week goes by without news of further cuts to essential services and facilities or of services being abolished altogether. Even the Tory leader of the council has made it known how concerned he is at the impact of these cuts on the borough. Would it not be wise to understand that in areas of deprivation and low income, it is essential for the Government to adopt a different direction of policy? Otherwise, it will certainly not be a merry Christmas or a happy new year for the people most vulnerable to the cuts.

Greg Clark: I have some news that might cheer up the hon. Gentleman—it looks as though he may need it. By 2019-20, as a result of this settlement that, as I have said, recognises the pressure on authorities with social care responsibilities, the resources available to the hon. Gentleman's council in Walsall will have increased by 1.5%.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Yesterday, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), I met the leaders of East Sussex County Council to discuss their budget plans and priorities. They will welcome today's announcement, especially the focus on longer-term funding and the recognition of the difficulties of rural councils. East Sussex has the highest number of 85-year-olds of any county in the country, and I believe that my Wealden constituency has the highest number in the country. Will the Secretary of State give my council further confirmation that the differing demands on local authorities in respect of adult social care will be taken into account?

Greg Clark: I know my hon. Friend's constituency very well as she is my parliamentary neighbour. I understand that the pressures on adult social care for elderly people are significant. She will be pleased to know that by 2019-20 the resources available to East Sussex County Council will increase by 1%.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): My local authority faces cuts of £77 million next year, and as the Secretary of State has indicated, there will be precious little left to invest back into social care costs. If my council is to meet the growing demand for social care, it certainly needs to be able to ensure that extra funds are made available from the savings it can make. Is the Secretary of State confident that the funds made available will mean that people will not miss out on social care over the next five years?

Greg Clark: These are, of course, decisions for the local council. In the settlement we have prioritised councils that have social care responsibilities. In his own borough, the un-ring-fenced reserves are nearly a fifth of a billion pounds, so the council can itself make some contribution to meeting those costs.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): The Secretary of State is absolutely right that local councils are answerable to local people. As he is aware, there is a very lively debate going on in Yorkshire at the moment about the relative merits of a West Yorkshire model and a Greater Yorkshire model of devolution. Will my right hon. Friend update us on when he sees a deal eventually being done in Yorkshire?

Greg Clark: I am keen to see a deal in that great county. I know that discussions are at an advanced stage. I do not think it is going to be an early Christmas present for my hon. Friend, but I hope that early in the new year, the good people of Yorkshire will agree to take on the powers and resources on offer through our devolution programme.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): A merry Christmas to you, Mr Speaker, and thank you for calling me earlier. I am afraid I came into the House after the start of the statement, so I did not deserve to be called in that way.

In Walsall South, libraries are closing, there is a disproportionate cut to the public health budget, and it is difficult to recruit and retain social workers. Will the Secretary of State confirm that under the settlement that he has just announced, all those services will be protected and there will be no need for further cuts in those areas?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady is a model of candour, whose example should be imitated by all Members.

Greg Clark: I am happy to answer the hon. Lady's question. As I said to her hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Mr Winnick), the resources available to Walsall will increase by 1.5% by 2019-20. Of course, as I said in my statement, savings will continue to need to be made in other areas right across local government. It is for the councils themselves to make those decisions, but they now have the ability with the certainty of four-year budgets and a possibility of reform within those years to make those savings, to protect those services and to make sure that elderly and vulnerable people are well looked after.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): I welcome today's statement and the increase in the rural services delivery grant, which will increase the amount per head from around £1.10 to about £5.50, I assume. I also note that in comparison with urban authorities the gap in central Government grant will remain at £130 per head. Will the Secretary of State meet me and other colleagues to discuss the next steps beyond this to make sure that we get a fair settlement for rural and urban alike, and so determine whether rural colleagues will be able to join the Secretary of State in the Lobby in support of the settlement in February?

Greg Clark: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who has been a persistent and effective campaigner, drawing attention to the special costs that the most sparse rural authorities face in providing services. We have gone a long way, based on the evidence we have seen, to address those needs. I and my colleagues will be happy to meet my hon. Friend and other colleagues to discuss how it will work out in practice.

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State accept that the paradox of the statement is exemplified by my own city council, which has had a reduction of nearly 50% in its central Government grant since 2010, yet also a massive increase in responsibilities? Pretending that adult social care can be picked up by a 2% increase in council tax is obviously nonsense. He realises, I am sure, that to resolve his

dilemma, he should enable—as every other western democracy has—local authorities throughout England to retain and raise funds of their own so that they can effectively no longer be an agent of central Government. That, surely, is the difference between devolution and decentralisation.

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman will know more than most that simply looking at central Government grant in an age in which local councils, at their own request and following their own campaign, are increasingly in charge of their own resources, is not the right way to consider the issue. We should look at the total resources available, including the business rate revenues, in respect of which Nottingham and Nottinghamshire authorities are doing very well, rightly attracting more businesses and expanding businesses. That is a buoyant source of income for his city and his county.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): As my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Nusrat Ghani) said, we met local councils yesterday and we were told that the counties of East Sussex, West Sussex and Surrey are joining together for a devolution bid, called “The three southern counties” bid. Currently the area's contribution to the Exchequer's revenue is second only to that of the City of London. Can the Secretary of State inform us what influence, if any, devolution bids such as “The three southern counties” bid will have on today's funding settlement?

Greg Clark: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her question, and I look forward to the discussions with the council leaders about the devolution deal. Today's settlement does not include the effects of those deals. One proposal that we will consider is for the earlier retention of business rates. I am delighted that such imaginative proposals have been put forward locally.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): The Secretary of State said that he would take account of demography: the ageing population and the density of population. I also urge him to take note of the few places in the country that have an extremely young population. In Birmingham, 30% of the population is below the age of 15. When he meets the group of MPs, can we discuss how his settlement will affect the special needs of the city?

Greg Clark: Of course I will, and when we have that conversation, the right hon. Lady will make the case for Birmingham. As I have said, it is important to recognise the need to help with social care pressures, and that is what we have done in the settlement.

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I welcome this excellent statement on behalf of the people of Herefordshire, but may I ask the Secretary of State to keep a watching brief? I know that he has set four-year budgets, but each county faces specific challenges.

Greg Clark: I will certainly consider the case that my hon. Friend has made. However, one of the advantages of a four-year settlement is that local authorities can prepare for the future and manage their resources well, rather than being subject to occasional year-to-year variations in the national Government income. It gives

them a greater proof against the uncertainty that they have experienced for a long time about what is coming each year.

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I am pleased that the Secretary of State has noted the criticism by the Public Accounts Committee of the handling of the better care fund and the public health grant. However, a year ago the National Audit Office reported that his Department had

“a limited understanding of the financial stability of local authorities”, and the position is being made worse by the complexity of devolution.

The Public Accounts Committee, of which I am a member, considered city deals, the Care Act 2014, and—as was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts)—the new burdens that are being imposed. Bristol’s people service was already £6.3 million overspent by November. What assurance can the Secretary of State give us that he is heeding the Committee’s recommendations, and that, given the various announcements about policy and cuts, he really understands and has a grip on the financial sustainability of local authorities?

Greg Clark: The hon. Lady suggests that uncertainty is a source of concern in local government. That is exactly why we heeded the calls of local government for us to provide the certainty of four-year budgets.

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Enfield Council lays the blame for the cuts in adult social care provision fairly and squarely at the Government’s door. It has already consulted my constituents, and it says that the cuts will amount to some £10 million by 2018, including £900,000 of transport cuts that will affect vulnerable people. Can the Secretary of State confirm—not least to Enfield Council and my constituents—that the council will have the resources and the choice that will enable it to protect the vulnerable?

Greg Clark: We responded to what local authorities had said about the need to recognise the importance of social services. My hon. Friend’s borough council has both upper-tier and lower-tier responsibilities, and in respect of the activities that it is required to perform in order to discharge its social services responsibility, it will benefit from this allocation.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): My best wishes for Christmas to you and all your staff, Mr Speaker.

I do not think that the Secretary of State answered the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth). Let me repeat, according to the National Audit Office,

“The Department has a limited understanding of the financial sustainability of local authorities”.

The NAO advised the Department to

“look for evidence of financial stress in local authorities”

to assure itself that they were able

“to deliver the services they are responsible for.”

May I give the Secretary of State another opportunity to explain in detail—rather than repeating his mantra

about a four-year budget—what work he did, before making his announcement, in order to understand the financial sustainability of different authorities?

Greg Clark: Every council has a statutory responsibility and a section 151 officer who is required to report, in real time, on the financial sustainability of the council. I have received no representations from a section 151 officer suggesting that a council is unviable. In recent years, the Local Government Association has been helping councils that require advice and assistance, and I expect that it will wish to go on doing so.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The Secretary of State is shortly to visit my constituency to discuss generation in the local economy. Will he expand a little on how the settlement will help local authorities in that regard? The other major challenge facing my authority is adult social care. When he visits the constituency, will he also discuss that with council leaders?

Greg Clark: I will indeed. My hon. Friend is a long-time campaigner for more independence and autonomy in local government. I know that his council will welcome the certainty of a four-year budget, and I shall be happy to meet its representatives when I visit his constituency again.

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): Whatever the Secretary of State says about available resources and reserves, he should be in no doubt that, in Lambeth and elsewhere, the reduction in central Government grant has led to, and will continue to lead to, cuts in front-line services. It is important that those who object to those cuts, and who demonstrate against them peacefully, protest not about our Labour councillors who have been forced to make the cuts, but about this Tory Government. Protesters should not be doing the Government’s dirty work by misattributing blame.

May I ask the Secretary of State how he expects my borough of Lambeth to carry on providing basic services when the Government have cut its budget by 56% since 2010?

Greg Clark: I think the hon. Gentleman’s local residents will be relieved that a Labour Government were not returned after the general election, not least because it was the Labour party’s stated commitment to cut local government funding. As for Lambeth, we have, against all expectations, been able to protect the resources available to the council so that it can make decisions that will help vulnerable residents, as I know it will wish to do.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend’s wise decision to heed the recommendations of the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government. I trust that that will continue into 2016 and beyond.

My right hon. Friend will be aware of concern about the fact that councils are increasing charges for monopoly services above the rate of inflation. What action is he taking to ensure that residents are not overcharged for services that they cannot obtain anywhere else?

Greg Clark: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. When councils charge for services, the general principle should be cost recovery and no more. I would expect

[Greg Clark]

councils then to become more efficient and to pass on their efficiency savings to their residents, as they ought to do.

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): Hartlepool Borough Council's grant has been reduced by 40% over the past five years. That equates to a cut in spending power of £313 per Hartlepool resident, which is twice the national average. In addition, the council has lost—this year, and in recurring years—£3.9 million from the business rates of the nuclear power station, which previously equated to a quarter of all business rates collected in the town. The council had no say, no power and no influence in regard to that decision, which makes a mockery of the Secretary of State's claim in his statement that retaining 100% of business rates would “forge the necessary link between local business success and local civic success.”

Given the real threats to the provision of local services, and the somewhat distinctive nature of the local economy and the business rates base, will the Secretary of State acknowledge that Hartlepool faces a real problem, and will he agree to meet me and discuss ways of mitigating the massive pressure on the council's budgets?

Greg Clark: Of course I recognise that in particular instances—such as the nuclear power station that the hon. Gentleman mentioned—there is a very specific impact, and I shall be happy to meet him to discuss that. However, as Chairman of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, he will know that businesses have long called for a closer connection between councils and the businesses in their areas. The 100% retention of business rates will create an unbreakable link between the success of businesses and councils, and I would expect the hon. Gentleman to welcome that in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Coastal communities such as Torbay, which has both an ageing and a younger population, face a range of unique challenges. How will the settlement deal with the needs of such communities?

Greg Clark: My hon. Friend has made a good point in drawing attention to the fact that coastal communities such as his contain a high proportion of elderly people, and often require child social services as well. The settlement will direct funds to authorities such as his for precisely the reasons that he has mentioned.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Following our earlier entreaty, Mr Speaker, that Members should demonstrate candour, I should perhaps start by declaring an interest in that my wife works for a district council.

The Secretary of State casually shrugs off the impact on councils of the cuts they will have to make by 2020, ignoring the fact that now the number of children's services rated as inadequate outnumber those rated as good, well-run councils are having to consider closing youth centres and adult social care services are under huge pressure. Does he accept that a shortfall in central Government funding for local services risks hitting the most vulnerable first and that devolving responsibilities

to local councils without associated funding simply puts councils in charge of implementing his Government's cuts?

Greg Clark: From listening to the right hon. Gentleman, we would think he wanted to centralise the power and take the resources back to the centre. I seem to remember working with his colleagues in government who purported to be in favour of decentralisation. When I was in the Department at the beginning of the previous Government, of which his party was a member, the savings that were required of local government were higher than we are proposing in this settlement.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the ongoing need to control costs means it is more important than ever for local councils to look at innovative ways of combining back-office functions across local authority boundaries?

Greg Clark: I agree with my hon. Friend and, as I have said throughout the statement, prioritising social care means savings do need to be made in other parts of councils' operations. An excellent way to do that is to combine councils' administrative services that cross borders.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): May I put it to the Secretary of State, the Member for Tunbridge Wells, that while the Government talk about the revival of our great cities of the north and midlands, this statement follows the long-standing policy of discrimination against the metropolitan boroughs, with disproportionate cuts not only to local council budgets, but to police and fire services as well? Will he now answer the question posed by the Opposition spokesman as to how he will deal with the dramatically different income levels from the business rate to boroughs, especially those in central London compared with the rest?

Greg Clark: I would have thought the right hon. Gentleman would have taken the opportunity of being here today to applaud the success of the west midlands. It has agreed a devolution deal that will bring £1 billion of extra resources into his area. On the 100% business rate retention, of course that needs to recognise that some places will need to contribute to others. That is well understood and during the months ahead we will be working with local government to find the best way to address that requirement. That is not part of this settlement because that comes in from 2019-20.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I applaud the certainty of long-term budgeting that the Secretary of State has brought in, but what is not certain is how the 2% precept for elderly social care will stretch for areas with very high very elderly populations such as mine. Some 4.6% of the population of Worthing is over the age of 85; they live a long time in Worthing, thank goodness. What consideration has he given to those additional costs on social care for the very elderly?

Greg Clark: I understand the point my hon. Friend makes. In moving money within the system to authorities with social care responsibilities, we have taken account of the pressures. I am sure he will want to meet me and my colleagues to talk about the particular circumstances of Worthing. West Sussex as a whole has the responsibility

for this, and I can tell my hon. Friend that its funding will increase by 2.9% by 2019-20, which will provide a big help in meeting these costs.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The full integration of health and social care in Tameside has already led to £30 million of recurring savings being identified, but that still leaves £40 million to find through other efficiencies. The Chancellor's social care levy on the council tax only raises £1.4 million because of the low council tax base, against a social care shortfall of £16 million. So how much of that extra money announced today will Tameside receive—not as a percentage, but in real cash terms—and how much of that £16 million social care gap does the Secretary of State anticipate will be filled?

Greg Clark: What I can tell the hon. Gentleman is that the allocation of the better care fund is done in a way that is complementary to the 2%, to recognise the particular pressures in authorities such as his. The answer to his question is that the package for adult social care, including both elements, will add almost £16 million to Tameside by 2019-20.

Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): Somerset County Council, of which I am a member, has faced significant challenges over the last few years both on account of the fact that it is a rural council, which means it has not had as much money as some of the urban ones, and because it has had to deal with nearly £400 million-worth of debt, which the previous Liberal Democrat administration had run up. Will my right hon. Friend meet me and the council leaders to help to welcome this, and also to talk about how things will work for Somerset in practice over the next four years?

Greg Clark: I and my team stand ready to meet colleagues to discuss local circumstances. I can tell my hon. Friend that as a result of this settlement Somerset will receive an increase in its spending power of 4% by 2019-20, which I know will be a big help.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Cheshire West and Chester Council's budget is being cut by central Government by £47 million. I hope the Secretary of State is clear that when local services are scrapped or cut, responsibility for that will lie squarely at the feet of himself and the Chancellor.

May I ask the Secretary of State about the new homes bonus grant, particularly in the light of his longer-term and four-year budgetary proposals? I understand that when it was first introduced, payments were to be made to councils for six years, and councils have planned their income on that basis. We understand now that payments might be made for only four years, which will of course restrict the ability of councils to respond to that grant. Will the Secretary of State clarify the situation?

Greg Clark: If the hon. Gentleman believes councils should be in charge of their own destiny and count on their own resources, he will need to understand that we are moving into a world in which councils are financed locally, not centrally. He will want, I am sure, to discuss with his council how it is going to make spending decisions.

On the new homes bonus, the good news for councils across the country is that we are continuing that very successful policy. We are consulting on some possible changes, and one option is to reduce the period from six years to four for new developments. Councils will continue to receive the funding that they have expected for developments they have approved. If we do go with that option, the funds that are released will be invested in social care.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): The people of Lincolnshire will particularly welcome increased funding for rural, sparsely populated areas, but may I ask the Secretary of State to continue—he has done this previously—to bear in mind that in areas such as Fenside in Boston and Skegness there is also genuine deprivation? Can he tell us a little more about what he will be able to do for those areas of deprivation through means such as the attendance allowance?

Greg Clark: One of the things we will be doing over the years ahead is looking at what services and responsibilities can be devolved to local councils, recognising the fact that if we are going to devolve 100% of business rates, it is an opportunity to devolve some functions that have previously been in central Government. Attendance allowance has been suggested, and we will consult on that, alongside other services that could potentially be in the hands of local councils.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): I congratulate the Secretary of State on the appointment of his Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), who has demonstrated the most remarkable level of assiduity this afternoon, ripping off crib sheets on every single constituency—and let me just say, for the sake of clarity, Ealing. *[Interruption.]* And here it is! But my question is not about Ealing—we have suffered enough. My question is about the new homes bonus, which has not been markedly successful. The Secretary of State has announced that he is extending it indefinitely, but at the same time he says he is consulting. Why is he extending before the consultation period finishes, what form will the consultation take, and how will he report it to the House?

Greg Clark: I am very disappointed that the hon. Gentleman has not asked me about Ealing, as I now have lots of information about Ealing that I could have shared with him. Perhaps I will give it to him at another time. The answer to his question on the new homes bonus is very simple: we are going to continue it, but in doing so, there will be different options as to how it might work. That is what we are consulting on, and we will publish the consultation. I am sure that the Select Committee will want to give its advice, as will other hon. Members.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): In Solihull, we have an average age of 43 compared with a UK average of 39. We have an ageing population, so the focus on adult social care is particularly welcome for my constituency. Can my right hon. Friend tell the House what specific discussions he is having with local government on the funding of adult social care? What assurances can he

[Julian Knight]

give us about councils not using up the £22 billion of reserves, bearing in mind that it is six weeks' worth of cash?

Greg Clark: In the case of Solihull, there will be £12 million available from the social care package for it to use. The great advantage of a four-year settlement is that reserves can be used to smooth the transition over the spending review period with the certainty and confidence that comes from knowing what the budgets are going to be for each of those years.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): In the hour since the Secretary of State got to his feet, he has not once acknowledged that this statement today is set against a background of Derbyshire, for example, having a 40% cut in its grant a few years ago. It has still not recovered from that £157 million cut. That is what he does not recognise. And I will tell him something else, in a question. Does he understand that this is like a Budget statement made by his pal Osborne, of the northern poorhouse variety? It is going to unravel as it goes along. The Minister had better glory in these few moments because by tomorrow, and certainly by next week when the detail is out, people will realise that it is nothing but another Tory con.

Greg Clark: The hon. Gentleman is characteristically churlish. If he had listened to my statement, he would have heard me pay tribute to the savings that councils have made, and of course they had to make them because we had the biggest deficit in peacetime history bequeathed to us by the party of which he is a member. What we are doing in this settlement is providing extra resources to meet the pressures on social services that have been identified. In the case of Derbyshire, that includes an increase of nearly £50 million in funding for adult social care from the package announced in the spending review.

Strathclyde Review

12.43 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on Lord Strathclyde's review. The Government have today published "Strathclyde Review: Secondary legislation and the primacy of the House of Commons". On behalf of the House, I should like to thank Lord Strathclyde for his work.

The Prime Minister invited Lord Strathclyde to undertake this review after constitutional questions were raised about the primacy of this elected House of Commons. There is a balance to be struck between the interests of proper parliamentary scrutiny and the certainty that Government business can be conducted in a reasonable manner and time. The House of Lords is a revising Chamber with an important core purpose: to complement the House of Commons and, in doing so, give the public confidence in what Parliament decides. On primary legislation, it can fulfil this purpose by asking the House of Commons to think again, through the process known as ping-pong. But ultimately, with the backstop of the Parliament Acts, the will of the elected House can prevail.

That is not the case for secondary legislation, in relation to which the House of Lords can only approve or withhold its approval. Given this, Lord Strathclyde was asked whether there was a better way to handle secondary legislation that would give the elected House of Commons the decisive say. He consulted parliamentarians in both Houses and from across the political spectrum in the course of the review.

In his report, Lord Strathclyde has outlined three options to provide the House of Commons with that decisive vote. Option 1 would remove the House of Lords from the statutory instrument procedure altogether. Option 2 would retain the present role of the House of Lords but clarify the restrictions on how its powers to withhold approval or to annul should be exercised. Option 3 would create a new procedure in statute. That is a compromise option that would provide the House of Lords with the ability to ask the House of Commons to think again but would give the final say to the House of Commons. This would be achieved by allowing the Commons to override a vote by the House of Lords to reject a statutory instrument. Lord Strathclyde has recommended the third option. He also recommended that the Government, with the involvement of the Procedure Committee, should review the circumstances in which statutory instrument powers should be subject to Commons-only procedures, especially on financial matters, and that the Government should ensure the appropriate use of primary and secondary legislation.

The Government will need to consider Lord Strathclyde's review and his recommendations carefully, and we will respond fully when we have done so. Clearly there will be views in both Houses as to the best way forward, and we will want to listen to those views as we decide on our preferred approach. We have begun doing so today by making oral statements in both Houses.

We are very clear that all Governments require, and indeed benefit from, a strong Parliament holding them to account and providing scrutiny. As Lord Strathclyde's report highlights, the House of Lords has long played

its scrutiny role effectively. It provides that scrutiny and challenge, but we also think it important that the elected House should be able to have the decisive say on secondary legislation as well as on primary legislation. Such a balance will allow the other House to deliver its core purpose more effectively. We will therefore study Lord Strathclyde's review in detail and respond fully next year. I commend this statement to the House.

12.46 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving me advance notice of his statement, which I received in exemplary fashion before 10 o'clock this morning.

I am afraid that this has all the hallmarks of government by fit of pique. The Leader of the House says that the review was set up "after constitutional questions were raised about the primacy of this elected House of Commons". What utter tosh! The only people who were raising constitutional questions were the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Leader of the House himself, who were stamping their little feet because they had not got their way. There were protests, yes, but people were not protesting against the Lords. They were protesting against the Government's miserly attempt to cut working tax credits. The truth is that this is payback time. It has absolutely nothing to do with principle. Maybe the Leader of the House is still smarting from losing more votes in the House of Lords as a Minister than any other Minister in the last Parliament—24 in all, or a quarter of the total number of lost votes.

The most astonishing thing, however, is how Lord Strathclyde has done an about-turn. In 1999, when in opposition, he said of the convention that the House of Lords did not strike down statutory instruments:

"I declare this convention dead."

But now he wants to resurrect it. There's a word for that. Between 2001 and 2010, when Lord Strathclyde was Leader of the Opposition in the House of Lords, he led his colleagues through the Division Lobby to defeat the Labour Government 390 times, including once on a fatal motion on a statutory instrument. Now he thinks that that is a disgraceful way to behave. There's a word for that.

This was meant to be all about the financial privilege of the House of Commons, but can the Leader of the House confirm that the review makes no distinction whatever between secondary legislation where financial privilege is concerned and any other form of secondary legislation? In essence, the Government are seeking to stop the Lords having any right to oppose any secondary legislation, whatever they might put through in it.

Does the Leader of the House accept that the other problem with secondary legislation is that because it is unamendable, each House is simply asked to say aye or no, content or not content? So ping-pong does not make any kind of sense. The report does not make sense, either. It seems to imagine a statutory instrument being sent back to the Commons, but the two Houses have completely distinct processes for deciding on secondary legislation. Every piece of secondary legislation that is now advanced depends on a parent Act. Each of them specifies whether the regulations shall be subject to the affirmative or negative decision process and whether there has to be a vote in one or both Houses before

coming into force. Are the Government really intending retrospective amendment of each one of these Acts of Parliament? There is a simple answer to this problem: use less secondary legislation and only use secondary legislation for non-contentious matters—do not use it for significant matters that dramatically affect households in this country.

The House of Lords is far from perfect—the Prime Minister has packed it with 240 new Members, doing so faster than any Prime Minister in history—but surely it would be wrong to deal with aspects of the powers and the role of the Lords without considering its composition. Is it not time we had a constitutional convention and proper, thoroughgoing reform? There is a pattern here: the Government have changed the voting rights in this House; they have curtailed the rights of trade unions and voluntary organisations to campaign; they have made it more difficult for the poor and the young to register; and today we learn that they have increased the number of Conservative special advisers from 74 to 96, costing an additional £1.6 million a year, even as they want to cut the support for Opposition scrutiny of this Government by 20%. Where there is dissent, they crush it. Where a body opposes them, they neuter it. That is not a Conservative Government, respectful of the constitution, dutiful in their dealings with their opponents, cautious in advancing radical change and determined to govern for the whole nation. It is not a Conservative Government; in the words of one of their former leaders, Disraeli, it is an "organised hypocrisy".

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that I will not allow him to use that word that he has just used—the very last one.

Chris Bryant: Those were words used by Disraeli in this House. I am not maintaining that any Member has acted hypocritically, but I am saying that this set of proposals is an organised hypocrisy.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I accept what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but the fact that Disraeli was also wrong does not make him right. I am sure he will find a better way of putting that last sentence he used.

Chris Bryant: Well, Madam Deputy Speaker, what word would you use for it? Let me make it absolutely clear that I am not imputing any sense of dishonourableness to any hon. Member of this House or any other House, but I am saying that the Government are trying to get something through the back door and that that is not fundamentally, for the Government, an honest way of behaving.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I accept that the hon. Gentleman is not impugning any Member of this House, so for the moment I will let him away with it.

Chris Grayling: It does not feel as though we are trying to move anything through the back door, given that I am standing in front of the House making a statement and setting out a report that has been prepared with a number of options for the Government to consider and undoubtedly for this House to debate before any legislative change could happen—if legislative change

[Chris Grayling]

were to be adopted as a result of this report. There is a degree of faux outrage from the other side on this matter.

Let us be clear about what happens. This House has an elected mandate, unlike the House of Lords. Our majority Government have a democratic mandate to implement our manifesto, and that is what we have sought to do. The conventions that have guided the relationship between the House of Lords and the House of Commons have existed for a very long time, and they have indeed broken down over many years. The Government's view is that it is time to re-establish a framework for the relationship between the two Houses which reflects the fact that this is the elected House of Commons. That is the purpose of the report, and it sets out three options for all of us to consider. Of course it makes specific reference to the issue of financial matters. The Commons has had primacy over financial matters for centuries; there are already Commons-only statutory instruments on financial matters. What occurred this autumn was the first time that a financial matter that had come before the House of Lords had been rejected—it was the first time a fatal motion had been used. Over the previous decades there had been hardly any fatal motions on SIs. On reading this report—I again thank Lord Strathclyde for his work—it is my view that in many respects it gives the Lords a clearer and broader role in the consideration of secondary legislation, while also making it clear that ultimately the democratically elected Chamber has to have the final say.

When the shadow Leader of the House talks about using less secondary legislation and about the composition of the House of Lords, I simply look back to my first few years in this House, and indeed yours, Madam Deputy Speaker, given that you were first elected in 1997, and I can say that I have no memory of a shortage of SIs being brought forward under the Labour Governments. I also have no memory of a shortage of appointments by Tony Blair of his friends and cronies to the House of Lords over an extended period, so I will take no lessons from Labour Members.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and join him in thanking Lord Strathclyde for his report? The Government could not have chosen a safer pair of hands for such an inquiry, and of course it does avoid the whole issue of the composition and other aspects of the House of Lords. Perhaps that is timely and convenient, but we will have to address those things.

May I welcome the proposal for dealing with this by primary legislation? The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee will wish to look at this, just as the Procedure Committee will. We have some questions. How often will this procedure be used? What kind of behaviour of the two Houses will we adopt? Would it be justified in using this procedure to deal with particular SIs that amend primary legislation through the so-called Henry VIII clauses? Would it be right to be able to use what one might call a "ding-dong" procedure, as opposed to a ping-pong procedure, simply to force through amendment to primary legislation in this way? I assure my right hon. Friend that we will be looking at these matters in great detail.

Chris Grayling: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments about the report and the work done by Lord Strathclyde. I would expect nothing less of my hon. Friend's Committee or of the Procedure Committee than the approach he has set out—both will want to express views on this. In Lord Strathclyde's comments about financial matters, he expressly makes reference to the need to work with the Committees of the House of Commons to do these things. I look forward to seeing my hon. Friend's work on this subject, as debate and discussion will be an important part of shaping a better relationship between the two Houses.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): May I thank the Leader of the House for early sight of his statement? Rarely has there been a review of such pointlessness, with such a pre-arranged outcome, as this endeavour in absolute uselessness. In the battle of blue verses ermine there was only ever going to be one victor, and it was not going to be our unelected friends down the corridor. The House of Lords as the be-ermined tribunes of the people was always an unlikely concept, but this Government have decided that they will never allow themselves to be embarrassed by the Lords again.

I quite like option 1. I like it up to a certain part, as it says it would

"remove the House of Lords".

Why could we not just leave it at that and get on with it? Let us be frank: the House of Lords is perhaps the most absurd, ridiculous legislature anywhere in the world. Stuffed full of unelected cronies, party donors, hereditaries and Church of England bishops, and with its 800 Members, it is becoming a national embarrassment. The only thing I can take comfort from in this statement is the fact that we may be starting to get rid of the whole ridiculous circus. We are poorly served with an unelected House whose rules a Government can simply change when it does not do their bidding, just because they can and because that place is accountable to absolutely nobody. Let us work together, and if we need to retain a secondary Chamber, let us make sure it is one equipped for the 21st century, not the 16th.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman talked about pre-arranged outcomes, but I think I could have written his speech in advance by anticipating what he had to say. He spoke with his customary flowing prose, talking about a pre-arranged outcome for the review. He knows Lord Strathclyde well enough to know that he is the last person to be given a script and then told to write a review around it and publish it. He has done a lot of work, he has talked to a lot of people and he has thought about it carefully. I understand the Scottish National party's position of not wanting the House of Lords, but it is here and it is not about to disappear. It makes good sense for us to make sure that the relationships and workings between the two Houses are well structured and appropriate, and that is what we intend to do.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I also welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I wonder whether the views of the Opposition would be somewhat different if the other place had blocked a left-wing financial measure, rather than the measure that was introduced. May I urge him to give serious consideration to option 1? I suspect that my motives in that regard are

different from those of the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart). The advantage of that option is its simplicity and clarity, and I fear that the other two options, although they would be an improvement, would still be open to different interpretations, as with the current convention.

Chris Grayling: I heard the shadow Leader of the House say that what took place has happened to a Labour Government many times. This of course was the first time that a financial measure has been blocked in the way that it was in the House of Lords. Although my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) share the same accent, I suspect that they do not share the same view for quite the same reasons. I take on board what my hon. Friend says. We will have to consider all three options very carefully, and we will bring forward our proposals in due course. None the less, I note the point that he makes.

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to be in the Chamber today for the First Reading of the Punishment of the Tax Credit Whistleblowers (Lords) Bill. I fully support what you said, Madam Deputy Speaker, in taking to task the shadow Leader of the House when he used the words, “disorganised hypocrisy.” [*Interruption.*] I meant organised hypocrisy. I have never seen anything more disorganised—other than me trying to make a joke out of it.

Once again, we have crisis management and firefighting instead of a clear strategy on what the Government want to do on democracy and constitutional change. We are in the middle of great change with English votes for English laws, Scottish devolution and the mess around English devolution, and the Government do not quite know what to do, so they are doing it bit by bit. I urge the Leader of the House to bite the bullet and create a constitutional or citizens’ convention that can look in the round at all those issues together—whether they involve the composition of the Lords and how they affect federalism in the United Kingdom and English devolution—and take a strategic view, rather than having this constant piecemeal firefighting.

Chris Grayling: I will not use any words to describe the views of the Opposition party, but given that, after 13 years of Labour, I was left with the clear impression that what it did was to take our constitutional arrangements and throw them up in the air with no idea of how they would land, it is a bit ripe to talk about our having a piecemeal approach to constitutional affairs. What we are trying to do is to sort out some of the mess that was left behind and to put back some stability into our constitutional arrangements, and this is a part of doing that.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Whatever happens to the Lord Strathclyde’s workman-like review, all of us who believe in democracy will have to agree with his conclusions. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, since we are in the business of quoting literary and political figures, it is important that we should at least try to see ourselves as others see us? Democracies, especially nascent democracies across the world, look somewhat aghast at some of the more archaic features of our constitutional arrangements.

Chris Grayling: There is always a case for modernisation in a parliamentary or constitutional process, and that should continue to be the case. None the less, the long-standing traditions of this House and of our constitutional arrangements provide a bedrock to how this country is governed and how this country works, which makes it admired around the world, and it should continue to be so.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I am afraid that, yet again, when we need comprehensive review and reform, the Government are offering us piecemeal change. I deeply regret how this matter has been brought forward. The Leader of the House speaks of this as if it is something for the Government alone. It is not; this concerns Parliament as a whole. If change is to be required, it must be owned by Parliament as a whole. This matter was last dealt with in 2006 in a Joint Committee report on recommendations. The Leader of the House threatens to drive a coach and horses through that. If he is to achieve anything, he will need to reconstitute some sort of Joint Committee between this House and the other place; otherwise all his efforts will come to naught.

Chris Grayling: I am not trying to drive anything through this House. We are considering a report that has been produced by a senior and respected member of the House of Lords with an expert panel that is drawn from some of the most experienced past officials of this House—people who have great knowledge of parliamentary process. He has brought forward a series of recommendations for us to consider, which we will duly do. Those recommendations will be discussed again in this House when the Government make clear their own view about which option to take. It seems that that is an entirely right and proper way to do this.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): This latest constitutional skirmish is just another symptom of a second Chamber that is far too large and that lacks a democratic mandate. Will the Leader of the House say when in this Parliament he will bring forward substantive reforms to make that Chamber democratically accountable with clearly defined powers vis-à-vis this House?

Chris Grayling: The reason I have not in the past supported an elected House of Lords is that it would create significant constitutional problems for this House. This matter has been considered three times since I was first elected in 2001. This House has not yet reached a clear view. What we do have in the House of Lords is an enormous wealth of expertise that adds to the value of our democratic process. I absolutely accept what my hon. Friend says about some of the issues and challenges around the structure and nature of the House of Lords at the moment. Right now, the best people to make proposals about how to address those are the Lords themselves, and I know that there is a move for them to do that.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): Madam Deputy Speaker, may I wish you a happy new year and a merry Christmas?

It is a fine review, except that it is into the wrong thing. Would it not have saved the Leader of the House a lot of trouble if his Ministers had gone on a weekend

[Ms Gisela Stuart]

course on when it is appropriate to use primary legislation and when it is appropriate to use secondary legislation? That would have saved us a lot of effort.

Chris Grayling: I can only repeat what I said earlier: Governments use primary and secondary legislation. When the right hon. Lady's party was in power, we were deluged with secondary legislation. I suspect that Governments in future will continue to use such legislation on a widespread basis. We will do so now—if some of these recommendations are enacted—in a more structured and balanced way between the two Houses.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I echo the words of other Members who have spoken and urge my right hon. Friend to move forward with a fundamental change to the upper House, rather than tinker at the edges. Can we please think again on how we can move forward towards a mainly elected upper House?

Chris Grayling: I do not imagine that we have heard the last of this debate, but when it comes to enacting our manifesto and the measures in the spending review, our legislative priority is to do things that will make a real difference to the country. That is what the country expected of us when it elected us in May.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Is the Leader of the House aware that people will recognise this as one big sulk, because of the decision taken by the House of Lords on tax credits? The Lords were right, and they were sustained in their decision by Members on the Opposition Benches, by public opinion and even by Members on the Government side. That is why this nonsense has come before us today.

Chris Grayling: The reason this matter has come before us today is that, by general acknowledgement, the conventions that have existed for a long time between the House of Lords and the House of Commons have somewhat broken down. It is time to sort that out and to put in place arrangements that give certainty and continuity for the future.

Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): As a new Member of this House, I must say that I find the other place a completely ridiculous anachronism. The people of Somerset are very confused as to why it should have any power at all in this place. I would rather see a much more wide-ranging review of what is going on with it. To limit our powers to countermand it to financial matters with regard to statutory instruments is too narrow. In my constituency, we have one elected Member of this Parliament, which is me, and three appointed residents, all of whom are Liberal Democrats with no mandate whatsoever, claiming £900 a day to be there. It is a purely political House now, and it is completely unacceptable that its Members do not need to be elected.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend expresses a sincerely held view and one which I know is shared by many in the House. The matter has been debated on many occasions. Right now, the important thing is to ensure that he has the final say. As a result of what is set out in

the Strathclyde review, we will return to a situation in which he does indeed have that final say as the elected representative of his constituency.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): As people have been wishing the occupant of the Chair a happy Christmas, having been at the Star Wars movie last night I feel I should say, "May the force be with you." Having watched the dark lords of the Sith at their nefarious business—I am not referring to the other place amending the Scotland Bill—may I ask the Leader of the House what impact the procedure that he is introducing today will have on the procedures for English votes for English laws that were introduced recently in this House?

Chris Grayling: If the hon. Gentleman went to both the Star Wars movie last night and the Scottish National party's Christmas party, he is doing well to be here today. That is perhaps why he has a glass of water in his hand. The proposals will not change the EVEL procedures. If a matter is an English-only statutory instrument, it will be passed in the ways described in the EVEL process. What will change is not the process for EVEL, but the process for statutory instruments. Every statutory instrument would therefore operate in a different way in future, not just English-only ones, but all of them.

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): Given that the House of Lords barely pays regard to a convention these days, I welcome the statement today and the report by Lord Strathclyde. Echoing the comments of many of my hon. Friends, does my right hon. Friend agree that the first option, removing the House of Lords from statutory instrument procedure, would be the best option?

Chris Grayling: I note what my hon. Friend and others have said today. That is something the Government will have to take into account as they consider how best to respond to the report, so I thank him for his contribution.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and merry Christmas to you and to everyone in the House. The power under discussion is one that the Lords seldom use. The fact that it has been used so rarely in its history probably proves why it should be there for a House that is required to make the Government think again. The Lords knew that what the Government had claimed at the Budget was wrong, and they discovered with the benefit of hindsight that the claims of the Chancellor that people would not be worse off were incorrect, and that working families with children would have been thousands of pounds a year worse off. It was not just the Opposition who were pointing that out to the Government. A significant number of Government Back Benchers were doing so as well. The Lords listened to that and used the power that they rarely use to make the Government think again. The Chancellor came back to the House and wanted to be cheered for saying that he would never do it again. The Lords were proven to be correct, so the power was proven to be useful. This is just a spat and a tantrum from the Government because the Lords had the temerity to make the Government think again.

Chris Grayling: I remind the hon. Gentleman that the changes that he is referring to were voted on and passed five times by this elected House. There comes a point

where the elected House needs to be able to assert its will. Lord Strathclyde has recommended a number of options that enable it to do that.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): If we have a revising Chamber in the form that we have, it makes sense that it still has a role in secondary legislation, much of which is of a more technical nature. I therefore welcome the fact that option 3 has been chosen. Will the Leader of the House confirm that this will not stop the Government looking at options to deal with some of the things that make the other place almost a laughing stock, such as those who do not attend and others whose reason for being there has perhaps now disappeared?

Chris Grayling: Of course, we need to look at all three options carefully before we respond. On other matters related to the House of Lords, there has been a push for reform in the House of Lords in recent years. A Bill was introduced by Lord Steel in the previous Parliament and I suspect that we will see further proposals for change over the next few years from that House. Right now our priority is to implement the manifesto that we were elected on, and the country expects that of us.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I listened carefully to the Leader of the House when he talked about the House of Lords giving the public confidence in what Parliament decides, and it will come as no surprise to the right hon. Gentleman if I urge him to seriously consider the abolition of the House of Lords. That would give the public confidence in democratic accountability. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the House of Lords is the only legislature in the world, with the exception of Iran, whose Members include unelected clerics. It is unelected and unaccountable, and the public do not have confidence in it. Will he consider abolishing this museum piece, which is filled with cronies and failed politicians who have been rejected at the ballot box?

Chris Grayling: If we talked to the public about the way our Parliament works and said that we have an elected House which, as a result of these proposals on secondary legislation, will have the final say, but that we also have a group of people who have been eminent in their very different professions—people ranging from Lord Lloyd-Webber in the arts to some of the most senior business people—whose job it is to advise and guide the elected House about when it might be getting it right and when it might be getting it wrong, I think they might form a different view. I accept that there are strong opinions about this, but right now this is about solving a structural problem in the relationship between the two Houses that has emerged in the past few months. Lord Strathclyde has given us three sensible options to work with.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Surely the episode that gave rise to the report was simply an example of Parliament functioning as it is supposed to do. The

Chancellor has since been trying to take the credit for the change. Will the Leader of the House accept, as I think the great majority of his hon. Friends now do, that the other place was right on tax credits?

Chris Grayling: What really happened was that having set out some tough decisions that we said we would have to take—we have always been clear about the tough decisions that we were going to have to take—and having discovered that the public finances were doing better than expected because of the success of his economic policies, the Chancellor was able not to take some of those difficult decisions, and that is a good thing.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Since I was elected democratically in May, 62 new Lords have been appointed to the other place. That includes 11 Liberal Democrat Lords. There are more new Liberal Democrat Lords than there are elected MPs of the same party, which stinks of the word that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) was not allowed to use earlier. The Leader of the House knows the position of the SNP, which is to abolish the House of Lords. Will he come clean and get Lord Strathclyde to print the real option 4, which is to continue stuffing the other place with cronies and donors?

Chris Grayling: I know that the Scottish National party believes in abolishing the House of Lords, and I know it uses the language of cronies and donors, but if the hon. Gentleman looks across the House of Lords, he will find people who have contributed vastly to our public life, have achieved great things for our society and have a role to play in advising the elected House on the final decisions it should take.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): The removal of the veto from the House of Lords effectively leads to the formation of the most expensive, over-subscribed think-tank in history. I seldom see the point of the current unelected affront to democracy, but how could any rational person justify spending such a disgraceful amount of taxpayers' money on an impotent talking shop? Surely this is the ideal opportunity to abolish the House of Lords and create a democratically elected second Chamber. Although I welcome any recommendation that seeks to remove legitimacy from an institution that lacks any, it does not go far enough.

Chris Grayling: Scottish National party Members are both consistent and not terribly shy in their views on the House of Lords. I know these views exist and those hon. Members are not alone in the House in holding those views of the House of Lords. Our priority is to get on with the job of sorting out the mess that we inherited in 2010. We have done much of the job up till now; we still have further to go and our priorities should be to deliver the rest of the changes that will transform this country.

Points of Order

1.18 pm

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. A number of colleagues are here for the two debates later today. I understand that there may be a number of speakers in the first debate and that it is a time-limited debate. Every colleague who wishes to speak would get in if there was some rough guidance from the Chair that 10 minutes for Back Benchers and Front Benchers would allow everyone to make their points in the debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point. I will consider how much time is available and how many Members indicate that they wish to speak. When the House is operating at its best, there should be no need for me to set a formal time limit because all hon. Members ought to be courteous to all other hon. Members and limit their remarks to a reasonable amount of time, which is usually less than 10 minutes, as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. On 21 July I asked the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK troops were embedded with the armed forces of the US and other countries and whether that was paid for from the Department for International Development budget. In September I was told that the Department was compiling an answer. I chased that answer in November but have still not received it, five months after asking my original question. Surely Members of this House deserve timely answers to questions. More importantly, we need to understand the role that our troops are playing on the ground around the world and which arm of Government is paying for that involvement.

Madam Deputy Speaker: As the hon. Lady knows, how Departments and Ministers organise their answers to parliamentary questions is not a matter for the Chair, but I will happily repeat what Mr Speaker and his predecessors have said for many years: Ministers must answer questions from Members of Parliament in a timely and reasonable fashion. I understand that the Procedure Committee is looking into the matter, because this is not the first time—I am sure that it will not be the last—that a Member has had no alternative but to ask the Chair to intervene in such a case. At the same time, I am sure that those on the Treasury Bench will have heard what the hon. Lady has said, and what I have said, and I expect that she will receive a proper answer to her question as soon as possible.

BILL PRESENTED

MARRIAGE REGISTRATION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mrs Caroline Spelman, supported Caroline Lucas, Victoria Prentis, Julian Knight, Frank Field, Christina Rees and Huw Irranca Davies presented a Bill to make provision about the registration of marriages.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 January 2016, and to be printed (Bill 113).

Backbench Business

Sexual Exploitation: Protection of 16 and 17-year-olds

1.22 pm

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House notes the findings of The Children's Society's report entitled *Old enough to know better?* which looked at the sexual exploitation of 16 and 17 year olds; further notes the particular vulnerability of that age group as they transition from childhood to adulthood and the role that aggravated offences and harsher sentences have in deterring crimes against 16 and 17 year olds; calls on the Government to clarify for prosecution and sentencing purposes the role drugs and alcohol, mental health problems, being in care and learning disabilities have in adding to the vulnerability of that age group; and further calls on the Government to give police the same tools to intervene when a 16 or 17 year old is being targeted and groomed for exploitation as they have for younger children.

Over the past few weeks it has been said a number of times in this House that our success as parliamentarians is measured by how we defend the vulnerable. In recent years we have seen all too clearly that children fall into that category. On the subject of this debate, the horrendous crime of child sexual exploitation, our first instinct is to recoil, and our next is to hide our children away, wrapped up so that no harm could ever come to them. But hiding from the problem because it is too grisly or, even more impossibly, stopping our children growing up would be markers of neither a brave society and brave lawmakers nor good parents.

As well as recognising that children are especially vulnerable, our approach must reflect the fact that they are also fully fledged adults in waiting, steadily gaining the experience, knowledge and mental development they need to take up all their rights and responsibilities. The protection of children and the maintenance of the environment in which they can grow therefore go hand in hand. On the whole, we do that well for most children, even if we need to think hard about how new technologic developments, such as the internet and social media, and cultural issues, such as body image problems and academic pressures, will impact on them.

However, our efforts to protect children and maintain that healthy environment run into the greatest difficulty at the very end of childhood—the transition to adulthood between 16 and 18—and on the issue of sex. It is a time of life that requires nuance, a nuance that does not come easily in laws that must deal in precision and definites. The age of consent for sexual activity is set at 16, and we are not suggesting that should be changed. But we start this debate in the light of the Children's Society report "*Old enough to know better?*", which shows that we still do not get the balance right in the case of the sexual exploitation of 16 and 17-year-olds. The report highlights the particular vulnerability of that age group and the awkwardness that exists between the fact they are children, their position over the age of consent and the expectations that society has of them.

Our motion therefore looks at what we can do in law to better protect 16 and 17-year-olds from being sexually exploited without changing the age of consent. In particular, we look at the role that aggravated offences could have

in better deterring sexual exploitation of those children and clarifying in the mind of the public their special vulnerability as they stand on the threshold of adulthood. If we can clarify, for prosecution and sentencing purposes, the guidance for judges and juries on the role that drugs, alcohol, mental health problems, learning disabilities and being in care have in adding to the vulnerability of that already vulnerable age group, I believe we can achieve some progress. The motion also suggests that the powers that the police possess to enable them to intervene when a child under 16 is in danger should be extended to situations in which a child over 16 is under threat. I cannot stress enough how necessary all this is. I suspect that I do not need to do so for those present in the Chamber today.

At that age, abuse and exploitation can cause profound damage that can last a lifetime. It will irrevocably shape how a child grows to see both the world and themselves. They will see the world as forever hostile and threatening. They will cling to any security or affection, no matter how bad it is for them or how malevolent the source—a vulnerability that many predators exploit in the first place. It risks their forever seeing themselves as a victim or as someone who cannot take the risk of trusting anyone. It can stop them ever becoming a healthy, independent adult.

We also know from research conducted by the Children's Society that those young people can end up feeling that they deserve the abuse, and that on occasion juries have not taken the fact of their vulnerability seriously enough: they have refused to recognise that the fact that the child was over the legal age of consent did not mean that their attacker was not guilty of sexual exploitation. When they did that, they failed and betrayed those young people.

All sexual crimes are extremely serious, but I think we can all agree that those committed against children are doubly cruel. That is why we must achieve some changes in the law. Although the proposed changes would protect all 16 and 17-year-olds, this is particularly pressing in the case of children in care. I expect that all Members of the House will agree that we could and should do better for them. The Prime Minister said as much recently. He noted that children in care today are almost guaranteed to live in poverty, and that 84 % of them leave school without five good GCSEs. He noted in a speech this year that 70% of prostitutes were once in care and that, tragically, care leavers are four times more likely to commit suicide than anyone else. We cannot go on setting those children up for a life on the streets, on welfare because they are unable to find work, or an early grave. Please God, the Prime Minister will make some progress on the issue. I understand that he will make a statement about children in care after the Christmas recess.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Gentleman's remarks so far have been music to my ears. When I chaired the Children, Schools and Families Committee we looked at children in care. He is absolutely right about vulnerability. Does he agree that access to therapeutic care for those children at that crucial age is often just not there?

Kit Malthouse: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Indeed, progress needs to be made in all manner of policy areas to deal with this issue.

Their vulnerability to child sexual exploitation is one area where we can stop failing those young people now. Their characteristics mean that this particular group of young people are in desperate need of the changes we are proposing today. While most children's vulnerability is shielded by family, friends and the support networks that come through good communities and good schools, those children are not so fortunate. Their backgrounds are chaotic, frightening or cruel, putting them in a nearly hopeless situation. Combine that fragility with the fact that there is no one actively looking out for them, and it quickly becomes clear that they are easy prey for evil people. We have seen from case notes that that kind of background is so often part of the trajectory of an abused child—a trajectory that sees an abused and vulnerable child become a troubled adult. The Children's Society report shows that these predators target children systematically and lie in wait near where they live, study or socialise. They stalk them on social media. They offer the child everything they have missed, win their trust, isolate them from the adults who would intervene, ply them with drink and drugs, and then strike. Every time they are successful, they leave a life in tatters; every time they fail, they just move on to the next target.

In the past few years we have seen several sickening cases of hundreds of children targeted by gangs and by predatory individuals. These cases of exploitation sometimes occurred in collusion with, or at least with the knowledge of, those who should have been protecting and caring for them. In some cases, the police or those responsible for the children wanted to intervene but lacked the authority or confidence to do so. Right now, the police, children's services and the courts look on without the legal teeth or power to stop it.

Some will immediately think of high-profile cases like those in Rotherham or Oxford, but let us be clear: this is not a problem with one demographic, even if divisive and unhelpful groups want to pretend that it is in order to further their own agendas. Child sexual exploitation affects, and is perpetrated by, all races, colours and creeds. The papers focus on the big cases, but there are thousands of individuals whose lives have been turned upside down by these crimes. As I have said, these children do not have parents who can look after them or family to care for them, so it is our collective duty as a society to be those parents and that family. We, us, you and me have to be the arms that catch them if they fall and the voices calling them back when they wander and stray. Now, too often, we fail them just when they need us most.

More broadly, these issues point to a wider problem in the way we protect children. To reflect the importance of ending this national scandal, it is time that we tilted the law and the criminal justice system decisively in favour of children and those who wish to protect them, not just in this instance but across the board. In thinking about protected groups, it seems strange to me that children are not among them. Gay people, minority racial groups and religious groups are all protected specifically in law, and rightly so, but children are not, and they should be. We have to add them as a category for special protection, at least to send a signal to society and the justice system that more effort is required. The upcoming policing and criminal justice Bill that was announced in the Queen's Speech offers just such an opportunity.

[*Kit Malthouse*]

On the distinct matter of child sexual exploitation, the crux is that 16 and 17-year-olds are not protected in the same way because they are over the age of consent. Children under 16 are already protected by the fact that they cannot consent to sex, and the rightly harsher sentencing that exists because of this is a strong deterrent. Sexual crimes against children under 16 are further prevented by the extra powers and tools that the police possess to intervene when someone is targeting and grooming them for exploitation. These include child abduction warning notices, which are used to disrupt an adult's association with a child under 16. We should take note of this deterrent effect and extend the power to 18. There is already backing for this.

In 2012, the Office of the Children's Commissioner asked the Government to extend the use of these notices and allow them to be served without parental consent where necessary. There is solid statistical backing for this change too. In 2012-13, 306,118 incidents of missing persons were reported to the police in England, Scotland and Wales. During that year, children accounted for 64% of all missing person incidents, and 15 to 17-year-olds were the most common missing persons, accounting for 36% of all such incidents. This means that in over a third of cases, the police did not have the right powers to intervene to protect a child. That must change.

The fact that 16 and 17-year-olds are still children, and that children are vulnerable and more likely to be targeted, is enough to warrant extending these protections to them.

Mr Sheerman: Does the hon. Gentleman share my misgivings—I make myself very unpopular on the Labour Benches in this regard—about introducing the vote at 16, which would be a move towards adulthood at 16 and therefore reinforce the problem of the shrinking of childhood? We must be very careful about that as the length of time that someone is child, as a percentage of their now very long life, becomes shorter and shorter.

Kit Malthouse: I realise that the House is divided over the issue of votes at 16. My personal view is that we should stay at 18. I am trying to illustrate the fact that the two years between sexual consent and legal majority is a particular zone of childhood which, as I hope the hon. Gentleman agrees, requires particular attention from a legal and a parliamentary point of view.

We also have to consider the psychological impact that the lack of protection has on society. It makes people think that these children should not have this protection, that they are not really vulnerable, and that they are, in the words very deliberately chosen by the Children's Society, "old enough to know better". Furthermore, in many cases, because they lack these protections and are above the age of consent, they are all the more likely to be denied justice, and that is why predators are drawn to them. The fact that they are above the legal age of consent has had a big psychological impact on how crimes committed against them have been interpreted. There is evidence that juries have lacked sympathy with their cases when these crimes have come to court. Their vulnerability and the cruel effectiveness of grooming are not well understood across the population, and attackers are aware of the public's complacency.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): On the topic of public attitudes and misperception, is the hon. Gentleman aware of the case of Maria Cahill, who bravely came forward to the authorities, and eventually to the media, with her story of abuse within the republican movement, as a member of that movement, and how her story was suppressed? Ever since the BBC revealed it, she has been subjected to punishment tweeting by Sinn Féin supporters and, indeed, by Sinn Féin politicians, who have cast slurs on what age she was to imply that she did "know better" and was somehow complicit in her own victimhood.

Kit Malthouse: I am sad to say that I do not know of that particular case, but the hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point.

This point is so obvious that it should not need stating, but I will do so anyway, because even when it is intellectually understood, people still do not "get it": not fighting someone off, not objecting vociferously, or not attempting to take oneself away from a situation does not equal consent. That is even more obvious when we think of common factors in the cases that have come before the courts. We are talking about victims with mental health problems and learning disabilities. We are talking about children recovering from traumas and encouraged to take drugs or drink alcohol so that they would submit. Complacency about this matter is the biggest encouragement that the attackers look for. It needs to be clear in law that these children are to be considered vulnerable and that the targeting of vulnerable people will never be accepted in the United Kingdom.

All this points to the fact that the sudden removal of protections at 16 is not working, and that we can protect children better with our actions in this House. Let me reiterate what we are asking for: the Government must clarify, and put the clarification in statute, that when a victim of sexual assault is aged 16 or 17, it is an aggravated offence. They must make it clear that drugs and alcohol can never be viewed as consent for a sexual act. They must recognise that vulnerable people are deliberately targeted, and that this should be further considered as an aggravating condition. Passing this motion will move us towards doing a better job of helping parents, police and child protective services to look after children, and we must do so.

I do not advocate these reforms as a Conservative but as a father and as a Member of Parliament. I believe that it is in that spirit that other hon. Members joining us today also back this motion. As we do so, we lay claim to the best traditions of social reform that Britons have offered from within and without these walls through the ages. Every party in this House can lay claim to this, the most honourable of political traditions—the tradition that looks the vulnerable in the eye and says to them, "I will use the good fortune and power that society has given me to protect you." When it comes to this kind of reform, I do not believe that any Member is sitting on a particular side of the House.

1.39 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I am grateful to have an opportunity to speak in this debate and grateful that it has been secured.

The focus of the debate could not be more serious. Protecting our young people from sexual exploitation as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood

must be a priority of this House. It goes to the heart of the kind of values we have—the value we place on our young people, the value we place on protecting the vulnerable, and the values we have around dignity, fairness and consent.

Child sexual exploitation is abhorrent and can have devastating and lifelong consequences for those who are victims of it, not to mention the effects on their families and those closest to them. All children and young people have a fundamental right to be cared for and protected from harm, and to be able to grow and thrive in an environment where they feel safe and where their rights are respected, as outlined by the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, which applies to all young people up to the age of 18.

Yet the report “Old enough to know better?”, which was published in November, makes for truly harrowing reading. The Children’s Society report examined why older teenagers are particularly at risk of child sexual victimisation and the extent to which 16 and 17-year-olds are victims of sexual offences. It also considered why they find it so very difficult to disclose their experiences and to access help and support.

We know that the justice system is not always as kind and supportive as it should be to victims of sexual crimes, and nowhere is that more true than in its treatment of our young and vulnerable. Of course, the law recognises that those in the age range under discussion can legally consent to sexual relationships, but under the Children Act 1989 they are still considered to be children. As such, professionals and, indeed, wider society have a legal duty to safeguard those young people from exploitation.

Although 16 and 17-year-olds continue to be protected from sexual abuse within the family or by those in a position of trust, and from sexual exploitation offences such as child prostitution and pornography offences, they simply, and appallingly, do not receive the same kinds of protections as younger children if they are targeted for sexual abuse by predatory adults. That is shocking and it is put sharply into focus by the Children’s Society report, which shows that 16 and 17-year-olds are more likely to be victims of rape or sexual offences than any other age group. That situation demands our considered response.

Just as we find it appalling and evil when young children are sexually exploited, mistreated and abused, so too we should be outraged when those going through the transition from childhood to adulthood face such exploitation. It is concerning that it seems that professionals are more likely to see those in the age range of 16 and 17 as complicit in their own exploitation. Such a view fails to understand the targeted and intense nature of grooming, and it mistakes consent to drink alcohol or to participate in risky behaviours as consent to having sex. Clearly, professionals need more training so that young people who need support and understanding—not to mention justice—receive it. Pointing to the age of legal sexual consent cannot be the means by which we fail to live up to our collective duty to protect our young people on the threshold of adulthood.

In England and Wales there is no specific offence of child sexual exploitation, and that is worth examining. In Scotland the definition of child sexual exploitation states:

“Any involvement of a child or young person below 18 in sexual activity for which remuneration of cash or in kind is given to the young person or a third person or persons. The perpetrator will have power over the child by virtue of one or more of the following—age, emotional maturity, gender, physical strength, intellect and economic and other resources e.g. access to drugs.”

Under Scots law, there are specific protections for those aged 16 and 17 who are at risk of exploitation, with offences specifically to protect that particular demographic. The offence of sexual abuse of trust makes it a criminal offence in Scotland for a person in a recognised position of authority to engage in sexual activity with anyone under the age of 18 in their care. The Protection of Children and Prevention of Sexual Offences (Scotland) Act 2009 makes it a criminal offence to involve children in child pornography, extends protection against indecent images to 16 and 17-year-olds, and provides for restrictions to be placed on sex offenders.

The Scottish Government introduced Scotland’s national action plan to tackle child sexual exploitation, which represents a comprehensive and ambitious strategy to address that complex challenge. The “Getting it right for every child” strategy aims to improve outcomes in Scotland’s public services that support the wellbeing of children and young people. It is part of a framework for responding to sexual exploitation and it applies to young people up to the age of 18. That, as well as the sex offender community disclosure scheme, also offers protection for 16 and 17-year-olds. The keeping children safe scheme enables parents, carers and guardians of those under the age of 18 to make a formal request for disclosure of information about a named person who may have contact with their child, if they are concerned that he or she might be a registered sex offender.

The Scottish Government will launch a campaign to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation in the week beginning 25 January 2016. This high-profile campaign will be aimed primarily at parents, carers and those aged between 11 and 17 years old. It will include TV advertising and poster material that will run for three weeks. In addition, partnership material is being developed in order to reach the youth audience, and a campaign website, which is also being developed, will highlight the risks, as well as offer advice and support. A practitioner’s toolkit will be made available on the website ahead of the launch, so interested parties will be able to download material for use in their local communities.

We must continue to be vigilant in the protection of our young people, wherever they live in the UK. The Scottish Government have done much good work in this area, but there can be no room for complacency and we must always examine all protections offered with a critical eye, to ensure that they continue to offer robust protections for all our young people, including those in the 16 and 17-year-old age bracket. I am not going to stand here today and argue that in Scotland we think it is job done—absolutely not. We must continue to be vigilant, as are those who would exploit young people. As the hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) pointed out, those in care are at particular risk. Moreover, the Children’s Society’s call for increasing the age for the application of child abduction warning notices is eminently sensible.

I sincerely hope that Members can learn from the good work and initiatives being undertaken by the Scottish Government, because I know that the Scottish

[*Patricia Gibson*]

Government will examine all measures taken by this House, to see what they can learn in turn. We should also be learning lessons from how countries further afield tackle the issue. As technology grows ever more sophisticated and those who would exploit our young people become ever more creative, we must all continue to be vigilant. We must not let our young people down. We must not allow the law to let our young people down.

Young people travelling down the road of transition from childhood to adulthood are not being protected as they should be. They are not telling those in authority when they experience sexual exploitation. The Children's Society report points out how chronically under-reported such exploitation is to the authorities. We know that young people often feel that it is their fault when they are sexually exploited, and we know that it can have huge consequences for their development into full adulthood. The more we talk about it, and the more we recognise it as a problem that actually exists, the more likely those who are exploited will feel able to report their ordeals.

This is an issue that must be brought out of the shadows. We must talk about it, how it can occur and the ways and means through which these young people may be sexually exploited. We must remember that the onus for what happens to them cannot be placed on the shoulders of young, vulnerable people who can be manipulated by others who are far more worldly wise and cunning than them. Concluding that vulnerable young people of 16 and 17 years of age are complicit in their exploitation lets the exploiters and sexual predators off the hook, and that serves only to heap insult on to injury.

Let us not kid ourselves: child sexual exploitation is as much a reality in Scotland and across the UK as it is anywhere else around the world. That is the reality we cannot ignore, and we must tackle it collectively. No one is saying this will be easy, but it must not and cannot be beyond the wit of politicians to draft laws fully to protect our young people from exploitation. Everything that may help must be explored fully. We need to make sure we create an environment that is as difficult as possible for those who would prey on and sexually exploit our young and vulnerable. We also need to create an environment in which the victims of sexual predators and exploiters feel able to speak up, and are confident about doing so, in order to receive the support that they need. Surely, that it is the least we can do.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. In his point of order, the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) was a little generous in estimating that 10 minutes might be the correct amount of time that hon. Members can take to speak. If everyone who has indicated that they wish to speak is to have an opportunity to do so, I ask hon. Members to take no more than eight minutes each.

1.50 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I will quickly knock two minutes off my speech, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) and to hear about some of the good work going on in Scotland. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), ably supported by the hon. Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey), on securing this debate.

I also congratulate the Children's Society on its "Old enough to know better?" report. As a former Minister with responsibility for this area, I did a lot with the Children's Society, including meeting the victims of child exploitation whom it was taking care of, as well as runaways. I saw at first hand the excellent work that it did, and which it continues to do.

I am delighted that the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), has taken over the Government's cross-cutting role on this whole very important area of child sexual exploitation. I am delighted to say that she is very ably shadowed by the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion). It is good to see the shadow children Minister, the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), in the Chamber as well.

This subject is not aired enough in the House, despite the fact that the profile of child sexual exploitation in this country has never been higher, thanks to high-profile celebrity prosecutions and the series of virtually weekly reports of historical sexual abuse coming from the BBC, celebrities, care homes, schools, boarding schools, music schools, churches, church institutions and so on. As my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire said, the trouble is that the vast majority of child sexual exploitation still taking place in this country is done not by celebrities or by people in high-profile positions, but by ordinary people and, in many cases, relatives of the victims.

At long last, the Lowell Goddard inquiry, which many of us called for, is taking place. Its work will take a long time, and it will continue to put a lot of pressure on the police investigating historical cases. Putting the historical sexual abuse cases aside, however, we have a problem—here and now—with contemporary child sex abuse, and specifically for those transitioning from childhood to adulthood.

The age at which one becomes an adult has always been a grey area. Through the all-party group on children, we have done some work on the relationship between children and young people and the police. That work has led to a recognition that, in the eyes of the law, and certainly for young people taken into custody, a 17-year-old is a child and must be treated as such. The Home Secretary has reacted very favourably to that work and has made changes. The status of 16 and 17-year-olds has been problematic since the age of consent was raised to 16 back in 1885.

My hon. Friend mentioned the introduction of child abduction warning notices. When there are concerns, they can be used to disrupt contact between a vulnerable child and an adult. Children under 16 are protected, but 16 and 17-year-olds are covered only if they are in the full care of a local authority under an order under section 31 of the 1989 Act. That leaves an awful lot of children who might be exposed. The recent report by the Children's Commissioner on child sexual abuse in the family network highlighted the extent and complexities of the problem.

Some 70,000 children are in the care system, and this is still a very big problem, despite the changes to residential children's homes, through regulations that I instituted some years ago, to prevent children's homes from being sited in areas where there are a lot of sex offenders as well as other temptations and dangers to young children. Children in care still suffer from huge poverty of achievement, and the Government still need to go a long way towards addressing that.

I have mentioned the Children's Commissioner's excellent report, which came out last month. The most shocking finding she came up with is that, between 2012 and 2014, there were between 400,000 and 450,000 victims of child sexual abuse, but only 50,000 of them were known to statutory agencies. That means that only one in eight cases of sexual abuse are actually picked up by the authorities. Some 11.3% of young adults aged between 18 and 24 had experienced contact sexual abuse during their childhood. About two thirds of all child sexual abuse occurs in or around the family—involving relatives or close and trusted family friends—with all the implications that has of cases being swept under the carpet, of victims being afraid of speaking up or bullied into not doing so, and of family discord. It is likely that children from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and boys in particular, are under-represented in the data. As my hon. Friend mentioned, children with learning disabilities are particularly vulnerable and are particularly unlikely to be able to report, even if they wish to, or to understand that they have been the victims of a crime.

There is a bigger issue in that, in many cases, children do not really appreciate that they are victims, but feel that they have, in some way, brought it on themselves. A few years ago, disgraceful comments were made about how a 14 or 15-year-old girl in care could in some way bring sexual abuse on herself. That is absolutely outrageous, and anybody who agrees with such comments has no place anywhere near child social care. They are children, and if someone old enough to be a girl's father or grandfather has sexual relations with her, that is a crime. Such people must be treated as criminals, and prosecuted and persecuted as such.

There is also the issue of how children actually tell someone. The report by the Children's Commissioner revealed that a failure to listen to children and young people has resulted in a failure to identify abuse. Indeed, child sexual abuse often comes to the attention of statutory and non-statutory agencies as a result of a secondary presenting factor that becomes the focus of intervention.

There is a big role for schools in this whole issue. According to the report, the majority of respondents said that they tried to tell their mother, a friend, a peer or a teacher. There is a problem of parents being in denial about the involvement of close relatives in child sexual abuse, or being ill-equipped to detect it or to know exactly what is going on. In schools, we need to get much smarter about how we pick up or detect it. I remember going to a school in Stafford and having the privilege of sitting in on an interview with a full-time social worker employed by the school. A young girl—a 15-year-old—who had come to see the social worker broke down halfway through the interview and revealed that she was being abused by her stepfather. Nobody had had any clue about that, so there was clearly something wrong. We need to be able to pick such

things up in schools, and we need better training for teachers and school staff to detect such things.

There is also the hoary old chestnut of sex and relationships education: the Children's Commissioner's report showed that not having had any sex education or having had only poor quality sex education undermined the ability of vulnerable youngsters to understand that the abuse was wrong and should be reported. We need to do more to ensure that young girls have the confidence to say no when sex is forced on them, and to understand that they have the right to say no. There is also the issue that about a quarter of cases involve perpetrators who are themselves under the age of 18. There is a real problem of young-on-young sexual abuse.

The Government have a good record in starting to approach this issue. The child sexual exploitation action plan, which I launched back in November 2011, has produced many practical results. The Home Office produced a CSE report earlier this year. Since last year, there have been new sentencing guidelines for courts, enabling courts to give individuals more severe sentences in cases where the victims were particularly vulnerable, such as 16 and 17-year-olds.

Much has happened, but much more needs to happen. The Children's Commissioner's report is very relevant to this debate. It highlights the need for the Government to step up their response to this huge problem with a truly cross-Government strategy. In this debate, we have rightly raised serious concerns about 16 and 17-year-olds, but that is only part of a much bigger issue that we are only just beginning to get on top of. However, I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing this matter before the House.

1.59 pm

Ann Coffey (Stockport) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who did so much excellent work as children's Minister to tackle child sexual exploitation.

"Old enough to know better?" is, indeed, a thought-provoking report by the Children's Society, which has long been concerned about the vulnerability of this age group. It should be congratulated on its campaigning work in this area.

The last Parliament saw high-profile child sexual exploitation cases in Rochdale, Rotherham, Oxford and Telford, among other places. The public were shocked as the graphic details of the offences were reported, with children and young people being passed around for sex by groups of men, their plight made worse by the attitude of those working in the agencies charged with protecting them, who regarded them as making a lifestyle choice to exchange sex for gifts.

Those cases led to an increasing awareness of grooming and what constitutes consent, and an examination of the wider issues around child sexual exploitation and vulnerability. They also led to a better understanding of online grooming, sexting, peer-on-peer exploitation, the impact of the digital age on how young people communicate and the pressures that that can place upon them.

The last Government introduced a number of measures, such as the new offence of sexual communication with a child and the reduction in the number of occasions on

[Ann Coffey]

which the defendant must initially meet or communicate with the child before a prosecution may be brought to only one.

Because of the high-profile cases, child sexual exploitation has been identified predominantly with the exploitation by Asian men of white girls, so some of the more common kinds of sexual exploitation are not well understood, particularly how vulnerable young people can be groomed one-on-one by much older adults, either online or in person, or both, into performing sexual acts in which they feel complicit. Neither is the extent of peer-on-peer sexual exploitation fully appreciated. It is the ruthless exploitation of vulnerability—arising from a craving for love or acceptance, a dependence on drugs or alcohol, a disability or the inexperience and immaturity of childhood—for sex that needs wider understanding if we are really to protect children and young people by holding their exploiters to account.

That brings me to 16 and 17-year-olds. Sixteen is the age of consent to sex in law. A 16-year-old can marry with permission and at 17 a young person can drive. Although children can leave school at 16, they cannot work full time unless they are in part-time education or training. We recently debated in the Houses of Parliament whether 16-year-olds should be able to vote in the European referendum. Those differences reflect our ambivalence in respect of that age group. It is an age at which young people want the right to be respected for the decisions they make on their pathway to independence, but at which they still need protections. That is reflected in the different levels of protection that are offered by the law, which recognises that they are still immature in terms of life experience.

That vulnerability in respect of immaturity and age was recognised in the passing of the amendments by the last Government that consigned the term “child prostitute”, referring to those under 18, to the history books. Those amendments came into force on 3 May 2015. One important implication of those measures is that a child of 16 or 17 can no longer be seen as contracting to sell sexual services. Section 47 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 clearly recognises in law the vulnerability of this group as a result of their age and makes it clear that alleged consent to specific acts will not be a defence when an offender sexually exploits a child of this age group.

That recognition of the vulnerability of this age group needs to be extended and made explicit elsewhere in the law to make it clear that when a sexual offence of any kind is committed against a 16 or 17-year-old, it will always carry a harsher sentence than if the victim had been an adult. The sentencing guidelines for rape, for instance, list a number of factors that determine the category of the offence for sentencing purposes, one of which is that the

“victim is particularly vulnerable due to personal circumstances”.

Along with mental health issues and disabilities, that has been interpreted to include age, but we need to make its inclusion explicit and unambiguous.

No scope should be left for a 16-year-old to be considered not vulnerable, despite their being a child, when we know that there have been significant problems with professionals and the justice system treating people in this age group as adults or as “resilient” or “asking

for it”, particularly when the victim is involved or is seen to be involved in criminal activity. The message should go out to perpetrators loud and clear that if they sexually exploit, abuse or rape a 16 or 17-year-old, they will automatically receive a harsher sentence.

Altering the sentencing guidelines in the way I have outlined and in the ways proposed by the report of the Children’s Society, so as to make the vulnerability of this age group clear and consistent across all sexual offences, is an important first step in strengthening their protection in law. I would hope that something could then be done to decrease the disparity in the starting point for sentencing in cases of rape. If the victim is 15, the sentencing range is eight to 13 years, whereas for a child of 16, the range drops to only six to 11 years. There is no reason to make that distinction for offences such as rape, where the age of consent is clearly not relevant, given that rape cannot be consented to. There is every reason to afford 16 and 17-year-olds the same protection we give to children of a slightly younger age.

Last year, I was asked by Tony Lloyd, the Greater Manchester police and crime commissioner, to undertake an independent inquiry into the work that has been done to tackle CSE in Greater Manchester since the shocking Rochdale case. As I said in the report, which was published last October, we cannot prosecute our way out of the problem of CSE. The report highlighted figures for the previous six years in Greater Manchester, which revealed that there were only about 1,000 convictions out of 13,000 reported cases of nine major sexual offences against under-16s.

We know that there is under-reporting of sex crimes against 16 and 17-year-olds because victims are frightened that they will not be believed or because they feel complicit or ashamed. As the “Old enough to know better?” report shows, the police received 4,900 reports of sexual offences against this age group last year, but the crime survey for England and Wales shows that an estimated 50,000 girls alone said that they had been victims. In the last year, Greater Manchester police recorded 311 sexual offence cases against 16 and 17-year-olds, but I believe that there is a much higher level of offending.

Children who are sexually exploited can suffer lifelong harm and everybody agrees that prevention has to be the goal. By the time of prosecution, it is already too late for that particular child, and yet they have to face delays in cases coming to court and challenging and sometimes bullying cross examination, which can add further to their trauma.

Therefore, an important part of the strategy of tackling CSE must be better prevention. To ensure that that happens, we need to listen to children and young people about their experience of the world and support them to inform other young people. We need to build on a new approach to preventing CSE that is spearheaded by young people themselves. One of the things that young people told me again and again was how they valued talking to their peers, because they felt that their peers understood the pressures they faced.

My central proposal was for a multimedia digital network led by young people to spearhead the fightback against CSE, including a high-profile weekly radio show on CSE-related issues produced and hosted by young people. It is a peer mentoring session, writ large. We now have a very successful weekly radio show on CSE

on Unity Radio. For two hours on a Thursday evening, this dance and urban music radio station is taken over by 11 to 16-year-olds for the “Next Gen Youths” show, which has serious but accessible discussions on child sexual exploitation, led by young people. The strapline of the NGY show is

“helping young people lead safer and happier lives”.

Its aim is to spread awareness of CSE so that young listeners are better able to understand what a healthy relationship is. The shows have included discussions on what grooming is, how fashion is part of CSE and how pop stars influence the way in which young people dress. Greater Manchester is also developing an app, funded by a Home Office grant, called CTZN, which is a mobile-based digital platform created by and for young people.

Educating young people and effecting a sea change in culture is the only way forward. I believe that all those initiatives show that Greater Manchester is one of the leaders in the fightback against CSE. Public attitudes are fundamental to the protection of children and young people, but the criminal justice system is key in reflecting our attitudes to children and young people. We know that 16 and 17-year-olds are a difficult and challenging age group, but we must understand that during those two years, they often inhabit a dangerous twilight world between childhood and adulthood. Their vulnerability needs to be recognised and the clear message needs to go out to sexual predators that if they commit sexual crimes against people of this age group, they will receive a tougher sentence. That is not the solution, but it is an essential part of a wider strategy to tackle the child sexual exploitation of 16 and 17-year-olds.

2.9 pm

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) and the hon. Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey) for securing this debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire on his speech, which he made with great passion.

Sixteen and 17-year-olds sometimes believe that they are adults, but they are one of our most vulnerable groups. We all remember what those years were like. We were thinking about our futures, making decisions about what to study or where to go on to work, and we all experienced a range of emotions in that period of our lives. Many young people of that age are worrying not only about those decisions, but they may also be in a chaotic home environment. Some may not be able to be at home at all for a number of different reasons, including domestic, emotional or physical abuse, or because of their own behaviour. In particular, looked-after children may have had very traumatic pasts and been exposed to situations that we would never want a young person to experience. The experiences that some of our looked-after children go through, coupled with the feelings and challenges that come with being 16 or 17, make those people an extremely vulnerable group.

In the UK, approximately 8,400 teenagers aged between 16 and 17 are placed in supported accommodation to prepare them for their independence or for a whole host of reasons. Supported accommodation for young people can take many forms, and it is run by a number of different providers, including charities and private businesses.

In many settings, 16 and 17-year-olds can be placed in the same building as people who might be up to nine years older than them. They could be placed with ex-offenders, or with individuals who have other vulnerabilities such as mental health issues, or those suffering from substance misuse.

Supported accommodation is not subject to the same standards and regulations as other settings such as foster placements or children’s homes. Foster carers receive rigorous training and are supported by supervising social workers, as well as the social workers of the children who may be placed with them. There is also a stringent process to get through, prior to being given the green light to become a foster carer. However, the Children’s Society has found that half of providers employ staff with no qualifications.

I have had the privilege over the past eight years to get a small insight into the lives of some of our looked-after children, and to see at first hand some of the challenges that those wonderful young people have had to overcome in their young lives. For example, a young person could have been in care from a young age because of emotional or physical abuse, or because of neglect. That child might have been moved from foster carer to foster carer, and they could also have gone through an adoption failure, or had a period in a children’s home with a number of different social workers over that time. They may have no strong positive relationship with an adult who has been there through all their challenging circumstances. Given the nature of those formative experiences, those young people will often be extremely emotionally vulnerable and will have had few long-term, positive and meaningful relationships with adults, and few—if any—clear role models or mentors.

The Children’s Society found that half of supported accommodation providers are not consulted by children’s services when they plan how a young person’s care package will change as they approach independence. I have seen at first hand how vulnerable that group of young people are and, as we have seen recently in south Yorkshire, they are extremely susceptible to being targeted by predatory individuals who are looking to exploit and abuse our youngsters. I believe that individuals who seek to exploit that age group should be subjected to aggravated offences and harsher sentences. At any age, people can be at risk of abuse and exploitation, but 16 and 17-year-olds are legally still considered to be children. It is naive to believe that because a young girl or boy has reached the age of consent, they will automatically understand if they are being targeted or groomed.

Predatory individuals seek out vulnerable youngsters and pose as people who can be trusted and relied on. Often those individuals were once vulnerable young people themselves. The damage that can be done to young people subjected to those offences has a long-lasting impact on their individual future and on our society as a whole. I therefore call on the Minister to take forward the recommendations in the Children’s Society, “Old enough to know better?” report. I would also welcome particular focus on and consideration of the risks of safeguarding children in supported accommodation, to ensure that those settings can effectively protect vulnerable children from harm.

We are about to break for what can be a happy time for many, but one group of young people will be alone

[*Kelly Tolhurst*]

and experiencing some of the abuse that we have spoken about today. We must do all we can to ensure that, whatever their circumstances, our young people are supported to thrive and go on to enjoy the best possible future that any young person should expect.

2.15 pm

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): I declare an interest as the founder of the Early Intervention Foundation. It is a great privilege to follow the hon. Member for Rochester and Strood (*Kelly Tolhurst*), who made an eloquent speech. Those who see Members of Parliament from the end of 140 characters on Twitter would do well to follow colleagues such as my hon. Friends the Members for Stockport (*Ann Coffey*) and for Rotherham (*Sarah Champion*), and the hon. Members for East Worthing and Shoreham (*Tim Loughton*), for North West Hampshire (*Kit Malthouse*) and for Oxford West and Abingdon (*Nicola Blackwood*)—unfortunately she is not with us today. They are exemplars of what Members of Parliament can do when they get their teeth into an issue that they care about, and refuse to let go until something is done. I hope that this debate will be another demonstration of how Members of Parliament from across the House can be effective when we work together as parliamentarians, pushing Governments of all colours in the right direction.

I am not going to talk about 16 to 18-year-olds, because we will help those people by intervening much earlier. If we only help a 16 to 18-year-old, we are firefighting. That has to be done and fires have to be fought, but if we are to get a strategic grip on this issue we must eliminate the causes of child exploitation, as well as tackling the consequences. That, in essence, is the definition of early intervention, and it is important to consider this as an intergenerational problem.

This problem is so big and deep rooted that we must have not merely a set of tactics, but a set of strategies to take us forward. One of the best ways to do that is to consider the example of What Works centres in this country, where people collect together best practice and evidence to discover what kinds of programme work most effectively to help victims, and indeed to help perpetrators from re-offending. We have that all in one place, so that instead of reinventing the wheel, whether in the police, the health service or as a Member of Parliament, there is a place to go where we can rely on other people's experience and practice that has accumulated over many years. Every instinct in a normal human being to the awful sexual abuse of children and 16 to 18-year-olds is an emotional response, but this is about evidence and science.

I first called for a national institute to consider how to reduce the perpetration of sexual abuse 26 years ago, together with the then right hon. Member for Finchley—the Prime Minister, *Mrs Thatcher*. I say that only to bring us up to date and to urge us to ensure that our successors are not sitting here in 26 years' time demanding exactly the same thing. It is now time for us to help the next generation.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (*Karen Bradley*): In the interests of time, let me put on the record that the Department for

Education has recently announced a new What Works centre for child protection. That will build an evidence base to show us the best practice available to help social workers, health workers, the police and other practitioners, and give better support to children and families—something I know that the hon. Gentleman has been calling for.

Mr Allen: I was just about to make that point and the Minister has made it very eloquently for me. I have served in the House with Governments of all political complexions. Ministers are concerned and empathetic. We are fortunate to have her as a Home Office Minister as well as having her colleagues, the Minister for Children and Families; the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Battersea (*Jane Ellison*), who has responsibility for public health; and the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for North West Cambridgeshire (*Mr Vara*). All of them have been involved in pulling together the idea that there should finally be a national institute or centre of excellence to look at the sexual abuse of children and how to help them and perpetrators.

I raised that with her colleague the Minister for Children and Families in an Adjournment debate in June—I did it as fast as I could after the general election. The Minister has already said as much, but in that debate, the Minister said that there would be a centre of expertise to identify and share high-quality evidence to tackle child sexual abuse. That must include 16 to 18-year-olds.

I am conscious of the announcement, but I will tee this up for the Minister as the willing smasher of volleys over the net that I know she can be: will she tell the House how that is going and when we can expect it to be established? I hope the centre can be productive before the next general election, producing reports on best practice in particular situations and in the field, and producing reports for the agencies—the police and the health service—Members of Parliament and everyone who has an interest. Above all, I hope it can give *Justice Goddard* a head start by doing an interim report that calls for and supports the institution, so that, before what could be a Chilcotian length of time before he reports, he can influence the necessary political developments and changes.

I hope the Minister will inform the House that, as well as doing valuable work pulling together departmental interests, such an institution will listen to the voluntary sector, which does so much work in the field, and those out in the individual local authorities. There is a great body of work, but it is all over the place and it is never quite there when we need it. I suspect that many colleagues who have been through the awful experience of raising constituency cases are powerless and frustrated for a fair period because they cannot quite lay their hands on what somebody did earlier that would save them a lot of time and victims a lot of grief.

I should highlight the work of the Early Intervention Foundation. It is working closely with the Home Office, as the Minister knows, and has commissioned a review of the evidence on the indicators that suggest that a child under the age of 18 is at heightened risk of becoming a victim, or even a perpetrator, of sexual abuse or exploitation and many other things. The foundation will undoubtedly do a first-class job on that commission but, in the long term, the answer for us all is to get

behind what the Government are doing, which I applaud from the rooftops, in putting together a What Works institution. We should ensure that its work is spread far and wide and that there is a connection with local authorities. From the top of my head, I suggest to the Minister that perhaps there should be 30 champion local authorities—they could be health authorities or police services—that can take forward the best measures that are pulled together in that central place.

The House can have an impact, working closely with the Government. The Government have been very receptive to representations made to them and will do something that will resonate and help children—it will also help perpetrators not to offend—in a way that could last several generations. That is an incredibly worth while thing to do. I congratulate all Members of the House who have led us to the conclusions that the Children's Society has put before us today, and who have led to the Government introducing a national institute for the study and prevention of the sexual abuse of children, including 16 to 18-year-olds.

2.24 pm

Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friends who have been involved in securing the debate on this excellent topic.

I want to lend a little of my experience as someone who has been involved in thinking about how to do things better in Somerset. Somerset has had its challenges recently and has tried to improve the standards of care that it provides to children in its care and to children in the county generally. It is right that the Government have raised the Ofsted standards with which councils must comply to ensure that that improvement happens correctly. Although we know of no serious cases in Somerset, the Ofsted inspection found that because of some of the structural arrangements and the way things were happening there, some of what had been happening in other parts of the country could in theory happen somewhere like Somerset.

I am interested in the issue both as the father of young daughters and as a Somerset councillor who has that corporate duty of care to children in care—the council is the corporate parent to them. I have talked to children in that age group about some of the challenges they face and some they could face as they move out of care at that vulnerable age. The risk comes in different ways. In a rural area such as Somerset, young people are very dependent on friends and family for lifts in cars—I am not talking about children in care because there are stricter rules. The problem is hidden in all sorts of ways.

It is right that we are trying to raise standards and to do some of the things that hon. Members have mentioned. In Somerset, there is a potential devolution deal. One aspect proposed in the draft devolution bid is more local control of mental health budgets and services. Somerset is currently under-served by child and adolescent mental health services. The thought is that, if we can control those budgets better and apply them in the local environment, we might be able to help children who currently do not have as much help as we might like.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): My hon. Friend refers to the devolution deal that will cover both Devon and

Somerset, including Torbay. One bonus of such a deal would be that it allowed more co-ordinated work across different areas. However, there is still a need to ensure that those budgets are well monitored and accounted for to local people.

Marcus Fysh: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. That is one of the things that I am keen to work on with him through the devolution process—ensuring that there are clear lines of accountability and that the governance aspects work well. As MPs, we can be involved in those things in future.

The recommendations in the excellent report—I congratulate the Children's Society on it—do a good job of making it clear that the fact that children are aged 16 to 18 and have some element of personal responsibility does not absolve the authorities of their responsibility to look after them. One key problem we have seen in what has gone wrong in other parts of the country is that agencies did not talk to one another—the police, healthcare and social services did not always talk to one another—and it will be good to put the onus on them to do so.

We should always be mindful of the people involved—the children. We do not want them to feel like they are young offenders. Given the scale of the problem, it is obvious that young people are victims as often as they are young offenders. We need to be much more sensitive to the realities of the life that some of those young people face and the circumstances they unfortunately find themselves in.

2.29 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): In the light of the restriction on time and a desire to allow everybody to make a contribution, I would like to concentrate my remarks on this very sad subject on the incredible work done by the WISH Centre in helping the victims of sexual exploitation. I was delighted to open its new centre in Merton just a few weeks ago, extending its pre-existing site in Harrow. The centre is already having a wonderful impact on my local community. The centre's work is made possible by funding from Comic Relief and is supported by its excellent director, Rowena Jaber. I am indebted to my friend Michael Foster for making me aware of the work of the centre and allowing me to work on bringing it to my area.

Having the courage to speak out after sexual abuse is the beginning of a long journey, but there is a terrible shortfall in therapeutic support for children who are victims. We need at least another 55,000 clinical therapeutic support places to make sure that all children who have displayed suicidal or self-harming behaviour receive this vital support. The provision of non-clinical early support is inadequate, even though such early intervention has been proven to be cost-effective, particularly when a child enters the criminal justice system.

That is why institutions like the WISH Centre are so important. The centre has been supporting those who have suffered from sexual abuse on the road to recovery for over 10 years. It specialises in support for those who self-harm, but it works extensively with young people who have experienced sexual abuse. This is because self-harm is a key indicator of sexual violence and abuse, as young victims struggle to cope with the trauma of their experience.

[*Siobhain McDonagh*]

The centre has a tremendous history of success. In the past year, the centre supported over 220 young people on a long-term basis—mainly female and mainly from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities—recording an 89% increase in safety from sexual exploitation and abuse. The emphasis on BAME communities is particularly welcome, given the different problems around the reporting of child sexual abuse in some communities. There are a number of commendable ways in which the WISH Centre supports young people. It has an independent sexual violence advocacy service for young people who have experienced current or historical sexual violence, including rape, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, gang-related sexual violence and child sexual abuse. This confidential, emotional and practical support helps young people to understand how the criminal justice process works and explains what will happen if they report crimes to the police.

The centre also works very closely with schools, so they are immediately notified on anything they need to act on regarding a vulnerable young person. It builds connections between schools, social services and the police to raise awareness. This is very important because a staggering proportion of young people still believe that if a teenager is too drunk or high to give sexual consent to sex, the sexual act is not rape, according to them.

Nusrat Ghani (Wealden) (Con): Will the hon. Member give way?

Siobhain McDonagh: I will not, just because I want to get on.

The centre's response strategy is focused on three main points: prevention, identifying early and responding appropriately. An excellent example of this work is its Shield campaign in Harrow. A shocking 44% of teenagers in Harrow know someone who has been stalked, sexually harassed or attacked. Funded by the Mayor's office of police and crime, the campaign has been raising awareness of the rights of young people and where they can go for help or confidential support in a crisis.

Other fantastic programmes specifically help those who self-harm with their recovery. Safe2Speak and the award-winning Girls Xpress! provide out-of-hours support, mentoring and creative therapies to help young women express themselves in productive and positive ways. The girls can take part in self-defence courses and healthy relationship workshops to discuss concerns surrounding young people, power, choice and safety. Guidance with regard to healthy relationships is particularly important, given that the most serious sexual assaults are usually committed by someone known to the victim, most often a partner or ex-partner.

The girls who attend these groups will have experienced self-harm, but are likely to have also faced issues such as exposure to domestic violence, sexual assault, depression, bullying, rape, neglect and low self-esteem. They are often at risk of sexual exploitation. Furthermore, by assessing and reviewing how well these services are supporting young people, the centre is constantly improving its techniques and provision in the light of the responses of service users. I am sure that this House will want to join me in commending the tremendous work of the

WISH Centre, and I invite the Minister to visit the centre in Merton and see for herself the excellent work it does.

Despite the hard work of groups such as the WISH Centre, however, there are still gaps in the provisions and protections available to 16 and 17-year-olds. Older teenagers, as we have heard, are at the highest risk of being victims of sexual crime. It is clear that they desperately need to receive better protection. I hope this protection will be delivered when the policing and criminal justice Bill is considered in the new year. Sexual offences against children at the age of 16 and 17 should always be treated seriously.

I fully agree that child abduction warning notices should be amended so that they can be used to protect vulnerable children of this age. We also desperately need the law to recognise that 16 and 17-year-olds can be groomed for sexual abuse through coercive and controlling behaviour, such as through the use of drugs and alcohol, and the fear of intimidation. Furthermore, the need for additional safeguards for children with learning disabilities of this age is clear.

I sincerely hope we will hear in due course how the Government plan to develop, revise and implement the legislation, policy and guidance for all children and young people who experience, or are at risk of, child sexual exploitation. It is high time that these victims received our full support and proper protection under the law.

2.36 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): I would like to begin by thanking the Backbench Business Committee for approving this debate, and by expressing my gratitude to the hon. Members for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) and for Stockport (Ann Coffey) for bringing it forward. We are all indebted to the Children's Society, which is to be commended for its work that seeks to prevent children from suffering heinous abuse and neglect. Child sexual exploitation is a truly reprehensible crime and one that has a lifelong impact on the lives of victims. I am sure Members on all sides of the House can find common cause today and unite behind this important issue.

Child sexual exploitation regrettably remains a problem, one that must be tackled collectively. A report released just this week from the National Crime Agency entitled, "Strategic Assessment of the Nature and Scale of Human Trafficking in 2014" lays bare a persistent problem. Of all the types of exploitation, child potential victims of trafficking aged 16 to 17 most commonly experienced sexual exploitation, with almost 100 cases reported in 2014. One child suffering in this manner is one too many; 100 is a failure that needs to be urgently addressed. That is two young people aged 16 or 17 every week falling through the cracks in the system and being preyed upon by some of the most despicable criminals in the UK. This only scratches the surface: countless more will doubtless have gone unreported.

Today's debate focuses on legislation and research covering England and Wales, but child sexual abuse is not a crime that stops at borders. It is important, imperative even, for jurisdictions to look at one another to share practices. The vast majority of children in Scotland live safe, healthy and happy lives, but child

sexual exploitation is as much a reality there as it is in the rest of the UK. The Scottish Government have introduced Scotland's national action plan to tackle child exploitation, a far-reaching and ambitious strategy to tackle the problem. Embracing the kind of joined-up approach required, the plan was developed with a working group that included Police Scotland, the Care Inspectorate, Barnardo's, the Crown Office and others. Real progress has been made in implementing the plan in Scotland.

A national summit, which brought together key service providers to share best practice, was held in February. Another such summit is due to be held in a couple of months. Police Scotland's national child abuse investigation unit is now fully operational, and a programme of work will be developed across child protection to be agreed by February 2016 and presented to the Scottish Parliament. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) mentioned, the Scottish Government will also be launching a campaign to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation week. That campaign will involve television and poster campaigns aimed primarily at parents, carers and children. The plan forms part of a wider strategy and legislation aiming to get it right for every child.

Getting it right for most, but not all, children simply is not good enough. No child, at any age, should be able to slip through the net in society. Children who have reached the age of consent are still children, and today's debate importantly highlights the disparity in how authorities deal with older victims. We have a moral duty to ensure that every child is protected from exploitation. Article 34 of the UN convention on the rights of the child lays clear our responsibilities. We must undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse and to take all appropriate measures to prevent the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity, the exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices, and the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.

Older children cannot be excluded or forgotten. It is arguable that older children are more at risk of grooming. The motion notes the role drugs and alcohol, mental health problems, being in care and learning disabilities can play in adding to the vulnerability of the age group. A true understanding of these complex issues is required in order accurately to target those who prey on vulnerable young people and to protect all those at risk. These issues span social work, policing, justice, the health service and the third sector. That should emphasise the need and importance of a collective and joined-up approach. Interworking between agencies, authorities and stakeholders is vital. It is also crucial that police be able to do their job properly and protect all children, including those who are older. One of the most impactful pages in the Children's Society's report is that which contains a single statement in large print:

"The police currently lack the tools they need to intervene early to disrupt sexual exploitation of older teenagers".

The report contains several recommendations on how police can be better equipped to deal with child sexual exploitation, and I ask that the Government give them serious consideration. Resourcing authorities should be of paramount importance, and I hope the Government will reflect on this debate and the report and come forward with proposals.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) made a good point about this being part of a much wider issue. We hear that the Goddard inquiry could take up to 10 years. Does that mean that victims of child sex abuse have to wait 10 years for justice? No one, no matter what their standing in society, should be shielded from prosecution for sexual abuse crimes. Victims deserve justice. Now is the time to act, and I ask that the Government do not delay. If even one more child is saved through expedient action, it will have been worth while.

2.43 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Thank you for your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, and a very happy Christmas to you too. I also thank hon. Members for securing this debate and the Backbench Business Committee for allowing it to happen today.

Many Members have mentioned the excellent Children's Society report, "Old enough to know better?" They have rightly described the situation for already vulnerable children—those in care, suffering mental health difficulties or dangerously exploiting drugs and alcohol, for example—but I shall focus on mobile and online sexual exploitation, to which all young people with smartphones are vulnerable. By not tackling that effectively, we risk setting another set of young people on the path to vulnerability, serious mental health problems and drink and drugs exploitation. We also have to recognise that many young people, while being victims, could also, if we are not careful, be defined as perpetrators. The law has to be right and work in tandem with other approaches.

I thank Kevin Prunty, an experienced headteacher in Hounslow and executive head of the successful Cranford schools partnership, for helping me to prepare for this debate. He has direct experience of this situation and has some solutions I know he wants to share with the Minister.

The Children's Society report recommendations apply to child sex abuse wherever and however it occurs, but there is justification for further consideration of mobile and online culture and the ways of helping to prevent the abuse, and to reduce the vulnerability to abuse, of 16 and 17-year-olds. In particular, the report does not address aspects of proactive prevention crucial to success in this field. Some important aspects of child online and mobile safety and of the equalities agenda are totally ignored, not just in the report, but seemingly by all the agencies and initiatives that Mr Prunty has come across.

We need to work in key areas, with cross-political support, to help schools and parents to safeguard children much more effectively than is possible merely by amending the law. The guidance says that child sexual exploitation can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition. The definition of child sexual exploitation in the Sexual Offences Act 2003 includes merely the recording of an indecent image of a young person. The key findings of "Old enough to know better?" focus on strengthening the law. This age group is particularly vulnerable and inadvertently more vulnerable because of the potential for clumsy, inappropriate or disproportionate use of regulation and legislation.

It is right to strengthen the law to afford these children the same protections as younger children, but it is the continuum with the circumstances prior to the age of 16

[*Ruth Cadbury*]

that makes them so vulnerable as they mature, particularly online. Tackling offenders and strengthening the law, while important, are only a small part of what needs to be done and are not, on their own, the real solution. Merely strengthening the law will do little good for the majority and will not address those who could become victims. We need to protect children earlier, as my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) said, and proactively to prevent abuse.

The law in this area is designed primarily to tackle the serious offences committed particularly by adults against young people. The Children's Society report and the work of most agencies and organisations tasked with online safety, although extremely valuable, focus too narrowly on already vulnerable children and fail to address the context of young people's lives more widely. The recommendations in the report focus on reaction rather than prevention. I want more resourcing, more strategies and action to provide an appropriate adult presence—not necessarily the police—in the mobile and cyber world, in which many young children spend huge amounts of their time growing up without us.

In this respect, the law must not be used where young people are engaging in unwise activities, which many do, that relate to the expectation and culture of a mobile and cyber environment in which appropriate adults have virtually no presence and where we too often leave the young people abandoned to fend for themselves. Here is a quote from Mr Prunty on the issue:

“In running schools and elsewhere, I always contend that a strong positive culture must dominate any community, including online and mobile, because in its absence there will never be a vacuum and instead street culture will fill the void.”

In strengthening the law for 16 and 17-year-olds, steps must be taken to ensure the system does not end up targeting and criminalising young people who are in fact victims themselves. It will also require significant training and support for the police and others whose response to such crimes appears already to be under-confident and variable. Mr Prunty's schools subscribe to a restorative justice approach, and this may be appropriate in cases where mitigating factors are considered.

Naïve online activity by 16 and 17-year-olds, which would also be subject to any strengthening of the law, such as online and mobile communication between peers, will be most frequent, is perhaps more detectable and could be easier to prosecute. It is important to remember, however, that in most cases 16 and 17-year-olds will actually remain victims even when they break such laws in the context and environment of the school and the world they occupy.

The vast majority of our young people are already mobile and already online victims in a largely unsupervised cyber world. Although the internet gets considerable attention from safeguarding organisations and in training, mobile activity and mobile-based abuse are, in fact, even more rife yet also more neglected by adults. Parents, teachers and other adults responsible for the routine safety of children are often best placed to supervise and guide young people, but they are largely absent from this dangerous environment. We tend to operate in Facebook, but young people are not on Facebook so much nowadays. The mobile world, and to some extent the dark web, get less attention, yet these are really part of most young people's experiences—day and night.

I believe that the figures quoted in the Children's Society report are actually a huge under-representation of the scale of the underlying problem. It is the underlying problem that contributes to a culture and environment that make identified sexual offences more probable and possible. In effect, it normalises them in the minds of young people, especially girls. I contest that a much larger proportion of 16 and 17-year-olds—boys and girls to differing degrees—experiences sexual and other harassment, abuse and pressure, and for many this is regular and unrelenting. Sometimes they take part in it, too. This normalisation, with no appropriate adult presence to challenge it, is what leads to the lack of reporting of sexual and other mobile, online and cyber-abuse. I support all the recommendations in the report, but feel that they are insufficient and incomplete without recommendations aimed at establishing a different online, mobile and cyberculture and skilling up children, parents and other adults.

I am short of time, so in conclusion I welcome the Minister's announcement of the What Works review and hope that she will consider the specific issues of mobile and online sexual exploitation. I hope she will look not only at the already vulnerable children, but at the policies of all those who work with all our children, so that consistent, deliverable and effective solutions can be achieved, rather than just punishment under the law.

2.52 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): Let me first congratulate the hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey) on securing this important debate. I would also like to thank everyone who has spoken because they have done so with passion, on the basis of many years of experience and out of a real commitment to using the opportunity we have as parliamentarians to make a difference for the most vulnerable people. I am always most proud when we have debates such as this one.

The clear driver for this debate is improving the lives of the most vulnerable 16 and 17-year-olds. Too often, young people of this age are treated like adults and not afforded the additional protections given in law to younger children. However, teenagers of this age are more predisposed towards risk-taking behaviour. For the most vulnerable—for example, those with earlier experiences of abuse, trauma and neglect—this risk taking can have serious consequences.

Yes, 16 and 17-year-olds can give consent to sexual acts, but is it always informed consent? The law does not recognise that in many cases where children aged 16 and 17 become victims of sexual offences, they are coerced into submission by perpetrators who supply them with drugs and alcohol or of whom the young people are scared. The capacity to consent is impaired through an imbalance of power between a child and a perpetrator, and by the young person's use and/or dependency on drugs or alcohol prior to the offence.

As far as under-18s are concerned, the law is clear that the sale and consumption of alcohol from licensed premises and from licensed vendors is prohibited, but the law does not specifically address the fact that 16 and 17-year-olds, particularly vulnerable 16 and 17-year-olds,

can be coerced to submit to their own sexual abuse through adults supplying them with alcohol on private premises.

It is welcome that the Serious Crime Act 2015 has created an offence of coercive and controlling behaviour in intimate and family relationships, which protects vulnerable individuals, including 16 and 17-year-olds, in cases of domestic abuse. However, similar changes are needed to recognise the fact that 16 and 17-year-olds can be coerced and controlled—either through drugs or alcohol, or through fear—for the purpose of sexual abuse in more transient relationships.

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 defines sex offences against adults and children. In the case of a number of sexual crimes, the Act views young people aged 16 and 17 differently from those under the age of 16, and differently again from adults. For example, young people aged 16 and 17 are recognised as children if they are victims of sexual exploitation. A person who is found guilty of such an offence will incur a shorter prison sentence—up to seven years—than a person whose victim is under 13. That person will be sentenced to life imprisonment, while a person whose victim is between the ages of 13 and 16 will be sentenced to up to 14 years in prison.

Despite the age-related gradation in the length of sentences for sexual exploitation, the sentences for offences of rape and sexual assaults do not reflect the age of the victim in the same way. They do not recognise that young people aged 16 and 17 are children, and are therefore more vulnerable than adults aged over 18. The current legislation provides no guarantee that a sexual assault against a 16 or 17-year-old will incur a more severe sentence than an attack on an adult aged over 18.

Child abduction warning notices are used by the police to disrupt contact between a vulnerable child and an adult when it is feared that the child may be at risk of sexual exploitation or harm. They are primarily used to protect children under the age of 16, with the consent of their parents or guardians. Currently, the law also affords protection to the tiny proportion of vulnerable 16 and 17-year-olds who are in local authority care under section 31 of the Children Act 1989. Police protocols specify that only that group can be protected by child abduction warning notices.

Last year 4,510 teenagers aged 16 or 17 became looked-after children, but only 190 were taken into care formally under section 31. The other 4,320 became looked-after children voluntarily, under section 20. As only those who are formally taken into care under section 31 are protected by child abduction warning notices, the vast majority of 16 and 17-year-olds in care are not protected. That denies the police a critical tool to keep them safe from sexual exploitation. For example, when two children are living in the same supported accommodation and facing the same risks of exploitation, and one is looked after under section 31 while the other is looked after under section 20, the police can protect only the first child; the second is left unprotected. As the Minister knows, there is clear evidence that children in care are more vulnerable to grooming and sexual exploitation. I ask her to look at the position again to see whether that highly vulnerable group of 16 and 17-year-olds could be protected by child abduction warning notices.

We must bear in mind that there are other vulnerable 16 and 17-year-olds who are not looked after by local authorities. They include “children in need” under section 17 of the Children Act, who could be disabled or young carers. Those aged 16 or 17 who are assessed as homeless under the Housing Act 1996 are not eligible either. Both groups are at significant risk, and would benefit from the increased protection provided by child abduction warning notices.

In Rotherham there are 2,360 young people aged 16 and 17, and analysis of Department for Education statistics shows that 160 of them have been assessed as “children in need”. I want those 160 to have the protection of child abduction warning notices, so that if they are being sexually exploited—even if the process of sexual exploitation is just beginning—the police can disrupt the perpetrators rather than sitting on their hands until the abuse happens. The Minister has the perfect opportunity to make amends in the upcoming policing and criminal justice Bill. It is an opportunity to send a strong message that 16 and 17-year-olds are children, and that sexual offences against children will always be treated seriously.

Let me end by asking the Minister some questions. Does she agree that the law should make it very clear that a young person who consents to drink alcohol or take drugs should never be seen as also consenting to a sexual act? Does she also agree that the sexual offences legislation could be strengthened with the introduction of a new offence of coercive and controlling behaviour for the purposes of sexual activity with vulnerable 16 and 17-year-olds?

The definitive sentencing guidelines on sexual offences, specifically on offences of rape or sexual assaults, do not include vulnerability due to the victim being under the age of 18 as the harm factor, the culpability factor, or even the aggravating factor. This means that those convicted of these horrible crimes against children aged 16 and 17 may not get a sentence reflecting the seriousness of their crime due to a victim being a child. Does the Minister agree that the sentencing guidelines on sexual offences should be amended to include a victim aged under 18 being listed as a category 2 harm factor? This would strengthen the message that targeting children for sexual crimes will not be tolerated and raise awareness of the vulnerability of children of this age.

3 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): It seems incongruous to do this during this debate, but I would like to start by wishing you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and all hon. Members a very happy Christmas. May I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) and the hon. Member for Stockport (Ann Coffey) on securing this important debate and all hon. Members on their very thoughtful contributions? It is clear from the genuine concern expressed that this is an important and challenging issue which deserves our careful consideration.

May I start by reassuring all hon. Members that, as the Minister for preventing abuse and exploitation, I can say that I and this Government share their desire to protect everyone, particularly vulnerable young people, from violence and sexual exploitation? Like my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham

[Karen Bradley]

(Tim Loughton), who did such an enormous amount in this field when he was a Minister in the Department for Education, I have met victims and survivors, as, I am sure, others have. As the hon. Member for Stockport said, it is vital that we listen to those children—that we listen to the victims and survivors—and that we hear what they say.

Social media was mentioned. Children feel that they cannot escape from social media. They do not feel they can turn off from it. If somebody is trolling them online, they do not feel they can escape from it. These are important points and we need to listen and to understand so that we can take the right action.

Nusrat Ghani: On the need to take young people seriously, has the Minister come across the Barnardo's service report, which highlighted that when young vulnerable people go to authority figures, they must always be taken seriously, because they may also be engaged in antisocial behaviour? Can we do all we can to ensure that people in authority take our young people seriously?

Karen Bradley: My hon. Friend, who serves on the Select Committee, makes an incredibly important point. Barnardo's has just completed a trial of child trafficking advocates for the Government—I have placed a written ministerial statement on that in the Library today—and it does incredible work to make sure children are listened to. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we need to change the culture and change attitudes. A point was made earlier—by the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), I think—about victims being perpetrators. It is too often the case that a victim becomes a perpetrator and is seen as a perpetrator, and is not seen for the child that they are. We need to change attitudes. This debate, and the contributions today, will go a long way to doing that, but there is still more to do.

Preventing abuse and exploitation and protecting the vulnerable present complex challenges, particularly when dealing with young people. We know that children are being deliberately targeted, manipulated and coerced, and consequently sexually exploited. In this context, the Government welcome the research and findings presented in the Children's Society report "Old enough to know better?" The report rightly highlights a number of important areas, including prevention, identification, protection, support and prosecution—areas which absolutely require the co-ordinated focus of Departments across Government, and beyond.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Survivors (Hull and East Riding), which serves victims of CSE with mental health support services in my constituency, has seen a 20% rise in clients over the last three years and its waiting list is now six months. Does the Minister agree that delays in providing mental health services for survivors are unacceptable and increase the risk of suicide and self-harm among CSE victims?

Karen Bradley: I join the hon. Lady in paying tribute to the work of that organisation. I will talk about mental health services later, if she will bear with me. I am absolutely sure that the organisation does incredibly important work. The length of its waiting list clearly demonstrates the demand for its services and the fact that it is tackling the issue in an effective way.

We need to work across Government, which is why we have established a cross-Government response to child sexual exploitation. I want to assure all hon. Members that this is a top priority for this Government. The Home Secretary launched the report "Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation" in March this year. It sets out a national response to the failures that we saw in Rotherham, which the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) described, as well as in Manchester, Oxford and elsewhere, where children were let down by the very people who were responsible for protecting them. It sets out how we will continue the urgent work of overhauling the work of our police, social services and other agencies together to protect vulnerable children.

I want to assure all hon. Members that significant work has been and is taking place across Government, but given the time available today, I will not go through all the points that have been raised. My door is always open, however, and all hon. Members are very welcome to come and see me to discuss their concerns and the work that is being done. I will be happy to share in detail the work we are doing across Government.

I want to touch on the issue of terminology in relation to child sexual exploitation. We know that there is an issue with the terminology, so we are reviewing and reissuing the current definition and the statutory guidance on safeguarding children and young people from sexual exploitation. We will make it clear what constitutes sexual exploitation as a form of sexual abuse, and we are working with a number of stakeholders, including the Children's Society, to sharpen the definition and strengthen the guidance. We will publish a progress report on all actions taken following the "Tackling Child Sexual Exploitation" report early next year.

We recognise that 16 and 17-year-olds are a diverse group and can be particularly vulnerable. They are children, but they are old enough legally to consent to sexual activity where appropriate. We know that that combination can be exploited and lead to abuse. There is a contradiction between the ever-decreasing age of sexual maturity and the age of emotional maturity, which is not going down. The wider that gap becomes, the harder it is for us to deal with these complex issues.

The court process can clearly present a particular challenge to vulnerable victims and witnesses, and everyone involved has a responsibility to manage that impact. In January 2015, toolkits were launched for the police, prosecutors and advocates, addressing the fact that consent is an issue for vulnerable young victims as well as dealing with the context of drugs, alcohol, mental health and learning disabilities. We have also completed the training of all specialist prosecutors, which will include Crown Court cases of child sexual abuse, and in 2016 we are training in-house advocates as well.

The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) talked about the law that applies to the sexual exploitation of children aged 16 and 17. I want to assure her that the law in England and Wales already specifically protects that age group from abuse. For example, sections 47 to 50 of the Sexual Offences Act 2003 criminalise payment for the sexual services of a child aged under 18 and provide for the offences of causing, inciting, controlling, arranging or facilitating the sexual exploitation of a child under 18.

The hon. Member for Stockport has campaigned vigorously on this issue. During the passage of the Serious Crime Act 2015, she was a leader in ensuring

that the Government removed the terms “child prostitution” and “child pornography” from the law. I know that the guidance has not yet been updated in some areas but we are working incredibly hard to ensure that that happens and to ensure that all agencies with responsibility for that guidance update it as soon as possible. This is the clear message: a child cannot consent to sex. They are forced into sex, they do not consent to it, and there can therefore be no such thing as a child prostitute.

My hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire talked about children in care, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst). Children in care are particularly vulnerable, which is why the Children Act 1989 makes it an offence to take any child in care, including a 16 or 17-year-old, away from the person responsible for them without lawful authority or reasonable excuse. We also know that 16 and 17-year-olds can be vulnerable in a variety of ways, some of which may be directly or indirectly linked to their age. That is also reflected in the sentencing guidelines, in which additional aggravating factors include the use of alcohol or drugs on the victim and the targeting of a particularly vulnerable child.

Sarah Champion: I apologise for interrupting the Minister, but I want to go back to her last point. I do not believe that either the police or people working in care homes are aware of that piece of legislation. If there is anything she can do to make them aware, that would be great. When I speak to these workers, they say, “The child is 16, so I can’t intervene if they want to go off with this person.”

Karen Bradley: I hope they have been listening to the debate, but we will make sure that even those few people who are not watching the House of Commons on a Thursday afternoon are made aware of that piece of legislation. The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran talked about a young person’s consent after taking drugs or alcohol. Let us be clear: the law is clear that a young person’s consent to take drugs or alcohol can never be viewed as consent to sexual acts.

I am making sure that I deal with the important points, so let me move on to the issue of mental health. Some children who experience the kind of trauma associated with child sexual exploitation will need support from mental health services. The Minister for Community and Social Care has just joined us on the Front Bench. He is a Health Minister, and I am working closely with him on the crisis care concordat to make sure that mental health services are appropriately delivered. It is crucial that we get this right for children, including 16 to 17-year-olds. That is why we have commenced a major transformation programme, backed by additional investment, which will improve the support provided to vulnerable 16 and 17-year-olds who have experienced sexual abuse and are in need of mental health and wellbeing services. The programme will place the emphasis on prevention and early intervention, which I know to be an issue close to the heart of the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen), building care around the needs of children, young people and their families, including the most vulnerable.

May I thank the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for bringing the details of the WISH Centre to the Chamber today? I welcome

the invitation she made and I hope that we can arrange time in my diary for me to visit.

Mr Graham Allen: We are all grateful for the Minister’s mention of a centre of excellence to look at dealing with sexual exploitation. Will she make it clear that this will deal not only with what people traditionally look at as the sexual abuse of children, but with programmes to help prevent perpetrators from reoffending? Can she confirm that all that best practice will be in one place?

Karen Bradley: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the work will be done not just in the What Works centre, but in the Home Office and elsewhere, particularly on the perpetrator programme. He is absolutely right in that the academic evidence is patchy in this field and we need to get the right evidence, because we will not be able to deal with this otherwise. We talk about conviction rates, but actually a conviction is a failure, as it means that a crime has occurred. We want to stop those crimes happening. That means dealing with perpetrators, stopping the perpetrators and protecting young people so that they understand and know what abuse looks like and how to avoid being abused. The work he has done in this area for many years is incredibly valuable and has helped us in Government to form our views on this issue.

The Government recognise the terrible scale and impact of these crimes, particularly on vulnerable victims. I am proud of the progress we are making in tackling all aspects of child sexual abuse and exploitation, but there is still much to do. That is why I commend the Children’s Society for its invaluable work in drawing attention to particular vulnerabilities and recommending actions. I acknowledge the helpful contributions that have been made in this debate; hon. Members from all parts of the House have advocated wonderfully on behalf of the vulnerable in society, and I commend them all for doing so.

3.13 pm

Kit Malthouse: With the leave of the House, I thank all Members who have taken part in this thoughtful and important debate, and I thank the Children’s Society for the support it has offered to a number of us in compiling our contributions. I also thank the Minister for her offer of an open door, which I took to mean a meeting to talk about perhaps putting together some clauses in the criminal justice Bill which might close some of these loopholes. More than that, I hope that this can be the start of an examination, before that Bill appears, of what more we can do to protect children, because it is obvious that the evidence is available to us.

As my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) said, the 2012 report of the Children’s Commissioner pointed to things that needed to be done. We now have the Children’s Society report with similar evidence. We also have the appalling cases that we see in the newspapers. Obviously, something needs to change. Much of the legislation around the protection of children is quite old, and has not been looked at since the 1980s, when there was a period of rapid change. I know from my own experience that children have just been through another period of enormously rapid change, and that the legislation has lagged behind. I would welcome working with Members,

[*Kit Malthouse*]

the Minister, and, hopefully, the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Justice to see what more we can do in the upcoming criminal justice Bill to protect young people.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House notes the findings of The Children's Society's report entitled *Old enough to know better?* which looked at the sexual exploitation of 16 and 17 year olds; further notes the particular vulnerability of that age group as they transition from childhood to adulthood and the role that aggravated offences and harsher sentences have in deterring crimes against 16 and 17 year olds; calls on the Government to clarify for prosecution and sentencing purposes the role drugs and alcohol, mental health problems, being in care and learning disabilities have in adding to the vulnerability of that age group; and further calls on the Government to give police the same tools to intervene when a 16 or 17 year old is being targeted and groomed for exploitation as they have for younger children.

Mr Graham Allen: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The brilliant way in which you managed the debate meant that every single person who wanted to speak did speak, and they all kept to within 10 minutes. Can you work that magic again?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): I genuinely thank the hon. Gentleman very much indeed for his excellent point of order. I am pleased to have it noted that the debate ended precisely at 3.15, which is what I intended. The next debate will end at 5pm whether or not I intend it. I do hope that by the same courteous behaviour from Members—

Mr Allen: Including those on the Front Bench.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Yes, including those on the Front Bench. I hope to accommodate everyone without the need for a formal limit on speeches.

Conception to Age 2: The First 1001 Days

3.16 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Old Whip's habits die hard, but we accept the overtures of the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen).

I beg to move,

That this House calls on the Government to consider the adoption of the recommendations in the cross-party manifesto entitled *The 1001 Critical Days*, the importance of the conception to age two period.

In this my seventh contribution of the day, let me wish you a happy Christmas, Madam Deputy Speaker, when it eventually starts. I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for giving us this important debate, particularly as it is so close to the launch of this excellent manifesto, which I will also be promoting today. I know that every single Member in this Chamber and beyond has been sent a copy of it. I am also grateful to those Members who have stayed for the final debate on the last day before the Christmas recess.

It is perhaps appropriate that the final debate should be about babies and conception to age two just eight days before we celebrate the birth of one particular baby, albeit the subject of an immaculate conception and in which the confusion over paternity, a somewhat unprepared and astounded mother and inadequate birthing facilities could have given rise in normal circumstances to some attachment dysfunction problems.

It is good to see the Minister for Community and Social Care here. I know that his door is well and truly open to what we have been promoting. It is particularly good to see my old great friend the Minister of State in the Department of Energy and Climate Change, my hon. Friend the hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom). I wish to pay tribute to her. Effectively, she conceived this whole manifesto, gestated it and gave birth to it, and has done so much to champion the cause of early years attachment and perinatal mental health in this House and for many years before she came to this House. She continues to combine her advocacy with her new day job in DECC. She championed "The 1001 Critical Days" manifesto, which is now three years old and which was relaunched this week with more support and recognition than ever before.

On Monday, no fewer than 200 people came to the House of Commons Terrace to support this manifesto. Those present included academics, senior practitioners in paediatric and mental health, commissioners, voluntary organisations and politicians of all parties. It is particularly gratifying that the manifesto has now been sponsored by Members from eight different parties across the House. There really is a genuine cross-party consensus to promote this manifesto.

There has been big progress since the manifesto was launched in 2012 and promoted in the party conferences in 2013. The manifesto is now becoming part of the mainstream. It was supported at its launch and continues to be supported by the WAVE Trust—I pay particular tribute to George Hosking and all the work that he has done well before our time in the House—the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and PIP, the parent and infant partnership charity. I declare an interest as the chairman of the trustees.

PIP is putting the “The 1001 Critical Days” manifesto into practical action through children’s centres around the country and changing the mindsets of commissioners. Our projects started in Oxford with OxPIP. We now have NorPIP in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire, projects in Enfield and Liverpool, and others in Brighton, Croydon and Newcastle coming online in the near future. We want to spread that network across the whole country.

It is crucial to change mindsets in relation to how we intervene early and reconfigure our health—particularly mental health—services, education and children’s social care services to intervene earlier to prevent the causes of poor mental health for mother and baby from leading to indisputable life disadvantages that become mired in a vicious cycle of intergenerational underachievement. The alternative is that we continue to firefight the symptoms at great cost to our society both financially and, more importantly, socially.

The Government have made good progress, largely through the troubled families programme, in acknowledging that if we recognise the problems of dysfunctional families early and intervene with intensive focus and joined-up support we can often get those families back on track and convert them to balanced, contributing members of society, rather than a huge challenge to it and drain on it. I am proud to have been involved with that work when it was started in the Department for Education in my time as a Minister there.

But we need to go further, with what I have termed a “pre-troubled families programme”. That is, in effect, what the “The 1001 Critical Days” manifesto is about, and this is why. Last year the Maternal Mental Health Alliance, so ably led by Dr Alain Gregoire, produced a report which estimated that the cost of perinatal mental illness at more than £8 billion for each one-year cohort of births in the United Kingdom. That is equivalent to a cost of almost £10,000 for every single British birth. Nearly three quarters of this cost relates to adverse impacts on the child, rather than the mother. Perinatal mental health problems are very common, affecting up to 20% of women at some point during and after pregnancy, yet about half of all cases of perinatal depression and anxiety go undetected and many of those which are detected fail to receive evidence-based forms of treatment.

As the Minister well knows, the current provision of services is patchy at best, with significant variations in coverage and quality around the country. Most alarmingly, just 3% of clinical commissioning groups in England have a strategy for commissioning perinatal mental health services and a large majority still have no plans to develop one. I am sure that with the new Minister’s laser-like focus and zeal, and the fact that NHS England has adopted perinatal mental health as a priority, this will start to change soon.

Why does this matter? Apart from the obvious major public health epidemic going largely under-appreciated at its extreme, the statistics are alarming. Just last week a report by the maternal research group MBRRACE, analysing maternal deaths between 2011 and 2013, found that one in four of those deaths between six weeks and one year after giving birth were linked to mental health issues, one in seven were a result of suicide, and mental health problems were instrumental in the deaths of one in 11 new mothers within the first six weeks after giving

birth. At this extreme the figures are shocking, but they are also largely preventable with better and early detection and intervention, yet 40% of those women who committed suicide in that timescale would not have been able to access any specialist perinatal mental health care in their areas.

For those who lived through pregnancy and the early years of a baby with a mental illness, the impact on that child can be considerable. Another major negative impact might be substance abuse, poor parenting skills—often inherited as a result of a young mum being poorly parented herself—and being exposed to domestic violence. Incredibly, more than a third of domestic violence cases begin in pregnancy. This is a statistic that many of us would find hard to believe. Sadly, these negative influences are all too prevalent among new parents. Those is by no means a problem limited to those from poorer backgrounds. Parents unable to form a strong attachment with a new baby come from all parts of society, and we need a multifaceted approach for detection and intervention at all levels.

Children need nurturing from the earliest age. From birth to age 18 months, it has been calculated that connections in the brain are created at a rate of a million per second. The earliest experiences shape a baby’s brain development, literally, and have a lifelong impact on that baby’s mental and emotional health.

A pregnant mother suffering from stress can sometimes pass on to her unborn baby the message that the world will be dangerous, and the child might struggle with many social and emotional problems as a result; their responses to experiences of fear or tension have been set to danger and high alert. That will also occur at any time during the first 1001 days when a baby is exposed to overwhelming stress from any cause within the family, such as parental mental illness, maltreatment or exposure to domestic violence.

Attachment is the name given to the bond that a baby makes with his or her care givers or parents. There is long-standing evidence that a baby’s social and emotional development is affected by his or her attachment to his or her parents. As the chief medical officer, Sally Davies, puts it in her foreword endorsing “The 1001 Critical Days”:

“The early years of life are a crucial period of change; alongside adolescence this is a key moment for brain development. As our understanding of the science of development improves, it becomes clearer and clearer how the events that happen to children and babies lead to structural changes that have life-long ramifications. Science is helping us to understand how love and nurture by caring adults is hard wired into the brains of children.”

The all-party group for conception to age two—the first 1001 days, which I have the privilege of chairing, produced a report in February called “Building Great Britons”. That, too, was sent to every hon. Member and it complemented “The 1001 Critical Days”. The report calculated the cost of child neglect to be some £15 billion each and every year. When combined with perinatal mental illness, that makes a cost of more than £23 billion every year for getting it wrong for our youngest children and their parents. That is equivalent to two thirds of the annual defence budget.

In concentrating on perinatal mental illness in young mums, it is also important to stress how a child benefits most from forming strong and empathetic attachments with both parents. We should not forget that 39% of

[Tim Loughton]

first-time fathers also experience high levels of distress during a child's first year. We need a strong whole-family approach, and it is especially important to get that strong attachment with fathers in the second year of a child's life as well.

Another big problem in this country is that it has been calculated that 1 million children suffer from the type of problems—attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, conduct disorder and so on—that are clearly increased by antenatal depression, anxiety and stress. Yet the cost of appropriate and timely intervention and support has been calculated at a fraction of the annual cost of failure. It equates to roughly £1.3 million per annum for an average clinical commissioning group with a budget of around £500 million.

The “Building Great Britons” report calculated that preventing these adverse childhood experiences could reduce hard drug use later in life by 59%, incarceration by 53%, violence by 51%, and unplanned teen pregnancies by 38%. It is not rocket science—technically, it is neuroscience. More and more people are coming to realise that this is an investment that we cannot afford not to make.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. He and I have worked on children's issues for a very long time. This is a brilliant initiative. As we are listening to his brilliant analysis, we have to consider whether we have the right skills in the communities. Are we training people the right way? Are we depending too much on people with PhDs in educational psychology, rather than on trained people based in GP surgeries who can identify problems and support families at an early stage?

Tim Loughton: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support. He has been working on this stuff for even longer than I have and has great experience. We need to ensure that we are training the people who know about this stuff, appreciate its importance and know how to communicate with other professionals to have a joined-up approach. There is too much silo thinking going on. When Minister and shadow Minister, I saw families who seemed to be having all sorts of different professionals going in and out of the house but no joined-up approach to bring it all together and make the difference that the family needed.

We also need those professionals to be able to work with the parents, and to be able to communicate and empathise with them, because ultimately it is the parents who will have the biggest influence on the children. They need to be guided and supported. The state needs to take over only in extreme circumstances in which children might be at harm. We need to do more to ensure that parents know what good parenting looks like and are able to do it.

That is why “The 1001 Critical Days” manifesto is so important. It is not simply a political wish list; it has been endorsed by a very wide cross-section of children's organisations, charities, practitioners, and academic and professional bodies, including the royal colleges of paediatrics and child health, midwives, psychiatrists, obstetricians and gynaecologists, and general practitioners; the NSPCC; Bliss; the Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships; and the Centre for Social Justice. The Institute of Health Visiting said:

“As far as health visitors are concerned, the 1001 Critical Days Manifesto may yet prove to be one of the most important developments of the new millennium. It has created a long overdue focus on the essential first days of life when the blue print for an individual's future health and wellbeing is laid down.”

I will not go into great detail about what the manifesto calls for, because every hon. Member has received a copy. In essence, it is about allowing vulnerable families to access specialist services; working closely together to share vital data between the different agencies I have spoken about; and making sure that every woman with past or present serious mental illness should have access to a consultant perinatal psychiatrist and specialist support in relation to mother-infant interaction, as required and in accordance with existing National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines.

The manifesto has a truly holistic approach involving many Government Departments and agencies at a national level and a local level. In essence, it is about changing mindsets so that that should be the approach we ordinarily have and take for granted, because it is the right one. The aim is that “The 1001 Critical Days” becomes a recognised term with a recognised programme being delivered across every community, focused on children's centres. I know that the Minister is already on board with this aim, and I urge him to promote and champion its adoption to his colleagues across Government. I commend the motion to the House.

3.31 pm

Mr Graham Allen (Nottingham North) (Lab): First, I declare an interest as the founder of the Early Intervention Foundation, and take this probably unique opportunity to put on record my thanks to its chief executive, Carey Oppenheim, its director of evidence, Professor Leon Feinstein, its director of policy, Donna Molloy, and all the fantastic staff there.

Secondly, I pay tribute to colleagues who secured this debate. If I may say so, the inspiration behind a lot of this comes from the hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom). I do not suppose that she is allowed to contribute today, but we are getting thought beams from her as our speeches progress and drawing great inspiration from that.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. The hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) may, on this unusual occasion, acknowledge the praise being heaped on her, and rightly so, from around the House.

Mr Allen: I would gladly give way to the hon. Lady if it did not break all sorts of precedents.

I come to this issue as a constituency Member of Parliament representing the fifth most deprived constituency in the United Kingdom who is learning how to resolve some of the intergenerational problems that start with the very youngest in our communities—indeed, as “The 1001 Critical Days” implies, before birth. Trying to break some of these cycles is my own personal learning curve. I share that, surprisingly but very importantly, with the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), who has been on a similar journey to mine, in very different circumstances. I hope that those two strange bedfellows, he and I, have demonstrated that we must have an all-party view on

this. As with the previous debate on the sexual abuse of 16 and 17-year-olds, we will make no progress unless we agree across the House, in all parties, because getting something from one Government only for it to fall under the next is no progress at all. The problems we tackle are intergenerational and long-running. They require us to invest in individuals, whether with love or with money, and take a very long-term approach. We must all unite across the House to make sure that this moves forward.

Mr Sheerman: I absolutely agree. Throughout my time in the House, there has been cross-party support on issues affecting very small children and children before they are born. The one thing that I always stipulated when I chaired the Children, Schools and Families Committee was that we should determine policy on the basis of good evidence and what works in countries such as ours.

Mr Allen: I hope that my own journey has exemplified that approach. The two reports the Prime Minister asked me to do in 2010 and 2011 were signed off, as it were, with very nice pictures of the then leaders of all the main political parties. The reports are still valid and they are still available, albeit not at all good bookshops, but if anybody who is viewing wishes to contact me, I would be very happy to share them. I hope they have been of some help and influence to the excellent “The 1001 Critical Days” campaign.

Whenever I dig out such reports, having not looked at them for a couple years, I look to see whether they are still relevant. In an opening paragraph, I use the term “early intervention” to refer to

“the general approaches, and the specific policies and programmes, which help to give children aged 0–3 the social and emotional bedrock they need to reach their full potential; and to those which help older children become the good parents of tomorrow.”

I hope that is in line with the superb work of my hon. Friend, the influential former Chair of the Children, Schools and Families Committee.

For me, early intervention is a philosophy, not a set of programmes. It is about changing the way we do business, whether as a political party, a family, a community or an individual. That philosophy is essentially about giving the nought-to-threes the social and emotional bedrock to become great people in their own right, and to be able to grow and flourish. It is about applying what we wanted for our own children to as many children as possible, not least those throughout the United Kingdom.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Allen: I will give way, but I hope my virtual time limit will be extended by Madam Deputy Speaker.

Stephen Hammond: I will be extremely brief. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right about ensuring that the nought-to-threes become great people in their own right. One of the things that can help is recognition of when in the school year they were born. Does he agree that the Summer Born campaign, which wants local education authorities to properly assess children born in July and August, and the anticipated change to the code of practice, which is welcome, will help those children?

Mr Allen: That is a classic case—we referred to this earlier—of the need to rely on the evidence and the science. Let us listen to people who know about these things, rather than do something because that is the way we have always done it or because it is a reflex reaction. That is why the Early Intervention Foundation is central. Best practice needs to be collected in and propagated from one place, so that anyone who visits the website or who makes a phone call can learn from the experience of all those who have gone before them.

I agreed with so much of what the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) said about how this will save us all not only a lot of grief, but a lot of money. I remember telling the Chancellor of the Exchequer that early intervention is the biggest deficit reduction programme he could possibly have. There are various views of the total amount that could be saved, but the Early Intervention Foundation puts the cost of late intervention at £17 billion a year. People are very quick to jump up and ask, “How much is this programme going to cost?”, but they are very slow to say that what we are currently doing is incredibly costly. If someone said, “I’ve got a budget for you: it’s called the late intervention budget and it’s going to cost you £17 billion a year,” there would be an uproar. People would cry, “We can’t afford that!” Of course we cannot afford it, but that is the cost of the criminal justice system having to deal with dysfunctional young people who could have had a chance earlier in life; of mental and physical ill-health; of the court system; and of educational underachievement.

We are wasting money, which we can ill afford, rather than spending a bit of money to start us off. It is received wisdom to talk about a stitch in time, and we often say that prevention is better than cure. In religious terms, we say, “Give me the boy and I’ll give you the man.” We use such phrases in our daily lives, but somehow we cannot bring them to bear on the political choices we make.

It is essential to support this 1001 days campaign. It is very important to underline that helping a child or a mum-to-be is money in the bank in terms of both the child’s development and financial prudence for us as a community and a society. Brain development was mentioned earlier. Given the plasticity of the brain, it is now absolutely without doubt—the neuroscience is incontrovertible—that if we can influence the development of a child’s brain pathways during the nought-to-three phase, we will be helping them for the rest of their life. It is absolutely essential to do so.

We will continue to do all this work together and to have overlapping campaigns, including with Governments of all parties. I must say that that was very difficult when my party was in government. I have to be honest and repeat that we made more progress with a Conservative Prime Minister in a coalition Government than we did with two Labour Prime Ministers.

This is an all-party campaign, and all parties need to use the vocabulary of early intervention. One thing that I and the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green did, if I may say so, was to make such vocabulary commonplace in this House. We now talk sensibly about early intervention, rather than about “ASBOs on embryos” or “hugging a hoodie”, and all the other terms of abuse bandied about, to no effect whatever, by both parties 10 years ago.

[Mr Graham Allen]

We are growing, improving and getting more mature. With the example of hard science and the example of practice—the Early Intervention Foundation has been involved in 20 local areas to prove what works—we are on the verge of breaking the philosophy out of purely children’s policy into something that we should do in every policy area of government.

Does devolution have anything to do with this issue? Of course it does, because if we allow people in our constituencies, boroughs or councils sensitively to develop things that they know will work, we will spend public money better, even when the early intervention grant is being abolished and austerity is striking at every local authority. At such times, we need to spend money more accurately and with more precision.

I would argue that there may be an early intervention aspect to confronting international questions. Some fascinating work has been done on trauma by Suzanne Zeedyk and Robin Grille from the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism. What greater trauma is there for a growing child than to be involved in a civil war or appalling acts of violence? That is the very breeding ground of religious fundamentalism and terrorism.

Early intervention is a philosophy whose time is about to come. Let us make sure that late intervention as a philosophy is consigned to the dustbin of history. One of the best ways for us to do so is to continue to support early intervention, to back initiatives such as the Early Intervention Foundation and to give this motion on the 1001 most critical days a resounding cheer of support from both sides of the House as it is, I hope, approved unanimously.

3.43 pm

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I must apologise to the Minister. I have a long-standing engagement in my constituency this evening, and I would be grateful to him if he released me to attend it. I will not therefore be able to listen to his winding-up speech.

I want to concentrate on the first part of the 1001 days—the period between conception and birth. A report was published earlier this year by a team from leading UK and US universities who had studied pregnant women in rural Gambia and the children to whom they gave birth. It is clear that the children conceived in the dry season, when there was not an abundance of leafy green vegetables, were seven times more likely to die in young adulthood than those conceived in the wet season, when their mothers’ diet was so much better. The research team said that later in life the impact could be seen in a lack of ability to fight viral infections and in their chances of surviving cancers such as leukaemia and lung cancer. That report shows the clear impact of what the mother ingests on her system and that of the unborn child.

Something that we ought to be much clearer about in this country, but that we sadly are not, is the effect of alcohol consumed by the mother during those first precious days of a child’s life in the womb. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children estimates that about 7,000 babies born in the UK each year suffer the effects of alcohol drunk during pregnancy.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), who is chair of the all-party parliamentary group for foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, of which I am the vice-chair. This week, we published a report on the picture of FASD in the UK today, following an inquiry that ran throughout the autumn. We held a number of hearings with families and young people who have been affected by FASD, as well as with members of the medical professions and other interested organisations. The report is so substantial and so deeply concerning that, although you have been good enough to call me before the chair of the all-party group, Madam Deputy Speaker, it might have been more appropriate if we had been called the other way around. None the less, the report has such a lot of substance that I hope what I say will complement, rather than duplicate, what he will say.

The evidence that we gathered was severely alarming in respect of both the far wider impact of FASD compared with what is understood in this country and the lack of clinical and other support available to families who are affected. We learned that a mother need not consume large amounts of alcohol during her pregnancy to be affected, because individual women’s constitutions respond differently to alcohol consumption.

The impact on the unborn child, which can last for the rest of their life, can be profound. FASD causes organic brain damage in an unborn child. We were told that it causes heart defects, dental issues, eyesight problems, bladder difficulties, walking difficulties, cognitive challenges and memory and behavioural difficulties. Often it means that babies are premature. We heard about the emotional impact on those affected by FASD as they develop into young people and move into adulthood: they can withdraw from society, become unpredictable and even become suicidal. That places great stress on parents and carers, many of whom experience periods of isolation and ill health. The inquiry heard that it is likely that a much higher proportion of children are born with FASD than is currently recognised. Those children will have a variety of difficulties in childhood and in later life.

The tragedy is that, theoretically, FASD is 100% preventable if all pregnant women are given clear advice on the risks of alcohol intake to their unborn child. We were told that the best advice for young women is not to drink if they are considering becoming pregnant, since there are effects even at the earliest stage.

Equally tragic is the fact that in the UK there have been decades of mixed messages regarding the right level of alcohol intake during pregnancy. I remember that from when I had my children, which is well over 20 years ago. The all-party group was advised that a clear message should be given by Government Departments that, just as smoking during pregnancy affected the unborn child and should be avoided, so too did alcohol and it too should be avoided.

For the UK not to be sending that message is not only tragic for the families concerned; it goes against international best practice, which is to advocate that alcohol be avoided if a woman is pregnant, thinks she might be pregnant or is trying to conceive. In Canada, children as young as primary school age are taught that. Pregnant women in Denmark, France, Israel, Norway, Mexico, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, Spain and the Netherlands are advised to abstain completely from alcohol. Since 1981, the USA has advocated that “no alcohol is safest for baby and you.”

Without such a clear message, pregnant women in the UK are left confused and uncertain. I know from my work as the chair of the all-party group on alcohol harm that few people can accurately measure one unit of alcohol. If a message is sent out that one or two units a week is okay, it is probably easy to think, “Well, why not three or even four or more?”

One of the reasons that women are confused stems from the unclear guidelines provided by UK professional and governmental bodies. Although NICE and the Department of Health warn of the potential for alcohol to harm an unborn child, incredibly they do not go on to stipulate that women should abstain from drinking during pregnancy. The Government are currently carrying out an alcohol review, and I hope they will seriously consider that issue. By contrast, the British Medical Association advocates that no alcohol should be drunk during pregnancy. As a result of those mixed messages, not only are women confused but many midwives are uncomfortable about giving advice on alcohol. A study that questioned 200 midwives found that only 60% asked women about their drinking habits, 30% advised against binge-drinking, and only 10% were aware of FASD. As our report says:

“this is astonishing and deeply worrying, and something which must be rectified as a matter of urgency.”

More encouragingly, 93% of midwives said that they would be comfortable advising that no alcohol should be drunk during pregnancy if that was the consistent message from the Government. In the absence of such clarity, however, they are afraid to offer such advice.

Our inquiry also revealed a similar lack of in-depth knowledge about FASD across the medical profession. There is only one specialist FASD clinic in the UK, and it is wholly overstretched. That lack of in-depth knowledge means that children with FASD are often given multiple inaccurate diagnoses, such as ADHD, autism or an attachment disorder. Appropriate support mechanisms are rarely put in place, and families are left frustrated and confused. It is critical that FASD is given a higher priority within the NHS for research, diagnostic, and support services.

Mr Graham Allen: The hon. Lady is making a fascinating contribution. Given that the Minister is in his place, is this a good moment for her to comment on the failure to fund research into the prevalence of foetal alcohol syndrome? I am sure she is coming to that, but given that the Minister is paying great attention, perhaps this is a good moment to get that message sprayed on to the Department’s eyeballs.

Fiona Bruce: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. Our report states that because of inadequate research in this country, there is insufficient information to encourage those involved—including, we believe, Government representatives—to take action.

Several of our witnesses testified that there must be more appropriate training on FASD among the medical profession, and national standards must be adhered to. For example, we heard how diagnosis could take place as early as for a one-month-old child, or as late as at 10 years, or not at all. It appears to rely on which professional a child sees. Time and again we heard from families, including parents, grandparents, adoptive parents and foster carers, that they had to explain to medical staff the diagnostic nuances of FASD.

As I have said, the extent of this condition has been under-recognised by successive Governments. Research now indicates that 30% to 50% of children in foster care could be affected by FASD, and a study mentioned in our report from an audit in Peterborough, published in October 2015, showed that 75% of children referred for adoption had a history of pre-natal alcohol exposure. If those figures are extrapolated across the UK, that should have major implications for Government policy on fostering and adoption. Sadly, there are also impacts on the criminal justice system, and our inquiry heard of vulnerable young people with FASD who move into adulthood where they cannot meet societal expectations and behavioural norms. Those people are being exploited by criminal gangs and sexual predators, which is a result—certainly in part—of a lack of concern, understanding and support for them and their condition.

In conclusion, the seriousness of the problem cannot be overstated. Our report makes a number of recommendations that the hon. Member for Sefton Central may well go into in more detail. The impact on the early stages of a child’s life cannot be overstated. Even the alcohol industry has taken considerable steps to send warnings not to drink during pregnancy. Ninety-one per cent. of alcoholic drinks in bottles and cans now carry a warning.

That is not enough, however. A study by Drinkaware revealed that more than half of pregnant women in the UK receive no advice at all about drinking while pregnant. The original clinical diagnosis of FASD was made in 1973. Our inquiry showed that

“in the four decades since then, the UK as a whole has still barely acknowledged its existence.”

That must change, and the Government must take a lead.

3.55 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who has been an excellent vice-chair of the all-party group on foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. I congratulate hon. Members on bringing the debate to the House because it gives us a timely opportunity to talk about the initial findings of our inquiry, of which the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) was another valued member.

I want to repeat as forcefully as I can the point that the hon. Lady made about the need for a prevalence study. I have asked the Minister about it previously in questions, and I put it to him that such a study is essential. The evidence we took in our inquiry is backed up by evidence that has come from around the world over many years—the hon. Lady identified a number of those countries. The time has long since passed for us getting that evidence base in this country so that we can understand as well as possible exactly how great a problem it is and what solutions are needed. The Minister can intervene now, but perhaps he will address that point later.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham and my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) mentioned brain development and the damage done by alcohol during pregnancy when a mother and baby are susceptible to that damage. They are frightening results.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): One other area we need to consider is malnutrition and micro-malnutrition. Regardless of obesity or weight, we are seeing a more malnourished diet in this country from poor quality food and reliance on food bank food. Work done has shown low levels of iodine, which increases cretinism, and low levels of folate, in girls in their late teens, which means that, as they enter the child-bearing age, they are at high risk of having children who have major disabilities.

Bill Esterson: I am glad the hon. Lady managed to get that point on the record. That is an incredibly important part of the picture of the damage done to brain development. I want to concentrate my remarks on the damage from alcohol and the inquiry report that the all-party group has just published, but I am grateful to her. Her point is very complementary to my remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North made a powerful point on the potential of early intervention—he said it could be the biggest deficit reduction scheme of all and mentioned the figure of £17 billion. That is an important point when it comes to foetal alcohol spectrum disorders. In Canada and the US, they use the term “million dollar baby”. It refers to the lifetime costs of the damage done by alcohol during pregnancy. The hon. Member for Congleton and others have mentioned many of those costs, whether it is the inability to engage socially or hold down a job. Many end up in the criminal justice system and many of us care for children and young adults who were damaged by alcohol during pregnancy. All of these things have huge economic and social costs. It is incredibly important that we take those points on board, whether on alcohol harm or other forms of damage and deprivation caused during pregnancy and in the early years.

The all-party group took evidence from a great many experts: Martin Clarke of the Adolescent and Children’s Trust; the consultant psychiatrist and nationally renowned expert on FASD, Dr Raja Mukherjee; Sir Al Ainsley Green, now President of the British Medical Association; SABMiller from the drinks industry; the British Pregnancy Advisory Service; Public Health Research; a midwife; and parents and carers, as well as young adults living with foetal alcohol spectrum disorders. We heard heartrending examples of damage done, difficulties faced and the life-limiting effects of alcohol during pregnancy.

I want to pay tribute to and thank the Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Trust for the secretariat support, and other organisations such as the National Organisation for Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, which has for many years attempted to improve the education of professionals in health, education and other sectors on what is needed to prevent the disorder and to support people who care for children and young adults; and Mencap, which advises GPs.

There have been some puzzling changes over the past 20 or 30 years, something the hon. Lady touched on. In the 1970s, alcohol consumption in the UK was one of the lowest in the western world. From that low base, however, there has been a steady increase. There is a remarkably strong correlation between the increase in alcohol consumption and the increase in the incidence of mental health problems, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism, Asperger’s, and many different kinds of learning and physical disabilities. The remarkably

close correlation suggests causality. Brain damage is not reversible and is clearly significant. As the hon. Lady said, the World Health Organisation estimates that 1% of people born today are affected by FASD. Even at 1%, that is 7,000 children born every year. That is 7,000 too many.

For anyone new to this subject, there is a widely shared video of the effect of a small drop of alcohol on an embryo, which is compared with an embryo that does not experience the ingestion of a small drop of alcohol. The difference is stark. For two hours, the embryo stops moving altogether. We can only wonder at the damage done at that very early stage of pregnancy. International evidence suggests that the damage is done in the early days and weeks in particular.

As the hon. Lady said, the advice is far from clear. On the one hand, people are told not to drink. That seems clear. From the evidence heard by the all-party group, that is the right advice. However, the advice also says that if a woman chooses to drink, she should drink only one or two units. The advice appears inconsistent and contradictory. We took evidence from health professionals, the vast majority of whom do not appear to be aware of the real level of risk and danger. They do not appear to be passing on advice to women planning to conceive or who are pregnant. That is why our inquiry recommended it be made clear that the best thing for mother and baby is for the mother not to drink at all.

I hope that the Minister—I am sure he will—and all who are interested will read the report and carefully consider its recommendations. It is only an initial report—we plan to continue our work—and I hope that he or one of his colleagues will come to one of our meetings to discuss this matter in greater detail. As my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North said, early intervention gives us a fantastic opportunity not only to improve the life chances of many people but to save a lot of money. When it comes to the damage done by alcohol during pregnancy, the 7,000 figure, which, from the evidence we received, might well be on the low side, suggests that there is a huge opportunity. I hope that, as a result of the work we have done and the fine work of those Members responsible for today’s report, progress can be made and that the Minister will agree to commission the prevalence study, so that we can start to reduce the number of children damaged every year in this country.

4.6 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Members for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), and I completely endorse their points about foetal alcohol syndrome. It feels like we have not caught up with the evidence, and we need to do so urgently, given the awful carnage being done to babies by this dreadful condition, so I congratulate the all-party group on foetal alcohol spectrum disorder on its work.

I also congratulate the right hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton)—

Tim Loughton: Hon. Member.

Norman Lamb: Oh, I do apologise. To me, he is right honourable. He has shown great leadership, both as a Minister and in his work since, and I applaud him for that. I also join others in acknowledging the fantastic

leadership shown by the hon. Members for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) and for Nottingham North (Mr Allen).

Like the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham, I had the one-to-one seminar with George Hosking from the WAVE Trust. I had it many years ago, but I remember it still very clearly: the evidence he showed me, from Australia and the United States, was compelling. He is rightly on a mission and has had a significant influence, which should be acknowledged, so I join the hon. Gentleman in thanking him for his amazing work.

I want to focus on perinatal mental health. Here, we are dealing with two lives: the mother's and the baby's. The impact of mental ill health in the first year after birth is profound. As the hon. Gentleman said, it affects up to 20% of women. We often think of it as post-natal depression, but it goes much wider than that. The London School of Economics' personal social services research unit and the Centre for Mental Health have produced an important piece of work on the economics of this. They refer to anxiety, psychosis, post-traumatic stress disorder and other conditions, including obsessive compulsive disorder. The impact of these conditions on the mother, but also on the baby and the wider family, can be very profound.

The cost of failure, as the hon. Member for Nottingham North made clear, is enormous. The report by the LSE and the Centre for Mental Health estimates the cost of perinatal ill health as being £8.1 billion at the very minimum. The basis for calculation was the mothers who suffered depression, anxiety and psychosis, but they recognised that other conditions were relevant, too, which have not been costed, so the overall cost is bigger. We must understand that. As the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham made clear, this amounts to £10,000 for every baby born in this country. The cost of failure is just enormous.

How have we responded to this extraordinary impact? Slowly but surely, things are changing, but if we look at the recently published map on the availability of services around the country—this relates to the UK's specialist community perinatal mental health teams—we see that in 2015, the map is still horribly red. This does not indicate constituencies held by the Labour party—*[Interruption.]* Thank goodness! This indicates the parts of the country where no specialist team is available. Let us imagine for one moment that this was the case for stroke care or heart conditions: there would be a national outcry.

No party or Government is responsible for this situation. We are dealing with an emerging understanding, and it is about developing a new service. When I look at the whole of East Anglia, my own region, I see that not a single specialist team is available. That is truly shocking. As the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham said, people are dying, and some even take their own lives, yet these are deaths that could be prevented by the application of specialist services around our country. None of us can be comfortable with the fact that so much of our country does not have the ready availability of support for mothers in this situation.

There is an urgency to ensuring that we act to get the whole country covered. I was pleased when in response to the cross-party campaign for equality for mental health, we had the basic simple principle that there

should be equal access to care and support—irrespective of whether people have a mental or a physical health problem. At the moment, that does not exist, but the campaign that we launched in the run-up to the spending review secured a response from the Chancellor of an extra £600 million for mental health. In his statement to Parliament, the Chancellor specifically mentioned the importance of perinatal mental health services. That money must be used.

I end by urging the Minister to do everything in his power to instil a real sense of urgency, with a programme and a timetable to get every part of the country covered by specialist services. I find it unbelievable in this day and age that the CCGs mentioned by the hon. Gentleman have not even started to think about this yet. These are the people who hold responsibility in our NHS for commissioning services for our populations, but a significant number of them have not yet even started the process of thinking about the problem. The message needs to go out from the Minister, but also from NHS England nationally, that this situation is intolerable and cannot be sustained. We must ensure that this Parliament reaches the point by 2020 when the whole of that map of the United Kingdom is green, so that every mother, when she is in need, following birth, can get access to the specialist services that can help her to recover.

4.13 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), who touched strongly on perinatal mental health. That is one of the issues addressed in the work of the all-party parliamentary group on conception to age two—the first 1001 days. In common with others, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) not just for his introduction to the debate, but for the way in which he has chaired that all-party group and the thorough way in which evidence has been drawn and accumulated from so many practitioners, academics and others. He has followed up the pioneering work done by the hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) in establishing the group, along with the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) and the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas).

I have been a member of the all-party parliamentary group since its own conception, and I have been particularly impressed by the way in which so many different organisations, all of which have pledged their support to this manifesto, have engaged with its work with the aim of making us better informed about the policy questions that we raise, the policy priorities that we identify, and the ideas that we present.

It is great that the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) has been here to contribute to the debate, because in a number of respects he has been a policy prophet. For many years, people who talked about early years policy tended to mean the year or two before a child went to school, when the child was three or four years old. All too often, early intervention or early years policy has concentrated less on the role of parents as parents than on their role as workers who have parental responsibilities and are therefore in need of childcare, and who, along with their employers, benefit from good childcare support. We need to support parents in their capacity as parents with key responsibilities

[Mark Durkan]

for their children, and that means supporting them when the children are experiencing those first, formative stages of their lives.

We have already heard today about all the scientific evidence relating to the plasticity of the brain and the key development of neurological pathways during the early stages of life. One of the academics who gave evidence to the all-party parliamentary group made the telling point that many of the experiences that affect people over their lifetimes can be traced back to childhood experiences that could have been averted, or prevented, by good early years support, and that means adequate support for parents during the formative years of their children's lives. For instance, there may be a high correlation between child and adolescent mental health issues in the later stages of people's lives and some of their experiences during their early years, when they may have faced challenges such as an upbringing in distressed circumstances or the absence of opportunities that could have been afforded if their parents had been given proper support.

That academic used a striking phrase. He was a north American, so perhaps it came from him all the better. He said, "Unlike what happens in Las Vegas, what happens in the early years does not stay in the early years." For good or bad, what happens in the early years is with us throughout our lives, and many of those experiences may inform our expectations in life and of life. That is all the more reason for us to invest strongly in the early years, not just in terms of family love but in terms of policy and programme planning, and of actual support in the form of local services.

While I have been hugely impressed by much of the evidence that I have received as a member of the all-party parliamentary group—and, like the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), by the compelling case that has been put forward by George Hosking and others—I am happy to say that I have benefited from the presence in my constituency of the Lifestart Foundation, which was established in Ireland back in the 1980s and which operates active programmes in different parts of that country. Its essential mission is to provide high-quality parental support in order to produce better child development outcomes. It gives parents evidence-based information about the way in which young children learn and develop, and helps them to use the knowledge that they have gained.

The foundation also promotes the delivery of its Growing Child programme. Unfortunately time does not permit me to spell out the details of the programme, but they chime with all the points that Members have made today, and accord very strongly with the main points and principles in the manifesto that we are discussing. The foundation delivers a systematic evidence-based child development programme by means of home visiting, from which, as a parent myself, I benefited in my own area. That goes to parents of children from birth right up to pre-school, and indeed school entry. The outcomes are informed by sound empirical research, and they are designed and reviewed by child development and parenting experts.

There has been a randomised control trial conducted by Queen's University from 2008 to this year and beyond. It involves 848 parents and children, and it has already

proved the findings that argue for this manifesto. I encourage the Minister to look up those findings from the centre for effective education at Queen's University in Belfast, because they prove that the Lifestart programme and the home visiting service work as predicted, with significant positive outcomes for parents and improved outcomes for children. Parents are less stressed, have greater knowledge of child development, demonstrate higher levels of parenting efficacy, are more confident around child discipline and boundary setting, report better parenting mood, have increased feelings of attachment with their children—the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham stressed that earlier—and feel less restricted in their parenting role. Of course, for children there are better cognitive skills, better social and emotional development, improved behaviour, and fewer speech and language referrals, and these positive effects on children will be expected to continue through life. This research team will be following the children's development through school.

This all goes to show what international research points to: the quality of parenting, the amount of time adults spend interacting with children, and the nature of the whole learning environment are critical to child development and ensuring we avoid many of the social stresses and problems and behavioural issues that affect us all, and inform some of our debates on other subjects in this House.

As well as giving that example of Lifestart and its work in my constituency and elsewhere in the north and south of Ireland, I encourage the Minister not just to look at this manifesto in terms of what he can do in his own departmental responsibilities and in talking to ministerial colleagues here, but to see whether he should have a wider conversation not just with devolved Ministers, but using the British Irish Council model which takes in all eight Administrations on these islands, to talk about how we might roll out truly effective early years and proactive early intervention policies more widely, building on the arguments in this manifesto and drawing on the evidential experiences from elsewhere. What this shows is that all the rendered science chimes with our most tender instincts about what is the best thing to do for children in these early years.

4.23 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and the Backbench Business Committee on bringing this important debate and issue to the House.

"The 1001 Critical Days" document is an extremely important manifesto, attracting support from across the political spectrum as well as from a wide range of professional and third sector organisations. It highlights how vital the early days of childhood are for both parents and children, and the importance of acting early and focusing policies in order to enhance the outcomes for children both over the short term and the long term. This is of benefit for the individual child, their families and society as a whole.

The principle of early intervention encourages a holistic approach to meeting the needs of children and families, including though play, learning, social relationships, and emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing, along with health, nutrition, growth development and

safety. Evidence has highlighted that this early part of the child's life between conception and the age of two is a formative period in all spheres of their development. Although there is little narrative memory of this period, a child's experiences from this time impacts upon their cognitive, social and emotional functioning and in turn their relationships, behaviour, educational attainment and opportunities throughout the course of their life.

In this regard, "The 1001 Critical Days" manifesto highlights evidence from international studies that demonstrate that when a baby's development lags behind the norm during the first years of their life, this gap tends to increase over subsequent years rather than to improve. Prior to being elected, I was employed in the NHS as a clinical psychologist and, in the various areas where I worked, I have seen at first hand the long-term impact of adverse childhood experiences on development and on later life chances.

A lack of parenting skills can be a product of intentional or non-intentional conduct by carers, and it is recognised that the period between pregnancy and the first years of a child's life is a time of great vulnerability. Secure attachment and nurture are crucial to children's emotional wellbeing and development, and it is important that parents who lack confidence in their abilities or who are struggling should have access to the support, mentoring and skills building opportunities that they need. Parenting skills classes have therefore been rolled out across Scotland.

Babies are disproportionately represented in the child protection system and statistically more likely to die prematurely than older children. In addition, any neglect or abuse occurring during this period can have life-changing effects, owing to infants' bodies being fragile and their brains being at a crucial stage of their development. Because of the additional pressures of parenthood, parents are also at risk of perinatal mental health problems and of coping difficulties during this period. Individual, social and environmental factors can have an impact in this regard.

However, as well as being a time of vulnerability, this period of a child's life is also a time of great opportunity when it comes to providing support and changing patterns. In this regard, I note it has been reported that during pregnancy and the first year of a child's life is an ideal time to work with families, as it is a time when parents are particularly open to support and motivated to change, and when firm foundations for family life can be established. There is a growing body of evidence that intervention in early life can transform the lives of babies and of their parents.

"The 1001 Critical Days" manifesto states that it aims for every baby to receive sensitive, appropriate and responsive care from their main care givers in the first years of life, with more proactive assistance from the NHS, health visitors, children's centres and other public bodies that are engaged in a coherent preventive strategy. My own experience tells me that additional monitoring and early assessment does not happen often enough in cases where there could be developmental disorders such as autistic spectrum disorder. That can have a negative effect on children, as well as on their parents, who might find it difficult to cope and therefore require additional support at an early stage. Early assessment of developmental disorders can ensure that the right resources are swiftly put in place, which will improve a child's chances and their adaptation.

Our party agrees that the early years are a crucial time for development and intervention because, when it comes to breaking the cycle of inequality, we recognise that prevention, resources and support are key. Throughout our time in government in Scotland, we have promoted an early years framework and been committed to strategies aimed at promoting and facilitating a stable and nurturing environment for children. In recent years, the Scottish Government have developed and introduced legislation in the form of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, which gives Scottish Ministers and public bodies a legal requirement to issue reports on how they take the United Nations convention on the rights of the child into account. It also extends free pre-school provision from 475 to 600 hours a year of early learning and childcare for all three and four-year-olds and for just over a quarter of all two-year-olds—those from low-income households. It also gives children and young people access to a named person service. In the early years, that is the health visitor. The named person is a single point of contact who can help to co-ordinate support and advise families, and those working with them, when required. This can involve the monitoring of emerging perinatal mental health difficulties.

In 2010, through collaboration with a wide range of experts, the Scottish Government also launched their pre-birth to three strategy, based on four main areas: the rights of the child; relationships; responsive care; and respect. Those strategies are not all-encompassing, and there is room for continued improvement. However, the Scottish Government understand the importance of the early years of children's lives and the benefit to society as a whole of trying to prevent future issues through early intervention. A child's sense of interaction with the world develops at this time, alongside its learning of emotional regulation and well-being, and the development of its neurological functioning. As such, we are committed to continuing to make early years the key priority it deserves to be, focusing funding accordingly and trying to ensure that all children have the best start in life possible.

My party will work collaboratively across this House to ensure that in Scotland and across the UK children have the very best start, which they deserve. I am impressed and pleased that we have guidelines from the all-party group on foetal alcohol spectrum disorder and I am happy to share those with the Scottish Government and to look at key recommendations.

In finishing today, I would like to thank sincerely all of the House staff for their extraordinary efforts this year. I wish all Members of the House, the House staff and of course, you, Madam Deputy Speaker, a very merry Christmas and a happy new year from my party.

4.31 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): First, I commend and congratulate the hon. Members for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) on securing this debate. I also pay tribute to the members of the all-party group for conception to age two—the first 1001 days for developing the manifesto and raising the profile of these important issues. All the Members who have spoken today have done so with great eloquence on these issues.

[Justin Madders]

Let me go through some of today's contributions. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham, in his opening remarks, correctly said that this is about challenging the mindset and going beyond the troubled families programme, which has proved to be a success around the country. He rightly highlighted the shocking statistics on suicide among new mothers and rightly said that much of it is preventable. He gave us a volley of statistics and they all point towards this manifesto as being something on which there should be widespread agreement, and I think that agreement has been apparent from today's contributions.

It was also a pleasure to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen), whose work in this area I was a keen reader of before entering this place. I was glad to hear his contributions today. He rightly said that this is about investment in individuals, that a consistent approach has to be taken across changes of Government and that this is about a philosophy in the way we do things. He made an interesting point when he said that, if we proposed spending £17 billion on an early intervention programme, we may have a little difficulty in getting that past the Treasury, but that is actually the potential saving that might be realised if this is done correctly. Of course, this is about so much more than simply making savings. He said that early intervention should mean that late intervention is consigned to the dustbin of history, and we would all welcome that.

Mr Graham Allen: Like the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), and many others who spoke, including the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), I did not have a chance to speak about a broad policy area in this field—social investment. There is now a way of monetising and finding out how much we can save ourselves, and the many social instruments and social investments out there are growing by the day. I hope my hon. Friend will consider that in his remarks, because massive savings can be made in this area—indeed, money can be made in order to reinvest in new services.

Justin Madders: I am grateful for that intervention, and my hon. Friend is right to say that this can be monetised. I recall that when my local authority carried out an examination of the early intervention scheme, a figure of about £100 million was mooted. There are challenges in getting different Departments to buy into that, because they are all quite protective about their own sources of money, but if we take a holistic approach, we can see that there will be savings right across Departments. I hope that we can begin to develop that approach.

The hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) rightly highlighted the staggering and shocking statistics about alcohol intake during and indeed before pregnancy, and rightly said that a clear message needs to be sent out about the risks. She rightly paid tribute to the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) with his all-party group on foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. The group took a great deal of evidence in preparation for its report, which has been released today. It is unambiguous in its recommendations about the need for clear and consistent advice to be

given on the dangers of alcohol during pregnancy and the need to improve training and education across the board. He has laid down a clear challenge for the Minister in this area and I look forward to hearing what his response will be.

The hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) spoke with his usual passion and sincerity on the subject. He gave us the memorable phrase, "What happens in our early years stays with us throughout our years." I am not sure what he meant about the goings on in Las Vegas. Perhaps he will enlighten me outside the Chamber. He rightly pointed out the academic research that is set out in the manifesto. Clearly, an evidence-based approach is welcome, because the evidence is there and it is clear.

The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow spoke with great personal experience on this area. She rightly pointed out that early experiences can affect a child's relationships throughout their lives. We have heard from a number of Members about how difficulties in relationships can perpetuate the cycle of despair that we currently see and have been discussing today. She made a valid point about early assessment of development disorders, especially autism. At the moment, that assessment does not happen quickly enough. She also talked about this idea of a named person being the point of contact for the families, and saw it as a positive development. I am certainly aware of a number of similar initiatives that have shown the benefit of such an approach.

We have had a great many informed, respectful and consensual contributions today. I will try my best in this season of goodwill to maintain that. I am speaking here as a member of the shadow Health team. The NHS is really where my focus is. It was first conceived to be a responsive treatment-based service that supports everyone in society from the cradle to the grave. It is only in recent years that we have begun to understand how that short time in the cradle—those very first few months—can ultimately decide how long, healthy and happy a newborn baby's life will be.

I will keep my remarks quite brief as we have been squeezed out by other business today. Let me just touch on a few areas that highlight why this period is so vital and a few areas where we should be doing a little better.

As we know, the manifesto takes its title from the period from conception to age 2 when a baby's brain is developing at its fastest. We know that the earliest experiences have a lifelong impact on mental and emotional health. We also know that, when a baby's development falls behind the norm during the first years of life, rather than catch up with those who have had a better start, they are actually more likely to fall even further behind in subsequent years. More than a quarter of all babies in the UK are living in complex family situations that present heightened risks to their wellbeing. The sad reality is that babies are far more likely to suffer from abuse and neglect and up to seven times more likely to die in distressing circumstances than older children. We have a duty to give every child an equal opportunity to lead a healthy and fulfilling life.

"The 1001 Critical Days" manifesto is the best chance for us to make that happen. Not only is it the right thing to do for our children, but it is the right thing for the public purse. According to the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, there is increasing evidence to show that spending on early years intervention can yield a

return on investment as high as 6% to 10%. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North eloquently showed how that could be translated into significant savings across Government.

Mr Allen: I sense that my hon. Friend may be coming to the end of his remarks, so I am going to squeeze in one more intervention, if I may, and it is in respect of the next Government. There may be a change of Government in 2020. My hon. Friend has an opportunity to spend some time developing an early intervention philosophy across, as I mentioned, not only health and children's services, but the economy and even international affairs. That preventive view, rather than attempting to cure, could be fundamental to the next Government, as it should be and increasingly is to the current Government. Will he give us an assurance that this will be in his thoughts as he develops policy in his area?

Justin Madders: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I am certain that I will be able to take those comments on board. As I said, it is a subject in which I took an interest before I entered this place. I believe that is the right approach and I am confident that in four and a half years' time we will have the opportunity to put it into practice. *[Interruption.]* Some may disagree about that. In the season of good will, a little latitude is surely permissible.

If it is done in the right way, early intervention can save money, save lives and improve the wellbeing of parents and children. The former Scottish Health and Finance Minister, Tom McCabe, summed it up perfectly when he said,

"We have heard evidence, stacked from the floor to the sky, that this is the right thing to do."

Focusing on the first 1001 days is not just about ensuring the healthy development of future generations of children, but about making our NHS and many other public services sustainable.

I want to say a few words about perinatal mental health, as I know this is an issue that many Members feel passionately about, not least the shadow Minister for mental health. Perinatal mental health problems affect up to 20% of women at some point during pregnancy or in the year after childbirth. We heard from the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), who pointed out the impact not only on the mother, but on the child and the wider family. About half of all cases of perinatal depression and anxiety go undetected and even those that are detected fail to receive evidence-based forms of intervention. This is important because severe perinatal mental health problems are bad not only for the women affected, but for the development of the children involved, as the right hon. Gentleman highlighted.

In particular we need to ensure that all women affected have access to appropriate treatment, and that variation in access is addressed. The right hon. Gentleman referred to a map which starkly highlighted that. It is worrying that 41% of maternity units have no access to a trained mental health worker, 30% are unable to offer psychological support, and on a wider but connected issue, about a third have no overnight accommodation. It is also regrettably the case that under this Government there has been a reduction in the number of specialist in-patient mother and baby units. The Government's pledge to spend £15 million on perinatal mental health was extremely

welcome, but we need to see that pledge put into action. I would be grateful if the Minister could update the House on what he has been doing in that respect.

We will tackle the problems that parents and children might have in this period, and spot the problems early enough, only if we have joined-up multi-agency working between health services and local family support services. Children's centres have a critical role to play in this mix in many areas. As a former member of the advisory board of the Stanlaw Abbey children's centre in my constituency, I have seen at first hand what a welcoming and safe place it is for families to visit, as indeed are all children's centres. In addition they have a wealth of experience and knowledge, and trained staff who have the skills to identify problems at an early stage, whether in bonding, the mother's mental health or child development, so that that disadvantage can be tackled.

I have heard from Stanlaw Abbey the great strides made by children coming into the centre and how much progress they make, as well the support given to the parents, many of whom have re-entered education and the world of work, thanks to the help of the centre. The one challenge that continually remains, though, is how to engage with those families who do not come through the door. We know that they are out there. They will not all need support, but some will, and despite extensive efforts to reach out to these families, they simply stay outside the system for too long, missing out on the crucial support that this debate is trying to highlight.

For me children's centres have to be the cornerstone of a successful early years policy. That is why it is so concerning that under this Government we do not appear to have any strategy for children's centres. The Prime Minister famously promised to protect such centres, but there are 700 fewer designated children's centres than there were in 2010.

Alongside that, many of the local government services that families used to rely on are taking a massive hit. The transfer to local authorities in October this year of the healthy child programme for children up to five years of age presents an important opportunity for local authorities to integrate health, education, social care and wider council-led services and to focus on improving outcomes for children from birth. But I find it difficult to square the circle of this announcement alongside the £200 million in-year cut to public health that this Government have introduced.

There is a real risk that the decision could cost more money than it saves and that the good intentions behind passing responsibility to local authorities could be stymied from the off as a result of the short-term approach to funding that the cuts represent. I would therefore be grateful if the Minister updated the House on what support he is giving to local authorities to ensure that commissioning is properly resourced when they assume this new responsibility. What steps is he taking to ensure that the cuts do not affect front-line services?

As we know, many local authorities have been forced to pare back to the statutory minimum, which is totally against the grain of what we are trying to achieve. Taken together, the failure to invest in early help services and the lack of priority the Government give to this type of provision mean that Ministers will fail to support adequately all children and families in those critical 1001 days. The cross-party agreement we have heard about today needs to be matched by cross-departmental harmony across Government.

[Justin Madders]

In conclusion, the evidence is overwhelming. It is so obvious that it should have underpinned Government policy decades ago. Anyone who is a parent will recognise the intensity of feeling when observing how their child is developing. That innate desire for one's offspring to grow up to be happy, healthy and wise should be all the encouragement we need to support this incredibly important document, not just for our children but for everyone's children. On that note, I would like to wish everyone in the House a very merry Christmas.

4.45 pm

The Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt): I thank all colleagues who have taken part in what is a most important debate, despite being the last of this parliamentary term. It was handled in an exemplary way by a number of colleagues who know a great deal about the subject. I commend them for the breadth of interest and knowledge they demonstrated. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Liz Saville Roberts) for securing the debate through the Backbench Business Committee.

I also pay tribute, as others have done, to my hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom). The debate has been graced by a number of colleagues who have taken a huge interest in these matters over a lengthy period, often in quiet rooms, talking to people about the issues, and raising them on the Floor of the House. That often unsung work has been vital in giving us the information we need, and a number of hon. Friends deserve real credit for it, not least my hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire.

I congratulate the all-party group for conception to age two—the first 1001 days on relaunching its manifesto, “The 1001 Critical Days”. I popped into the relaunch for a short time, but a few weeks earlier I was grilled by the group's members on my interest in the subject. I am not the Minister responsible for children's health, but one of the issues is that a number of different agencies are involved, and I understand very well that one of the requirements of the manifesto is to ensure that they work more closely together. I also have a particular interest in perinatal mental health, which I will spend a bit of time speaking about today. I certainly take the manifesto's point about the range of different actors that need to be involved, and the fact that we need to work together more effectively. I will be glad to take that message back to colleagues. I thank the all-party group for its work.

I note that the manifesto includes a foreword by Dame Sally Davies, the chief medical officer. I must say that that is probably at least three quarters of the work done. I do not know how many Members have met Sally Davies, but they should know that anything she gets behind tends to happen. I therefore congratulate the all-party group on securing her support, which will be vital.

At the manifesto's core is a clear and simple message: the first 1001 days of a child's life are a critical window of opportunity. Prevention and early intervention at that stage can improve outcomes and transform life chances. There is no dispute about that across the

House; there is perhaps sadness and regret that more was not done in the past, but we must all start from where we are and make progress. Much work has been done in recent years, and colleagues have been generous in their praise of it, but clearly there is more to do, and the manifesto sets out some of the challenges.

I will make a few general remarks about the speeches we have heard, and then I will refer to others as I go through my speech. The hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen), who has spent a great deal of time working on early intervention, spoke about the philosophy that was needed to understand this, and he is absolutely right—few could have done more than he has to bring that forward. Some of these issues are cultural; they are about taking people out of silos. He was generous in his praise of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith). My right hon. Friend, and I suspect a number of other Members, was much inspired by the work of a chap called Bob Holman—a family worker and an academic who chose to live in Easterhouse in the centre of Glasgow—on social justice. Bob is unfortunately quite ill at present. I would like to send good wishes to him for the remarkable work he has done. He is well known for his work in Scotland, and in the United Kingdom. We are sorry that he is ill and send our best wishes to him and to Annette.

The hon. Members for Foyle (Mark Durkan) and for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron)—thank you, John Ronald, who follows on me on Twitter, for helping me with the pronunciation—pointed out the importance of all of us in the British Isles looking to what work is done by one another. I will certainly inform ministerial colleagues of the work being done by the unit at Queen's University Belfast, and that being done in Scotland, and we can follow that up. I said to the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow after her intervention on mental health that I am keen to see what is being done in other places, and I will follow that up as well. We do have parenting skills classes in England. That provision has been much boosted by the health visitor programme, and it is as vital to us as it is in Scotland. I am sure that others will be interested in looking further at that.

The manifesto highlights the importance of high-quality universal services from conception to age two, which have rightly been described as a “lynchpin”. For the vast majority of women and babies in England, NHS maternity services provide a positive experience and good-quality care. We also have a good, strong, evidence-based universal public health programme—the healthy child programme from pregnancy to age five—which is delivered by health visitors. To strengthen the delivery of the programme, we have increased the number of health visitors by almost 50% in the past four years—one of the most rapid workforce expansions in NHS history. At the same time, the landscape for delivering services to under-fives is changing. On 1 October, responsibility for commissioning nought-to-five public health services transferred to local authorities. This change is of course a challenge for services, but it also presents an opportunity for local leaders to commission and provide more joined-up services for young children and families, across health, education and social care, based on their understanding of local need.

The manifesto contains a number of recommendations, including one mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham about the attachment needs of families:

“Childminders, nurseries and childcare settings caring for under 2s must focus on the attachment needs of babies and infants, with OFSTED providing specific guidance on how this can be measured effectively.”

The Government absolutely agree. Personal, social and emotional development is one of the three prime areas of the early years foundation stage curriculum, and forming positive relationships, including with adults, is key to this. I will ensure that my colleagues in the Department look particularly closely at that recommendation, for attachment is absolutely crucial.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and the hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) raised foetal alcohol issues. I commend them for the report that has, I think, come out today, following the inquiry by the all-party group on foetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Bill Esterson: It is on its way to you.

Alistair Burt: Thank you very much.

It is too early to respond to the report, but I can say that it is really important. It is not like a Select Committee report, in that the Government do not have a duty to respond to it, but I would be extremely surprised if colleagues did not want to do so in due course, because it is so important. The official advice given is this:

“Our advice remains that women who are trying to conceive or are pregnant should avoid alcohol...If women choose to drink, to minimise the risk to the baby, they should not drink more than one to two units of alcohol once or twice a week and should not get drunk.”

We will shortly publish a consultation on the UK chief medical officer’s alcohol guidelines review. This will offer an opportunity to work with clinicians and other professionals to ensure that they are fully informed about the content of the guidelines and able to explain them to the women they care for and help them make informed choices on alcohol consumption. I would imagine that the substance of the inquiry ought to form part of that consultation and discussion. I think that the most important part of the advice is:

“Our advice remains that women who are trying to conceive or are pregnant should avoid alcohol”.

Bill Esterson: I am grateful to the Minister for those comments. The international examples given by his colleague the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) are very clear. The advice is not in two parts; it is a simple, single piece of advice: the best advice for mum and baby is to not drink at all. That is what happens around the world. The Minister has mentioned Dame Sally Davies. I hope she will agree with that and that that is what we will end up with, because it would make a massive difference.

Alistair Burt: I absolutely understand the hon. Gentleman’s point and hope that comes to pass. The Government will respond in due course.

I am the Minister with responsibility for mental health, which was raised by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) in particular and the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders).

Mr Graham Allen: If the Minister is moving on from foetal alcohol syndrome, it is important to put it on the record again that, as of a couple of weeks ago, the attempt to have a prevalence study on foetal alcohol syndrome has not found funding. It is really important that we try to understand the issue in depth and get some evidence on how widespread it is. Will the Minister please consider looking at the matter in the light of the report he will receive today?

Alistair Burt: I take the hon. Gentleman’s point and I will raise it with the appropriate Minister.

I have only a couple of minutes left, so I want to cover a couple of other things. Perinatal mental health is really important to me. I am disappointed that we have lost a couple of perinatal mother and baby units over the past few years. The increased emphasis on the issue is absolutely right. An NHS England working group is doing some intensive work on the £75 million that was committed in the last Budget to improve perinatal mental health services over the next five years. The report will come to me in the early weeks of January, as we look at the first tranche of that funding and then beyond. It is not as simple as just providing the units; it is about the community support care and everything else.

I was horrified by last week’s MBRRACE report. The association between people taking their own lives and perinatal mental health issues is very stark. Both of those issues are a very high priority for me. We will return in due course to say more about the detail. I offer the right hon. Member for North Norfolk that assurance.

Norman Lamb: Is the Minister satisfied that Health Education England recognises the importance of building the capacity of the workforce in order to ensure that there is a national service?

Alistair Burt: Yes, I am. HEE takes a real interest in the issue and I am sure there is more to be done. I take the right hon. Gentleman’s point about urgency as well. I am committed to doing more about that.

I am sure we will come back to this issue. This has been an excellent debate and I want to leave time for the mover of the motion to say a few words.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish you and all colleagues in the House a happy Christmas. If we conclude on a consensual note, with a debate as good as this one with very well informed people, the House is more than doing its job and is ready for a break.

4.58 pm

Tim Loughton: I am grateful to all hon. Members who have taken part in this debate. There have been some weighty contributions and I am grateful to those who have stayed for this last debate on the last parliamentary day of the year.

I am particularly grateful to the hon. Member for Nottingham North (Mr Allen) for his contribution. He spoke of the intergenerational problems we are inheriting, which he has done so much to address. He was also right in a later intervention to mention social finance and the possibility of social impact bonds, which we certainly want to develop.

[Tim Loughton]

At times the debate risked being hijacked by the report of the all-party group on foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, of which I am a member. I am delighted that we had an opportunity to give the group a voice, because it is a very important subject.

I am grateful to the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), who did so much on perinatal mental health when he was a Minister. The map he produced puts starkly, in graphic terms, the service provider gaps around the country. I was also grateful to hear from the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), who speaks on behalf of the Scottish National party, who spoke of the Scottish experience and her time as a clinical psychologist in the NHS.

I pay tribute to the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), not least for his optimism about the political fortunes of his party. I am grateful for the cross-party consensus, to which he contributed. He is absolutely right to say that it is a false economy not to be doing this. We need to impress on the Chancellor the fact that, just as we invest in roads and factories to aid the economy, we should invest in our youngest children as citizens who are going to contribute to society in the future.

This is an urgent matter for the whole Government and I urge the Minister to promote it as such. In doing so, I wish everybody a very happy and peaceful Christmas and an “attachment” new year.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House calls on the Government to consider the adoption of the recommendations in the cross-party manifesto entitled The 1001 Critical Days, the importance of the conception to age two period.

Access to Health Services: West Cumbria

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Guy Opperman.)

5 pm

Mr Jamie Reed (Copeland) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for presiding over this Adjournment debate, the last parliamentary business of 2015.

The issue at hand is one that my constituents and people living across west Cumbria care a great deal about. I know that the Minister is well aware of the challenges. He has responded positively to my questions and requests in the past, for which I am exceptionally grateful to him, and I hope that he will do so again today.

I will first outline the issues facing my constituents with regard to their ability to access health services in west Cumbria, particularly hospital services at the West Cumberland hospital. The issues facing the North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust, the pressures on ambulance services and the intense pressure on overworked and under-resourced staff are well documented, but despite that, little, if any, progress towards solving the problems would appear to have been made. I will then address the success regime and the opportunity it represents for health services in west Cumbria and therefore for our communities. The recent floods, the effects of which are keenly felt throughout the county, have magnified the issues at the heart of the debate on health services in west Cumbria, and I will also talk about that. I will conclude by outlining what I believe are the needs of the west Cumbrian community. After all, the key decision for decision makers, the Government, Ministers and NHS executives comes down to this: what do the people of west Cumbria want from their health and hospital services, and how can that be delivered? It must be said at the outset that that is a very different question from: what is the North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust prepared to provide? The simple answer is that the people of west Cumbria need better access to health services, particularly in relation to hospital services provided by the West Cumberland hospital in Whitehaven.

In this context, the term “access” has myriad meanings. It means the actual services provided locally, and it means that those services must be staffed appropriately so that they can be provided to a high quality. It also means empowering communities so that when decisions are made about their services, they are listened to during the decision-making process. Access also means proper planning for the significant population expansion that is forecast for the area. In west Cumbria, each of those points are immensely challenging, and that is what we must address.

In July 2013, Sir Bruce Keogh, with whom I have a very good and effective working relationship, published his review of mortality rates at several hospital trusts around the country. North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust, which serves my constituents, was one of the trusts and, along with 10 others, it was placed in special measures. The trust had higher than average mortality rates, and action to remedy that was justified and was welcomed.

At the time, Ministers were unable to provide basic information about what “special measures” meant for the trust. It was patently clear, however, that a major

reason for the care failings at the trust was a chronic staff shortage. It is only right that I use this opportunity to thank, personally and on behalf of my constituents, the tremendous staff who are working tirelessly in trying conditions to provide high-quality healthcare. I know that many work unpaid overtime because they care about their patients, about the community and about the care they provide. It will be a tough winter and there will be huge pressures, but I want them all to know that I and my constituents understand that they are working in extraordinary circumstances.

The trust simply needs more staff, and the Government must intervene to ensure that it has more staff. Such a request has fallen on deaf ears for too long. The most recent report by the Care Quality Commission, published in September, showed the scale of the challenge:

“The recruitment of nursing staff also remained an on-going challenge. At the time of our inspection nurse staffing levels, although improved, were still of concern and there was a heavy reliance on staff working extra shifts and on bank and agency staff to maintain staffing levels. There were times when the wards were not appropriately staffed to meet the needs of patients.”

This simply is not acceptable.

In 2013-14, the trust spent £16 million on agency staff. That cannot be sustainable, and it is clearly a false economy. Agency staff are a short-term, expensive solution, and in my view the Government should be empowering trusts to achieve long-term, efficient solutions. Capping agency costs is a small, tentative step in the right direction, but it would be better all round if the Government provided funding to enable trusts to train and recruit for the long term. That would surely save money in the long run and enable predictable, stable, secure service design for the long term. Will the Minister therefore commit to making relief funding available to allow the trust to be more competitive in the recruitment market? If my local trust has to pay over the odds to secure services that are taken for granted in other parts of the country, it ought to be funded appropriately to do so.

In my constituency, I have been working with the trust and the University of Central Lancashire to bring a medical school to west Cumbria so that we can grow our own medics. That is a long-term sustainable solution to one of the key problems we are facing. I am delighted to say that the new West Cumberland medical education campus now exists at the Westlakes science park in my constituency, immediately adjacent to the new West Cumberland hospital. So far, it has succeeded without the support or involvement of the Government, but I hope that they will support the development not just in spirit, but through practical assistance, including money.

In addition to growing our own medics in west Cumbria for the benefit of the entire Cumbrian health economy, every part of which faces similar challenges, we are providing the basis for policy solutions by becoming a rural health policy laboratory. The campus can and should become the crucible of innovation that provides the solutions to the problems facing rural areas in respect of the provision of high-quality, accessible, universal health services. I hope that the Minister will express the support of the Government and the Department for that today.

I hope that the Government will look again at nursing bursaries, as I fear that their new policy will make it harder to train and recruit the medical staff that we all know we need. On 14 December, the chief executive of

the Royal College of Nursing said that the decision to cut bursaries that was announced in the Chancellor's autumn statement is having a negative impact on people who are considering a career in the profession. It is all well and good pledging to increase the number of training places, but the impact is wasted if the mechanism that we adopt turns people away.

The NHS staff survey shows the current strain on medical staff in north and west Cumbria. There has been a big increase in the proportion of staff who suffer work-related stress and, unforgivably, the prevalence of staff experiencing bullying from other staff is increasing. Staff are working extra hours unpaid. The people in west Cumbria rely on the services provided by those hard-working people. Much like the expensive agency bills, overworking staff simply is not sustainable. Will the Minister commit to seeing what action the Department can take to improve the situation? Sooner or later, our luck will run out. The good will of the medical professionals, who are exhausted and demoralised in so many ways, will run out too. It is patients who will pay the price.

At the beginning of the year, I wrote to the NHS's chief executive, Simon Stevens. I asked him to visit Cumbria to see for himself the geographical challenges and to speak with patients and staff. I asked him to work with me and other stakeholders to develop a comprehensive recovery plan for the Cumbrian health economy. Nowhere in the country is quite like our county. The health inequalities, the demographic differences, the challenging geography and the contrast between the affluent and those who are less well-off all present unique challenges in designing and providing hospital services and health services in the round.

What is provided should be broadly the same in every community in the country. A national health service should ensure that there is equality of standards and accessibility in the health service, but how that is delivered must be flexible enough to accommodate unique local circumstances.

The success regime is the response to my request for a comprehensive recovery plan. The new regime is intended to develop a locally tailored solution to the problems we face. I support the success regime fully, but I have doubts about the support of the North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust for the process.

Over recent years, actions by the trust's executive team have led to the public being understandably worried about the prospect of key services being removed from West Cumberland hospital without a rationale. In September 2013, the trust moved some out-of-hours surgery services from the West Cumberland to the Cumberland infirmary in Carlisle, over 40 miles away. The public were not consulted on the change. Crucially, the modelling and assumptions underpinning the move were flawed. Much greater numbers of patients have had to travel than was either anticipated by the trust or told to the public. Either it was a lamentable failure properly to model the effects of service change or it was a lie. That raises serious questions about either the honesty or competence of the trust.

The trust's attitude on a number of other issues since then has done little to reassure those who are concerned about its intentions with regard to the provision of services at the new West Cumberland hospital. I was present at a meeting—I think it was in October—with Simon Stevens on the success regime, in which the local

[Mr Jamie Reed]

hospital trust was told categorically that the “asset stripping” of services from West Cumberland hospital must not continue. It was an exceptionally uncomfortable meeting. Days later it was reported that senior managers at the trust had told staff that the accident and emergency department would be downgraded. That is unacceptable. The trust must abandon any preconceived plans to strip services. Those services must be provided at West Cumberland hospital, and the success regime must be allowed to complete its work.

I welcome the recent statement from the NHS in Cumbria, which set out in a public letter that the accident and emergency department, and other services, must remain at the West Cumberland hospital. That is the bare minimum that my community would expect, yet the trust had to be shamed into making such a basic commitment.

With regret, if the trust does not abandon its preconceived ideas about service reconfiguration and reduction, and if it tries to ride roughshod over the work of the success regime programme before it has a chance to develop its plan, I will be left with no option but to pursue the removal of the current trust management. I would be grateful if the Government would support what is clearly an effort of last resort. I take no pleasure in that, but unless the trust management can commit fully to the terms of reference of the success regime, it should have no part in the future of healthcare service design in north and west Cumbria.

The attitude displayed by the trust, whether deliberate or not, has meant that many in the local community simply do not believe a word it says. Its lack of willingness to engage with the public who use or rely on the services provided at our hospital means that many feel disconnected from a key service—the key service—in their community. The service reconfiguration of September 2013 was done without public engagement, and the development of the trust’s future clinical options did little to assuage legitimate concerns. The document showed the stripping of key services from West Cumberland hospital which, I repeat, is unacceptable.

Last year, in front of a crowd of almost 5,000 people at the recreation ground—the home of Whitehaven rugby league football club—trust representatives assured an anxious crowd that no decision on service reconfiguration would be made. However, the publication of the future clinical options appraisal in October 2014 showed that the plans had been in development for a year. It is easier to deal with Iran!

The duplicitous nature of the trust’s public statements, the covert actions that seek to pursue in private the opposite of what it states it wishes to do in public, and the public distrust that it has singularly managed to establish is staggering. It is truly breathtaking. Too often, the trust acts as a rogue trust, seemingly beyond any accountability to anyone and beyond the influence of the Cumbrian public. Will the Minister commit to examine the behaviour of the trust? Senior local medics, patients, local civic society, trade unions, and local representatives of all parties all doubt that any eventual consultation designed by the trust will be genuine or honest. Progress will not be possible within that climate of distrust.

Hopefully, many of the trust’s preconceived ideas about service reconfiguration will be superseded by the work of the success regime. In the rest of the country the Government and NHS would be hard pushed to find a more committed, willing, well-informed and passionate community when it comes to health services than the community of west Cumbria. A campaign group set up to fight for services, “We Need West Cumberland Hospital”, has garnered much public support and I pay tribute to its work, as I do to the fantastic work of Siobhan Gearing, Carol Woodman, Lee Butterworth, Rachel Holliday, my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) and so many others.

Does the Minister agree that if the trust was committed to rebuilding trust within the community, it should involve the local public in open and transparent discussions about local services, instead of defying the NHS chief executive, deliberately undermining staff, raising doubts about services about which there should be no doubt, and acting like thieves in the night?

The recent local floods did not cause the underlying issues inherent in the north and west Cumbrian health economy. Nor did they cause lasting damage to the ability of the NHS in Cumbria to deliver services. What the recent floods did, among many other things, is prove beyond doubt the sheer folly of removing services from the West Cumberland hospital and putting them in the Cumberland infirmary in Carlisle, more than 40 miles away.

The floods meant that roads were impassable. Ambulances and other emergency services, which were already struggling more in Cumbria than anywhere else in the north-west, were under intense pressure. Power was cut to the Cumberland infirmary, which had to rely on back-up generators. I am told that there were no clean sheets or bedding. The laundry service failed and doctors and nurses could not get to work. The impact on patients was severe.

Getting from west Cumbria to Carlisle at the best of times is difficult. If the weather does not beat you, the tractors or the sadly routine road traffic accidents and diversions will. I am campaigning for serious improvements to the A595, but because of the floods over that weekend and the following days it was simply impossible to get from west Cumbria to Carlisle—not difficult, not unlikely, but impossible. The levels of the flooding could not be anticipated, but there are things that we can do to ensure access to, and the resilience of, our key services. Rain in the Lake district should never come as a surprise—it should never lead international news bulletins—but severe weather should not create a health emergency because access to services has been cut off.

I have been inundated with numerous examples of the situations people found themselves in, but the underpinning point is relatively simple: access to a full and comprehensive range of hospital service is, for the people of west Cumbria, essentially non-negotiable. The recent flooding showed that, if services are transferred from the West Cumberland hospital, in times of emergency, patients simply would not be able to access them because they would not be able to get to the Cumberland infirmary in Carlisle.

I repeat that that cannot be acceptable. In times of emergency, the people of west Cumbria need to be able to access their services. That can be assured only by retaining their services in their local hospital—the West Cumberland

hospital—which is a fantastic new facility for which I have campaigned for more than 10 years. I make two specific requests of the Minister with regard to the hospital. Will he please move to unblock the funding for phase 2 of the hospital new build programme? The money has been allocated but is not yet accessible. I ask that that be done as soon as possible so as to provide confidence and help to build public trust. If, as is suggested by some, Monitor will shortly be able to allocate a fund £1.8 billion to the most challenged health economies in the country, will the Minister ensure that north Cumbria is at the top of that list?

The last point I should like to address is the short-sightedness of the trust's desire to move services. West Cumbria is home to one of the most nationally strategic points in the shape of Sellafield. Over the coming years, with new nuclear reactors at Moorside, which is adjacent to Sellafield, thousands of jobs will be created, and my constituency will become one of the fastest-growing regional economies anywhere in the United Kingdom. As a result, the local population will grow significantly and quickly. The people who live in west Cumbria need better access to the health services on which they rely, but it is simply mind-boggling that, when the local population is growing, the trust thinks it is possible and perhaps even desirable to move services more than 40 miles up the road. The Minister has been unequivocal about that in the past and I thank him once again for that. The local NHS must take into account strategic infrastructure and the local population of host communities when planning services, so will he commit to write to North Cumbria University Hospitals NHS Trust to ensure that it publicly acknowledges that? Will he today, at the Dispatch Box, urge the trust to factor that population growth and strategic need into its future plans?

The fundamental principle in the debate is absolutely straightforward. Moving services more than 40 miles away from the West Cumberland hospital is the antithesis of the principles that underpin a truly national health service. I would go as far to say that, unless patients and taxpayers in my community can access the same level of healthcare routinely provided by the NHS in other communities, the national health service exists in name only. Forty miles is not a reasonable distance to ask people who are in need of medical care to travel, particularly when that 40 miles is served by such inadequate infrastructure. Mothers giving birth do not want to sit in an ambulance on the A595 hoping beyond hope that they do not get stuck behind a tractor.

A fully operational accident and emergency department supported by associated departments, consultant-led maternity services and paediatric services must remain at the West Cumberland hospital, for which I have much to be grateful for, both as an individual and as a recent parent. If we need to adopt a flexible approach in order to achieve that, that is what we must do. It must be accompanied by what will in many ways be nothing short of a new model of healthcare. The trust should know that the people of west Cumbria will stand for nothing less. The trust may be a provider of services but, after all, the NHS belongs to all of us.

I fully support the success regime, but I ask the Minister today to tell the trust in unequivocal terms that, unless it listens and responds to the west Cumbrian community, it will face a fight the likes of which it has never seen.

5.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer): It seems appropriate that the final debate before Christmas is about maternity. It is appropriate in another way because it is about an area of the country that has too often been forgotten in the planning of services and where the people feel left out from the way in which the NHS has been formed in the past. The Government and I wish to address that. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Copeland (Mr Reed) for bringing his points to the House. He is a forthright campaigner for his constituents and cares passionately about his constituency, and he understands the needs and concerns of his patch. I listen with care, because I know he chooses his words with care. He would not have used the strong language he used in his speech were it not for the fact that he judged it necessary to do so.

I will begin where the hon. Gentleman ended—on the floods. I was glad that, despite the extraordinary amount of rainfall in Cumberland and Westmorland, the effect on NHS services was not as severe as it was in 2009 and 2005. That shows we are at least getting a bit better at resilience and planning. I would like to pay tribute to some of the people who stood out during the difficult period of the past few weeks. The NHS workers from across north Cumbria, many of them in his constituency, worked all hours to make sure people could access medication and receive treatment. It is a credit to them. The amount of work, commitment and vocational passion they bring to their jobs was reflected in the hon. Gentleman's speech.

I will come on immediately to the problems in north Cumbria. They are well documented, although there is no agreement yet on how we address them. The fact is that north Cumbria is one of those rare things in England: a very remote area. We do not have them in our country in the way that others do. Our neighbouring country of Scotland has more remote areas and is able to understand the pressures that they put on health systems in a way that we do not. The Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), also represents a remote and rural area. Rural areas pose particular challenges to a service that has grown out of an urban design for healthcare provision over many decades. We are seeing the pressures and difficulties posed by that structural conflict in north Cumbria.

To be blunt—the hon. Gentleman is cognisant of this—the care of patients in north Cumbria has fallen well short of where it should have been because of the structural failures in the way the NHS is set up in that area. That is why the hospitals were placed in special measures and why they have been there for so long. It is why they have not exited from special measures and why NHS England, together with Monitor and the trust development authority, has felt it necessary to place the whole of the health economy of north Cumbria into its so-called success regime. That is not a title I love very much, but I hope it points to the place we need to get to.

I will say from the outset that the success regime will be successful only if it comes up with a plan that is deliverable and has the support of local people and clinicians. The problem in the past has been that ideas have been proposed, normally from the centre, and placed on to local people. Completely understandably, they have said, "I am not having this. This doesn't suit what we believe we need in terms of healthcare for our

[*Ben Gummer*]

area and that's not good enough." Because the NHS is owned by local people, we will only win this if they feel any redesign will improve quality and services. We also have to be clear that it will pose difficult challenges to us as politicians, both as local representatives and Ministers. It is important we get behind the success regime when it concludes and are prepared to take difficult decisions. The one thing that will ensure that the poor state of patient care quality persists in north Cumbria for years and decades to come is if we do not take a decision. We have to take a decision. We have to make sure it is the right decision. We have to get behind it and make sure it happens.

Turning to some of the specific issues the hon. Gentleman raised, the issue of staffing really underlies all the problems in the various NHS bodies in north Cumbria. It is difficult to recruit to certain specialties in north Cumbria. That means the trusts and other NHS bodies depend on locums and agency staff. That is not the way to run the health economy either in north Cumbria or across the NHS. That is why we have taken wider action on staff agency costs and why we need specific help for north Cumbria. The success regime is looking specifically at this.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the new medical school, led by the University of Central Lancashire, on the West Cumberland campus. I welcome its sense of innovation. It already provides very good non-medical healthcare courses, and I am glad it is reaching into new areas. I will be excited to see how it progresses and would like to see what it is doing for myself in the near future. I certainly endorse his plan for a rural health policy laboratory—it is the right way to go—which I hope will feed into the success regime and our understanding of how to learn from other areas of greater rurality and sparsity, such as Canada and Australia, and how they deal with, and provide exceptional care to, people in dispersed communities.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned nursing bursaries. I will not get into that debate now, but I hope he will be reassured by my announcement a few hours ago of a nursing apprenticeship route all the way to degree level to ensure that healthcare assistants can progress to registered nurses via an intermediate nursing associate position. In north Cumbria, it is much easier to recruit to healthcare assistant posts than to nursing posts. I hope he will understand where I am going with this. As in Hull and other parts of the country where it has been difficult to get nurses into post, it will allow us to give to our excellent, committed healthcare assistants, who have the values of the NHS right at the core of their being, a career progression route that they have not had so far. I hope he will take comfort from that initiative.

I understand that staff often work excessive hours just to keep things going in stressed areas such as north

Cumbria. The NHS depends on their good will at such moments, but it is not something we should bank on, which is why we need to get it right for his constituents and the whole of north Cumbria.

The hon. Gentleman made two final points about the building programme at the West Cumberland and the transformation fund. I will certainly consider his request in respect of the West Cumberland, although it is probably best that Monitor comes to a final decision once the success regime diagnostic is at least concluded, which should be imminently, because it would be a mistake to embark on something that would be moderated by a joint decision within the success regime deliberations. I will ensure, however, that there is pace to that. It is important, if it is committed to, that it is delivered, but I assure him that I will look into the matter first thing in the new year.

The transformation fund is designed to stimulate the innovation we know there is in the NHS around clinical management and to bring efficiencies to bear across the hospital estate. It is not, I stress, a bail-out fund; it is designed to do what it says on the tin: to transform how we run our hospitals. Efficient care is good-quality care, as the hon. Gentleman understands better than most, which is why the hospitals delivering the best care in the country are also the best at looking after their finances. There is considerable talent within the management and clinical management core in the NHS, and we want to realise their ideas for making the NHS more efficient across the services it provides. That is the purpose of the fund. It is to help realise that innovation and to match their efforts. If we simply pour it into bailing out hospitals that are not doing their bit to transform and bring in efficiencies, it will be doing the wrong thing and we will be wasting money. However, I will certainly make his request clear to the leadership of NHS Improvement, which is concerned with this matter. He will be pleased to know that Jim Mackey, the exceptional new chief executive of NHS Improvement, is well acquainted with his part of the country and has its interests at heart.

It remains to me, as the last person to speak from the Floor this year, to thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this important matter to the House. On this occasion, last is certainly not least, and I hope that Cumbria will be first in the new year in terms of the announcements we will make. I wish everyone still remaining in the Chamber—the Clerk, the Serjeant, the Whip, the Doorkeeper, the officials in the Box, the one or two determined visitors and you, Madam Deputy Speaker—a very happy Christmas.

Question put and agreed to.

5.30 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 17 December 2015

[MR CLIVE BETTS *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Tobacco Control Strategy

1.30 pm

Kevin Barron (Rother Valley) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered a new tobacco control strategy.

I am pleased to speak in this debate with you in the Chair, Mr Betts, because we are not talking about football today—our teams are doing different things in the league at the moment. I ought to declare that I am the vice-chair of the all-party group on smoking and health, and have been an officer of sorts for it for some 20 years. I am sure Members are aware that the group's secretariat has been the Action on Smoking and Health charity for many years.

My commitment to tobacco control is well known in this House. For the more than 20 years that I have been involved in this issue, I have had great support from Action on Smoking and Health, as I know Governments have from time to time. My commitment was an individual one at one stage, going back a couple of decades, so I am pleased that in recent years we have seen a growth in cross-party support for tobacco control, as people recognise that it is a key area of public health.

The Minister has played a key leadership role in guiding through the House measures such as standard packaging and the prohibition on smoking in cars with children. She has been helped by the strong support for these measures across Parliament, both here and in the other place. We have moved on in leaps and bounds on this major public health issue in the past decade. Measures to tackle the harm caused by smoking are strongly supported by the public, three quarters of whom supported Government action to limit smoking in a YouGov poll conducted for ASH, and around half of whom think the Government could do more.

In recent years, a great deal has been achieved with the support of the public and all political parties, starting with the Labour Government introducing the first comprehensive tobacco control strategy in 1998; they subsequently introduced comprehensive smoke-free legislation with strong cross-party support. The coalition Government published as their first detailed public health strategy the tobacco control plan for England in 2011. Over the life of the current plan, a great deal has been achieved, and smoking prevalence rates in England have fallen significantly during the five years of the plan from some 20.2% in 2011 to 18% in 2014.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I am not sure whether the right hon. Gentleman will cover this, but I am particularly interested in smoking prevalence rates among those who suffer severe and enduring mental

ill health. It appears to have been stubbornly more difficult to reduce smoking rates among that group. Given that people with mental ill health die earlier, and that smoking actually damages their mental health, does he agree that it is critical that the NHS ensures that those people get access to support services to help them give up smoking?

Kevin Barron: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right; there is a high incidence of smoking among people with mental health conditions, as there is among poorer households. I will go into that in more detail, but he is right to mention it.

Smoking rates have fallen among not only adults but, importantly, young people. Regular smoking among 15-year-olds has fallen even faster under the plan, from 11% in 2011 to just 6% in 2014. That is a great credit to the current plan, but it is about to come to an end, so we need a new strategy.

The reduction ambitions set out in the tobacco control plan for England have been achieved ahead of the end of the strategy. However, a great deal remains to be done. Smoking remains by far the single largest cause of preventable illness and premature deaths in the United Kingdom, causing about 100,000 premature deaths a year and killing more people than the next six causes put together, including obesity, alcohol and illegal drugs. The cost of smoking to the national health service in England is estimated to be about £2 billion a year.

My constituency, Rother Valley, sits in Rotherham borough. Just under one in five people smoke in Rotherham, which is about the same as the national average. That amounts to some 37,391 people. Nearly 500 people in Rotherham die from smoke-related diseases every year—primarily cancer, heart disease and respiratory diseases. An estimated 900 children in Rotherham start smoking every year, and it is important to remember that two thirds of smokers start before the age of 18. Of those who try smoking, between one third and one half will become regular smokers. The best way to prevent children taking up smoking is to encourage their parents to quit, because children are three times more likely to start smoking if their parents smoke.

Smoking rates are much higher among poor people. In 2014, 12% of adults in managerial and professional occupations smoked, compared with some 28% in routine and manual occupations. Almost all groups that experience disadvantage have higher smoking rates than the general population. For example, as the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) mentioned, people with mental health conditions are much more likely to smoke, and nearly eight out of 10 prisoners and people who are homeless smoke.

Poorer smokers also face financial hardship as a result of smoking. When their expenditure on smoking is taken into account, some 1.4 million households are below the poverty line—that is 27% of all households that include a smoker. In Rotherham alone, smoking is estimated to cost the national health service some £12.2 million. The current and ex-smokers who require social care in later life as a result of smoking-related diseases cost society in Rotherham an additional £5.7 million, £3.3 million of which is funded by the local authority through social care costs, and £2.4 million of which is self-funded.

[Kevin Barron]

Quitting smoking surveys show that about two thirds of smokers would like to stop smoking, but only around one third make a quit attempt in any given year. Continued Government and public sector action to cut smoking rates therefore remains necessary, and a new strategy is required to replace the expiring tobacco control plan.

The current Department of Health tobacco control plan will expire at the end of this month, as I understand it. I am delighted that the Minister with responsibility for public health has announced that there will be a new plan, and I look forward to her announcing when it will be published; we may hear something today. It is crucial that a new tobacco control plan be a public health priority, and it has to be comprehensive. The current strategy has been successful because it is comprehensive and, so far, properly funded.

The main elements of successful tobacco control, as implemented in the UK, are well understood and strongly backed by evidence. They are: price rises through taxation, intended to make tobacco less affordable and to help pay for tobacco control interventions; stopping the smuggling of tobacco, which allows children and young people easy access and reduces the incentives for adult smokers to quit; helping smokers to quit through evidence-based services, including support and, where appropriate, the prescription of nicotine replacement products; an end to tobacco advertising, marketing and promotion, including on the pack design; and mass-media campaigns and social marketing of anti-smoking messages. Legislating for smoke-free enclosed public places and vehicles to protect people from the harmful effects of second-hand smoke has been a great success. The new strategy will need to be comprehensive and ambitious, with tough new targets, and it has to be well funded.

I commend to the Minister the comprehensive set of measures set out in the ASH document, "Smoking Still Kills", which has been endorsed by more than 120 public health-related organisations, including the British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK, medical royal colleges and the British Medical Association. The report calls on the Government to impose an annual levy on tobacco companies, proposes new targets for reducing smoking prevalence to make our country effectively tobacco-free by 2035, and makes a comprehensive set of recommendations for a renewed national strategy to accelerate the decline in smoking prevalence over the next decade.

Hon. Members will remember that at the launch of that report in June, the Minister committed the Government to publishing a new strategy to replace the current plan. Sustained funding is essential to the success of any new strategy, as it has been for Government strategies to date. Clear evidence from the UK and overseas shows that a reduction in spending on tobacco control, together with less emphasis on new policies and on enforcement of existing ones, is likely to slow, halt or even reverse the long-term reduction in the smoking prevalence rate.

Some measures, once implemented, either do not need funding—such as standardised packaging, and the ban on advertising, promotion and sponsorship—or are self-funded, such as tax increases and reductions in smuggling. Others continue to need to be properly funded,

including mass-media campaigns, stop smoking services and enforcement to prevent children from being able to buy cigarettes.

I am deeply concerned that the cuts in funding to the Department of Health and local authority public health budgets, both in-year and announced in the spending review, threaten to undermine the ability of the planned new tobacco control plan for England, so that, unlike the current plan, it will not be effective. We are already seeing cuts to stop smoking services up and down the country, and to local authority investment in tobacco control, even before the spending review cuts are implemented. Will the Minister confirm that the new tobacco control plan will contain ambitious targets and be sustainably funded?

I want to focus on the importance of mass-media campaigns, which are highly cost-effective in encouraging smokers to quit and in discouraging young people from taking up smoking. When funding was cut to mass-media campaigning in 2010, when the coalition Government came in, there was a noticeable impact on quitting behaviour. There was a decrease of 98% in the amount of quit support packs. Quitline calls fell by 65% and hits on the website fell by 34%, but the evidence shows that such services are only effective if they are sufficiently well funded; in recent years, they have not been.

At the peak in 2009-10, nearly £25 million was spent by the Government on mass-media campaigns. However, last year, in monetary terms, not taking inflation into account, the amount had fallen to less than £7 million, and it is likely to fall again this year. Investment in mass-media campaigns is a crucial part of the mix of tobacco control interventions needed to drive down smoking rates, and the UK is seriously under-investing.

To give an international comparison, in the US, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention's best-practice recommendations for mass-reach health communications to reduce smoking is \$1.69 per capita. Using 2014 population figures, that means that in England, we should be spending in the region of £57 million a year on mass-media campaigns for that to be evidence-based. We are spending eight times less than that.

The cut in spending is already having an impact. An early indicator of the effects of reductions in spending on tobacco control is given by the smoking toolkit study run by Professor Robert West, from University College London. Results for 2015 show that smoking prevalence has stopped declining and is beginning to go back up again for the first time in many years.

Smoking rates have increased from 18.5%—the lowest ever recorded—to 18.7% in recent months. There has also been a fall in the proportion of smokers who made an attempt to quit, from 37.3% in 2014 to 32.4% in 2015. There are lower success rates for quit attempts, from 19.1% in 2014 to 17.0% in 2015. That is going in the opposite way to how it should be going.

I want to move on to an area on which the public have contrasting views: the role of electronic cigarettes, which are perhaps badly named, and harm reduction. Over the last few decades, it has become increasingly clear that although population smoking rates had been declining, some groups—particularly the poor, the disadvantaged and those with mental health problems—were being left behind. Those are the groups with the highest levels of nicotine addiction, who find it hardest to quit.

At present, the most popular source of nicotine—the cigarette—is far and away the most hazardous and addictive. In response to that, tobacco harm reduction approaches have been developed in the UK to find ways of giving smokers who are unable to quit access to alternative, less harmful forms of nicotine. We are at the forefront in the world in developing such an approach. Current smoking cessation programmes use nicotine replacement therapy, but they also use non-nicotine approaches such as psychotherapy and other pharmaceutical products. Although there has clearly been success with those products, they predate the advent of electronic cigarettes as a major consumer product.

Electronic cigarettes are now widely on sale and have become the most popular tool used by smokers to help them quit. There is growing evidence that they are effective aids to quitting, and they are used by around 2.6 million smokers, primarily to help them quit or prevent them from relapsing back into smoking. Although concerns have been raised about their use by young people and never-smokers, this has not been found to be an issue. Indeed, use by adults who have never been regular smokers is very rare, and although a growing number of young people under 18 have experimented with electronic cigarettes, regular use is limited almost exclusively to young people who are current smokers or who have experimented with smoking in the past.

More worryingly, evidence from ASH indicates that the public increasingly have false perceptions of the harm from electronic cigarettes, and smokers who have not yet tried an electronic cigarette are much more likely than other smokers to believe they are as harmful as conventional cigarettes, or more harmful. That is certainly not the case. A recent groundbreaking review by Public Health England, which was published in August, found that they are 95% safer than smoking tobacco and recommended that health providers and stop smoking services take a more proactive approach in supporting smokers who want to use electronic cigarettes to quit smoking.

For 50 years we have known now that it is not the nicotine in cigarettes that does the damage to people, but the contaminants in the tobacco. However, some people, including in the medical field, are talking electronic cigarettes down as though they were as dangerous as cigarettes. That figure of 95% safer gives us 5% wriggle room, because I do not think that has been tested or proven at this stage. It could be far higher than that, but this product is a way of taking nicotine into the system that does not do the damage that tobacco does.

I believe a large part of the delay in the roll-out of electronic cigarettes has been due to the fact that they were not developed in the UK, or not through traditional methods in national health service labs. I just wish they had been, because then some medical practitioners in the NHS would have had a different attitude to them. The regulatory systems are not used to this sort of organic growth that comes in from outside. However, the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency's new approach to licensing e-cigarettes is a welcome step. To my knowledge, the MHRA is the only medicines regulator in the world to licence an e-cigarette, as happened earlier this month. They will potentially become a major part of smoking cessation programmes.

Unfortunately, there are high costs to putting e-cigarettes through the MHRA, and from conversations with British suppliers it is clear that the licensing costs are prohibitive for smaller manufacturers if they want them to be a medicinal product. That is obviously a major block, and it is argued that only the tobacco companies are putting those products through the MHRA at the moment. That may be because they have the money to be able to put them through at this stage. I would prefer a tobacco company to spend money on putting these products through the MHRA, so that they can get into smoking cessation clinics, than to sell cigarettes, which prematurely kill 50% of the people who use them. We should take our head out of the sand and look at the potential of these products to get everyone off cigarettes, which are so damaging to their health.

I recently met someone who runs a small business in my constituency and has developed a product called E-Burn, which is an e-cigarette for use in prisons. It is currently used in the prison on Guernsey and is being adopted by the NHS for use in secure hospitals. That innovation is taking place out there. I have not tasted that product and I do not know it from any other, but when I was on the Select Committee on Health in 2005-06 and we did an inquiry on smoking in public places, one of the most difficult things was trying to convince people that those in prisons ought to have smoke-free workplaces as well.

Norman Lamb: It should also be mentioned that in mental health settings and in-patient wards, where no-smoking policies have been introduced and patients have been helped to escape from addiction to tobacco, a significant improvement in their mental wellbeing and mental health has been seen.

Kevin Barron: The product to which I referred comes from China, I understand, but is assembled in Rother Valley, and the person who runs that company wants to expand his business and create jobs. I want to encourage him on the basis that it creates better health if these products are used both in mental health institutions and in prison.

I mentioned the 2005-06 report. The Health Committee, which I chaired at the time, had great difficulty in convincing people who ran institutions that smoke-free workplaces should be as much for people inside prisons and secure hospitals as for anyone else. Various arguments were put to us at the time. The major issue was not just about taking people off cigarettes; it was about control in prisons. I now see that from 1 January we are banning smoking in all Welsh prisons and selected English prisons, which we could loosely call non-traditional environments. That has taken a long time. We were told when we were doing that inquiry in 2005-06 that the Prison Service would bring things forward within three months of our completing it. It has actually taken 10 years to get to this stage. I suspect that if e-cigarettes, no matter which ones they are, go into those institutions for people who are addicted to nicotine and cannot get off that addiction, it will help us get what some of us were arguing for 10 years ago.

Next year, the UK will implement the electronic cigarette provisions in the tobacco products directive, which will provide a regulatory framework for those products, giving users greater assurance about their

[Kevin Barron]

safety and quality. However, e-cigarette users have raised concerns that the UK Government's implementation of those provisions will force products that they use off the market and may cause them to revert to conventional smoking.

I accept entirely that it is essential that the directive be implemented proportionately. As I understand it, the MHRA will be responsible for that, although not for making all e-cigarettes medicinal product, which involves high expense. It will bring in a regime whereby it will look at the quality of e-cigarettes, and quite right too. We want to know, if people are buying e-cigarettes in shops on our high streets or wherever, that what the packet says is what is in the product. People should know exactly what they are using. I agree about that, but I hope the Government will ensure that the regulation of electronic cigarettes is proportionate and maximises the benefits to smokers while minimising the risks.

I want to finish by discussing our role in global tobacco policy. As reported by Public Health England, money has been found in the spending review for the Department of Health to support the international implementation of tobacco control. The UK, as a world leader in tobacco control and in supporting development internationally, has a key role to play in that area. I am pleased to see the Minister nodding. The UK is the first G7 country to meet the long-standing commitment to spend 0.7% of gross national income on official development assistance—a commitment that is enshrined in law, I am very pleased to say as a Member of the House. Building economic growth and creating jobs helps developing countries to lift themselves out of poverty, and we can justly be proud of our work in that area.

Key to effective development work going forward will be helping to deliver on the new sustainable development goals. One of those is to accelerate the implementation of the World Health Organisation framework convention on tobacco control. I hope, therefore, that our new tobacco control plan will be cross-Government and will include an ambitious international strategy to help countries with FCTC implementation.

The Addis Ababa declaration on financing for development, which backs up the sustainable development goals, says that parties, such as the UK, should strengthen implementation of the WHO FCTC and support mechanisms to raise awareness and mobilise resources for the convention. The UK, as a world leader both in development and in tobacco control, has a key role to play in helping to support FCTC implementation, particularly in low and middle-income countries.

The financing for development declaration goes further and states that

“price and tax measures on tobacco can be an effective and important means to reduce tobacco consumption and health-care costs, and represent a revenue stream for financing for development in many countries.”

Clearly the UK has expertise in tobacco taxation: we have some of the highest taxes in the world, combined with a comprehensive and effective strategy to tackle illicit trade. A 2014 study found that tripling tobacco taxes around the world could reduce the number of smokers by 433 million and prevent 200 million premature deaths from lung cancer and other smoking-related

diseases. That would benefit UK plc, because increased tobacco taxes of necessity go hand in hand with enhanced anti-smuggling strategies, which we now have to deal with daily. Her Majesty's Treasury, in collaboration with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs, is in the process of setting up a cross-departmental ministerial working group to tackle the illicit trade in tobacco and help HMRC to achieve its aims, which include:

“Creating a hostile global environment for tobacco fraud through intelligence sharing and policy change”.

If other Governments increase tobacco taxes and enhance their anti-smuggling strategies, that will help to create precisely that hostile global environment for tobacco fraud. HMRC is working on that at the moment.

Our international strategy also needs to include work to help countries protect their tobacco control public health policies from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry, and to ensure that UK diplomatic posts do not help tobacco companies promote their deadly products around the world. It was rightly considered a scandal earlier this year when the British high commissioner to Pakistan was revealed to have attended a British American Tobacco meeting with the Government of Pakistan, at which BAT lobbied the Government not to implement tougher health warnings on cigarette packs—a campaign that was successful, sadly. In a recent BBC “Panorama” programme, it was alleged that BAT employees and contractors had been involved in making payments to officials and politicians in Africa in return for access to draft tobacco control legislation. Given the UK's strong domestic record on tobacco control and our leading international role in promoting successful tobacco control policies, we need to remain vigilant and ensure that we all do everything we can to promote successful tobacco control around the world.

I had personal experience of what the tobacco companies do more than 20 years ago, when I was promoting a private Member's Bill to ban tobacco advertising and promotion. A lot came out years later through the tobacco files about exactly what had taken place and the influence that those companies exerted to try to stop us doing what this country has now done. They tried to stop us putting this country on the map as a major force in tobacco control, as it is now. Will the Minister confirm that the international work to support the implementation of the WHO FCTC will be a key part of the new tobacco control plan, and that it will include supporting Governments in protecting their public health policies from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco companies, in line with article 5.3 of the FCTC?

I thank you for your indulgence, Mr Betts—you will be pleased to know that I am about to sit down. The tobacco control strategies have been published, in recent history, about once every five years. They have been crucial to this country in saving the lives of many of our fellow citizens and in our getting a good evidence base for the same thing to happen throughout the world. The last thing I want is for this country to stop doing what it has been doing well. I have asked questions about funding and other things, but there is much that we can do that requires not money but good will and determination.

2 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It is an honour and a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts, as I do weekly on the Select Committee on Communities

and Local Government. It is also a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Kevin Barron), who has almost a lifetime of experience of dealing with the tobacco industry and ensuring that the country wakes up to the fact that tobacco and the products that the tobacco industry produces will, if they are used in the way that is intended, kill us. They are the only legal product that will achieve that. I declare an interest in that I speak as the chair of the all-party group on smoking and health. I thank the vast plethora of organisations that have contributed to the debate by supplying me with facts, figures and determinations.

I remember in September 2013, on the first Tuesday back after the long summer recess, we held a debate in this place on standardised packaging for tobacco products. The predecessor of the Minister for Public Health was in post, and some 22 Members contributed to the debate. The Government's position was that they would not introduce standardised packaging, and the Opposition's view was that it would be the wrong thing to do. Less than two years later, however, it has come to pass. Government policy changed quite radically as a result of pressure from MPs on both sides of the House. I pay tribute to the work that has been done over many years on tobacco control. The key point is that we must continue to bear down on smoking prevalence, so that we see a reduction year on year.

High taxes on tobacco, to prevent people from starting smoking, are part and parcel of that strategy, which has continued for the past 25 years on a progressive and comprehensive basis. Action on stopping smuggling was started in 2000. We are the only country in the world to have smoking cessation services available free at the point of delivery to smokers. We were the first to introduce them, and we are the only country that has continued with them. I think we should be proud of that. We have been at the forefront when it comes to comprehensive laws prohibiting advertising, promotion and sponsorship by the tobacco industry of our sports and activities.

Over the lifetime of the current tobacco control plan, a substantial amount has been achieved, such as the prohibition of point-of-sale tobacco displays in large shops from April 2012 and in small shops from April of this year, and the ending of smoking in cars carrying children. That measure was introduced in the last Parliament, carried through at the behest of Back-Bench MPs and implemented with Government support. Some of the action is still to be implemented, including the introduction of standardised packaging for tobacco products. That, as the Minister is no doubt aware, is the subject of attacks in the courts by the tobacco industry, but it should come into place in May next year. The new tobacco products directive and the illicit trade protocol will also come into effect later next year.

The new measures together have been very effective in driving down the prevalence of smoking. For the first time since records began, fewer than one in five members of the adult population smokes, and we are seen as a world leader in tackling tobacco. Our leadership has been acknowledged internationally since 2007, and the UK has received the highest score and the top ranking in Europe from the European Cancer Leagues. This year, the Department of Health received the prestigious triennial Luther Terry award from the American Cancer Society. I know that the Minister was pleased to receive

that award, and we must congratulate her and the Department of Health on it. We were only the second country in the world to pass legislation to implement standardised packaging for tobacco products. The legislation is being challenged in the courts, but we feel sure that the Government will win that challenge, as they have done in many other cases, including on smoke-free laws, advertising and point-of-sale displays.

Having said that, we must recognise that there is a lot more to be done. Almost one in five adults still smokes, and smoking remains the single biggest cause of preventable deaths and premature death. As we have heard, smoking kills almost 80,000 people in England every year. In London alone, more than 8,000 people die prematurely from tobacco-related diseases, and more than 51,000 hospital admissions can be attributed directly to smoking.

Smoking is the leading cause of inequality, and it is responsible for half the difference in life expectancy between the rich and the poor. As a general rule, those who experience disadvantage have smoking rates higher than those of the general population, and that fuels cycles of deprivation. We have heard that nearly eight out of 10 prisoners smoke, and that people who are homeless smoke. Rates of smoking are also much greater among those who live with a long-term condition, such as asthma or diabetes. That, in turn, has an impact on the national health service. We know that health interventions are less successful for smokers than for non-smokers, and non-smokers tend to have much shorter hospital stays and fewer complications as a result.

In my constituency, Harrow East, which is within the London Borough of Harrow, 13.1% of people still smoke. That equates to 24,855 people who still smoke. That is lower than the national average, but in Harrow 209 people still die from smoking-related diseases every year, 1,410 hospital admissions a year are caused by smoking and 80 people die from lung cancer each year. We know that 90% of lung cancer is attributable directly to smoking. Every year, 55 people in Harrow die from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, which is also known as emphysema, and 60% of those deaths are caused by smoking. Although smoking rates have fallen significantly among children, from 10% in the early 2000s to just 3% last year, we must not become complacent. It has been estimated that 207,000 children—11 to 15-year-olds—start smoking every year. In Harrow, that is 551 young people starting smoking every year.

Government and public sector action to cut smoking rates is still, clearly, necessary. As such, I was delighted to hear the Minister announce earlier in the year that there will be a new tobacco control plan. The current plan runs out in just two weeks, at the end of the month, so we look forward to hearing from the Minister when the new strategy will be in place. For the new strategy to be successful, it needs to be properly funded. In July this year, the Chancellor announced an in-year cut to public health funding of £200 million, which amounts to some 6.2% of the total budget. That has been compounded by further cuts of 3.9% each year to 2021, which were announced in the Treasury's spending review. That, according to Public Health England, translates into a further cash reduction of 9.6%, in addition to the £200 million of savings this year alone. Those cuts are already having an impact on local authority spending. I am very disappointed that the local authority where my constituency sits is cutting its public health funding by

[Bob Blackman]

60% over the next three years. That has had a severe impact on the stop smoking services, for which funding is being cut from £299,000 in the current financial year to just £20,000 in 2017-18. My local authority is not the only one making such reductions and that is deeply concerning because there may be a return to young people starting to smoke and fewer adults taking the opportunity to give up.

According to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, stop smoking services are some of the most cost-effective healthcare interventions—far more cost-effective than the drugs needed to treat smoking-related diseases when they start to develop. Stop smoking services are considerably cheaper than treating long-term conditions caused by smoking, such as lung cancer and coronary heart disease. There is considerably stronger evidence for the effectiveness of stop smoking services compared with many prevention interventions such as, for example, NHS health checks.

What is more, smokers are four times more likely to quit successfully with the combination of behavioural support and medication provided by services compared with unsupported quit attempts. In the previous financial year, more than 450,000 people set a quit date with stop smoking services in England and 51% had successfully quit after four weeks. Those figures include nearly 19,000 pregnant smokers, 47% of whom successfully quit. I was pleased to see in the official statistics released yesterday that the Government have reduced their ambition to cut smoking in pregnancy to 11%. If support available to those women is cut, it raises the question of whether such achievements can be sustained and built on in the future.

Services play an important role in reducing health inequalities. Poorer smokers, who find it more difficult to quit as they tend to be more heavily addicted, are more likely to be successful with the support of those services. More people from routine and manual groups use the stop smoking services than any other socio-economic group and, as such, the services can help reduce health inequalities. They also help to prevent the uptake of smoking among children, although assisting adults to quit is their most important element. Children growing up with both parents who smoke are three times more likely to start smoking compared with children whose parents do not smoke. The cuts to public health funding, which I referred to, have been described, unsurprisingly, by the King's Fund as the "falsest of false economies". The reductions do not only affect my constituency, but people all over the country. For example, Manchester City Council, which is part of the new devolution deal, has already announced that it will not fund such services in 2015-16, and there are numerous reports of planned reductions in other local authorities—and that was before the announcement of further reductions in the spending review.

As well as reductions in budgets, a great deal of change is taking place in local services, and it is not clear that new approaches are properly evidence-based. A recent survey conducted by ASH for Cancer Research UK found that more than half the respondents—53%—described some form of restructuring of local smoking cessation services. One in five described a shift to an integrated approach, in which smoking cessation is

delivered as part of a wider lifestyle package, including, for example, measures to tackle obesity and reduce the harm of alcohol. This has meant the loss of important specialist support.

The changes taking place within services raise questions about their efficacy and outcomes. In particular, the shift to integrated services or lifestyle choices has limited support from the evidence base. An authoritative Cochrane review did not find a significant effect in reducing smoking from those interventions. Will the Minister tell us what steps the Government will take to ensure that smokers continue to have universal access to stop smoking services that meet NICE standards and are free at the point of delivery?

Given the pressure on local budgets, and reductions to funding for local authorities, it is crucial that the NHS picks up the baton and does more to support reductions in smoking prevalence. Not only will this support local authorities, but it is essential for the viability of the NHS and the long-term impact that taking no action against smoking would have.

The NHS five-year forward view rightly states:

"The future health of millions of children, the sustainability of the NHS, and the economic prosperity of Britain all now depend on a radical upgrade in prevention and public health."

The forward view also notes that this has long been a policy objective, stating:

"Twelve years ago, Derek Wanless' health review warned that unless the country took prevention seriously we would be faced with a sharply rising burden of avoidable illness. That warning has not been heeded—and the NHS is on the hook for the consequences."

It is important to note that even after additional Government funding of the NHS, there is still an estimated potential shortfall of £22 billion by 2020. That is likely to be closed through some efficiency savings, but there will still be a funding gap, which will have to be met through reductions in services, longer waits for treatment or reductions in demand for NHS services. Clearly, the latter possibility requires a much more sustained effort to improve public health and to tackle the major causes of illnesses, particularly smoking, but we have seen a reduction in NHS activity to tackle smoking over the last few years.

The number of GPs recommending that smokers quit and directing them to further support has declined markedly. In addition, services to support people to quit smoking in secondary care—already far from universal—are also under threat. For example, the reductions in specialist stop smoking services in Manchester have resulted in the end of funding for smoking cessation services at the city's world famous cancer hospital, the Christie. The service will now only continue through charitable funding made available by the hospital.

Smoking places a significant burden on the NHS. Getting smokers to quit can prevent diseases from developing but there is also great value in supporting smokers who are already sick to quit. Many diseases are improved if a person quits. For conditions such as cardiovascular disease, smoking can be a major risk factor in further illness or exacerbation. For people who have developed cancers, including lung cancer, quitting improves the effectiveness of treatments, the likelihood of successfully treating the cancer and five-year survival rates. Even when smokers have an illness that is not related to smoking, quitting can improve the outcome

of their treatments. Those who have quit have much better surgical outcomes and reduced recovery times in hospital.

About 1,260 hospital admissions a day in England are due to smoking—amounting to one in 20 of all admissions. It is estimated that smoking costs the NHS in England around £2 billion a year. In the local authority where my constituency sits, the NHS spends about £6 million on treating smoking-related diseases every year. Reducing the number of people who smoke delivers immediate as well as long-term savings to the NHS. Evidence suggests that if we could increase the rate at which smoking is declining by an additional further 0.5 percentage points a year above the current rate of decline—0.66 percentage points—the NHS could save at least £117 million a year by 2020. That estimate does not include the contribution that reducing smoking makes to conditions that are made worse but are not caused by smoking, such as diabetes.

In short, helping patients to quit smoking should be a core part of NHS business as a means to save lives, reduce costs and improve outcomes. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that the NHS does more to help smokers to quit in line with the implementation of the five-year forward view? To ensure that the radical upgrade in prevention and public health called for in the NHS five-year forward view is achieved, our tobacco control strategy needs to be properly funded. We know that tobacco remains the primary cause of preventable and premature death in this country. Despite that, we have already seen mixed services cut, and the impact of such disinvestment is only beginning to be seen. If we are to continue driving down smoking rates and ensuring that people do not die early from smoking having suffered years of disability, we need an ambitious and comprehensive strategy and to ensure that such a strategy is properly and sustainably funded.

We have already heard that public health and stop smoking services budgets are declining. We must conclude that that effect is likely to continue and is likely to be long term. There is clear evidence that reductions in public spending on tobacco control, together with less emphasis on new policies and on enforcement of existing policies, are likely to slow, halt or even reverse the long-term reduction in smoking prevalence rates. In New York, for example, sustained investment from 2002 led to a decline in smoking rates until 2010, when the decline ceased following funding reductions. Investment was reinstated in 2014, and the rates of smoking cessation began to improve again.

An early indicator of the effect of both national and local spending reductions on tobacco control is given by the smoking toolkit produced by Professor Robert West of University College London. The results for 2015 show a small increase in smoking prevalence over 2014, a fall in the proportion of smokers who made an attempt to quit—from 37.3% in 2014 to 32.4% in 2015—and a lower success rate for quit attempts, from 19.1% in 2014 to only 17% this year.

Clearly, the tobacco industry needs to fund the control of tobacco. As we have heard, the gains we have made run the risk of being reversed, so funding for tobacco control is a good investment by the Government. In advance of the spending review, the all-party group that I chair published a proposal to fund tobacco control with an extra £100 million a year to reduce smoking,

combined with a 5% tax escalator on tobacco, which could deliver more than £11 for every £1 invested in the NHS. As we have already heard, spending on tobacco control is extremely cost-effective, but national and local resources for tobacco control and stop smoking services are far from secure, so the Government need to find an alternative, sustainable source of funding.

The report published earlier this year, “Smoking Still Kills”, was endorsed by more than 129 public health organisations and recommended the introduction of a new annual levy on tobacco companies to help fund evidence-based tobacco control and stop smoking services in England. In the United States, the principle of charging the industry for the specific costs imposed on the public purse is well established. In the US, the costs of the levy are apportioned to tobacco companies according to their market share in the country. That concept has received broad-based support in Congress because it is understood to be a charge related to a specific cost, rather than general taxation.

The Chancellor said in 2014:

“Smoking imposes costs on society, and the government believes it is therefore fair to ask the tobacco industry to make a greater contribution.”

His decision not to proceed with a levy on the industry in the 2015 Budget was disappointing. Rather, in the 2015 autumn statement, he suggested that future funding for local public health delivery could be met by returning business rates to local authorities. However, one of the primary purposes of public health interventions is to improve ill health and address inequalities. There is a fundamental flaw in his proposal because richer areas, which have higher business rates, have lower rates of smoking than poorer areas with lower yields from business rates.

Applying that principle, the *Local Government Chronicle* has highlighted that there will be clear winners and losers from returning the national share of business rates to local authorities. The five areas outside London that are the biggest winners from the proposal have an average smoking rate of 16%, whereas the five biggest losers have an average smoking rate of 20%. In Harrow, 138% of the national share of business rates would need to be returned to the council in order for it not to lose out if the revenue support grant is ended and the council instead has to rely on business rates. If that were to happen, Harrow would be the 35th worst-off authority in the country, out of 125 unitary authorities.

I have two more questions for the Minister. How will the Government ensure that tobacco control is properly funded locally and nationally so that prevalence rates continue to fall, with consequent benefits for the NHS and public health? Equally, what analysis have the Government undertaken to determine that using business rates to fund local public health activity will not further reinforce existing inequalities?

Despite being a lethal drug, tobacco products can be sold by anyone in England almost anywhere—a licence is not required. The sale of tobacco used to require a licence, and signs above pubs and shops from that period still state that they are licensed to sell tobacco and alcohol. Local authorities in England have powers to shut down a tobacco retailer, if necessary. However, that requires the local authority to take legal action against the retailer, which is both time consuming and resource intensive. What is more, reductions in local authority budgets are affecting the work of trading

[*Bob Blackman*]

standards departments across the country, which could damage enforcement work on illicit tobacco in future years.

In 2013-14, there were only 34 convictions in England for selling tobacco products to young people, and there were no restricted premises or sales orders, yet 44% of young people who smoked said that they obtained tobacco directly from shops. We were pleased to hear in the autumn statement that, as part of the obligations under the illicit trade protocol, the Government will consult on the introduction of a licensing scheme for tobacco machinery and the possibility of licensing tobacco vendors. Licensing retailers is an important step that was recommended by ASH in the "Smoking Still Kills" report and endorsed by more than 120 public health-related organisations, and it would enable the Government and local authorities to promote higher standards in the retail market and clamp down further on illicit sales. Such a system would also protect legitimate retailers and simplify the action that local enforcement officers can take against those selling illicit tobacco both within and outside the retail setting.

I congratulate the Minister on the Government's success throughout the last tobacco control plan in taking major steps to drive down smoking rates. Successes have been lauded, not just in the UK but internationally, but the plan has come to an end. We need to build on the achievements that have already been made by implementing another ambitious and comprehensive strategy. We have heard that, in recent months, some local services have been cut and that others are likely to follow. We have also heard about the impact of similar cuts in places such as New York. With that in mind, I urge the Government to think about how the strategy will be not only implemented but sustainably funded to ensure that the UK remains a world leader in tobacco control.

We should be ambitious in our outlook and look forward to a tobacco-free Britain much earlier than 2035 to enable our young people to live much longer and much healthier lives and to encourage people who have unfortunately become addicted to this lethal product to quit smoking much earlier so that they can improve not only their life expectancy but their quality of life.

2.29 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) gave us a comprehensive summary of the situation, so I will bring us back to a few key points that we need to think about. What are the issues? They are not just the obvious things that people care about, or see mentioned in adverts, such as lung cancer; there is hardly a part of the body that is not affected by smoking. There are many problems that people are not aware of, such as stomach ulcers and bladder cancer. There are also the obvious ones, such as strokes, heart attacks, peripheral vascular disease and dementia—14% of Alzheimer's is caused by smoking. Amputation is commonly due to peripheral vascular disease. Those are things that put people in a dependent situation and often result in them being in care homes. Not only does that have a direct cost for the NHS, but huge costs in our care world will become an increasing burden.

We have had quite a lot of success, but as was mentioned, 18.7% of people in England smoke. Unfortunately, while there has been a considerable drop in Scotland, the figure there is 20%. We started with the worst heart attack rates, and we still have 10,000 people in Scotland dying from heart disease every year. That number is almost equivalent to the population of Troon, where I live. That is a considerable number of lives lost every year. In England, the figure is 100,000. In addition to the question of the number of people who die, there is the painful journey to dying, and the amount of debilitation and suffering for the person and their family.

We have had success: in March 2006, Scotland was the first United Kingdom country to go for the smoking ban, so next year's 10-year anniversary is approaching. I expect that there will be a re-evaluation of the ban's success. We had a 17% drop in admissions for heart attack in the first year. That is a bigger effect than anyone expected. We saw an 18% drop in admissions for acute childhood asthma. Myocardial infarctions had been dropping slowly by 3% a year in the previous decade, but the rate accelerated to 17%. Childhood asthma admissions had been increasing by 5% a year until the smoking ban; there has been a 40% drop in smoking exposure for 11-year-olds. And so it goes on. We saw a much bigger impact in the first year than we could have hoped for. There has been success, and that has been UK-wide. It has all been done separately, but we were very much moving in the same direction.

We think of the debates that we have had here with the Minister with responsibility for public health on other issues, such as obesity. The whole public health agenda involves us taking radical action. It is interesting to hear about the earlier debates on banning sponsorship and banning smoking in public places, and how hard those things were to do, but look at what we and the NHS have recouped from that. We need to look at that going forward.

The impact of the cuts and changes to Public Health England has been covered in great detail. It is right that a lot of public health measures are integrated in local authorities, because they can bring about a more people-centred approach to such things as active transport, and the control of how tobacco is sold and how things are sold near schools. This is about looking at the whole person, because public health cannot always just be campaigns looking at one bit at a time. We need to challenge our whole lifestyle, and local authorities are in the best position to do that.

Unfortunately, Public Health England faced a significant cut of more than 6%, or £200 million, and it has been earmarked for significant ongoing cuts. That is a real problem. We have heard about the cuts to smoking cessation, including Manchester stopping all specialist services, and it being on a charitable or basically ad hoc basis in other places, and that just is not good enough. We need to think about how we go forward, and the lives being lost, the suffering being caused and the burden on the NHS.

In the five-year forward view, a shortfall of £30 billion was identified. Some £22 billion of that is expected to be found by the NHS. When Simon Stevens was in front of the Health Committee, on which I sit, he identified that the NHS was expecting about £5 billion to be saved through prevention, but at exactly the same time, we are

talking about cutting public health funding. If that prevention does not come about, that £5 billion saving will not happen and the NHS will hit a brick wall. It is important that we look at all that local authorities do, including to prevent tobacco being sold to under-age people, and to prevent the smuggling of cigarettes and the selling of illicit cigarettes—the whole environment that people are facing.

The hon. Member for Harrow East mentioned the experience in New York, and the stalling of the drop there. That is already being seen here, with the slight increase in the prevalence of smokers, the decrease in quit attempts and the decrease in success. One of the biggest successes is an almost halving of young smokers starting. While the main drive of smoking cessation is helping people to stop, it is important that we do not create future generations who are in the same boat as ours. If we had listened to Wanless 12 years ago and got serious about public health then, we would be in a better place. He said that there would be a sudden surge of preventable and multimorbid diseases hitting the NHS, and that is exactly what we are living through.

It is timely that the debate in the Chamber is about the 1,001 critical days of pregnancy and the first two years of life. We need to invest in our children to try to have healthier, more successful generations in the future. We see odd patterns, such as the connection between smoking and people who end up in prison, and between smoking and those who have mental health problems. There has not been enough research to enable us to say that that is causal, but the fact that mental health patients smoke one third of all tobacco consumed does prompt the question: which one is the chicken, and which the egg? We need to think about our future generations; we need to ensure that pregnant women stop smoking—and do not start again as soon as the child is there, thereby exposing those young children to cigarette smoke. A lot of work has been done on smoking in cars. There has been a big campaign in our neck of the woods to try to get people to go outside the home and not smoke in the presence of children.

We have had a huge amount of success on this issue, due to the work of successive Governments who have ploughed forward, but we cannot afford to take our foot off the gas. We owe it to adults, to those who are approaching the age at which they might take up smoking, to the young, and to those not yet born to aspire to a future generation that is not burdened with the crippling diseases related to smoking. I saw this as a breast surgeon. People ask, “Why do people from deprived areas have poor success from cancer treatment?” Quite simply, I would meet someone aged 70 with breast cancer who had begun to collect morbid diseases from the age of 50. I could see straight away that they would not survive chemotherapy, and might not survive surgery. Treatment for a disease that is not related to smoking is therefore completely inhibited by their underlying disease. Smoking affects every part of people’s bodies. It affects the NHS and our society. We need to ensure that the smoking control policy we have at the moment is quickly replaced by one that is just as determined.

2.37 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I begin by thanking the Backbench Business Committee

for granting the debate, and I take the opportunity to wish all hon. and right hon. Members, the Clerks and everyone else sitting in this room a very merry Christmas.

Clearly, it is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), because she speaks about these issues with such passion and a great deal of knowledge. She adds greatly to our debates. The need for a strategy and for funding to make it happen is pressing, and I am glad we have had the chance to discuss it today. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Kevin Barron). His interest in the issue is, as we are all fully aware, not just passing; he has been championing the issue for a great number of years, and I commend him and the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) on the work that they have done on it through the all-party group.

I start with the problems with the autumn statement—an issue raised by all Members who have contributed so far. It is clear that the autumn statement brought yet more cuts to the public health grant. As a result of year after year of cuts to public health budgets, there has been a consistent fall in the number of people using local smoking cessation services. It is not the kind of thing that can be done half-heartedly. We can throw a little cash at the problem and suggest we are tackling it, but if we spend too little, the returns will be minimal. We may as well spend a sufficient amount and enjoy much greater returns on the investment in public money. We all know that a smoker may throw themselves into an attempt to stop—usually in the new year period, following a new year’s resolution—but if the support is not there, many of them might fail in their attempts. Even worse, after a failed attempt with insufficient support, they are unlikely to try again; that is just human nature. It is worth getting it right the first time round, and giving people the support that they need. That is why some of the cuts to the public health budget have been short-sighted and are the falsest of false economies.

I fear that most smoking cessation services will not survive a 24% cut to the non-NHS part of the Department of Health’s budget. I want public health bodies to be able to push to make children born today the very first smoke-free generation, but I am worried that their ability to do so will be damaged by the reduction in funds.

Let us consider just one aspect of the cost of smoking that may be overlooked. The general health implications of smoking are well known and documented, but mouth cancer often gets overlooked. Oral cancer kills more people in the United Kingdom than cervical and testicular cancers combined, yet there is still an alarming lack of public awareness about oral cancer. Nine out of 10 oral cancer cases are preventable, and two thirds of cases are a direct result of smoking, so improved awareness of all the possible health problems caused by smoking is one role of local public health services. Awareness as a concept can often be dismissed, but when it comes to deterring people from using tobacco products, it is invaluable, yet such services will be slashed in the upcoming public health bonfire. I call on the Government and the Minister, for whom I have a great deal of respect, to think again and try to reverse some of the cuts to public health services.

I welcome the introduction of standardised packaging for cigarette packets by May next year. There are powerful arguments in favour of it, and I am pleased that the

[Andrew Gwynne]

Minister pushed ahead with the policy, with cross-party support, albeit that there were a few recalcitrant members of Government, and even louder voices against on the Back Benches. Nevertheless, we got that through, and I commend her on the work she did in pushing for that.

This month marks the third birthday of plain packaging. Australia's Tobacco Plain Packaging Act 2011 came into force on 1 December 2012, which made it the first country to halt the use of figurative trademarks on tobacco products. In the past few months, both France and Canada have taken significant steps forward in introducing a similar ban. France should be introducing a ban in May, at the same time as our standardised packaging laws come into force.

The importance of removing legitimacy from such activities cannot be overstated. Take the example of the ban on smoking in cars, championed by my predecessor as shadow Public Health Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger). The purpose is obviously not to punish every single driver smoking in a car with children; that would be impossible to enforce. The real purpose is to send a very strong message that it is not acceptable to smoke in cars with children, and that it is punishable by law. A similar example is the ban on driving without a seatbelt. There are not many convictions, but the number of people using seatbelts soared after the ban was introduced. Our approach must include encouragement as well as enforcement.

I come on to my main point. The previous tobacco strategy was, on the whole, a success. It has encouraged the introduction of measures such as standardised packaging, which are to be welcomed, but I am concerned that a new strategy has not been developed yet. I welcome the Government's commitment to establishing a new strategy in the new year, but I have concerns about their ability to implement it fully and comprehensively.

In October last year, the five-year forward view noted that

“The future health of millions of children, the sustainability of the NHS, and the economic prosperity of Britain all now depend on a radical upgrade in prevention and public health.”

As the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire said, Simon Stevens has gone on record to say that as part of the efficiencies that the NHS is looking to implement, £5 billion will come from prevention, but how can we achieve £5 billion in prevention when preventive services are being cut back—or, in some cases, removed altogether? I hope the Minister can give Members of all parties, who want the same outcomes, assurances that cessation and other public health services at a local level will not see the axe fall on them in the way it is suggested they might, and that the £5 billion of efficiencies that Simon Stevens has identified as coming from prevention are achievable through the role and remit of the Minister with responsibility for public health.

I will return to the point that I opened with. A person is four times as likely to quit smoking successfully with the help of specialist support, but those services are under attack. In the autumn statement, the Chancellor announced further cuts in the public health grant, amounting to an average real-terms cut of 3.9% each year to 2020-21. That translates to a further cash reduction of 9.6%, in addition to the £200 million-worth of cuts announced in the summer Budget.

Meanwhile, tobacco, as we have heard from other Members, is still the single biggest cause of premature and preventable death, responsible for 100,000 deaths every year in the UK. Some 10 million adults still smoke. More than 200,000 children aged 11 to 15 begin smoking every year. This is an income inequality issue, too. In 2014, 12% of adults in managerial and professional occupations smoked, compared with 28% in routine and manual occupations. People with mental health conditions, prisoners and the homeless are far more likely to smoke than the general population. In my constituency, smoking rates are still far too high and well above the national average. In Tameside, where smoking is prevalent—a quarter of the population smokes—450 deaths a year and 2,500 hospital admissions are attributable to smoking. I know how much this contributes to poor health, which places a huge pressure on health and care services locally, and causes untold misery for the communities and the families of those affected.

I want to touch briefly on the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley about e-cigarettes, because I have seen them work for people who have smoked for a very long time. The e-cigarette not only helped to wean them off tobacco, but, by reducing nicotine levels over a long time, removed the need for nicotine and got them off cigarettes altogether. I implore the Minister to ensure that any regulations she introduces are proportionate, as my right hon. Friend said.

I ask the Minister to keep a watching brief, though, because I am a little concerned. I am starting to see in my constituency the glamorising and normalising of smoking among young people through the use of e-cigarettes. I fully support them as a product to help people come off smoking, but as a gateway product to smoking, they worry me considerably. I accept that there is probably nothing more than anecdotal evidence at this stage, which is why I urge the Minister to keep a watching brief, but having seen the marketing of some e-cigarette products, I am concerned that it uses precisely the same marketing tactics as we saw used by tobacco companies, which brought about the introduction of the regulations on standardised packaging. Let us make sure that e-cigarettes are used for their correct purpose: to bring people off smoking. If there is evidence that they are starting to become a gateway product to smoking, I hope very much that the Minister will look again at whether action is required.

Health inequality is one of my biggest bugbears, and smoking is one of its most virulent causes. A comprehensive strategy to reduce smoking rates is imperative if we are to tackle the issue. The Opposition will support the Minister with responsibility for public health and the Government in developing such a strategy, building on the achievement of both her Government and the previous Labour Government over a number of years. I hope that she can give some assurances on the issues that Members have raised, and some Christmas cheer to Members looking for a renewed strategy on this very important issue.

2.52 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. What an excellent and extremely

well-informed debate we have had. I thank the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Kevin Barron) for raising this important issue for debate. In a way, the timing is more helpful for me than for right hon. and hon. Members, inasmuch as this is a piece of work to which we in the Department of Health are turning our minds, so it has been enormously helpful to hear the views of colleagues from across the House on how we go forward. There are some areas of the topic on which I can respond, but some on which Members might have to wait until a little way into the new year.

The Government have a very clear position on tobacco control, recognising that smoking is and remains one of the most significant challenges for public health, with all the devastating social and personal consequences that Members have outlined. The Government have been proactive and, I think, ambitious in their approach to tobacco control. That was reflected in the comments made by both Government and Opposition Members, for which I thank them. It is also reflected by the fact that many other countries approach us for advice on tobacco control matters. Over the time I have been in this post, it has been a pleasure to attend a number of international events at which we were asked to provide a leadership role. I will say a little more about international matters before I finish.

Our efforts are paying off, and have paid off. As the shadow Minister said, they build on the good work done by previous Governments in previous Parliaments, and we continue to see year on year reductions in smoking. Since 2010, its prevalence has decreased by almost 3%, saving thousands of lives and, of course, countless families from the pain and harm caused by smoking. At various events in the past I have been open about discussing my experience of that harm in my own family. I know that I speak for other Members who have seen that as well.

Before I talk about the new strategy, it is worth reflecting on progress against the current tobacco control plan. We have met, or are on track to meet, the three national ambitions. Adult smoking prevalence is now at 18%, which is the lowest rate since records began; only 8% of 15-year-olds smoke, which is also an all-time low; and rates of smoking in pregnancy are falling, with the most recent figures showing a rate of 10.5%, so we have a high degree of confidence that we will meet that national target as well. On 1 October, it became an offence to smoke in a car carrying children and for adults to buy tobacco for those aged under 18. Making the latter—also known as proxy purchasing—an offence has been called for a great deal in the past. As has been noted, we have also passed legislation to introduce standardised packaging and consulted on how we intend to transpose the revised EU tobacco products directive into UK law.

Despite those achievements, smoking is still the leading cause of premature death and health inequality, and Members have rightly focused on that throughout the debate. About 8 million people still smoke, and the resulting number of premature deaths has been recorded. There continues to be enormous regional variation, which weighs heavily on me—I know that the right hon. Member for Rother Valley is very conscious of that as well. In some areas the prevalence rate is as high as 29%. With that backdrop, we can by no means think that the battle is won.

There is similar variation in ill health and death rates associated with smoking, as the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) eloquently outlined. That variation means that there can be 472 deaths per 100,000 people in one area and fewer than 200 deaths in the same population in others. Throughout the country, we see variation in rates of smoking by pregnant women from more than 25% to about 2%. I know that some areas are working really hard to address that variation. I pay tribute to the people working in places that, despite the high rates that they battle, have seen encouraging results, such as the public health and NHS teams in Blackpool. They are bearing down on their high rates with some success and have done very well.

While we are discussing the ill health caused by smoking, perhaps this is a useful moment to give the shadow Minister a little reassurance in two regards. He made a good point about oral cancer, and I can confirm that one of the pictures in the new library of photographs being introduced with the tobacco products directive will feature throat cancer, so that will draw attention to it. Also, we received welcome information today from the British Dental Association setting out how dentists can help with smoking reduction and the identification of oral cancer. We will consider that further as we develop the strategy. That is welcome and timely news.

As we are talking about the work that people have done in different areas, such as the efforts to bear down on smoking in pregnancy, which have seen some welcome drops, I want to mention the role of health professionals. Their role has run as a thread through the debate, and I suppose it will be ever more relevant as some services look to integrate more with health professionals in the NHS and elsewhere. The movement of health visiting into local government in October—it is now commissioned through local government, as are public health services—offers a welcome opportunity to get some really close working between those two functions in local government right across the board.

As we look at the new tobacco strategy, we are working with Health Education England to identify how NHS health professionals can be further supported to act on smoking. Nevertheless, progress has been made, and I congratulate the midwives and health visitors who have done such good work to identify women who smoke during pregnancy. We have seen their work reflected in the ongoing reductions in the level of smoking during pregnancy, but there is more to do, so we are looking to build on that success.

As I have said, the Government remain committed to tobacco control, and our goal is to drive down the prevalence of smoking in England. At this point, I should say that we are working very closely and constructively with colleagues in the devolved Administrations on that shared objective. Our officials speak to each other regularly, and we are always interested to look at what measures are introduced. As always, it was good to hear the contribution from the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire. Tobacco-related deaths are avoidable, so we want to do more to avoid them.

Although I have said this in an event in the Palace of Westminster, I have not yet confirmed it in the Chamber, but I can confirm that the Government will publish a new tobacco control strategy for England next summer, which I think is a sensible timetable. I hope Members agree that, given the significant measures coming into

[Jane Ellison]

force in the spring and the fact that we want a little time to reflect on the current strategy, that strikes the right balance. The work is under way already, which is why this debate is a timely opportunity to hear Members' thoughts. I will ensure, throughout the timetable for developing and producing a new strategy, that there are ample opportunities for Members on both sides of the House to contribute to the strategy development. Important stakeholders, such as those who contributed through Members' speeches today and supplied useful briefing materials ahead of the debate, will have important and regular opportunities to influence the strategy and have input into it.

In developing the strategy, we will review the current national ambitions, and we will further empower local areas and support action within them, particularly where tobacco control strategies can be tailored to the unique needs of local populations. We cannot ignore the stark differences in the results of different areas across our country, so the new strategy has to focus on those discrepancies. Robust activity at that level is vital if we are to tackle the impact of health inequalities in England and ensure that smoking prevalence continues to decline in all communities. We will, of course, need to support local authorities in pursuing collaborative partnerships and securing a high return on investment as they prioritise and streamline their budgets.

A number of questions were asked about funding, and we will give careful attention to it. I am not in a position to comment in detail on the funding of the strategy itself, about which hon. Members made a number of points and expressed concerns. It was made clear in the spending review that the public health budgets are to be ring-fenced for the next couple of years and protected, with conditions stipulating that the whole budget must be spent on public health duties.

If any right hon. or hon. Members are concerned about what is happening in a particular area, I ask them to please speak to me. The chief executive of Public Health England remains the accounting officer for how the ring-fenced public health grant is spent, and I am always extremely happy to ask him to speak to Members about their concerns about what is happening in their own areas. Manchester was mentioned specifically. I can confirm that we are aware of Manchester City Council's decision, and Public Health England is currently working with it to identify how it can provide cost-effective support to local people who want to stop smoking. The new control strategy has not been finalised, so we cannot commit to the level of funding that will be needed, but Members have made their views on that extremely clear.

I gently say to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) in particular that we have championed the way in which, over the past five years, local government has done extremely well in providing excellent services for less cost. It has focused far more on outcomes than on the money spent. It is relevant to bear that in mind, given that Members have expressed reasonable concerns about the local government spending landscape.

Kevin Barron *rose*—

Jane Ellison: I sense an intervention coming.

Kevin Barron: I entirely accept that there are regional variations. We must all accept that, but the mass media—the news and the national media—cut across all regions. Will an evidence-based mass media campaign be part of the strategy that will be published in the summer?

Jane Ellison: I can give the right hon. Gentleman a broader assurance than that. Our approach to the subject has at all times been evidence-led, so the new tobacco strategy will clearly encompass a range of evidence-led activities. I hope that reassures him more broadly than just on that point. We must at all times be led by the evidence, as those who contributed today highlighted.

The new strategy is an opportunity to shine a spotlight on what local councils are doing locally, and to learn from innovative work. We cannot stand still in that regard. We must be open to evolving the way we do things, and that is already happening. The new devolution deals are an opportunity to focus on the exciting new ways in which local areas are reimagining the way they do things, and we have seen councils of all colours doing that. We must be optimistic in that regard and pay tribute to the innovation of local government across a range of areas. I have seen that in a host of different public health areas in the two-plus years that I have been doing this job.

But the picture in some communities and areas is not positive. Smoking rates vary across social groups—those from poorer communities and backgrounds experience higher tobacco use and much greater health burdens, as the right hon. Member for Rother Valley and others said in their speeches. Although the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) has left, I want to put it on the record—I am sure he will follow this up after the debate—that a particular focus of the new strategy will be on reducing health inequalities and their impact on people who suffer from a mental health condition. We are conscious of the great differences in smoking rates, so that will be a focus of what we do. A quarter of cigarettes are smoked by people with mental health conditions, so I can confirm that that group will be a key priority for the new strategy. We seek to embed the importance of tackling health inequalities both in the new strategy and locally, to cement the national gains that we have made.

We have introduced a significant tranche of legislation, some of which is still to come into force, so we are unlikely to commit in the strategy to a package of legislative interventions. I think colleagues appreciate the reasons for that. Rather, we will set out what we must do to identify and develop new and more effective measures for reducing smoking and smoking harm.

It might be useful to update the House on prisons, which hon. Members mentioned. We are conscious of the great differences in the rates for prisoners and non-prisoners. The Ministry of Justice has announced a programme to make prisons smoke-free, which will be implemented in stages, and prisoners will be given support to stop smoking. Public Health England continues to improve the support that it offers to prisoners who quit in prison to stay smoke-free when they leave.

Of course, tobacco control is not a matter just for legislation or for the Department for Health. There are a range of measures that can choke off the supply of new smokers and help those already addicted to quit. We will work with Her Majesty's Treasury on tax, as

Members would expect; with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs on the illicit trade; with local authorities, as I have already said; and, of course, with the NHS on smoking cessation services. I am conscious, as we look at the preventive landscape, that there has rightly been a focus on the five-year forward view. I am looking at several strands of that key piece of work, and this strategy is part of it. Our colleagues in trading standards, who do so much great work on enforcement, are also part of the solution. We will work with academia, the royal colleges and the wider tobacco control community to look at what works and how the Government can play their part.

Next year, in addition to publishing the new tobacco control strategy, we will introduce the stricter packaging requirements, and the revised EU tobacco products directive will come into force. The directive sets out harmonised rules on the composition and labelling of tobacco products that will apply from May 2016, and it will strengthen the functioning of the EU internal market. We look forward to its helping to improve public health. Examples of the impact of the directive are that the minimum pack size for cigarettes will increase to 20, and all flavours, including menthol, will be banned by 2020.

I will come to e-cigarettes in a moment, as I want to respond to the right hon. Member for Rother Valley and others and hopefully give them some helpful updates. First, on the international element, which was rightly raised, I can confirm that the UK has a significant role to play. The UK Government have signed the framework convention on tobacco control, and are now working in the UK and with the Commission to ensure that everything is in place to ratify that protocol. That is something we are committed to doing. The Department for Health has been awarded an overseas development assistance fund to assist other countries with developing their tobacco control policies. That funding will be used to protect people from the harms of tobacco internationally and to tackle the problem of health inequalities globally. A dedicated team will be established to deliver that work. I look forward to updating the House on that in due course.

I turn to e-cigarettes. Of course, the best thing a smoker can do for their health is to quit smoking, and to quit for good. There are now more than 1 million ex-smokers who have used e-cigarettes to help them to quit smoking completely. The evidence indicates that e-cigarettes are significantly less harmful to health than smoking tobacco. I thank Public Health England for the important piece of work it provided to advise us in the summer.

However, the quality of products on the market remains variable. It is therefore important that we have regulation that is proportionate—that is exactly the right word, and I echo that view—to ensure that we have minimum safety requirements and that the information provided to consumers allows them to make informed choices. That is exactly the aim of the regulatory framework set out in the revised directive.

In implementing the new EU rules, we intend to work towards regulation that will permit a range of products, which people want to use, to remain on the market, but with those products positioned as alternatives to smoking, not as products that introduce children to vaping or smoking.

I join the right hon. Member for Rother Valley in welcoming the arrival of licensed products that can be prescribed alongside existing nicotine replacement therapies. The Government had full support from both sides of the House when we took through precautionary legislative measures on the issue of children and e-cigarettes; indeed, most parts of the industry welcomed and supported the uncontentious approach of adopting the precautionary principle with regard to children.

We will continue to take a pragmatic approach to e-cigarettes, and we will be guided by the evidence. The right hon. Gentleman was right that, in a fast-evolving marketplace, we must be guided by the evidence. To that end, we have commissioned a comprehensive review of the impact of e-cigarettes to ensure that future policy decisions continue to be supported by a robust and published evidence base. That will build on the PHE review of evidence on e-cigarettes, which was published in August.

It might be helpful if I update right hon. and hon. Members on some relevant research projects. The National Institute for Health Research is funding a randomised controlled trial to examine the efficacy of e-cigarettes, compared with that of nicotine replacement therapy, when they are used in the UK stop smoking service. I spoke earlier of the evolving world of smoking cessation services and of understanding what works, and that will be an important piece of research. The report of the trial is expected to be published in 2018.

The Department—I hope this speaks to the watching brief that the shadow Minister asked that we keep—is commissioning work through the Public Health Research Consortium to identify whether there are any early signals of e-cigarettes having the potential to renormalise use of tobacco products. That work is expected to report in summer 2016. Again, we will look to update the House when we have the results—I know there will be interest in them on both sides.

I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing a debate on this important issue. As I said, it comes at a really timely moment. When I come back in the new year, I and my officials will certainly turn considerable attention to this important strategy. As I hope I have made clear, none of us can rest on our laurels. We have made some good progress, but the Government will continue to develop support and new measures to reduce the prevalence of smoking further and faster in England. We will, I hope, continue to work constructively with colleagues in the devolved Administrations, with the objective of preventing more people—more of our constituents—from dying prematurely as a result of smoking.

I am acutely conscious of the fact that the burden of disease and harm associated with smoking falls most heavily on the most disadvantaged. Addressing that will be right at the heart of our new strategy. Like all those who have contributed to this excellent debate, I look forward to our first smoke-free generation.

In closing, I echo the words of the shadow Public Health Minister. I wish colleagues and the staff of the House a very happy Christmas, and I thank all those who have contributed to this excellent debate.

3.13 pm

Kevin Barron: May I also echo those comments? I wish everybody a happy Christmas and a peaceful new year as well.

The debate shows just how far the House, as a legislative body, has travelled over the past two decades, taking on these major issues on the basis of their effect on people, as opposed to their potential effect on political parties. That is greatly to the House's credit, and I thank everybody who has spoken this afternoon.

I thank the Minister for leaving the door open in terms of what will be in the strategy next summer. Things may come forward that test us—such as what

happens in the e-cigarette market and how we deal with that—and I am sure we will watch the issue with great interest. I thank everybody who has contributed.

Mr Clive Betts (in the Chair): May I also take this opportunity to wish everyone here a very happy Christmas? I look forward to seeing you all again in the new year.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered a new tobacco control strategy.

3.15 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

UK Steel Industry

Thursday 17 December 2015

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Industry Training Boards Triennial Review

The Minister for Skills (Nick Boles): The commencement of the combined triennial review of the three Industry Training Boards (Construction ITB, Engineering Construction ITB and Film ITB) was announced in Parliament on 1 July 2013. The purpose of this statement is to update the House on the completion and outcome of the review.

Although each ITB operates in a different industry, a combined review of all three bodies was undertaken owing to the similarity of responsibilities and their common objective to raise skills in the sector via a training levy.

The triennial review took place under the coalition Government but it was not possible to publish the report prior to the 2015 general election.

Following the election, on 8 July 2015 the new Government announced the introduction of a new levy on large UK employers to fund post-16 apprenticeships. The CITB and ECITB will consult employers in their respective industries before the introduction of the apprenticeship levy on whether or not they should continue to pay the sector skills levies in their current form. The review concluded that given these skills funding policy changes, it would be premature for the review to make recommendations on the future of the CITB and ECITB; the right time for this will be once the future levy arrangements for the sectors are clearer.

There is currently no statutory training levy on the film production sector; instead the Film Industry Training Board (FITB) oversees the delivery of a voluntary training levy, the “skills investment fund”, which is administered by creative skillset. The FITB also provides a valuable advisory function to creative skillset on the skills and training needs of the sector. The triennial review concluded that as the FITB does not operate a statutory training levy it is not necessary for it to be a non-departmental public body (NDPB) in relation to the levy powers and functions detailed in the Industry Training Act. It therefore recommends that unless there is a clear policy commitment and timetable from Government to implement a statutory film sector levy, the FITB need not remain as a NDPB. In this case, the valuable advisory function and the voluntary training levy could continue without NDPB status.

The review also examined the governance arrangements for the CITB, ECITB and FITB, in line with guidance on good corporate governance set out by the Cabinet Office. The review made specific recommendations that will improve the performance of the ITBs against their existing missions, and the ITBs have already started to act on these recommendations.

The full report of the triennial review can be found on the gov.uk website and copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS407]

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid):

When the steel summit met on 16 October, I agreed that three ministerial-led working groups would be set up immediately to address the “5 Asks” of UK Steel and the longer-term future of the industry. This statement reports on the progress of the working groups and other action taken by Government to support the industry and steel workers.

The three working groups are:

- Procurement—chaired by Matthew Hancock (CO);
- International Comparisons—chaired by Anna Soubry (BIS)
- Competitiveness and Productivity—chaired by Lord O’Neill (HMT)

Procurement

UK Steel asked at the summit that the Government should:

“Support local content in major construction projects: British steel must have every opportunity to be at the heart of HS2—the Government must look to unlock the significant opportunities for the steel sector and to strengthen supply chains on this and other major projects.”

Matthew Hancock’s group has met three times. It has brought together procurement leads from across Government—Cabinet Office, HM Treasury, Infrastructure UK, Department Energy and Climate Change, Department for Transport and Ministry of Defence—alongside representatives of the UK steel industry and the Scottish and Welsh Governments.

Areas focused on have been:

- new guidelines for Departments to apply when procuring major projects involving steel, as enabled by flexibilities in the new public contracts regulations 2015, and consistent with value for money;
- interrogating the national infrastructure plan and government construction pipelines to better identify the future pipeline for steel; and;
- updating the current British Standards for steel.

Specific outputs to date include:

A new procurement policy note (PPN) on procuring steel in major projects was issued by Cabinet Office and the Crown Commercial Service on 30 October. This requires Government procurers to consider wider socio-economic impacts and benefits in their procurement objectives so that issues such as skills, responsible sourcing, good supply chain management, and health and safety capability can be taken into account where relevant. This will help to level the playing field so that the true value and competitive edge of UK steel is fully recognised. The PPN applies to all central Government Departments, their Executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies; and directly to any major procurement projects with a significant steel component, where the overall project requirement has a capital value of £10 million or above. The PPN is at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/procurement-policy-note-1615-procuring-steel-in-major-projects>.

Further detailed guidance on how social issues should be taken into account in the procurement of steel for major projects was issued on 11 December. This covers all key stages of the procurement lifecycle, including pre-procurement, requirements and specifications, use of labels and standards—including reference to parts of BES 6001 relevant to responsible sourcing of steel—selection of suppliers, award of contracts, contract conditions and contract management. The guidance is at:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/484843/Social_guidance_supporting_PPN1615_.pdf.

Indicative quantities of steel have been mapped for key projects in the infrastructure and Government construction pipelines, including HS2, new nuclear and offshore wind, and shared with industry. Steps have also been agreed with industry on how to make better use of the pipelines as they are updated on a six monthly basis.

The British Standards Institute (BSI) has agreed to revise and update the voluntary British Standard BS4449 which applies to steel reinforcement bar (rebar), in the absence of a harmonised European standard. The revision, which is now being consulted on with a view to being implemented in spring 2016, addresses concerns about the type and quantities of alloys and other “exotic” ingredients being added to some imported rebar that is used in construction. The revisions involve changes relating to: (a) Traceability, which means that chemical composition details will have to be listed, similar to an ‘ingredients’ label on food; and (b) Limits placed for the first time on the amount of boron and other alloys that can be added to rebar.

The Procurement Group will meet again in January.

International Comparisons

UK Steel asked at the summit that the Government should:

“Continue to back EU-level action on anti-dumping measures which support the UK steel sector against the rapid rise in global imports and push the European Commission to speed up its investigation process and action. Industry also suggests other member states get away with sailing closer to the wind on state aid rules”.

The Prime Minister raised Chinese over-capacity with President Xi during his state visit to the UK. I did likewise with the Chinese Commerce Minister. Both recognised the issue for the UK and globally, and stated that China is taking action to reduce overcapacity. The Emergency Council also underlined that the EU should make use of both bilateral and OECD dialogues to raise the issue with China and other producer countries and we are following up to ensure this happens.

At our request, the Luxembourg presidency convened an extraordinary Competitiveness Council on steel, which, recognising the severity of the crisis facing the industry across the EU, concluded that concrete actions should be taken in a number of areas, including: making full and timely use of EU trade policy instruments; making best use of the possibilities given under the revised state aid rules to support energy intensive industries; considering, as part of the reform of the European emissions trading system (“EU ETS”), a more focused mechanism for free allocation of allowances; and a special high level stakeholders’ conference to review the current situation and consider policy actions. We are now following up to ensure the conclusions are implemented and expect the conference to take place in the new year. My fellow Ministers and I have also been engaging with MEPs to ensure that the European Parliament amplifies the messages coming out of the extraordinary Council.

Anna Soubry’s group has met four times and has brought together representatives from all major steel producers with trade and state aid policy leads from my Department and other Whitehall leads—Foreign Office, HM Treasury. The Scottish and Welsh Governments have also been involved.

Areas focused on have been:

Identifying opportunities for joint working between industry and Government on current and forthcoming anti-dumping cases;

What more could be done to support the steel industry by speeding up anti-dumping cases and how we can work with our international counterparts to address steel dumping, in particular from China;

Assessing whether more can be done to support energy intensive industries, within existing state aid rules, compared to our European and international counterparts;

Addressing concerns about existing support given from other EU member states to steel companies that may be out with state aid rules.

Anti-dumping

Industry and Government have agreed to work together on forthcoming anti-dumping cases. This includes full evidence sharing, clarity on the timetable for each case and agreement on, if, how and when the Government should intervene. We are also working with industry on identifying ways for the Commission to accelerate and prioritise its trade defence investigations so as to get results quicker to prevent dumping.

In July, we voted in favour of EU anti-dumping measures on the import of Chinese wire rod products. We have also voted in favour of anti-dumping measures on the imports of steel tubing products and lobbied successfully for an investigation into cheap imports of reinforcing steel bar.

The UK Government have been calling, at all levels for steel cases to be given priority. I have met with Commissioner Malmström to discuss how anti-dumping investigations can be accelerated and other related measures. Discussions have also taken place with other EU Ministers.

Following continued engagement with the Commission on the speed of investigations, the Commission has responded rapidly to an industry request for registration of cold-rolled flat steel products. This means that imports of this product will be registered in a timely manner so that, if appropriate, any future anti-dumping measures agreed will apply retrospectively from the date of registration rather than when the investigation has been completed. We will continue to press the Commission to ensure that ongoing investigations and requests for action will result in similarly rapid response from the Commission.

State Aid

We have undertaken a review of how other EU member states support their energy intensive industries within existing rules. This work concluded that the UK is currently making full use of the scope to provide state aid compliant support to industry through the suite of measures in the energy intensive industry compensation package. However, we are looking to see if there may be opportunities to make greater use of the EU’s general block exemption regime in other areas, particularly energy efficiency. Further, more detailed discussions will take place with industry.

We have looked into claims of wrong-doing in other EU member states and have found no evidence to back up these claims. We have shared this conclusion with industry and the unions and asked them to provide us with any further evidence they may have. The industry has raised concerns about interventions by the Italian Government in favour of Ilva with the European Commission. The Commission is currently investigating this matter. Given the importance of ensuring a fair and level playing-field across the EU, we have asked the Commission to be extremely vigilant and respond quickly wherever suspicions of wrongdoing arise.

We have also examined state aid regimes in non-EU countries and have concluded that there is substantial subsidisation of steel sectors.

The International Comparisons group will next meet in January.

Competitiveness and Productivity

UK Steel asked at the summit that the Government should:

“Fully implement the energy intensive industry compensation package ahead of April 2016. The sector is currently still paying 70% of the policy costs that the full package aims to address.”

“Bring business rates for capital intensive firms in line with their competitors, by removing plant and machinery from business rate calculations.”

“Don’t gold plate regulations unfairly and deliver pragmatic implementation of regulatory frameworks vital the sector (e.g. Industrial Emissions directive).”

“And for the longer-term: We call on the Government to develop a long term vision and strategy for the UK steel sector, through an independent report, demonstrating the broad value the sector adds to the economy and setting out a viable roadmap for safeguarding and growing this value for the UK.”

Lord O’Neill’s group has met three times. It has covered: energy costs; business rates; regulation; and the longer-term future of the industry, taking evidence from industry, unions and Government representatives, with involvement from both the Welsh and Scottish Governments.

Specific outputs to date include:

Energy Costs: The Prime Minister announced on 28 October that compensation for energy intensive industries would be paid from the date state aid clearance comes through. Today, we have received approval from the European Commission for the UK Government to commence relief in line with our initial notification for the most electricity intensive businesses for the costs of renewables policy in their bills. We are going further and at autumn statement 2015 the Chancellor announced that energy intensive industries, including the steel industry, will be exempt from the policy costs of the renewable obligation and feed-in tariffs, to ensure that they have long-term certainty and remain competitive. Compensation will continue to be paid until the exemption is in place. This commitment will give the UK steel industry greater certainty around energy costs. Relief from energy policy costs will save industry hundreds of millions of pounds.

Business Rates: Through the working group, industry have had direct discussions with HMT to feed into the review of business rates and to give more detailed evidence on the impact on investment in plant and machinery. The review of business rates will be fiscally neutral and will report at Budget 2016.

Regulation—Industrial Emissions: The Government confirmed to the steel industry in October that it will be able to take advantage of special flexibilities to comply with new EU rules on emissions. The EU industrial emissions directive (IED) was the industry’s primary concern and could have added millions of pounds of additional costs to the industry in January 2016 at a time when it is already facing unprecedented global pressures. The UK pushed for transitional arrangements and derogations in the IED, and both will benefit the steel industry following detailed work between Government and steel companies.

Regulation—Other: The industry was invited to highlight any other regulatory concerns to the working group. None were identified, though the working group stands ready to take evidence and act should any other regulatory issues emerge.

Improvements to competitiveness: A workshop was organised to bring together representatives from the steel industry, trade unions and Government in order to brainstorm interventions that could increase competitiveness within the areas of skills, innovation, exports and inward investment. Officials are working on the most promising proposals from these workshops to identify actions that industry and Government may wish to explore.

As an immediate step on innovation, £400,000 has been provided this year to enable the centre for process innovation on Teesside to extend its partnership programme to steel and other metals companies. The programme, which started with the chemicals industry, is focused on equipping SMEs in the supply chain to innovate and grow. The extension follows a recommendation in the metals strategy and will be delivered with support from the Metals Processing Institute.

Industry future: We have been working very closely with steel stakeholders to understand the needs of the sector both now and going forward. Through the Competitiveness and Productivity Steel working group an independent external report has been commissioned to identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of the UK steel industry, and consider how this could change over different time horizons. The outcomes will support the UK steel industry develop a strategic forward plan, and will help clarify how HMG could support competitiveness in the sector over the short, medium and long term.

The Competitiveness and Productivity group will next meet in the new year.

Local support

Notwithstanding the actions we can take as Government to support the industry, the UK steel sector is facing severe challenges and many companies have had to take difficult commercial decisions. There is no straightforward solution to the complex global forces facing the steel industry; the price of some steel has halved over the past year alone, there is 30% overproduction across the world, European demand has not returned to pre-crash levels and recent currency fluctuations have added further pressure.

I realise this is an incredibly difficult time for the employees affected by recent job losses, as well as their families and the local communities in which they live. The Government are committed to doing all we can to give these employees the help and training needed to quickly return to work and we have made available up to £89 million in support packages for those who have been affected.

Recently my ministerial colleagues the right hon. Anna Soubry, Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise, and Nick Boles, Minister of State for Skills visited Scunthorpe and Redcar respectively to better understand the issues currently facing the communities and how our support is having a real impact. We remain in regular contact with the companies and communities affected.

In Redcar, following the sudden closure of SSI in October, we set up a taskforce, chaired by Amanda Skelton, and agreed a support package worth up to £80 million over £40 million of the support package is aimed at skills and jobs creation and includes:

£3 million which has been made available to colleges in the region to support re-training activity, as well as a further £2.65 million skills funding to plug any gaps in skills provision not available via the further education offer;

£1.7 million to ensure that the 50 apprentices who were with SSI can continue their apprenticeships with alternative employers; a £16.5 million jobs and skills fund to help local firms employ former SSI workers or their spouses in full-time or part-time jobs for a minimum of three years;

£16 million support for firms in the SSI supply chain and wider Tees Valley impacted by the Redcar steelworks closure, to safeguard jobs, provide the stimulus to create new posts and provide expert assistance to help them expand their business

£750,000 to fund advice and grants to start up a new business.

This is in addition to statutory payments made to former employees, which have been processed rapidly by the Redundancy Payments Service to ensure individuals received the money as quickly as possible.

These initiatives have so far seen 500 affected individuals find new employment. I am also pleased to confirm that

all 51 apprentices that were affected by the sudden closure of SSI are in education, training or have been placed with employers.

In order to support the Tees Valley area going forward and ensure a strong economic outlook, Lord Heseltine has been appointed to lead the Tees Valley Inward Investment Initiative. He will be working to advance specific investment projects, to conduct a wider analysis on unlocking growth in the area and to help the new combined authority make the most of its new devolved powers. He has visited the region and met with key people on organisations several times and will be reporting back in the new year.

In Scunthorpe, we have announced a package, worth up to £9 million, jointly with Tata, to support Tata steelworkers, the local economy and supply chain. We are working closely with a local taskforce, chaired by Baroness Liz Redfern, to deliver this support. This package includes:

£3 million from UK Steel Enterprise (Tata's Regeneration arm) "to support job creation"

£3 million of match funding from the Government to provide "support for more start-up businesses and companies that are looking to expand and create jobs".

£3 million of training of affected employees through local further education colleges.

We remain in close contact with Tata to understand their ongoing issues and how we can support them.

I am pleased to inform the House that Administrators for Caparo Group have been able to complete sales for all but one of the remaining business entities, preserving over 1,100 jobs mainly in the West Midlands.

[HCWS410]

CABINET OFFICE

Public Bodies Reform Programme

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock): In May 2010, the coalition Government committed to reviewing public bodies, with the aim of increasing accountability for actions carried out on behalf of Government. The 2010 to 2015 public bodies reform programme delivered the biggest reform of the public bodies in a generation.

Its successes included:

reducing the number of public bodies by over 290, by abolishing more than 190 and merging over 165 bodies into fewer than 70;

98% of planned abolitions and mergers completed;

reducing administrative spend by a cumulative £3 billion over the life of the programme to the end of March 2015, comfortably exceeding the original estimate of £2.6 billion; an Act of Parliament, the Public Bodies Act 2011, to facilitate the abolition, merger and reform of public bodies;

improved accountability through bringing the functions of over 75 bodies closer to democratically-elected representatives; and

increased funding from alternative sources and volunteering by moving some organisations outside the public sector under innovative delivery models.

We have delivered our promise. The landscape is now smaller, more accountable and efficient, with reduced administrative costs, ensuring better value for money to the public. This remarkable achievement is thanks in no small part to the committed public servants who have embraced the spirit of reform.

Full details of the reforms are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/public-bodies-reform>.

"Public Bodies 2015"

The public bodies report was first published by the Cabinet Office in 1980 and is now a single transparent source of top-level data on all non-departmental public bodies, executive agencies and non-ministerial departments.

"Public Bodies 2015" details the broad range of public bodies sponsored by the UK government and provide further detail on the success of the 2010 to 2015 public bodies reform programme. The Cabinet Office will today publish "Public Bodies 2015" at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-bodies-2015> and I am also today placing it in the Library of the House. The online data set will be updated quarterly where applicable.

Public Bodies Reform 2015-20

I can also announce the Government's approach to public bodies reform from 2015 to 2020. We have worked in partnership with leaders of public bodies and departments to develop a new two-tier approach to transformation.

Instead of just piecemeal reviews, of individual arm's length bodies, we will look at how groups of quangos can be merged, share back offices or work better together. So the first tier is a set of cross-departmental, functional reviews, covering several ALBs in similar or related areas of Government. This will initially cover bodies with regulatory functions. The review, led by Amanda Spielman, Chair of OFQUAL, will be delivered through partnership with arm's length bodies, the Cabinet Office and other Departments.

Each ALB will continue to be reviewed each Parliament. So the second tier is a programme of tailored reviews, for those not falling into a functional review, or for those which may require a more in-depth review in addition to a review of some aspects within a functional review. It develops the triennial review programme, extending the scope of reviews to include executive agencies and non-ministerial Departments. Departments will have greater flexibility to dovetail with wider policy reviews. Crucially, every ALB will be reviewed at least once in the lifetime of each Parliament.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>.

[HCWS428]

Transparency Update

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock): Enhancing transparency and accountability continues to be at the heart of our approach to Government, ensuring that Whitehall's elected representatives and senior officials uphold the highest standards in public life through transparency and democratic scrutiny.

In support of this aim, the Government are today publishing:

The list of Ministers' Interests. Under the terms of the "Ministerial Code", Ministers must ensure that no conflict arises, or could reasonably be perceived to arise, between their ministerial position and their private interests, financial or otherwise. The list captures those interests relevant to Ministers' ministerial responsibilities, and

should be read alongside the two parliamentary registers. In addition, we have today published an update report by the Prime Minister's Independent Adviser on Ministers' Interests, Sir Alex Allan.

The list of special advisers. The list sets out the names of the special advisers in post as of December 2015, each special adviser's pay band, and actual salary—where this is higher than the senior civil service entry-level salary—together with details of the total pay bill for 2014-15 and the estimate for 2015-16. The cost has fallen from last year, and the cost represents just 0.08% of the civil service pay bill.

Details of the salaries of officials in Departments, agencies and non-departmental public bodies earning £150,000 and above. Excluding machinery of government transfers, the number of people of people earning £150,000 and above in central Government has reduced by a third since 2010.

Details of ministerial meetings with external organisations and overseas travel, ministerial and special adviser gifts and hospitality, the use of official residences and the Prime Minister's UK visits and charity receptions for the period April to September 2015.

Details of Permanent Secretary meetings with external organisations, and senior officials travel and gifts and hospitality for the period April to September 2015.

Copies of the list of ministerial interests and the list of special advisers have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. All publications will be available on gov.uk.

Attachments can be viewed online at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>.

[HCWS439]

TREASURY

Banking Act 2009 Reporting

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Harriett Baldwin):

The Treasury has laid before the House of Commons a report required under section 231 of the Banking Act 2009 covering the period from 1 April 2015 to 30 September 2015. Copies of the document are available in the Vote Office and the Printed Paper Office.

[HCWS433]

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Community and Business Recovery Fund (Storm Desmond)

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): I would like to pay tribute to the excellent work of the emergency services, the Army, local authority staff and members and the many voluntary and community organisations and residents that have done so much to help the people who have suffered as result of Storm Desmond.

I would also like to update hon. Members on the actions that the Government are taking to help communities and businesses impacted by Storm Desmond.

I am determined to get funding to areas quickly to help residents and business owners who are “rallying round” to rebuild their communities. I can confirm that county councils in Cumbria, Lancashire, Northumberland, North Yorkshire and Herefordshire have now received

an initial £10.5 million payment from the community and business recovery scheme to support affected communities in those areas.

It forms the first payment from the new dedicated community and business recovery fund announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to help residents and businesses back on their feet and into their properties, *Official Report*, 9 December 2015, column 983.

This new fund will be managed by the councils themselves, to ensure money can go quickly to people who need it most, without facing unnecessary delays caused by red tape and bureaucracy.

Communities are coming together to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of Storm Desmond. I have seen for myself both the damage and destruction caused by Storm Desmond and the way in which communities are rallying round to help each other through this difficult time.

Supporting the recovery

The Government have made clear their determination to stand squarely behind those communities hit by flooding in the wake of Storm Desmond.

The Government have confirmed that we will provide over £60 million of support. The £47 million community and business recovery scheme will:

provide local authorities with over £500 for each household affected by flooding; for example, it can be used to help people with temporary accommodation costs while they work to get them back into their homes.

provide grants of up to £5,000 for householders to protect their home from future flooding; for example, install new flood barriers, replace doors and windows with water resistant alternatives, or move electricity sockets up to a safer level.

ensure flood affected businesses that have had their trading disrupted can get back on their feet, with funding equivalent to an average of £2,500 provided to local authorities for each business affected and funding specifically provided for farmers to help restore their land.

We have offered council tax and business rate relief to those affected. As part of the recovery scheme, my Department will make funding available to enable councils to offer a 100% council tax discount to anyone who is unable to occupy their home and a 100% business rates discount for firms that have been impacted by flooding. This will be made available on at least as generous terms as in 2013-14.

We have activated the Bellwin emergency scheme and have made it simpler and easier to access, responding to local concerns. The Bellwin grant will be available at 100% above threshold. We have reduced thresholds for upper-tier authorities and allowed upper-tier authorities with responsibility for fire services to claim Bellwin on a comparable basis to standalone fire authorities for fire-related costs.

[HCWS442]

Green Belt Protection

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis):

This statement confirms changes to national planning policy to make intentional unauthorised development a material consideration, and also to provide stronger protection for the green belt, as set out in the manifesto.

The Government are concerned about the harm that is caused where the development of land has been undertaken in advance of obtaining planning permission. In such cases, there is no opportunity to appropriately limit or mitigate the harm that has already taken place. Such cases can involve local planning authorities having to take expensive and time-consuming enforcement action.

For these reasons, we introduced a planning policy to make intentional unauthorised development a material consideration that would be weighed in the determination of planning applications and appeals. This policy applies to all new planning applications and appeals received since 31 August 2015.

The Government are particularly concerned about harm that is caused by intentional unauthorised development in the green belt.

For this reason the planning inspectorate will monitor all appeal decisions involving unauthorised development in the green belt to enable the Government to assess the implementation of this policy.

In addition we will consider the recovery of a proportion of relevant appeals in the green belt for the Secretary of State's decision to enable him to illustrate how he would like his policy to apply in practice. Such appeals will be considered for recovery under the criterion set out in 2008: "There may on occasion be other cases which merit recovery because of the particular circumstances."

After six months we will review the situation to see whether it is delivering our objective of protecting land from intentional unauthorised development.

The national planning policy framework makes clear that most development in the green belt is inappropriate and should be approved only in very special circumstances. consistent with this, this statement confirms the Government's policy that, subject to the best interests of the child, personal circumstances and unmet need are unlikely to clearly outweigh harm to the green belt and any other harm so as to establish very special circumstances

[HCWS423]

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sports Strategy

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): I am today publishing the Government's new sport strategy "Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation".

This new strategy for sport and physical activity represents a significant shift in Government policy on sport. It moves beyond merely looking at how many people take part and instead considers what people get out of participating in sport and what more can be done to tackle head on the flatlining levels of participation and high levels of inactivity in this country. It also considers the value of broader engagement in sport, whether through volunteering, watching sport, or enjoying the shared pride that comes from sporting success

Through this strategy, Government is redefining what success in sport means, with a new focus on five key outcomes: physical wellbeing, mental wellbeing, individual

development, social and community development and economic development. In future, funding decisions will also be made on the basis of the social good that sport and physical activity can deliver.

There are several demographic groups whose engagement in sport and physical activity is well below the national average. Government will focus on these under-represented groups, including women and girls, disabled people, those in lower socioeconomic groups and older people. Government will also broaden Sport England's remit so that it becomes responsible for sport outside school from the age of five, rather than 14.

This strategy sets out how we will transform the way in which success is measured by replacing the Active People survey with a new survey called Active Lives. This will enable Government to capture how active people are overall—rather than how often they take part in any particular sport. A new set of key performance indicators will be used to test progress towards the five key outcomes.

Government is reaffirming its commitment to Olympic and Paralympic success but also extending that ambition to non-Olympic sports where we will support success through grassroots investment in those sports, and by sharing UK Sport's knowledge and expertise.

This strategy sets out plans to introduce a new, mandatory governance code that will be rigorously enforced and will help tackle doping, match-fixing and corruption wherever they occur in sport. We will make the sport sector stronger and more resilient through changes in governance, developing the workforce, and reducing the reliance on public funding. We will also introduce a new "duty of care" for all athletes and participants, to make sure that sport is safe for and inclusive of everyone.

It is Government's ambition that all relevant Departments work closer together to create a more physically active nation, where our children and young people have access to the best sporting opportunities available and people of all ages and backgrounds enjoy the many benefits that sport and physical activity bring, at every stage in their lives.

I am grateful to all those who contributed to the sport strategy consultation which ran through the summer of 2015 and received over 3,000 responses. The responses to the consultation showed that the sector is united in our ambition to be a truly successful and thriving sporting nation. This strategy sets out our plan for achieving this.

The strategy is being deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sporting-future-a-new-strategy-for-an-active-nation>

Attachments can be viewed online at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>.

[HCWS415]

Telecommunications Council

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): The Telecommunications Council took place in Brussels on 11 December 2015. The UK's Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU, Shan Morgan, represented the UK.

The first item was a progress report from the presidency regarding the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the accessibility to public sector bodies' websites (First reading—EM 16006/11). There was no substantive debate on this item.

The second item was a report from the presidency on the outcome of negotiations, specifically trilogues, regarding the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning measures to ensure a high level of network and information security across the Union (First reading—EM6342/13). There was no substantive debate on this item.

These items were followed by a round-table debate on the review of the European electronic communications framework. EU Commissioner Oettinger introduced the debate by noting that the EU had moved away from the era of fixed-line telephones, and highlighted the range of new technologies which are reliant on internet connectivity.

Member state interventions by Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, the UK, Slovakia, Poland, Belgium, Czech Republic, Ireland, Latvia and Lithuania all spoke against over-regulating the new “over-the-top” services such as WhatsApp or Skype. However, Germany, France, Spain, Greece and Portugal spoke in support of the need for “equivalent” regulation for such services.

Delivering investment in telecommunications networks through competition was also a common theme, as was the importance of flexibility in EU state aid to support investment in areas where the market was not well placed to deliver.

Many member states also raised the issue of spectrum management, and although several spoke of the benefits of increased co-ordination between member states for the allocation of spectrum, none supported a greater role for the Commission.

Better regulation was also raised by several member states, who saw the review of the electronic communications framework as a good opportunity to reduce the regulatory burden on operators. The UK's intervention was as per my pre-Council statement (HCWS384).

This was followed by two items under AOB led by the Commission. The first being information from the Commission on current internet governance issues, and the second an update on the telecommunication and ICT aspects of the negotiation of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). There were no substantive interventions on either of these items.

Finally, the Dutch delegation informed the Council of their priorities for their forthcoming presidency before Council adjourned until the next meeting in May 2016. [HCWS429]

DEFENCE

UK Embedded Forces

The Secretary of State for Defence (Michael Fallon): During my oral statement on 20 July 2015 (*Official Report*, column 1233), I committed to continuing to be transparent about UK service personnel embedded in other nations' armed forces on operations.

Today I am publishing details of UK Service personnel embedded in other nations' armed forces who are deployed on operations together with those who work on operations

in deployed coalition or single nation headquarters roles. Embeds play an important role in enhancing our national security interests around the world, strengthening our relationships with key allies and developing our own capabilities. These personnel perform a wide range of roles for their host nation including staff in headquarters planning for operations and training missions, members of a ship's company, helicopter pilots, transport pilots, fast-jet pilots and aircrew and air traffic control.

Following this first report to the House, future updates will be published annually through my Department's annual report and accounts. For operational and personal security reasons the information that can be routinely released is limited.

All of our armed forces, including embeds, are bound by and operate in accordance with the law of England and Wales and international law, in particular, the law of armed conflict.

UK SERVICE PERSONNEL EMBEDDED IN OTHER NATIONS' ARMED FORCES AND DEPLOYED ON OR IN SUPPORT OF OPERATIONS. (Data correct as at 30 November 2015)

<i>Host Nation/ Headquarters</i>	<i>Embedded HQ Staff</i>	<i>Embedded Exchange Officers</i>
Australia		2
Canada		2
France	3	5
New Zealand		3
Spain		1
United States of America	13	17
Coalition HQs	94	
EU HQs	18	
NATO HQs	9	
UN HQs	10	
TOTAL	147	30

Notes:

The data comprises: “UK service personnel embedded in other nations' armed forces, who are deployed on operations together with those who work on operations in deployed coalition or single nation headquarters roles”.

Due to the short nature of some attachments, the figures change regularly. The information is a snap-shot as at 30 November 2015.

[HCWS431]

EDUCATION

Reformed GCSE and A-level Content

The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb): The Government are reforming GCSEs and A-levels to be rigorous and more knowledge-based and to match the qualifications used in the best education systems in the world.

Schools are now teaching some of the new reformed GCSEs and A-levels, and we have already published reformed subject content for those GCSEs and A-levels to be taught from September 2016. Content for reformed GCSE subjects can be found on the Department for Education website for AS and A-level subjects.

The new GCSEs will be more academically demanding and will be qualifications that command the confidence of students, employers, and further and higher education

institutions. At A-level, our reforms aim to ensure that they prepare students for undergraduate study and the world of work.

Today I am publishing revised subject content for some of the GCSEs and AS and A-levels that will be taught in schools from September 2017:

GCSEs in astronomy, business, economics, engineering, geology and psychology; and

AS and A-levels in environmental science, design and technology, music technology and philosophy.

The astronomy GCSE requires greater depth of knowledge, for example by expanding topic areas such as the evolution of the stars. The content has also been brought up to date to reflect the latest knowledge, and the mathematical requirements are more demanding.

The business GCSE content has added breadth and depth with new requirements to understand business decision-making in more detail, including business growth and development.

The new economics GCSE content is more demanding and includes detailed requirements for specific mathematical knowledge. All students will now be required to understand more of the essential concepts of economics, and depth and breadth have been increased by adding a number of new topics.

The engineering GCSE has increased demand through a greater emphasis on systems-related content and requiring additional mathematical knowledge. A detailed section on testing and investigation has been introduced which includes content such as predicting performance through calculations, simulations and modelling.

Environmental science AS and A-level requires students to know and understand the science behind environmental issues and, in line with other reformed science A-levels, to use scientific theories, models and ideas.

The new geology GCSE content has increased demand by requiring increased mathematical knowledge, and the study of new content on planetary geology and a greater number of minerals, rock types and fossil groups. Fieldwork remains a fundamental part of the subject, with students required to spend at least two days engaged in fieldwork.

In music technology AS and A-level content, students are now required to develop an in-depth knowledge of the principles of sound and audio technology and the development of recording and production technology. Recording and production techniques for both corrective and creative purposes are also included.

Philosophy AS and A-level content will enable students to gain a thorough grounding in key philosophical questions and concepts. Students are required to study the ideas of key philosophers.

Psychology GCSE content will require all students to study five compulsory topics (development; memory; psychological problems; social influence; and the brain and neuropsychology) and two optional topics. The study of these is underpinned by the study of key theories and all students will be required to develop a strong understanding of research methods, including quantitative analysis.

The new design and technology A-level will require all students to study the iterative design processes and technical principles that are at the core of contemporary design practice. There will be options in design engineering,

product design and fashion textiles to allow students to specialise. Students will also undertake a substantial design and make task at A-level.

[HCWS430]

School Revenue Funding Settlement 2016-17

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr Sam Gyimah): Today I am announcing details of school revenue funding for 2016-17. My announcement includes the dedicated schools grant (DSG), the education services grant (ESG) and the pupil premium.

The distribution of the DSG to local authorities will continue to be set out in three spending blocks for each authority: a schools block, a high-needs block and an early years block.

The schools block has been allocated on the basis of the schools block units of funding announced in my statement to the House on 16 July 2016. To protect schools from significant budget reductions, we will continue with a minimum funding guarantee that ensures no school sees more than a 1.5% per pupil reduction in its 2016-17 budget—excluding sixth form funding and ESG—compared to 2015-16, and before the pupil premium is added.

We have been able to provide an additional £92.5 million for the DSG high-needs block. The high needs block supports provision for pupils and students with SEN and disabilities (SEND), from their early years to age 25, and alternative provision for pupils who cannot receive their education in schools.

The DSG early years block comprises funding for the 15 hour entitlement for three and four-year-olds; participation funding for two-year-olds from the most disadvantaged backgrounds; and the early years pupil premium. The rates per child for this block will be maintained at their 2015-16 level.

The ESG retained duties rate will remain at £15 per pupil. We have applied an efficiency saving to the ESG general funding rate for 2016 to 2017, and the rate will reduce from £87 per pupil to £77 per pupil. We will continue to provide a protection to limit the reduction of academies' budgets as a result of changes to the ESG.

The pupil premium per pupil amounts for 2016-17 will be protected at the current rates, which are:

<i>Pupils</i>	<i>Per pupil rate</i>
Disadvantaged pupils: Primary	£1,320
Disadvantaged pupils: Secondary	£935
Pupil Premium Plus: Looked After Children (LAC) ¹ and those adopted from care or who leave care under a Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangements Order (formerly known as a residence order).	£1,900
Service children	£300

¹A looked after child is defined in the Children Act 1989 as one who is in the care of, or provided with accommodation by, an English or Welsh local authority.

Pupil premium allocations for financial year 2016 to 2017 will be published in June 2016 following the receipt of pupil number data from the spring 2016 schools and alternative provision censuses.

As announced in the Chancellor's spending review statement we will introduce a national funding formula from 2017. We will consult on proposals in the new year.

Details of these arrangements have been published on gov.uk.

[HCWS432]

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Onshore Oil and Gas: Licence Awards and Environmental Monitoring

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Andrea Leadsom):

14th Onshore Licensing Round

I am pleased to inform the House that the Oil & Gas Authority (OGA)—the UK's oil and gas regulator—has today announced that licences for a total of 159 blocks are being formally offered to successful applicants under the 14th onshore oil and gas licensing round.

A petroleum exploration and development licence (PEDL) gives the licensee exclusivity over an area of land for onshore hydrocarbon exploration, appraisal and extraction, including for shale gas and oil as well as conventional forms of oil and gas. To be clear, a PEDL does not itself give any permission for operations to begin. Before the licensee can begin any operations such as drilling, hydraulic fracturing or production, they must be granted a number of further permissions and consents. These include, for example, planning permission, environmental permits from the Environment Agency, scrutiny by the Health and Safety Executive, and OGA consents under the provisions of the PEDL.

The 14th onshore oil and gas licensing round was launched on 28 July 2014 and closed on 28 October 2014. A total of 95 applications were received from 47 companies covering 295 ordnance survey blocks. Following scrutiny of the applicants' competency, financial viability, environmental awareness and geotechnical analysis, and following the decision not to award PEDLs in Scotland and Wales, 159 blocks were taken forward for further consideration.

In August 2015, the OGA announced its intention to offer PEDLs covering 27 blocks. In addition to this, 132 blocks were subsequently subjected to further detailed assessment in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010, and a public consultation on that assessment was carried out. Following the conclusion of the consultation process, the OGA is now satisfied that the approval of the 14th licensing round, and the offer and eventual award of each of the PEDLs under round, will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any protected European site. As a result, the OGA is today offering PEDLs for a total of 159 blocks. For 75 of these blocks, the PEDL will contain a condition that prohibits all or specific activities in parts of the block.

The 159 blocks covered by today's announcement will be incorporated into 93 onshore PEDLs. A map of the licence blocks being offered can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/oil-and-gas-licensing-rounds>.

Gas is central to our long-term energy security. The gas used to heat our homes is among the cheapest and most secure in Europe, despite the decline in our domestic gas production from the North Sea. However, we cannot be complacent. We currently import around half of our gas needs, but by 2030 that could be as high as 75%. That is why we were encouraging investment in our shale gas exploration so we can add new sources of home-grown supply to our real diversity of imports.

This licensing round will see the great majority of the UK's shale prospectivity licensed to be explored and tested. The 14th onshore licensing round has attracted a high quality of proposed work programmes and a mix of conventional and unconventional proposals. About 75% of the blocks being offered relate to shale oil or gas.

Once the companies being offered these licences accept these offers, they will be issued with PEDLs covering the blocks which they have been awarded, and will subsequently be able to begin planning their future strategies for exploration activities.

I have today written to all Members of the House within whose constituencies licences are being offered.

Environmental Monitoring

Following the award of funding in the autumn statement 2014, DECC has grant-funded a research consortium led by the British Geological Survey to support it to create a baseline of environmental data in the Vale of Pickering, North Yorkshire, as well as expanding the consortium's existing base-lining activity in Fylde, Lancashire. Applications for shale gas activity have been made in each area. The Government wish to ensure that a robust and independently gathered baseline of data on environmental conditions, such as the quality of ground-water or air and the levels of seismic activity, is in place prior to the start of shale gas operations in these areas, which are dependent on consents including planning permission. If shale gas projects take place in future in these areas, future data can be checked against these "baseline" data. This would allow any significant changes to be flagged for further scrutiny.

The Government regard such independent baseline data as important to building public trust in the first exploration-phase wells developed by the UK shale gas industry, in addition to the industry's own monitoring data, which is provided to regulators. Our aim is therefore to provide support for appropriate baseline monitoring for areas identified for the first exploration-phase wells. This work will be reviewed periodically alongside the development of the industry.

[HCWS434]

Renewal Energy Cost Control Measures

The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Amber Rudd): The Government are committed to cost-effective decarbonisation of our electricity supply and to protecting consumer bills by controlling costs under the levy control framework. Levy control framework projections published in July showed a significant overspend. This underlined the fact that we cannot afford to continue providing unchecked support for the renewables industry via demand-led schemes. As we transition to a low-carbon economy as cost effectively as possible, finding new sources of energy that are cheap, reliable and clean is essential.

Earlier in the year, we announced a package of proposed cost control measures that would help tackle this projected overspend on renewable support schemes. This included:

Measures to constrain support for sub-5MW solar under the renewables obligation (RO)—our monitoring of this technology scale since the closure of the RO to solar over 5MW demonstrated much higher levels of deployment than expected.

A review of the feed-in tariff (FIT), designed to put the scheme back on an affordable, sustainable footing and to ensure that we were not overcompensating projects—a requirement of our state aid approval.

We have consulted extensively on these proposals and taken on board views from a wide range of stakeholders. In considering their responses, we have sought to balance the different needs of industry, consumers and communities—and to target support where it is most needed. We consider that we have struck the right balance in the final policy decisions we are publishing today.

Today DECC is publishing a package of documents setting out measures to introduce cost control under for renewable energy support schemes. This includes:

the Government response to the consultation on the feed-in tariff review;

the Government response to the consultation on ending support for small-scale solar PV under the RO;

a consultation on a banding review for small-scale solar PV under the RO.

Government response to the feed-in tariff review

DECC launched a consultation on the future of the feed-in tariffs (FITs) scheme on 27 August 2015. This proposed a number of measures to meet two core objectives: to comply with our state aid approval requiring that the UK Government review the support offered by the FITs scheme every three years; and to control the cost of the scheme to limit the impact on consumer bills.

Today we are publishing our response to this consultation. Our measures seek to maintain a solar industry which, in the medium term, can continue to reduce its costs and move towards subsidy-free deployment, and to provide other technology sectors with tapered support over the coming years.

The Government response to the consultation sets out the following key decisions:

Updated generation tariffs, revised in response to evidence on technology costs received during the consultation.

Introduction of deployment caps to limit spend on the scheme to £100 million by the end of 2018-19.

The reintroduction of pre-accreditation for solar PV and wind generators over 50kW and all hydro and anaerobic digestion generators. We removed pre-accreditation last October to control costs under the scheme by limiting the value of the deployment surge in response to tariff reductions. Under the revised, cost-controlled scheme, pre-accreditation can play an important role for projects with longer lead-in times, such as those developed by the community energy sector.

Measures to pause acceptance of new applications to the scheme for up to four weeks in the new year. This will allow time for the implementation of cost-control measures, ensure better value for money for the bill payer by offering revised tariffs to investors, and preserve budget for the future of the scheme.

On several other areas in the consultation DECC does not intend to introduce changes now, but will build on the points made in responses to this consultation to produce more detailed future proposals. These include

energy efficiency criteria, the export tariff, smart meters, grid issues and sustainability criteria for anaerobic digestion. DECC also intends to consult on revised tariffs for new anaerobic digestion and micro-CHP installations in the new year.

Renewables obligation—support for small-scale solar and banding review

When DECC confirmed the closure of the renewables obligation (RO) to solar PV projects of 5MW and above last year, we made it clear we would monitor the pipeline of smaller solar PV projects, and take action if needed to control costs.

Because the monitoring indicated deployment was growing more rapidly than previously forecast, on 22 July 2015 we published a consultation relating to sub-5kW solar PV projects proposing the early closure of the RO, the removal of grandfathering for projects not accredited on 22 July, and a banding review. We received 94 responses in total, from across the solar industry, and from local authorities, community groups, NGOs and individuals.

Having reviewed the responses carefully, we consider that the approach we set out for the RO remains the right one, so today we are announcing that we intend to implement the measures largely as consulted upon. Specifically, we will be:

Closing the renewables obligation across Great Britain to new solar PV capacity at 5MW and below from 1 April 2016.

Introducing grace period arrangements to protect those developers who have preliminary accreditation, or have already made a significant financial commitment on or before 22 July 2015—the date of which the consultation document was published—or who experience grid delay beyond their control.

Removing grandfathering from 22 July 2015 for solar projects in England and Wales, unless they have made a significant financial commitment on or before 22 July 2015.

We do intend to make two minor changes to the policy consulted upon:

A change to prevent projects that made invalid or incomplete planning applications from benefiting from the grace period or exception to the changes to grandfathering policy.

A change to confirm our intention that projects meeting the criteria for the exception to the removal of grandfathering will receive the currently applicable support rate when they commission.

Updated evidence on costs published today highlights a risk that we could be overcompensating projects under the RO if support is paid at current levels while it remains open.

So we are also publishing a consultation document proposing new bandings for solar PV at 5MW and below, and proposals for an additional banding grace period.

Decarbonising electricity generation—progress report

I am also providing a report to Parliament on progress in decarbonising electricity generation in the period 2012-14, a requirement under the Energy Act 2010. Good progress has been made, for example low-carbon electricity's share of generation increased to a record 39% in 2014. The Government remain committed to affordable, reliable clean energy to ensure we can meet our climate change commitments.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Air Quality

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): I have today issued the UK plan for improving air quality. This plan sets out a comprehensive approach that will reduce health impacts and meet our environmental and legal obligations by implementing a new programme of clean air zones. It is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/air-quality-plan-for-nitrogen-dioxide-no2-in-uk-2015>

Under this plan, by 2020 the most polluting diesel vehicles—old polluting buses, coaches, taxis and lorries—will be discouraged from entering the centres of Birmingham, Leeds, Southampton, Nottingham and Derby. Newer vehicles that meet the latest emission standards, and private cars, will be unaffected.

Over recent decades, air quality has improved significantly. Between 2005 and 2013 emissions of nitrogen oxides have fallen by 38% and particulate matter has reduced by more than 16%. Over the past five years the Government have committed over £2 billion to help bus operators upgrade their fleets, reduce pollution from a range of vehicles such as refuse trucks and fire engines through cutting edge technologies, and promote the development of clean alternative fuels such as powering taxis with liquid petroleum gas in Birmingham.

In order to bring the UK into legal compliance and to reduce concentrations of nitrogen dioxide below 40 micrograms clean air zones will be introduced in five cities. These zones will reduce the pollution in city centres and encourage the replacement of old, polluting vehicles with modern, cleaner vehicles. Similar zones in Germany and Denmark have been shown to improve air quality.

These zones will target air quality hot spots. Following scoping studies, which Government will provide funding for, councils will consult on the details on these zones.

In Birmingham, Leeds, Southampton, Nottingham and Derby, these zones will cover old diesel buses, coaches, taxis and lorries. Newer vehicles that meet the latest emissions standards will not need to pay and, under this plan, no private car will have to pay. The local authorities will have to set charges at levels designed to reduce pollution, not to raise revenue—beyond recovering the costs of the scheme.

Birmingham and Leeds will also discourage old polluting diesel vans and implement other measures including park and ride schemes, signage, changes in road layouts and provision of infrastructure for alternative fuels.

Many companies have already started to update their fleets to modern, cleaner vehicles. For example, by 2017 British Gas will have replaced at least 10% of their commercial fleet with electric vehicles, reducing emissions compared to their old diesel vans. The new electric vans also represent a saving over their diesel counterparts. In London the cost savings could be as high as 20%, with other locations saving between 6% and 10%.

The Environment Agency, winner of Green Fleet of the Year 2015, has committed to increase the number of ultra-low emission vehicles to more than 100 by the end of 2015.

Another example of businesses modernising their fleet is Reading Buses—38% of their fleet are “ultra-clean” drastically reducing their emissions. Drivers are also given advice on fuel efficient eco-driving techniques.

One of the main reasons our cities continue to face air quality problems is the failure of diesel vehicles to deliver expected emission reductions in real-world driving conditions. We have recently secured agreement in the EU to introduce more stringent emissions testing across the EU, ensuring that vehicles live up to their low emission credentials. Our plans fully factor in current car performance and future performance standards following this agreement.

The Mayor of London has a well-developed strategy for improving air quality by 2025, including the implementation of an ultra-low emission zone by 2020, retro-fitting of buses and licensing new taxis to be zero-emission capable from 2018. We will continue to support and monitor the delivery of the Mayor’s plans.

[HCWS411]

Bovine TB

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss): Today I am updating the House on the implementation of our 25-year strategy to eradicate bovine TB in England.

The strategy is delivering results with more than half the country on track to be officially free of the disease by 2019.

Badger control operations in Somerset, Gloucestershire and Dorset were all successful in meeting their targets. The UK chief veterinary officer’s advice is that the results show that industry-led badger control can deliver the level of effectiveness required to be confident of achieving disease control benefits. As part of our strategy the Government want to see badger control over a wider number of areas next year. This is in line with the UK chief veterinary officer’s advice on what is needed to realise disease control benefits at regional level.

Bovine TB is the greatest animal health threat to the UK. Dealing with the disease is costing the taxpayer £100 million each year. Last year alone over 26,000 cattle had to be slaughtered in England to control the disease, causing devastation and distress for farmers and rural communities across large swathes of the country.

The Government are taking strong action to deliver a long-term plan to eradicate the disease and protect the future of the UK’s dairy and beef industries. The comprehensive strategy includes strengthening cattle testing and movement controls, improving biosecurity on farm and when trading, and badger control in areas where TB is rife.

The low-risk area, covering over half of England, is on track to achieve officially TB-free status by the end of 2019. This would be the first time anywhere in England has enjoyed this status.

The approach of tackling the disease in cattle and in wildlife has worked in Australia, is working in New Zealand and Ireland and is supported by the Government and DEFRA chief scientists, the UK chief vet and other leading vets.

To further improve our cattle movement controls, the Government plan to introduce statutory post-movement testing next year for cattle entering the low-risk area. This will reduce the risk of importing TB-infected animals from higher risk areas and bring this part of England in line with Scotland. In November 2015, DEFRA, in partnership with AHDB, the NFU, BCVA and Landex, launched a campaign to step up biosecurity measures in farms and in the cattle trade and help protect herds from bovine TB.

We have also overseen the successful completion of the first year of six private badger vaccination projects funded under the badger edge vaccination scheme. The ongoing worldwide shortage of BCG vaccine and the need to prioritise available stocks for humans is impacting on supply for badger vaccination projects. Following advice from Public Health England, I have taken the decision to suspend attempts to source BCG vaccine for the badger edge vaccination scheme and other private badger vaccination deployment projects in England until the supply situation is resolved. This follows the decision of the Welsh Government to do the same.

Our long-term research to develop an oral TB vaccine for badgers and an effective TB vaccine for cattle is ongoing.

The European Commission has endorsed DEFRA's bovine TB eradication programme for ongoing financial support in 2016.

To ensure we have a successful and resilient industry, I am determined to enable all available measures necessary to eradicate this devastating disease as quickly as possible. We will continue to deliver on our 25-year strategy for a TB-free England.

[HCWS409]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

British Council Annual Report

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): Copies of the British Council's annual report and accounts for the 2014-15 financial year have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The report can also be found at the British Council's website www.britishcouncil.org.

During the period the British Council received £154.88 million grant-in-aid from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

[HCWS423]

HEALTH

Departmental Contingent Liability Notification: Dementia Discovery Fund

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): A minute had been laid before Parliament regarding the Department of Health's £15 million investment into the dementia discovery fund (DDF) and specifically in relation to incurring a contingent liability. A copy of the minute is attached.

The DDF was publicly announced on 21 October and is an investment fund that currently stands at £100 million for the discovery of new approaches to dementia research and drug development.

The limited partnership deed for the DDF includes clauses relating to indemnification. The majority of indemnifications are made by the DDF itself rather than the investors and is therefore limited to £15 million. However, there is also a direct indemnification made by all the investors, including the Department of Health. The direct indemnification is triggered in certain circumstances largely relating to where the Department of Health has provided inaccurate or misleading information. Such circumstances are highly unlikely and most are within the Department's own control. The Department was advised by external legal advisers that it is not possible to quantify any potential liabilities. The Department has taken steps to mitigate the risks of the liability being realised. A senior Department of Health civil servant has been allocated as the senior responsible owner (SRO) for the Government's investment into the DDF. The SRO, among other things, has responsibility for final sign off for providing any information to the DDF on behalf of the Department.

If the liability is called, then provision for any payment will be sought through the normal supply procedures. The Treasury has approved the proposal.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>

[HCWS441]

Health Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): The Health Council met in Brussels on 7 December 2015 as part of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO) Council meetings. I represented the UK.

Member states adopted Council conclusions on the reduction of alcohol-related harm, personalised medicine for patients, supporting people living with dementia and lessons learned from the Ebola outbreak. A number of member states called on the European Commission to commit to a new EU alcohol strategy. The UK recognised the huge pressure on public services which results from alcohol misuse and welcomed the presidency's work. The UK stressed the importance of sharing information on best practice but cautioned that any further EU action on alcohol had to focus on areas of existing competence and had to fully respect member states' primary responsibility for the public health of their populations. On dementia, the UK underlined the importance of the issue and highlighted the considerable alignment with the Prime Minister's challenge on dementia 2020.

The Luxembourg presidency gave a brief update on trialogue discussions regarding medical devices and in-vitro devices regulations and outlined progress made through the general approach agreed in October. The presidency outlined that further positive steps had been taken on a number of issues through trialogue discussions.

The Commission gave an update on its report on trans fats in foods published on 3 December 2015. The Commission stated work would now begin on an impact assessment that would consider the available evidence.

The Dutch delegation set out its priorities for its upcoming EU presidency, which begins on 1 January. These include anti-microbial resistance, innovative medicine, and healthy foodstuffs.

[HCWS416]

Regulation of Health and Social Care Professionals

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer): The Government remain committed to reform of the regulation of health and—in England—social care professionals. The Government are grateful for the work of the Law Commissions of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in making recommendations and has been considering how best to take these forward.

Our priorities for reform in this area are better regulation, autonomy and cost-effectiveness while maintaining and improving our focus on public protection. We intend to consult on how these priorities can be taken forward, taking account of the Law Commissions' work on simplification and consistency and building on the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care's paper "Rethinking regulation" published in August 2015. We will present proposals that give the regulators the flexibility they need to respond to new challenges in the future without the need for further primary legislation.

We recognise the need for some immediate reform in this area. Subject to parliamentary time we plan to take forward reforms to regulators' rule-making process and the way that the larger regulators deal with concerns about their registrants. This will improve accountability and make the system more efficient and effective.

This Government remain committed to the principle of proportionate regulation of healthcare professionals. Having considered the arrangements already in place to ensure that public health specialists from backgrounds other than dentistry or medicine are appropriately registered and qualified, the Government do not consider that extending statutory regulation to this professional group is necessary. To this end, they will not be taking forward secondary legislation in this regard.

[HCWS417]

Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): NHS England will today publish the Mazars report on Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust. It will be available on the NHS England website at:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/south/our-work/ind-invest-reports>. I want to update the House on the action that the NHS will be taking in response.

The report describes, as I set out to the House on 10 December (*Official Report*, Col 1141-2), a lack of leadership, focus and sufficient time spent in the trust on carefully reporting and investigating unexpected deaths of mental health and learning disability service users. The report found that there had been no effective, systematic management and oversight of the reporting of deaths and the investigations that follow.

I am determined that we learn the lessons of this report, and use it to help build a culture in which failings in care form the basis for learning for organisations and for the system as a whole.

As a first step, I am announcing a number of measures today to address both the local issues at Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust and the systemic issues raised in the report:

The Care Quality Commission will undertake a focused inspection of southern healthcare early in the new year, looking in particular at the Trust's approach to the investigation of deaths. As part of this inspection, the CQC will assess the Trust's progress in implementing the action plan required by monitor and in making the improvements required during their last inspection, published in February of this year.

Avoidable mortality—understanding, action and improvement. The report reinforces the point that we need to do more across providers to understand and tackle the problem of avoidable mortality. Bruce Keogh and Mike Durkin are therefore writing to medical directors to describe the offer of help to providers (the mortality audit tool, case-note review methodology and reiterating the Government's commitment to delivering medical examiners) setting out how to use the audit tool to supply data to support understanding and improvement.

Learning Disability and mortality—The learning disability mortality review will support improvement by acting as a repository for anonymised reports pertaining to people with learning disabilities from a variety of sources, in particular anonymised copies of serious case reviews and Ombudsman Reports. This project will start in January 2016.

The Care Quality Commission will also be undertaking a wider review into the investigation of deaths in a sample of all types of NHS trust (acute, mental health and community trusts) in different parts of the country. As part of this review, we will assess whether opportunities for prevention of death have been missed, for example by late diagnosis of physical health problems.

I will continue to update the House on progress in each of these areas. I will place a copy of the report in the Library of both Houses once it has been published by NHS England.

[HCWS421]

Government's Mandate to NHS England 2016-17

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr Jeremy Hunt): Today the Government have laid before Parliament the mandate to NHS England for 2016-17. This mandate has been produced following public consultation, and will take effect from 1 April 2016.

The mandate sets the Government's objectives for NHS England, as well as its budget. In doing so, the mandate sets direction for the NHS, and helps ensure NHS England is accountable to Parliament and the public. In accordance with the Health and Social Care Act 2012, the Secretary of State must publish a mandate each year, to ensure that NHS England's objectives and any underpinning requirements remain up to date.

This mandate confirms this Government's commitment to increase spending on the NHS in real terms every year in this Parliament. The NHS will receive £10 billion more per year in real terms by 2020-21 than in 2014-15. This investment backs in full the NHS's own five year forward view and will mean patients receive seven-day health services, with hospitals providing the services people need at the weekend and people able to access a GP at evenings and weekends.

This mandate was produced following engagement with the statutory consultees, NHS England and Healthwatch England, and public consultation. We are grateful to those who responded. The public response

was significantly higher than in previous years with approximately 127,400 responses received, providing a rich source of feedback that has helped shape the final mandate. The Government's full response to the consultation, including a summary of what we heard and what we have changed in the mandate, has also been published today.

The new mandate sets out the priorities this Government believe are central to delivering the changes needed to ensure that free healthcare is always there whenever people need it. This mandate therefore sets NHS England the following objectives:

- to improve local and national health outcomes and reduce inequalities through better commissioning, supported by the new assessment framework for clinical commissioning groups;
- to help create the safest, highest quality health and care services seven days a week, including improved early diagnosis, services and outcomes for cancer patients;
- to balance the NHS budget and improve efficiency and productivity;
- to lead a step change in the NHS in preventing ill health and supporting people to live healthier lives, including improvement in the quality of care and support for people with dementia and increased public awareness;
- to maintain and improve performance against core standards;
- to improve out-of-hospital care, including reducing the health gap between people with mental health problems, learning disabilities and autism and the population as a whole; and
- to support research, innovation and growth.

We are also laying before Parliament today a revised mandate for 2015-16 to take account of changes to NHS England's budget, including additional funding announced in the spring Budget statement for children and young people's mental health, and the transfer of commissioning responsibility for 0-5 year olds to local authorities from 1 October 2015.

Copies of both documents will be available to hon. Members from the Vote Office and to noble Lords from the Printed Paper Office.

Attachments can be view online at: <https://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>.

[HCWS440]

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police and Crime Commissioners Public Consultation: Complaints

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): The Government are committed to building on the success of the police and crime commissioner (PCC) model by further strengthening their role; for example, the Government are proposing to enable PCCs to take on the governance of fire and rescue services as part of driving greater collaboration between emergency services. The Government intend to bring forward legislation to enable PCCs to take on responsibility for key parts of the police complaints system making that process more transparent and easier to navigate.

With PCCs taking on a greater role in the handling of complaints made against their police force, and with the responsibilities held by a PCC increasing, I believe the

time is right to amend the system for complaints made against a PCC. I have today published a consultation paper to seek views on proposals to improve the system for handling non-serious complaints made about a PCC. The consultation paper proposes:

Clarifying, through non-statutory guidance, what constitutes a complaint, ensuring police and crime panels (PCPs), who scrutinise the work of PCCs, take forward complaints about a PCC's conduct rather than their policy decisions.

Providing PCPs with greater investigatory powers to seek evidence pertinent to a complaint.

Clarifying, through non-statutory guidance, the parameters of "informal resolution" and setting out that, where agreement cannot be reached, it is open to PCPs to make recommendations on the expected level of behaviour of a PCC, and that they have powers to require the PCC to respond.

The consultation ends on 10 March 2016. Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the Library of the House.

The proposed changes to the complaints system ensure the fundamental principle of the PCC policy, that of accountability to the electorate, is not undermined. The proposals will improve the transparency of the complaints procedure and deliver more satisfactory outcomes for complainants.

[HCWS437]

G6: London

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): On 9 and 10 December 2015, the UK hosted the most recent meeting of the informal G6 group of Ministers of the Interior.

I chaired the meeting which was attended by the Interior Ministers of Germany (Mr Thomas de Maiziere), Spain (Mr Jorge Fernandez Diaz), France (Mr Bernard Cazeneuve), and Italy (Mr Angelino Alfano) and the Polish Ambassador to the UK (Mr Witold Sobkow). The United States of America were represented by the Attorney General (Ms Loretta E. Lynch) and the Secretary of Homeland Security (Mr Jeh Johnson). The European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship (Mr Dimitris Avramopoulos) also attended.

The meeting commenced on the evening of 9 December with a working dinner where we discussed the threat from Daesh/ISIL and how the Governments represented can collectively step up the fight against terrorism. Our discussion focused on the importance of sharing information, aviation security, and the practical steps we can take to counter extremism and radicalisation, including by working with and empowering communities. We had a very productive and informative discussion and there was collective agreement to publish a statement outlining our shared commitment to countering terrorism through a strong yet proportionate national and international response. The draft was produced overnight and agreed the following day when I introduced the statement to a group of selected journalists. The statement is available on gov.uk at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/g6-statement-commitment-to-fighting-terrorism>

On 10 December we reconvened at Lancaster House and began the day with a plenary discussion on migration and asylum. The discussion reflected on the unprecedented flows of people into Europe and the developments over the autumn, including the relocation mechanism, hotspots

and the importance of identification. The discussion also touched on the broader questions of how best we ensure asylum systems are helping the right people, addressing migratory flows at source and upstream and reducing the abuse of asylum systems.

The second plenary session of the day covered data protection and the importance of striking an appropriate balance between privacy and security. There was a discussion on the recent developments in data protection, including the judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union in the case of “Schrems” (C-362/14), the new EU data protection package and the role of communication service providers and how we can work effectively with them.

Over lunch, the discussion turned to modern slavery and I invited the UK’s independent anti-slavery commissioner, Kevin Hyland, to introduce the session by sharing his experiences on upstream prevention and innovative approaches in source countries. All those at the table shared their experiences of tackling modern slavery which varied in approach and success. The discussion then moved on to the question of working with business to eliminate demand in supply chains. In conclusion there was collective agreement on the importance of the sharing of best practice between countries to address this appalling issue.

The final plenary discussion of the day addressed the threat posed by illicit firearms and built on the recent discussions at the Justice and Home Affairs Council. The European Commission noted the UK’s longstanding contribution on this debate and gave a clear exposition of their approach to the firearms deactivation regulation and the amendments to the firearms directive. The discussion covered the benefits of enhanced information sharing and the importance of tracking the movement of firearms. I concluded the discussion by noting the collective agreement on the direction partners were taking to tackle the threat from illegal firearms and encouraged others to consider this issue and share their experience.

The informal chairmanship of the G6 group will now pass to Italy, who will host the next meeting.

[HCWS425]

Independent Child Trafficking Advocates Trial: Government Report

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): Section 48(7) of the Modern Slavery Act 2015 requires the Government to lay before Parliament a report setting out the steps they propose to take in relation to independent child trafficking advocates, within nine months of Royal Assent of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has today laid before Parliament our report outlining the Government’s next steps. We have also published the independent evaluation of the child trafficking advocate trial conducted by the University of Bedfordshire. Our report, along with the independent evaluation, will be published on www.gov.uk. Copies of the Government report will be available in the Vote Office. A copy of the independent evaluation will be available in the Library of the House

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Barnardo’s, which provided the child trafficking advocates service during the trial, the University of Bedfordshire for undertaking the evaluation of the trial and the 23 local authorities and all the other parties involved who played such a significant role in supporting the trial. Child victims of trafficking are among the most vulnerable in our society. This report sets out our response to the evaluation of the independent child trafficking advocates trial and what steps we intend to take to ensure trafficked children get the protection they need.

I would also like to thank my parliamentary colleagues for their ongoing advice and support in this area and I look forward to your continued support as we take this important work forward.

[HCWS435]

Overseas Domestic Workers

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley): I am today publishing the independent review of the overseas domestic worker visa. The Government commissioned the report in March 2015 as part of their commitment to stop modern slavery in all its forms. James Ewins QC was asked to undertake an assessment of how far existing arrangements for the admission of overseas domestic workers are effective in protecting such workers from abuse and exploitation, and to make recommendations. The Government have now received the completed report, for which it thanks Mr Ewins, and is considering carefully the recommendations which it makes. The Government’s response to the report will be announced in due course.

The report can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/home-office> and a copy will be placed in the Library of the House.

[HCWS427]

Police Grant Report England and Wales 2016-17

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): I have today placed in the Library my proposals for the aggregate amount of grant to local policing bodies in England and Wales for 2016-17, for the approval of the House. Copies are also available in the Vote Office.

On 25 November, the Chancellor announced that police spending would be protected in real terms over the spending review period, when precept is taken into account. This is an increase of up to £900 million in cash terms by 2019-20.

The Chancellor’s statement reinforces this Government’s commitment to protect the public. That has been true over the last five years and remains the case for the coming Parliament. At the same time as protecting the overall spending envelope for the police, the Government committed to finishing the job of police reform.

Since 2010 we have seen some of the biggest changes to policing in a generation. Crime is down by over a quarter. There is significantly greater local accountability and transparency and police leaders have taken the

opportunity to radically reform the way they deliver services to the public. Police officers have been taken out of back-office roles and resources focused on front-line delivery, putting officers back on the streets where the public expect them to be. Police forces are working more closely than ever before to reduce costs and duplication, and have started to work more closely with other emergency services through co-location and collaboration in areas such as fire and mental health.

But as Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary has set out, there remain further efficiencies to be made from improved and better use of IT, from greater collaboration between forces and with other public services, and from improving workforce productivity. Better, more collaborative procurement alone can save the police up to £350 million in real terms by 2019-20. We trust that police and crime commissioners (PCCs) and chief constables will do everything in their power to continue to drive those efficiencies, safeguard the quality of policing and continue to reduce crime.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) will today publish proposals for the distribution of funding to English local authorities for 2016-17. A further £4.2 million of council tax freeze grant funding, previously paid to local policing bodies by DCLG, will be paid by the Home Office in 2016-17. This follows the permanent transfer of £500 million of other legacy council tax grants and £3 billion of "formula funding" from DCLG to the Home Office in previous years, reflecting our ambition to simplify police funding arrangements over this Parliament.

The Welsh Government set out their proposals for the allocation of funding in 2016-17 for local policing bodies in Wales.

The overall settlement will increase counter-terrorism police funding in real terms to £670 million and includes extra investment to continue the job of police reform. It provides transformation funding to develop and deliver specialist capabilities such as those required to tackle cybercrime and other emerging changes in crime, and enable a major uplift in firearms capability and capacity so that we can respond quickly and forcefully to a firearms attack. By protecting overall police spending, we will be able to deliver these changes and we will do so ensuring local identity and accountability is not lost in the process.

This settlement also includes within it the police share of the £1 billion investment costs of the emergency services network (ESN), demonstrating the importance the Government place on investing in ESN's future capability and confidence in the substantial financial savings it will deliver.

For 2016-17, direct resource funding for each PCC, including precept, will be protected at flat cash levels, assuming that precept income is increased to the maximum amount available. This means that no PCC will face a reduction in cash funding next year compared to this year, and the majority will see marginal increases in their spending power.

I have set out below how we propose to allocate the police funding settlement between the different funding streams and between police force areas for 2016-17.

Table 1: The 2015 spending review settlement for the police

	15-16* (£m)	16-17 (£m)	17-18 (£m)	18-19 (£m)	19-20 (£m)	Change (£m)	Cash change (£m)	Real change (£m)
Government funding (excl CT)	8,271	8,378	8,497	8,631	8,785	514	6.2%	-1.4%
o/w Home Office	8,099	8,204	8,321	8,453	8,604	506	6.2%	-1.4%
o/w DCLG	37	37	37	37	37	0	0.0%	-7.2%
o/w Welsh Government	135	137	139	141	143	8	6.2%	-1.4%
Precept	3,105	3,194	3,286	3,379	3,474	369	11.9%	3.8%
Total	11,376	11,572	11,783	12,010	12,259	883	7.8%	0.0%

*Central Government funding includes Airwave which has been brought into the police settlement and council tax freeze grant amounts which were not known at the time of the 2015-16 annual police settlement.

Table 2: Police revenue funding 2016-17

Police funding	16-17 £m
Central Government funding*	8,995
o/w CT Police Grant**	640
o/w Airwave	204
o/w Police Private Finance Initiatives	73
o/w Legacy Council Tax Grants	545
Overall core Government settlement funding	7,534
Reallocations	218
o/w Direct Entry	4.6
o/w Emergency Services Network	80
o/w Independent Police Complaints Commission (for the transfer of integrity functions)	32
o/w Innovation Fund	55
o/w Major Programmes (HOB and NPDP)	21.8
o/w Special Grant	25
Transformation Fund	76
Total direct government funding	7,239
Government formula funding	7,061
cash change	-41
cash change percentage from 15-16	-0.6%
real change percentage	-2.3 %
National and international Capital City Grants	178
o/w City of London Police	4.5
o/w Metropolitan Police	173.6
Precept	3,194
Overall resource funding***	10,978
cash change	51
cash change percentage	0.5%
real cut	-1.2%

* includes £14 million baseline adjustment for NCA in 2016-17. A separate baseline transfer has been applied for HMIC.

** Additional capital of £30 million will be provided for CT policing.

***Comprises formula funding, NICC grants, legacy council tax grants and precept

Detail of Police Transformation Funds (totals indicative)	76.4
Transformation Fund	37.8
o/w Firearms	34
o/w Digital justice (CJS)/digital investigations (DII)	4.6

Provisional force-level allocations of these grants—excluding counter-terrorism police grant—for each force area in England and Wales for 2016-17 are set out in Table 4. Further detail is set out below.

Counter-terrorism police funding

I will continue to allocate specific funding for counter-terrorism policing over the course of the spending review period to ensure that the police have the capabilities to

deal with the terrorist threats that we face. The settlement will increase counter-terrorism police funding in real terms to £640 million revenue. Additional capital of £30 million will be provided.

Police and crime commissioners will receive full counter-terrorism funding allocations in the new year. For security reasons these allocations will not be available in the public domain.

BASELINE ADJUSTMENTS

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)

We will provide £9.2 million to HMIC to continue its programme of thematic inspections and more wide-ranging PEEL inspections. The PEEL assessments are strong evidence of how HMIC “shines a light” on policing outcomes and value for money. They give the public a clear, independent view of the quality of policing in their local area. The public can use this information to challenge their local force and through their police and crime commissioner, hold it to account. From 2016-17 this funding will form a permanent baseline transfer to HMIC.

In addition to ensuring that no force area will face a cash reduction in direct resource funding, I have also made funding available for a number of key priorities, set out below.

REALLOCATIONS

Emergency Services Network (ESN)

A total of £80 million will be reallocated for ESN which will give all officers priority access to 4G mobile broadband data on a single network, including in some areas where it is currently not available at all, allowing them to get even more benefits from mobile working than many forces are already achieving. This investment will bring productivity and operational benefits as well as substantial savings to the taxpayer of around £400 million per year, with the police accounting for around £260 million of that saving.

Major Programmes

This year we will provide £21.8 million from the police settlement to support the continuing development of Home Office biometrics, a transformation programme looking to provide a single platform for all users—police, immigration and border, counter-terrorism and Her Majesty's Passport Office—for all three biometric platforms (fingerprint, DNA and face), and the national police database programme that will develop a new national platform whose scope is likely to include that of the current police national computer, police national database and automatic number plate recognition systems.

Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC)

This is the third year of funding for the expansion of the IPCC to investigate all serious and sensitive allegations involving the police. At the midway point in 2015-16 the IPCC have opened more independent investigations than it delivered in the whole of 2014-15. In 2016-17 I am providing £32 million from the police settlement to allow the IPCC to expand and focus on investigating the most serious and sensitive cases.

College of Policing

£4.6 million will be given to the College of Policing to deliver direct entry schemes. These schemes aim to attract, select and train exceptional people who have the potential to become senior leaders in policing. This will

widen the talent pool from which police leaders can be drawn, open up police culture to new influences and foster an environment where challenge and innovation are welcome. Next year the College of Policing will be opening a new direct entry route in to policing at the rank of inspector to further open up policing ranks and encourage people from different stages in their careers to consider policing.

Police Special Grant

This is the second year we have decided to provide funding from the police settlement for the discretionary police special grant contingency fund, which supports police force areas facing significant and exceptional events which might otherwise place them at financial risk. In 2016-17 I am providing £25 million from the police settlement for police special grant.

Police Innovation Fund

I will continue to promote innovation, collaboration and improved efficiency by allocating £55 million to the police innovation fund for 2016-17. This year, we want to reward more breakthrough ideas than ever before. We will continue to fund high-quality, large-scale, “implementation-ready” bids to bring innovation to life more quickly. But we are also looking for ideas for smaller scale, early-stage, “proof-of-concept” bids to make ideas a reality, at scale and pace.

POLICE TRANSFORMATION FUND

New Transformation Funding

After consideration, we are allocating £38 million new transformation funding to incentivise and facilitate transformation in policing to invest in cross-force specialist capabilities, to exploit new technology and to improve how we respond to changing threats. Further details will be provided in the new year.

Firearms capability and capacity

We will provide £34 million to enable a national uplift in armed policing capability and capacity to respond more quickly and effectively to a firearms attack. This will be distributed via the counter-terrorism policing grant.

Digital justice and digital investigations

I have decided to provide £4.6 million for policing to begin the critical work of setting up a comprehensive, joined up programme of digital transformation. My priorities for digital policing reform can be divided into three component parts: public contact, digital investigation and intelligence and digital first. This reallocation will ensure these are established as funded programmes that can begin to deliver tangible results in 2016. Joining these together will not only ensure a consistent approach, but will also provide better value for money through economies of scale.

OTHER FUNDING

National and International Capital City Grant

The Metropolitan Police, through the Greater London Authority, will receive national and international city (NICC) funding worth £174 million, and the City of London Police will also receive increased NICC funding worth £4.5 million. This is in recognition of the unique and additional demands of policing the capital city, and also ensures that total direct resource funding to both forces is similarly protected.

Council tax referendum principles

As announced as part of the spending review, additional flexibility will be given to the 10 PCCs in England with the lowest precept levels each year (the lower quartile), so that they can raise their precept by up to £5 per year per band D household. Other PCCs in England will face a 2.0% referendum threshold each year.

The PCCs to receive this £5 flexibility in 2016-17 are Northumbria, West Midlands, West Yorkshire, Sussex, Essex, Kent, Hertfordshire, South Yorkshire, Greater Manchester and Cheshire.

The Communities Secretary will announce the council tax referendum principles for local authorities in England in 2016-17 shortly. After considering any representations, he will set out the final principles in a report to the House and seek approval for these in parallel with the final local government finance report. Council tax in Wales is the responsibility of Welsh Ministers.

Legacy Council Tax Grants

In 2016-17 we will provide council tax freeze grant to PCCs in England relating to the 2011-12, 2013-14, 2014-15 and 2015-16 council tax freeze schemes and local council tax support (LCTS) funding previously paid to PCCs in England by DCLG. This will total £507 million in 2016-17.

The Common Council of the City of London (on behalf of the City of London Police) and the Greater London Authority (on behalf of the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime) will also receive council tax freeze grant relating to the 2011-12 freeze grant scheme. The Greater London Authority will also receive an amount for the 2013-14, 2014-15 and 2015-16 schemes. These sums will continue to be paid from outside of the police funding settlement by DCLG. There will be no new freeze grant schemes in 2016-17.

Police Capital

I still intend to allocate the majority of capital funding directly to local policing bodies. Like last year all local policing bodies will receive the same percentage change in capital grant. I will continue to maintain a capital contingency. Indicative figures are set out in Table 3, and I will consider whether further reallocations are required.

Table 3: Police Capital

2015-16 Police Capital	£m
Police Capital Grant	64.5
Police Special Grant Capital	1
NPAS	16.5
Total	82

Table 4: Provisional revenue allocations for England and Wales 2016-17

Local Policing Body	HO core (including Rule 1) £m	Welsh Top-up	Welsh Government	Ex-DCLG Formula Funding	Legacy Council Tax Grants (total from HO) £m
Avon and Somerset	105.0	-	-	56.5	14.7
Bedfordshire	40.3	-	-	23.3	4.6
Cambridgeshire	48.5	-	-	24.4	6.5
Cheshire	61.5	-	-	44.8	8.3

Table 4: Provisional revenue allocations for England and Wales 2016-17

Local Policing Body	HO core (including Rule 1) £m	Welsh Top-up	Welsh Government	Ex-DCLG Formula Funding	Legacy Council Tax Grants (total from HO) £m
City of London	18.4	-	-	33.6	0.1
Cleveland	46.2	-	-	38.5	7.7
Cumbria	28.7	-	-	30.8	4.8
Derbyshire	62.1	-	-	37.7	8.7
Devon and Cornwall	102.7	-	-	63.1	15.5
Dorset	41.2	-	-	17.3	7.9
Durham	42.7	-	-	37.0	6.1
Dyfed-Powys	32.1	5.1	12.9	-	-
Essex	102.8	-	-	55.9	13.1
Gloucestershire	34.4	-	-	19.5	6.1
Greater London Authority	861.5	-	-	749.8	119.7
Greater Manchester	226.6	-	-	181.4	25.7
Gwent	42.4	-	30.1	-	-
Hampshire	120.0	-	-	63.1	12.9
Hertfordshire	71.4	-	-	36.4	10.2
Humberside	67.2	-	-	46.6	10.0
Kent	106.3	-	-	66.6	13.3
Lancashire	100.6	-	-	79.2	12.8
Leicestershire	65.3	-	-	39.6	8.9
Lincolnshire	38.4	-	-	20.3	6.8
Merseyside	122.5	-	-	112.8	15.6
Norfolk	50.2	-	-	28.8	9.3
North Wales	46.3	4.9	21.6	-	-
North Yorkshire	41.7	-	-	27.0	7.9
Northamptonshire	43.2	-	-	24.2	6.6
Northumbria	110.1	-	-	107.4	8.2
Nottinghamshire	77.9	-	-	48.1	9.7
South Wales	87.5	-	72.2	-	-
South Yorkshire	100.6	-	-	77.5	10.9
Staffordshire	66.5	-	-	39.9	12.0
Suffolk	40.7	-	-	22.9	6.8
Surrey	62.2	-	-	29.2	9.2
Sussex	97.8	-	-	53.9	13.2
Thames Valley	141.2	-	-	73.9	15.3
Warwickshire	31.0	-	-	17.4	5.2
West Mercia	66.3	-	-	43.4	12.0
West Midlands	250.8	-	-	180.3	19.0
West Yorkshire	171.5	-	-	129.3	16.7
Wiltshire	37.5	-	-	20.7	5.2
Total England and Wales	4,112.0	9.9	136.8	2,802.2	507.4

Table 5: Change in total direct resource funding*

Force Area	2015-16 £m	2016-17 £m	Cash change	
			£m	%
Avon and Somerset	269.3	270.7	1.4	0.5%
Bedfordshire	99.6	100.0	0.4	0.4%

Table 5: Change in total direct resource funding*

Force Area	2015-16	2016-17	Cash change	
	£m	£m	£m	%
Cambridgeshire	128.1	128.9	0.8	0.6%
Cheshire	169.5	170.9	1.4	0.8%
City of London	55.4	56.8	1.4	2.5%
Cleveland	122.3	122.5	0.3	0.2%
Cumbria	99.2	99.7	0.5	0.5%
Derbyshire	160.7	161.4	0.7	0.4%
Devon and Cornwall	278.0	279.5	1.5	0.5%
Dorset	118.4	119.3	1.0	0.8%
Durham	112.5	112.7	0.2	0.2%
Dyfed-Powys	93.3	94.1	0.8	0.8%
Essex	260.8	263.4	2.5	1.0%
Gloucestershire	104.3	105.1	0.8	0.8%
Greater London Authority	2,517.4	2,522.4	5.0	0.2%
Greater Manchester	541.2	542.9	1.7%	0.3%
Gwent	117.8	118.5	0.7	0.6%
Hampshire	299.1	300.6	1.5	0.5%
Hertfordshire	181.1	182.9	1.8	1.0%
Humberside	169.4	169.8	0.5	0.3%
Kent	273.1	275.5	2.4	0.9%
Lancashire	258.9	259.5	0.6	0.2%
Leicestershire	167.7	168.5	0.7	0.4%
Lincolnshire	108.4	109.1	0.7	0.7%
Merseyside	307.0	307.0	0.0	0.0%
Norfolk	145.5	146.5	1.0	0.7%
North Wales	139.8	141.1	1.3	0.9%
North Yorkshire	137.1	138.2	1.1	0.8%
Northamptonshire	119.2	119.9	0.7	0.6%
Northumbria	259.5	260.3	0.8	0.3%
Nottinghamshire	188.9	189.5	0.6	0.3%
South Wales	255.1	256.5	1.5	0.6%
South Yorkshire	239.1	240.0	0.9	0.4%
Staffordshire	176.7	177.6	0.8	0.5%
Suffolk	110.9	111.6	0.6	0.6%
Surrey	205.0	207.1	2.1	1.0%
Sussex	249.7	252.1	2.5	1.0%
Thames Valley	369.7	371.9	2.2	0.6%
Warwickshire	89.5	90.1	0.6	0.7%
West Mercia	198.5	199.8	1.3	0.6%
West Midlands	522.8	524.0	1.2	0.2%
West Yorkshire	404.6	406.3	1.7	0.4%
Wiltshire	102.8	103.5	0.6	0.6%
Total	10,927.0	10,977.8	50.8	0.5%

*This includes all formula grant, NICC grants and legacy council tax grants and police precept. This assumes that PCCs in England increase their precept to the maximum referendum limit in 2016-17, PCCs in Wales raise council tax by 2% and tax base growth of 0.5% across England and Wales.

[HCWS426]

Independent Police Complaints Commission

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): Today, I am launching a public consultation on reforming the governance structure of the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC).

The consultation proposals form part of the Government's continuing programme of policing reforms, including changes to the police complaints and disciplinary systems.

Public confidence in the police is the basis for our long-established model of policing by consent. The IPCC plays a critical role in securing and maintaining public confidence, providing independent oversight of the police complaints system and investigating the most serious and sensitive matters involving the police. I am committed to ensuring that the IPCC has the resources and powers it needs to perform these vital functions.

In March 2013, I announced that resources would be transferred to the IPCC to enable it to expand to undertake many more independent investigations. This major change programme is progressing well and in 2014-15 the IPCC started more than twice the number of investigations it began in the previous year. The IPCC are taking on more again this year, while concluding more cases than ever before.

On 12 March 2015 I gave a statement to the House in which I set out a number of radical reforms on police integrity which included giving the IPCC new powers and strengthening its role as an independent oversight body. The Government will be legislating for these changes in the forthcoming policing Bill.

As part of this package of reforms, I also asked the IPCC to consider reforms to its governance arrangements and structure to help it, as a significantly larger organisation, to deliver more cases and to increase public confidence in the reformed police complaints system.

Following the publication of the IPCC's proposals in August, I invited Sheila Drew Smith OBE, a member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, to undertake an independent review of the IPCC's proposals, in particular to consider their likely impact on public confidence and, as appropriate, provide recommendations for alternative reforms to governance structures.

Today I am publishing Sheila Drew Smith's report alongside the public consultation on the Government's proposed reforms to the IPCC's governance. I am proposing that the existing commission model should be replaced by a single Crown appointee, supported by a unitary board, providing one single, clear line of decision-making in the organisation from top to bottom. These changes, and others set out in the consultation, are designed to deliver a more capable, more resilient IPCC, with clear lines of accountability and decision-making, and will help ensure that complaints made against the police are responded to in a way that builds trust and public confidence, and allows lessons to be learned.

I would like to record my thanks to the IPCC and to Sheila Drew Smith for their efforts in considering these important changes.

The public consultation will run until 28 January 2015. Following the publication of a response to the consultation, the Government intend to legislate as soon as practicable. Copies of the consultation document and of Sheila Drew Smith's report will be placed in the Library of the House and also published alongside the public consultation via the Home Office pages on the gov.uk website.

I hope that those with an interest in the IPCC will take the time to respond to the consultation.

[HCWS424]

JUSTICE

HMCTS

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara): I will today publish the Government response to the consultation on proposals to increase court and tribunal fees. The consultation paper was published on 22 July 2015 and the consultation closed on 15 September 2015.

The Government announced in the spending review that it will be investing £700 million in reforming the courts and tribunals during the next five years. This crucial investment will allow us to modernise and improve the service we provide to the public.

There remains a need to ensure the courts are not placing too great a burden on the taxpayer. Courts and tribunals in England and Wales cost £1.7 billion in 2014-15, but we only recovered £700 million in income. That is a net cost to the taxpayer of around £1 billion.

It is therefore right that we ask for a greater contribution from court users who can afford to pay more. We have balanced this need alongside the responses we received to our consultation and decided to:

Implement fee increases of 10% across the range of civil proceedings, including enforcement proceedings, determination of costs proceedings, and civil business in the magistrates courts.

Introduce fees for the first time in the General Regulatory Chamber and the tax chamber of the First-tier Tribunal and in the Upper Tribunal Tax and Chancery Chamber.

Keep the maximum fee cap in money claims at £10,000. A number of consultees were concerned about the proposal to raise the cap to £20,000. We accept that it is too soon to understand the full impact of the first round of fee increases introduced in March this year. We will therefore not implement the further increase at this stage, but keep this option under review.

Introduce a fee of £20 for an appeal against a financial penalty in the tax chamber. Some respondents felt that it was unfair to charge an issue fee of £100 for an appeal against a financial penalty of £100 or less imposed by HM Revenue and Customs, so we have decided to introduce a lower fee than initially proposed.

Introduce fees of £100 to issue proceedings in the Property Chamber and £200 for a hearing. There will be an exception for proceedings relating to rent levels and pitch fee applications, where a lower fee of £20 will apply. This will mean fees are more proportionate to the amount in dispute. We will not implement the higher fees for leasehold enfranchisement proceedings that were proposed in the consultation paper at this stage, so these proceedings will be subject to the standard fees in the chamber.

Defer any decision on whether to introduce a fee for bringing an appeal against a decision of the Information Commissioner until the Independent Commission on Freedom of Information reports next year.

HMCTS's remissions scheme will apply to all of the new and increased fees, with the exception of those in the Immigration and Asylum Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal where there is a separate exemptions policy to protect vulnerable users. As proposed in the consultation document, we will introduce an additional exemption for those whose humanitarian protection or refugee status is at risk of being revoked.

Fees are never popular, but they are necessary if we are to reduce the burden of the courts and tribunals on the taxpayer.

We have sought to protect the vulnerable at every stage. We have also listened very carefully to concerns raised during the consultation and modified our proposals accordingly.

This balanced package will put the courts and tribunals on a more sustainable footing as we create a modern efficient service, fit for the 21st century.

Full details of how the Government intend to take forward these proposals are set out in the consultation response document which has been published on the gov.uk website.

[HCWS438]

Insolvency Litigation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Dominic Raab): My noble friend the Minister of State for Civil Justice (Lord Faulks QC) has made the following written statement.

The Government have made a priority of addressing the high costs of civil litigation in England and Wales.

To that end, part 2 of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act 2012 reforms the operation of no win no fee conditional fee agreements. Those reforms came into effect generally in April 2013 but were delayed in respect of insolvency proceedings.

After further consideration the Government have decided that the no win no fee reforms should now be applied to insolvency proceedings. The provisions will come into force for these cases in April 2016.

It has already been announced that there will be a post-implementation review of the LASPO Act part 2 reforms between April 2016 and April 2018. The review will take place towards the end of that period. The review under section 48 of the Act in relation to mesothelioma cases will also take place as part of the post-implementation review.

[HCWS420]

Prisons

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Michael Gove): I will today publish the Government's response to the Harris review into self-inflicted deaths in custody of 18 to 24-year-olds.

The Government are grateful to Lord Harris of Haringey and the Harris review panel for their report on this important review.

We must never simply accept self-harm and self-inflicted deaths as an inevitable feature of prison life. Reducing the rates of violence, self-harm and deaths in custody is a priority for the National Offender Management Service. I have already made clear that our prison system needs urgent reform. I have also asked Charlie Taylor to review the current system of youth justice. We will be setting out more detail on our plans for reform in due course.

The Government's response to the Harris review sets out the wide range of action we are taking to reduce self-harm and self-inflicted deaths in custody, including giving greater support to those with mental health vulnerabilities who come into contact with the criminal justice system and improving the management of "safer cells" in prisons. We are also increasing the number of prison staff. Over the last year we recruited 2,340 prison officers, a net increase of 540.

The Harris review, and our response, will help to address the serious problems of self-harm and self-inflicted deaths as we develop our wider reforms to make prisons places of decency, hope and rehabilitation.

The response will be laid today and copies will be available in the Vote and Printed Paper Offices. The response will also be published online at: www.gov.uk

[HCWS419]

Ex-armed Services Personnel and the Criminal Justice System

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning): I am today publishing an update on the progress that has been made in addressing the rehabilitation needs of ex-armed services personnel in the criminal justice system (CJS), as agreed by the Ministry of Justice in the Government response to the independent review into former service personnel in the CJS by Stephen Phillips QC MP, published in December 2014.

I reiterate my belief that we have an obligation to ensure those who serve in the armed forces are not disadvantaged as a result of their service. We are clear that all offenders, including those with a military history, should have the support they need to turn their lives around and stop offending.

The key to providing better services to ex-service personnel who find themselves in the CJS is to make sure that we identify them. I am pleased to see that the early data collected by the liaison and diversion services programme and the basic custody screening tool at prison reception, show that the number of ex-service personnel in the criminal justice system continues to remain small.

We are also working to consolidate our understanding of the needs of this group of offenders. We published two pieces of analyses last year, which found that, in general, the needs of ex-service personnel are broadly similar to those of other offenders, although specific areas of need may be more prevalent. For example, ex-service personnel had similar levels of reported general mental health problems to other prisoners, but may have greater levels of need in depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. A fully rolled-out liaison and diversion service will provide a real opportunity to meet the mental health needs, as well as other vulnerabilities, of ex-service personnel, and we will continue to drive this.

I am pleased that the covenant reference group identified support to ex-service personnel in the CJS as one of the funding priorities for the £10 million armed forces covenant fund 2015-16. The Government have also awarded £1 million to Care after Combat and £1.6 million to Skillforce to support their work with ex-service personnel in prisons and police custody.

The full update can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/former-members-of-the-armed-forces-and-the-criminal-justice-system> and copies will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS412]

PRIME MINISTER

Muslim Brotherhood Review

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I have today laid before both Houses the main findings of the internal review I commissioned in the last Parliament, to improve the Government's understanding of the Muslim

Brotherhood; establish whether the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology or activities, or those of individual members or affiliates, put at risk, damaged, or risked damaging the UK's national interests; and where appropriate inform policy.

The review involved substantial research and wide consultation, including Muslim Brotherhood representatives in the UK and overseas, and an open invitation to other interested parties to submit written contributions.

It is a complex subject: the Muslim Brotherhood comprises both a transnational network, with links in the UK, and national organisations in and outside the Islamic world. The movement is deliberately opaque, and habitually secretive.

Since the authors completed their initial research in 2014, and during the course of the Government's examination of the findings, further allegations of violence carried out by supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood have surfaced, which the Government will continue to investigate, taking action as appropriate.

As the Muslim Brotherhood continues to evolve so must our understanding of it. The findings have revealed much that we did not know but work will continue to ensure we keep up to date with developments.

The Government consider the following the most important findings.

The Muslim Brotherhood's foundational texts call for the progressive moral purification of individuals and Muslim societies and their eventual political unification in a caliphate under Sharia law. To this day the Muslim Brotherhood characterises western societies and liberal Muslims as decadent and immoral. It can be seen primarily as a political project.

Parts of the Muslim Brotherhood have a highly ambiguous relationship with violent extremism. Both as an ideology and as a network it has been a rite of passage for some individuals and groups who have gone on to engage in violence and terrorism. It has stated its opposition to al-Qaeda (AQ) but it has never credibly denounced the use made by terrorist organisations of the work of Sayyid Qutb, one of the Brotherhood's most prominent ideologues. Individuals closely associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in the UK have supported suicide bombing and other attacks in Israel by Hamas, an organisation whose military wing has been proscribed in the UK since 2001 as a terrorist organisation, and which describes itself as the Palestinian chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood. Moreover, despite the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's public condemnation of violence in 2012-13 and afterwards, some of their supporters have been involved in violent exchanges with the security forces and other groups. Media reports and credible academic studies indicate that in the past 12 months a minority of Muslim Brotherhood supporters in Egypt have engaged alongside other Islamists in violent acts. Some senior leaders have publicly reiterated the Muslim Brotherhood's commitment to non-violence, but others have failed to renounce the calls for retribution in some recent Muslim Brotherhood statements.

Muslim Brotherhood-associated and influenced groups in the UK have at times had a significant influence on national organisations which have claimed to represent Muslim communities—and on that basis have had a dialogue with Government—charities and some mosques.

But they have also sometimes characterised the UK as fundamentally hostile to Muslim faith and identity; and expressed support for terrorist attacks conducted by Hamas.

Aspects of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology and activities therefore run counter to British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, equality and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. The Muslim Brotherhood is not the only movement that promotes values which appear intolerant of equality and freedom of faith and belief. Nor is it the only movement or group dedicated in theory to revolutionising societies and changing existing ways of life. But I have made clear this Government's determination to reject intolerance, and to counter not just violent Islamist extremism, but also to tackle those who create the conditions for it to flourish.

The main findings of the review support the conclusion that membership of, association with, or influence by the Muslim Brotherhood should be considered as a possible indicator of extremism.

We will therefore keep under review the views that are promoted and activities that are undertaken by Muslim Brotherhood associates in the UK, in Arabic as well as English. We will consider whether any action under the counter-extremism strategy or as part of our wider work may be appropriate, including action in line with the new engagement policy the Government will develop to ensure central and local government do not inadvertently provide legitimacy or a platform for extremists. We will challenge extremists' poisonous narratives and promote positive alternatives that show vulnerable people that there are better ways to get on in life.

We will continue to:

refuse visas to members and associates of the Muslim Brotherhood who are on record as having made extremist comments, where this would be conducive to the public good and in line with our existing policy guidelines and approach to extremism in all forms;

seek to ensure charities that have links to the Muslim Brotherhood are not misused to support or finance the Muslim Brotherhood instead of their lawful charitable purpose; strengthen liaison arrangements with international partners to ensure that allegations of illicit funding or other misuse of charities are robustly investigated and appropriate action taken;

enforce the EU asset freeze on Hamas; and

keep under review whether the views and activities of the Muslim Brotherhood meet the legal test for proscription.

We will also intensify scrutiny of the views and activities that Muslim Brotherhood members, associates and affiliates—whether based in the UK or elsewhere—promote overseas. As our counter-extremism strategy makes clear, insights from our overseas posts will help the Government better understand drivers, networks and ideologies. We will continue to consult, and share information and analysis with, Governments in the middle east and north Africa as appropriate. We will then take further decisions and actions as needed.

[HCWS418]

TRANSPORT

Transport Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): I attended the final formal Transport Council meeting under the Luxembourg presidency (the presidency) on 10 December 2015.

The Council held a policy debate on social aspects in road transport, which also covered broader market objectives. Several member states made it clear that they could not support further market liberalisation without a greater harmonisation of social conditions. However I joined others in calling for a more balanced framework to ensure that social measures do not create barriers to the freedom to provide services. During the debate two member states called for an extension of existing licensing rules to bring vehicles below 3.5 tonnes into scope, in order to ensure fair competition. I flagged significant reservations on any such extension due to our concerns over the likely rise in enforcement costs and potential negative impact on road safety.

Under any other business, there were several aviation items, including: a presentation from the Commission on its proposed aviation package, published on 7 December, which aims to enhance competitiveness, improve growth and maintain high EU standards in safety, security, environment, social provisions and passenger rights; a presentation from the Netherlands on the investigation into the crash of flight MH17; and information from Bulgaria, together with other member states in the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) central European rotation group, on the 2016 election to the ICAO Council.

The Commission also gave a brief presentation on its state of the energy union report encouraging further member state action, in particular calling on member states to start drafting their national energy and climate plans, and updated member states on transport security following recent tragic events. The presidency encouraged member states to ratify the Luxembourg protocol, relating to the financing and purchasing of rail rolling stock, and finally, the Netherlands outlined their transport priorities for their upcoming presidency which include taking forward negotiations on aviation proposals, opening trilogue discussions with the European Parliament on the ports services regulation and completing them on the fourth railway package, and promoting developments in innovative technology.

Following formal Council business I attended the lunchtime debate on road safety, which discussed ways in which to reduce fatalities and serious injuries across the EU, and held bilateral meetings with my French and Polish counterparts, as well as thanking the Luxembourg Minister for their very competent presidency.

[HCWS414]

Ministerial Cars

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): I am publishing today details of the charges incurred by Departments for the use of official Government cars provided to Ministers by the Government Car Service (GCS) during the financial years 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15.

Charges to Departments have not increased since 2010. The GCS has reduced its running costs by over two thirds since the start of the reform programme and we are committed to continue reducing the cost to the taxpayer of the provision of secure ministerial cars. As a result of a series of changes, including closure of the Government mail service, overall operating costs have fallen from £21.617 million in 2010-11 to £6.325 million in 2014-15.

The charges recorded in this statement reflect the service model which came into effect in April 2012. This provides Departmental Pool Cars which are a shared resource for a Department to use as efficiently as possible. In addition, the Car Service offers a small pre-bookable service utilising any spare capacity.

These charges do not necessarily reflect the total spend on car services for Ministers as some Departments have arrangements with other providers. The Chancellor uses the Government Car Service to supply a driver and vehicle for his protection package whereas the Prime Minister, Home, Foreign, Defence and Northern Ireland Secretaries of State use the Metropolitan Police.

Attachments can be viewed online at: <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>

[HCWS436]

Walking and Cycling Investment Strategy

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): I am today publishing the Government's timetable for the development of the first cycling and walking investment strategy (CWIS).

In February 2015, the Government introduced a duty through the Infrastructure Act 2015 for the Secretary of State for Transport to bring forward a cycling and

walking investment strategy in England. In July, part 2 of the Infrastructure Act (cycling and walking investment strategies) was enacted.

The document, setting the first cycling and walking investment strategy, sets a long-term vision for walking and cycling to 2040 through a series of consecutive five-year strategies. Our starting principle for the development of the investment strategy is a desire for cycling and walking to become the norm for short journeys or as part of a longer journey in places that are designed first and foremost for people on foot or bicycle.

The document also sets out the elements that will form the first investment strategy, which will be a step towards delivering our manifesto commitment to double cycling—an ambition document and statement of funds available, governance structures, a performance monitoring framework, and a national walking and cycling infrastructure plan study. I plan to undertake public consultation on the draft first CWIS next spring with publication following in the summer.

I will be placing a copy of this statement and the document "Setting the First Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy" in the Libraries of both Houses.

Attachments can be viewed online at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenstatements>.

[HCWS413]

Petitions

Thursday 17 December 2015

PRESENTED PETITION

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Tax Credits

The petition of residents of the Wakefield constituency,

Declares that the petitioners are strongly opposed to the Government's proposed cuts to tax credits which will cost working families up to £1,300 a year.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons reconsiders the proposals and stop the tax credit cuts.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P001666]

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

OBSERVATIONS

Treatment of West African Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research personnel in Nigeria

The petition of Geoffrey Moffat,

Declares that the petitioner carried out two tours of duty as a field officer in Nigeria between 1957 and 1961 with the quasi-government organisation W.A.I.T.R (West African Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research); further that the petitioner believes he was treated unjustly and that he should have not been recruited in the manner he was; further that on arrival in Nigeria, he was denied the usual formal induction process; further that later, the petitioner had his terms of service deceitfully changed; further that the petitioner believes that information was withheld from him by the Colonial Office following termination of his services; further that such information would have enabled him to put forward a formal redress of grievance to W.A.I.T.R; further that since 1961, the petitioner has continuously complained to the Colonial Office and its successor, DFID, about his shameful treatment; further that in 2011, the petitioner submitted a twelve page analysis supporting his allegation to DFID but believes that it was not put in front of the Minister for political consideration; further that the petitioner notes that he had received a very poor (mainly wartime) education and following short R.A.F service had intended to undertake extended higher education; further that the petitioner gave up the opportunity for education to take up long term employment with W.A.I.T.R because qualifications were not required; and further that this meant that the petitioner was extremely disadvantaged when his employment was terminated without any provision for readjustment.

The petitioner therefore requests that the House of Commons urges the Government to set up an independent inquiry into treatment of W.A.I.T.R personnel in Nigeria, particularly in relation to the petitioner's own service

and further requests that in doing so, considers the case of John Hare (author of "Last Man In") who received compensation after similar treatment.

And the petitioner remains, etc.—[*Official Report*, 22 October 2015; Vol.600, c. 10P.]

[P001551]

Observations from Minister of State, Department for International Development (Desmond Swayne): Mr Moffat served for a short time at the West African Institute for Trypanosomiasis Research (WAITR) in Nigeria in the late 1950s. He was appointed by the Crown Agents in 1957 on a probationary agreement for two tours of service of 18-24 months each as a Field Officer. At the end of his second tour, his contract was not renewed, as the country was heading towards independence and there was no prospect of a permanent and pensionable post for him at the Institute. He left Nigeria in 1960 at this point.

Since then, however, he has maintained that he should receive compensation for loss of career prospects as an overseas officer, along the lines of that paid to certain permanent members of the Colonial Service whose careers were interrupted when Nigeria achieved independence. This is not the case as the facts concerning his appointment clearly exclude him from consideration for compensation arrangements.

Although the original offer of employment referred to a prospect of appointment subsequently to the permanent and pensionable establishment, the Crown Agents contract which he signed deliberately contained no reference to permanence, as his was a probationary appointment. Furthermore, he specifically acknowledged at the time, as officers were required to do, that he had not been promised a pensionable appointment.

Towards the end of Mr Moffat's first tour, and with Nigerian independence in sight, the Institute was overtaken by the need to employ local people in field officer posts, and it became clear that there was no prospect of his being considered for a permanent and pensionable appointment. The Institute paid Mr Moffat a gratuity for his first tour and he was then switched to straight contract terms for the second tour at the 10% higher rate of salary associated with these terms. His employment ended on completion of the second tour. He then left Nigeria on terminal leave in August 1960. Mr Moffat never held a permanent post and therefore cannot claim compensation for loss of permanent and pensionable employment. The Institute were not committed to providing him with a permanent post, nor did they do so.

Mr Moffat has sought to persuade Ministers and officials in DFID that the British Government have not paid proper regard to the claims of people like himself who, although not actually in permanent and pensionable employment, nevertheless felt that they had lost career prospects as a result of the move to independence. There is no doubt that the British Government's arrangements for pension protection and ex-gratia compensation clearly excluded all except permanent and pensionable Colonial Service officers in quasi-governmental bodies like WAITR.

The Government's view is that Mr Moffat has no case for compensation, as he was never employed substantively, nor was the Government under any obligation to offer him a substantive permanent and pensionable appointment.

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 17 December 2015

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
CHURCH COMMISSIONERS	1693	ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS—	
Fossil Fuel: Investments.....	1693	<i>continued</i>	
Hedgehogs	1694	Bovine TB.....	1677
Syria	1695	CAP Delivery Programme	1687
Syria	1696	Dairy Industry.....	1688
ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE	1696	EU Recycling Targets	1686
Postal Votes	1696	Flood Defence Schemes.....	1682
Voter Registration Rates	1697	Flood Risks	1684
Voting for 16 and 17-year-olds.....	1692	Poultry Sheds.....	1685
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	1677	Technology in Farming.....	1679
Air Pollution.....	1680	Topical Questions	1689
		Wine Production.....	1681

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 17 December 2015

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS	85WS	HEALTH	107WS
Industry Training Boards Triennial Review.....	85WS	Departmental Contingent Liability Notification:	
UK Steel Industry	86WS	Dementia Discovery Fund	107WS
CABINET OFFICE	91WS	Government's Mandate to NHS England 2016-17.....	110WS
Public Bodies Reform Programme.....	91WS	Health Council	108WS
Transparency Update.....	92WS	Regulation of Health and Social Care Professionals...	109WS
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT	93WS	Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust.....	109WS
Community and Business Recovery Fund		HOME DEPARTMENT	111WS
(Storm Desmond).....	93WS	G6: London.....	112WS
Green Belt Protection	94WS	Independent Child Trafficking Advocates Trial:	
CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	95WS	Government Report	113WS
Sports Strategy	95WS	Independent Police Complaints Commission.....	121WS
Telecommunications Council.....	96WS	Overseas Domestic Workers	114WS
DEFENCE	97WS	Police and Crime Commissioners Public	
UK Embedded Forces	97WS	Consultation: Complaints	111WS
EDUCATION	98WS	Police Grant Report England and Wales 2016-17	114WS
Reformed GCSE and A-level Content	98WS	JUSTICE	123WS
School Revenue Funding Settlement 2016-17	100WS	Ex-armed Services Personnel and the Criminal	
ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE	101WS	Justice System	125WS
Onshore Oil and Gas: Licence Awards and		HMCTS	123WS
Environmental Monitoring	101WS	Insolvency Litigation	124WS
Renewal Energy Cost Control Measures.....	102WS	Prisons.....	124WS
ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS	105WS	PRIME MINISTER	125WS
Air Quality	105WS	Muslim Brotherhood Review	125WS
Bovine TB.....	106WS	TRANSPORT	127WS
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE	107WS	Ministerial Cars.....	128WS
British Council Annual Report.....	107WS	Transport Council	127WS
		Walking and Cycling Investment Strategy	129WS
		TREASURY	93WS
		Banking Act 2009 Reporting	93WS

PETITIONS

Thursday 17 December 2015

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT	17P	PRESENTED PETITION	17P
Treatment of West African Institute for		Tax Credits	17P
Trypanosomiasis Research personnel in Nigeria....	17P		

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CONTENTS

Thursday 17 December 2015

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1677] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Church Commissioners
Speaker's Electoral Commission Committee

Royal Assent to Acts passed [Col. 1699]

Business of the House [Col. 1700]

Statement—(Chris Grayling)

Local Government Finance [Col. 1722]

Statement—(Greg Clark)

Strathclyde Review [Col. 1740]

Statement—(Chris Grayling)

Marriage Registration [Col. 1751]

Bill presented, and read the First time

Backbench Business

Sexual Exploitation: Protection of 16 and 17-year-olds [Col. 1752]

Motion—(Kit Malthouse)—agreed to

Conception to Age 2: The First 1001 Days [Col. 1784]

Motion—(Tim Loughton)—agreed to

Access to Health Services: West Cumbria [Col. 1812]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

Tobacco Control Strategy [Col. 613WH]

General Debate

Written Statements [Col. 85WS]

Petitions [Col. 17P]

Observations

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
