

Thursday
21 January 2016

Volume 604
No. 101



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 21 January 2016

House of Commons

Thursday 21 January 2016

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport was asked—

Small Production Companies: Cornwall

1. **Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to support small production companies based in Cornwall. [903140]

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): I hope you will indulge me, Mr Speaker, if I briefly pay tribute to the great George Weidenfeld, who died yesterday. He was a great patron and supporter of the arts.

The Government have taken steps to support small production companies across the UK through tax reliefs and grant schemes. In the last two years, Creative England has supported 51 productions in Cornwall, which has led to 439 shooting days in the county and an estimated on-location spend of nearly £7.5 million.

Scott Mann: Tourism in North Cornwall has benefited hugely from the “Poldark” effect, but other television dramas are also produced across our beautiful coastline, including “Doc Martin” in Port Isaac and “Jamaica Inn”, filmed on Bodmin moor. Will my hon. Friend assure me that he will continue to support the film industry in my part of the country?

Mr Vaizey: Of course. I am well aware of the “Poldark” effect. In fact, I am often mistaken for Aidan Turner’s body double. There are 13 great production companies in Cornwall. Our film tax relief has brought more than £7 billion of film investment to the UK as a whole, and I can assure my hon. Friend that we will continue to support productions in Cornwall.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman undertake to question exclusively with reference to Cornwall?

Ian C. Lucas: Indeed. Independent production companies in Cornwall and other areas of the country benefit hugely from Channel 4’s unique not-for-profit commissioning

strength. Will the Minister please explain why the creation of another business like ITV and Channel 5 is in the interests of production companies in Cornwall, and why it is in the public interest for Channel 4 to be privatised?

Mr Vaizey: I feel like I am taking part in an episode of “Just a Minute” where the subject is Cornwall. We have gone from the south-west to the heart of Westminster, where Channel 4 resides, in its headquarters on Horseferry Road. As the hon. Gentleman is well aware—I know there is another question on Channel 4 later—we are considering all options to take this fantastic channel into the future.

Subsidised Satellite Broadband Programme

2. **Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): What recent progress his Department has made on the subsidised satellite broadband programme. [903141]

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): I am pleased to confirm that all those living in houses unable to get a speed of at least 2 megabits per second can now take advantage of a subsidised satellite broadband installation, which should deliver speeds of about 10 megabits per second or more.

Sue Hayman: Connecting Cumbria promised my constituents superfast broadband, but this has not happened quickly enough or to the original programme, which has denied my constituents access to vital services. What assurance can the Minister give that, under the universal service obligation, they will be provided with a minimum of 10 megabits per second by 2020?

Mr Vaizey: I am pleased to say that the Cumbrian programme is going extremely well. About £20 million of Government money has been invested, and in the hon. Lady’s constituency we will reach 92% by the end of the programme, which is a fantastic result, considering that, commercially, less than half of her constituents would have got superfast broadband. We will soon be introducing a consultation on the universal service obligation, and we intend to proceed with haste.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): This kind of option is very important in rural areas such as mine, where we have technology issues getting broadband to Longney and Elmore. We have done some good work with BT, but can the Minister guarantee that we will push ahead with all options to make sure everybody has access to broadband in my constituency?

Mr Vaizey: Yes, I can guarantee that. We are moving as fast as we can to deliver superfast broadband, and we intend to reach 95% of the country by the end of 2017 and to have superfast broadband for everyone by 2020. We also have to think again about what we need to do in the decade after that.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): In early December, the Minister cast himself as Santa Claus, announcing a “Christmas present” for UK homes and businesses: £60 million to provide satellite provision for those failed by his super-slow broadband crawl-out. As of Monday, a grand total of £8,000 had been spent and only 24 people had benefited from his supposed

gift. Was it the fear of seeing him coming down their chimney that put people off or the fact that this is an inadequate stunt designed to fob off his Back Benchers and leaving millions digitally excluded for many Christmases to come?

Mr Vaizey: I thank the hon. Lady for that “Bah Humbug” question. I am delighted that, thanks to our superfast broadband programme, we have reached around 90% of the country. We have cast aside the Scrooge-like 2 megabits target that Labour had for the country as a whole, but we promised everyone guaranteed speeds of 2 megabits, and that is what we have done by providing subsidised satellite services.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): I am sure the Minister was busy at Christmas with rehearsals for the “Poldark” Christmas special. I welcome his announcement about enabling those in rural areas to get satellite broadband. This is a particular issue in Rossendale and Darwen where farmers struggle to get broadband. Will my hon. Friend undertake to work with the National Farmers Union and others who are in touch with those working in our rural industries to ensure that farmers find out about this fantastic offer the Minister made before Christmas?

Mr Vaizey: I will certainly give that undertaking. I am happy to work with the NFU, just as I am happy to work with the landowners association and the Countryside Alliance.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Since a commitment was given in a Westminster Hall debate to expanding superfast broadband across Northern Ireland, I have been contacted by many constituents who have told me that they cannot increase their business—this is mainly small businesses and people who work from home—or start a business without it. What is the Minister doing exclusively to help people with small businesses in the rural community to advance this issue?

Mr Vaizey: We had a very successful broadband voucher scheme, which brought superfast broadband to something like 55,000 businesses. That scheme has come to an end, but we always review what specific help we can give to businesses. The roll-out in Northern Ireland is now picking up pace, which will help both homeowners and businesses alike.

Grassroots Sport: Deprived Areas

3. **Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): What recent steps his Department has taken to increase support for grassroots sport in areas of deprivation. [903143]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (**Tracey Crouch**): I fundamentally believe, and it is reflected in the new sports strategy, that sport has the power to change lives and communities, particularly in deprived areas. As a result, we will invest significantly in organisations that deliver programmes in deprived areas, which will make a difference in health outcomes, community cohesion and individual life chances.

Damian Collins: As this will probably be the Minister’s last Question Time before the arrival of her new baby, may I wish her and her family well for the next few weeks?

Does the Minister agree that sporting programmes such as Kicks, run by the Premier League, and Hitz, supported by the rugby premier league, do excellent work tackling gang crime and antisocial behaviour and rehabilitating young offenders, and that they should be at the heart of the delivery of the Government’s new sports strategy?

Tracey Crouch: I am a huge fan of both those schemes. The Premier League Kicks project, which is supported by a number of partners, including my own Department and now the Home Office, shows that 75% of its participants live in the top 30% most deprived areas in England. Where the scheme has been run, it has seen a 60% reduction in antisocial behaviour. It is exactly those kind of projects that will play a key role in delivering the new sports strategy.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Will the Minister reflect on the role of apps and digitalisation within the programme she has outlined, and the way in which they can turn the telescope around to project information into the most disadvantaged communities?

Tracey Crouch: Certain members of society that we are trying to reach to ensure that they participate more in sport rely on apps and a greater use of technology. It is something that we reference with a great deal of interest in the sports strategy. Having recently met the hon. Gentleman’s constituents, I know that a great deal of work is being done to increase the number of apps and make sure that technology plays a key part in ensuring that we get the nation active.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Kettering Town Harriers, of which I am proud to be a member, is a fantastic local athletics club, which offers great opportunities for boys, girls and adults from across the borough of Kettering and further afield. Does my hon. Friend agree that local athletics clubs are a great way to help people get involved in sport?

Tracey Crouch: I certainly believe local athletics clubs can play an important role within their own communities. I know of athletics clubs across the entire country that want to make sure that they reach out beyond their core to ensure that all people who want to get involved in athletics—track and field—can do so. Major events, such as the Olympics coming up this year, will help to inspire others to get involved in the future.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): May I join the hon. Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) in wishing the Minister all the best for her forthcoming maternity leave? I am sure that we all look forward to the birth of a budding young athlete.

While volunteers at the grassroots of sport struggle with scarce resources and ever-increasing charges for facilities, we are seeing a growing number of scandals involving those at the elite end of sport lining their pockets with money that could well be invested in the grassroots. That is demoralising for those who work so

hard to deliver sport in our communities. Is it not time to insist that people who are found guilty of doping, match-fixing or accepting bribes are given life bans, no matter who they are? Are the Government demanding that all United Kingdom-based agencies, whether sporting, financial or criminal, actively search for evidence of corruption and cheating in our sport?

Tracey Crouch: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we need to ensure that as much money as possible is invested in grassroots sport. I am pleased that, as part of the sports strategy, we have managed to encourage the Premier League to at least double its investment in grassroots sport, which will be underpinned by the welcome settlement in the spending review. I was disappointed that the hon. Gentleman did not share our joy over that settlement.

Scandals and allegations of corruption are, unfortunately, ongoing. It is very disappointing when each scandal is reported. We in the Government will see what we can do, and if it is necessary to review existing legislation, we will do so. In the meantime, we are encouraging international federations to root out corruption as quickly as possible.

Amateur Sports Clubs: Flooding

4. **Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): What steps his Department has taken to help amateur sports clubs affected by recent floods. [903144]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): After the floods became more widespread, Sport England doubled its emergency flood relief fund, which is designed to help finance necessary recovery work for amateur sports clubs that are affected by flooding. That is entirely a matter for Sport England, but the Department and I receive regular updates on issues that clubs in affected areas are facing. The Football Foundation and the England and Wales Cricket Board are providing additional flood funds to assist clubs that are ineligible for Sport England funds.

Mr Nuttall: I thank the Minister for her reply, and wish her well for her forthcoming maternity leave.

The grounds of both Ramsbottom United football club and Ramsbottom cricket club, which are in my constituency, were completely submerged during the recent floods, which caused tens of thousands of pounds' worth of damage. Although the supporters have worked valiantly and they have done what they can to help themselves, the clubs are still struggling to recover. What further help might the Government provide, as a matter of urgency, to help them to do so?

Tracey Crouch: I have read about the awful damage at Ramsbottom cricket club and "Rammy United", as I believe it is known. It seems that the wider community, sporting and otherwise, has done an incredible job in helping with the immediate clear-up. The ECB, the Football Foundation and others have pledged financial support, but if the clubs need assistance with anything else, my hon. Friend is welcome to get in touch, and we will try to ensure that they receive all the help and advice that can be provided.

Channel 4

5. **Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had on the future of Channel 4; and if he will make a statement. [903145]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): My ministerial colleagues regularly meet a range of stakeholders to discuss issues relating to the work of the Department, including the future of Channel 4. The Government are considering a number of options, including those proposed by Channel 4's leadership, but no decisions have yet been made.

Mr Bradshaw: Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating Channel 4 on achieving a record number of both Oscar and BAFTA nominations this year? Does he agree that it would not be able to deliver its unique and invaluable remit if it had to return a profit to shareholders?

Mr Whittingdale: As I have said, my concern is to ensure the continuing success and viability of Channel 4, which is why we are considering a number of options. I understand that the last Labour Government did so as well, and that they also considered privatisation. We have not yet reached a conclusion, but I will adopt whatever policy I believe is best designed to ensure that Channel 4 continues to enjoy the success that the right hon. Gentleman has described.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): Does the Secretary of State recognise the inherent tension in the fact that one of the purposes of privatisation would be to raise the maximum amount of money for the Treasury, and the more Channel 4 sticks to its distinctive and successful remit, the less money is likely to be raised? Can he assure the House that, when he makes his final decision, the preservation of the broadcasting and the creative success of Channel 4 will be uppermost in his mind?

Mr Whittingdale: I am very happy to give my right hon. Friend exactly that assurance. The reason why we are looking at different options for the future of Channel 4 is to ensure that it can continue to deliver the remit in what is going to become a very fast-changing and challenging environment. However, as I have made clear before, it is the remit that matters, and I want Channel 4 to continue to deliver it into the future.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Has the Secretary of State had an opportunity to consider the "One year on" report on Channel 4's 360° diversity charter? Does he recognise that, while diversity is a pronounced feature in Channel 4's particular vocation, increasing diversity is not only the job of Channel 4, and will he value diversity when he considers the BBC charter renewal?

Mr Whittingdale: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman. The challenge of increasing diversity applies across all broadcasters. It is something that I know my hon. Friend the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy has paid close attention to—and indeed he was speaking only this week with Idris Elba, who is another person who competes with him in terms of his own attraction.

John Nicolson (East Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Can the Secretary of State confirm that the Chancellor of the Exchequer now believes Channel 4 privatisation will bring the Conservatives much public opprobrium for a relatively small financial return and that the Conservatives are now backing away from the idea of privatising this much loved public institution?

Mr Whittingdale: I hate to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but, as I said earlier, no decisions have been taken. I have not had an opportunity to discuss the matter with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, because we have not yet reached our own conclusions on it, but I look forward to doing so in due course.

First World War Commemorations

6. **Dan Jarvis** (Barnsley Central) (Lab): What plans his Department has to commemorate the first world war. [903146]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): There are two key first world war events to commemorate this year. On 31 May, national events will be held in Orkney to mark the battle of Jutland and the wider war at sea, and on 1 July national events will be held both in Manchester and at the Thiepval memorial in France to commemorate the battle of the Somme. These form part of wider national commemorations over the next two years, and I would encourage all hon. Members to read details of the latest 14-18 NOW culture programme, which was announced yesterday.

Dan Jarvis: I thank the Secretary of State for the work he and others, including the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), have been doing in ensuring the smooth running of these commemorations. They will have seen the great success of the Tower poppies installation at the Yorkshire sculpture park, which reminds us all of the importance of ensuring that the commemorations extend to every corner of the country. Does he agree that in this important year of commemoration we should also find a moment in this House for Members to come together and pay their respects in this place? Will he use his good offices to ensure that such an opportunity is forthcoming?

Mr Whittingdale: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his words, and in turn thank him for his support. We may argue over many matters in this House, but I think all parties can come together in memory of those who sacrificed so much. He mentioned the weeping window and the wave sculptures, and I was delighted that the Chancellor has made more money available to allow us to take that sculpture to more parts of the country, including St Magnus cathedral, as part of the commemoration of Jutland. The hon. Gentleman's suggestion that we should have an opportunity here to commemorate those who gave their lives is an excellent one. It is not entirely one I can deliver, but I am very happy to pursue it.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend say how Devonport is going to be included in the battle of Jutland commemorations, since my grandfather was a gunnery officer and wrote an eyewitness account of it?

Mr Whittingdale: I entirely understand my hon. Friend's wish to see the commemoration, given his own personal connection, and I pay tribute to his grandfather, and indeed all who served at that time. He will know that a series of events is being planned, including the ceremony at the Orkney islands. Descendants of those who served at the battle are invited to take part in the events and I hope he will apply—although he will need to be rather quick since the closing date is tomorrow. He may also be interested to know that the Royal Navy will be marking the centenary at memorials in his constituency at Devonport and also at Portsmouth and Chatham.

Children and Young People: Access to Sport

7. **Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): What plans he has to ensure that all children and young people have access to sporting activities. [903147]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): A positive experience of sport at a young age can create a lifelong habit of participation. It is therefore important that all children have the opportunity to engage in sport and physical activity in a way that interests them, and that sits at the very heart of the new sports strategy.

Huw Merriman: I thank the sports Minister for her question and I wish her well with her maternity. I am aware that she will have other notable diary commitments, but I would like to invite her and other parliamentary colleagues to join me, the BBC and ITV on 2 February for the parliamentary launch of the Six Nations rugby season. Does she agree that free-to-air sports, underpinned by the listed events regime, are crucial to inspiring young people to take up sport?

Tracey Crouch: I am conscious of the fact that my hon. Friend's injury is sport-related and that at this moment he might therefore not be the best advert for encouraging people to get involved in sport. On his specific question, I understand that the Secretary of State is hoping to attend the event on 2 February. Alas, I shall—I hope—be otherwise engaged. However, I do of course agree that sport on free-to-air TV, underpinned by the listed events regime, is crucial to inspiring youngsters to take up sport. Like so many others, I am looking forward to the Six Nations, even though I shall be watching it from my armchair.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I gently point out to both Front-Bench teams that I do not seem to have heard the words “England”, “cricket”, “South Africa”, “Joe Root” or “Yorkshire” this morning? Can we congratulate the English team on what they achieved in South Africa, as we have not already done so? On young people's access to sport, is it not a question, in this age of childhood obesity, of young people getting out into the countryside and walking as well as engaging in sport? As the chair of the John Clare Trust, I know how difficult it is to get children from poorer areas into the countryside so that they can learn about it and learn to love it.

Tracey Crouch: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to congratulate our England cricket stars on their sporting success in South Africa.

We should also congratulate our English men and women down in Australia, who appear to be doing incredibly well in the Big Bash tournament. Of course, ensuring that children are involved in sport is incredibly important and we need to ensure that they are inspired by all the different sports that are available to them. The sports strategy is very much designed to encourage people who want to do all sorts of sports and physical activities, whether traditional sports or other outdoor activities such as mountaineering or climbing, and to ensure that they have access to them.

Tourism: Yorkshire

8. **Sir Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire) (Con): What plans his Department has to increase the level of tourism in Yorkshire from domestic and foreign visitors. [903148]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): The Government are supporting an increase in visitor numbers to Yorkshire through the work of VisitBritain, VisitEngland and the GREAT campaign. Yorkshire received record inbound tourist numbers in 2014, and we are continuing to work hard to attract domestic and international visitors to the county. That is why the Prime Minister has published his five-point plan on tourism and why at the recent spending review we secured a new £40 million Discover England fund.

Sir Greg Knight: Does my right hon. Friend agree that when a heritage item is movable, there is a case for occasionally placing it on display outside London and the south of England? Is he aware that Hull is our city of culture next year, and that many people in Yorkshire have been expecting that the aeroplane used by the Hull-born aviator Amy Johnson will be on display in the region? However, the London-based Science Museum has refused to give its permission, saying that the plane must stay in London. Will he join me in asking the London-obsessed Science Museum to think again, and will he agree to meet me to discuss this matter?

Mr Whittingdale: I am very much aware that Hull is to be the next city of culture; I recently had a meeting with the organisers, as did both my ministerial colleagues, to discuss that. I quite understand why Hull should want to celebrate the life of Amy Johnson, who was born in the city. I know that there has been a lengthy dialogue about the specific issue that my right hon. Friend has raised and that the Science Museum is concerned about the delicate state of the aeroplane and the potential cost of the move, but I am happy to look into the matter further and I am of course willing to meet my right hon. Friend to discuss it.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I am sure the Secretary of State will be delighted to know that Hull now ranks in the top 10 cities of the world to visit, according to the "Rough Guide". On that basis, I am very pleased that one of my constituency neighbours, the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight), has supported the bid to bring Amy Johnson's plane to Hull. Also on that basis, will the Secretary of State press the Treasury to fill the £5 million gap that has resulted from the Arts Council turning down an application for funds to refurbish the New theatre in the city? That refurbishment needs to go ahead in time for

the 2017 celebrations. I make this request in the light of the fact that the Treasury has found £78 million to pay for a new theatre in Manchester.

Mr Whittingdale: The hon. Lady is quite right to highlight the autumn statement and the settlement that was achieved, which included money for arts institutions across the country. I am aware of the issue relating to the New theatre in Hull, and of course I am keen to support as much as possible in the city during this very important year approaching. I am happy to continue to press the case, but obviously she will understand that there are a lot of competing bids. We are determined to make Hull a success as the UK city of culture.

BBC Charter Renewal

9. **Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): What progress has been made on the BBC charter renewal process. [903149]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): Good progress is being made on the BBC charter review programme. The consultation launched in July received 192,000 responses. We are, of course, committed to reading and analysing all of them, and we reached 150,000 earlier this month. In addition, I have commissioned further reviews and research, including an independent review of governance and regulation led by Sir David Clementi. In the coming months, my Department will work towards publishing proposals for the future of the BBC.

Patricia Gibson: Does the Minister not accept that the huge number of responses to the consultation—the second largest response to any Government consultation—shows the concern for and interest in the BBC? In the interests of full transparency, will the Secretary of State now give, as my constituents are demanding, a specific timetable for the Government publishing their full response to the BBC consultation?

Mr Whittingdale: As I say, I am very pleased about the volume of responses we have had, although approaching 150,000 of them came in within 48 hours; 38 Degrees has boasted of its success in generating all those responses. That does not mean they are not valid expressions of opinion; it just means that perhaps they are not wholly representative of public opinion at large. However, we are committed to reading every one. That is proving a logistical challenge and it has taken longer than we anticipated, but we will be publishing both a summary of the consultations and our proposals as soon as we are able.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): There have been persistent reports that, as a part of cost-cutting, the BBC will downgrade news coverage and its parliamentary coverage. Does the Secretary of State agree that the public reasonably expect a news channel and comprehensive parliamentary reports to be essential parts of a public service broadcaster's remit?

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend will understand that it is not for me to tell the BBC how to spend its resources. However, I agree with him that a core part of the BBC is that it should provide news, and that includes coverage of the proceedings of this House.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): My constituents tell me that they do not want the BBC dismantled or diminished, and they certainly do not want its remit narrowed. This Government have flogged off more of our national assets than almost any other, so can we really trust them with the BBC?

Mr Whittingdale: The BBC charter expires at the end of this year, and that provides an opportunity to look at all aspects of the BBC in what is a very fast-changing media landscape. That is the purpose of the charter review. We have not reached any decisions yet and we are listening to all expressions of opinion about the future of the BBC, of which there are very many.

13. [903153] **Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): How does the Secretary of State explain the worrying discrepancy between the amount raised via licence fees and the amount spent in Scotland? There is a mismatch between the £335 million in income for the BBC from Scotland and the £190 million spent there. Does he not agree that a fairer share of that income would boost our broadcasting sector and provide funding for the restructuring of BBC Scotland?

Mr Whittingdale: Of course, viewers in Scotland, just as elsewhere in the United Kingdom, benefit from the national programming of the BBC. She will be aware that the director general recently gave evidence to the Scottish Education and Culture Committee, in which he pointed out that in 2014 £108 million was spent on local content and that that rose to more than £200 million when central support and distribution costs were included.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): Ninety-seven per cent. of the adult population of the UK use the BBC services for an average of 18 hours every week, and their perceptions of the BBC have improved over the past 10 years. According to the BBC Trust, 85% of the public support the BBC's main mission to inform, educate and entertain. Those figures are a remarkable endorsement of the public service ethos of the BBC. The consultation on charter renewal of the Secretary of State's Department closed on 8 October last year, and he has now spent more time considering the responses to that consultation than he allowed for the public to respond. When will he get his act together and publish the results? Can he just give us a date today, please?

Mr Whittingdale: May I begin by welcoming the hon. Lady to her new position? I have been doing this job for a relatively short time—just eight months—and she is now the third Opposition spokesman I have faced. I do hope that she survives a little longer than her immediate predecessors. In relation to her question, I am keen that we should publish our proposals, but we did not anticipate 192,000 responses. She will understand that, if I were to get up and publish our conclusions, she would quickly be at the Dispatch Box claiming that we had not properly analysed them and that this was a cosmetic exercise. It is not a cosmetic exercise and we are reading the responses carefully.

Maria Eagle: I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman sounds as if he is procrastinating. The BBC charter expires at the end of this year, but he has not even got around to publishing his White Paper because the consultation is taking so long. Will he guarantee that his Department's

time wasting will not result in some kind of debilitating short-term charter extension beyond the end of the year? Will he be clear today that the next charter will be for a minimum of 10 years?

Mr Whittingdale: Charter review comes round once every 10 years and I am determined that we should get it right. We will take however long it takes to ensure that we fully consult and consider the options, and we will publish as soon as we are ready. We are currently considering the length of the next charter, which was one of the questions in the Green Paper, and it will form part of our conclusions when we come to publish them.

Topical Questions

T1. [903159] **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr John Whittingdale): Since the House last met for these questions, the Minister for sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Tracey Crouch), has launched the first Government sports strategy in more than a decade and the Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy, my hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey), has become the longest serving arts Minister in history. We have also seen the sad passing of some of our great cultural icons. I am sure the whole Chamber will join me in extending our sympathies to the families, and indeed the fans, of David Bowie, Jimmy Hill, Alan Rickman and Lemmy, and also in celebrating the enormous contribution that each made to the sporting and cultural life of our country.

Mike Wood: The success in attracting the “Star Wars” trilogy to the UK underlines the terrific talent available in our creative industries as well as the incredible variety of filming locations. What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the impact of tax credits on the film and other creative industries?

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the success we have had in attracting international investment in film to this country not just in “Star Wars”, but in a huge proportion of the major films now being made. Part of the reason for that is indeed our creative industry's tax credits. In 2013, the creative industries accounted for 5% of the economy, and our tax credits are one way of our supporting them. The film tax credit has been responsible for nearly £7 billion of investment in the UK, and our high-end TV tax credit has helped to support more than £800 million of investment.

T5. [903163] **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): What assistance will the Department give to local authorities to keep their regional museums open following the recent Museums Association report, which stated that one in five regional museums has closed in part or in full and that one in 10 expect to introduce entrance charges to cover reductions in local authority funding?

The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey): I read the Museums Association report, and I welcome the fact that 60% of museums have seen their visitor numbers increase and that 40% of museums have seen their museum outreach increase.

We want to work with local authorities and to work through the Arts Council with local authorities. I urge Labour authorities such as Lancashire to look again at their horrific plans to close their museums.

T2. [903160] **Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Nuisance phone calls—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. I have never known a situation in which Mr Nuttall has not been fully heard, and he will be fully heard.

Mr Nuttall: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Nuisance phone calls continue to blight the lives of many of my constituents. Will the Minister explain how quickly the latest proposed action on caller line identification will be introduced and enforced?

Mr Vaizey: I am very pleased that we have now issued a consultation on caller line identification which will, we hope, allow receivers of nuisance calls to screen the calls so that they take only calls from people from whom they want to hear.

T7. [903165] **Mr David Crausby** (Bolton North East) (Lab): What progress has been made in securing at least 5% of the Premier League TV deal for grassroots football? Children's football is virtually unplayable at this time of year, yet the Premier League continues to throw money around as though it is going out of fashion.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): The hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know that through negotiations and discussions with the Premier League I have managed to secure at least double what it currently invests in grassroots football. That will be more than £100 million per annum from the domestic TV rights, which equates to about 6.5% of the total.

T3. [903161] **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): The long-serving Minister responsible for arts and broadband will share my disappointment that despite his welcome promise to ensure that no home in the country has broadband speeds of less than 2 megabits per second, there are apparently parts of my constituency in Gloucester that have still not reached that speed. I have raised one particular area and problem with BT since 2013. First BT promised to upgrade the cabinet, then it failed to do so, and now it says that it is commercially unviable. Will the Minister meet me and celebrate his long tenure by resolving this problem?

Mr Vaizey: I will happily meet my hon. Friend at any point. I am pleased that at least 93% or 94% of his constituents have superfast broadband. Of course, it is more difficult because of state aid rules to subsidise broadband in cities, but I will certainly meet my hon. Friend and discuss the particular issues he faces.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): I, too, wish the Minister well on maternity leave. I hope that it all goes well and that we see her back in her role.

A recent response from the Gambling Commission to a freedom of information request has revealed 633 possible incidents of money laundering in betting shops in the past 12 months alone. Not only that, but online we are seeing videos of fixed odds betting terminals being

smashed up with chairs and hammers. What are the Government going to do to protect lone staff and vulnerable people in betting shops?

Tracey Crouch: I take the issue of money laundering in gambling very seriously and the Gambling Commission is currently consulting on proposed regulatory changes to strengthen the fight against that crime. I understand that the Treasury will be consulting on the EU directive on money laundering, which will include gambling. On the issue of violence in betting shops, there has of course been an increase in the number of police callouts to high street shops. Whether the callout is related to FOBT machines is not recorded, but as a keen campaigner on BT machines I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be interested to know that today I have published on the gov.uk website the evaluation of the £50 regulations introduced last April, and I expect a triennial review of stakes and prizes to begin soon.

T4. [903162] **Jeremy Quin** (Horsham) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating the many towns across the UK that will be laying on cultural experiences in the coming year? In Horsham, that varies from a brand new cultural festival we are putting on in the summer to pancake racing next month. The Secretary of State would be very welcome to join me at either.

Mr Whittingdale: I am very happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating all those towns holding arts festivals, which include not just Horsham but Maldon. I am particularly pleased that there are plans in my hon. Friend's constituency, as part of a festival, to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Shakespeare's death, which will be marked not just across the country but around the world. I would be very happy to visit an event in my hon. Friend's constituency, although I cannot promise to participate in the pancake race.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Despite the Secretary of State's earlier bluster about national programming, people in Scotland were shocked by the £145 million differential between income and expenditure as regards the BBC licence fee. That could free up £100 million for direct production in Scotland, which would support 1,500 jobs and add a boost of £60 million to the economy. Will he commit to full devolution of broadcasting to make that happen?

Mr Whittingdale: I am aware of the concerns in Scotland about this, and, as I said earlier to the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock), it is something that the director-general discussed with the Select Committee last week. I shall be seeing the director-general later. It is important that the BBC should serve all parts of the country, but I do not think that we can simply sit down and allocate spending precisely in proportion to the licence fee. It is a national broadcaster.

T6. [903164] **Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I, too, wish my hon. Friend well in her imminent personal sporting challenge. As she knows, Faversham and Mid Kent is rich in fascinating tourist destinations, such as Leeds castle and the historic market town of Faversham itself, so I welcomed the recently announced £40 million Visit England fund. Will organisations such as Visit Kent have a chance to bid for a share of this fund?

Tracey Crouch: As a fellow Kent MP, I am proud of the tourist attractions across the county. I reassure my hon. Friend that all parts of the country, including Kent, will have an opportunity to bid for the Discover England fund.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I am proud that “Downton Abbey” was made in Ealing—the below-stairs servants quarters were in my constituency—but the series has now ended, so what are the Government doing to increase representation on and off-screen of the nation’s ethnic, regional and gender diversity so that the airwaves are not all dominated by the classes upstairs?

Mr Vaizey: I fully support the sentiment behind the hon. Lady’s question. We have worked closely with the broadcasters to have stretching targets. We have put the Creative Diversity Network on a permanent footing and we have clear guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission on what broadcasters can do—but they need to get on with it.

T8. [903166] **Christopher Pincher** (Tamworth) (Con): Destination Staffordshire recently submitted its bid for funding from the European regional development fund. In the interests of brevity, will my right hon. Friend encourage Ministers in the Department for Communities and Local Government to look favourably on the bid—yes or no?

Mr Whittingdale: My hon. Friend is right to stress the importance of tourism to Staffordshire as it contributes to the economy of so much of our country. He will know that this is a matter for my colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government. I understand that discussions have taken place and my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton South (James Wharton), the Minister with responsibility for local growth and the northern powerhouse, would be happy to set up a meeting to discuss the position.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Over 20,000 jobs depend on tourism in York. What support can the Minister give to ensure that attractions such as Jorvik and the merchant adventurers hall are quickly restored, following the floods?

Mr Whittingdale: I am very conscious of the challenge to ensure that we get the message out that Yorkshire and other parts of the country affected by flooding are open for business. We will be looking closely at what we can do to support those businesses affected by flooding. I hope we will be able to say more about that quite soon.

Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con): Did I just hear the Minister confirm that there would be a triennial review this year, and will she comment on exactly when and what that will be?

Tracey Crouch: My hon. Friend is right—he did hear me say that. The triennial review is expected to be in 2016. It will be in 2016. Precise timings are to be confirmed.

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): Andy Murray, who hails from my constituency, won again last night. He is a hero and the epitome of integrity in sport. He made

some comments this week about matchfixing. We have had the International Association of Athletics Federations report and the FIFA fiasco. Can the Minister assure me that we will do all we can to make sure that we are a shining example of promoting integrity in sport, as epitomised by Andy Murray?

Mr Whittingdale: I am happy to join the hon. Gentleman in that call. I have spoken this week with the Lawn Tennis Association, the All England tennis club and the Association of Tennis Professionals. We are determined to do all we can to support them in ensuring that the game is absolutely clean, and I know they are committed to that as well. We will be holding a summit later in the year, looking at the challenge of tackling corruption across all sectors, including sport.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Given the imminent demise of the largely unsuccessful Arqiva mobile infrastructure programme, what can now be done to improve the “not spot” situation, which is wholly unsatisfactory in relation to the £400 billion rural economy?

Mr Vaizey: I am pleased that we should have 75 sites erected as a result of the mobile infrastructure programme. Thirty-two people living in Wales have benefited from a new mobile site that has just been erected. I am pleased that under the deal that we negotiated with mobile operators, they will increase their coverage to 90% geographic coverage.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I congratulate my local team, East Kilbride football club, on reaching the last 16 of the Scottish cup for the very first time. Does the Minister agree that it is unfair that while English fans can watch their national team free of charge, Scottish fans have to pay? Will she meet the Scottish Government’s sports Minister to discuss and resolve the situation?

Tracey Crouch: That is a matter for the home nation football associations, so the Scottish FA should negotiate with UEFA, under its central sales strategy, which broadcasts qualifying or friendly matches. We have a listed events regime whereby we can see home nations compete in the European championship and, of course, world cup final tournaments, but home nations need to qualify to be able to do so.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): The hon. Member for Hyndburn (Graham Jones) has a nerve trying to claim to be the champion of betting shop workers. If his policies were adopted there would be far fewer of them, because many betting shops would close. Does the Minister agree that if we want to see more staff employed in betting shops—I certainly do—they need to have a viable financial future, particularly in relation to negotiations on machines and the levy?

Tracey Crouch: There are some very strict rules and statutory requirements, particularly on the number of staff in betting shops. They are subject to health and safety regulations, and voluntary minimum standards are required across the industry. I expect all operators to adhere to those standards in order to protect their staff on the high street.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—

Restoration and Renewal

1. **Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): What steps the Commission plans to take to ensure public and parliamentary scrutiny of the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster after a decision on the options for that project has been made. [903179]

2. **Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): What steps the Commission plans to take to ensure public and parliamentary scrutiny of the restoration and renewal of the Palace of Westminster after a decision on the options for that project has been made. [903180]

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I anticipate that both Houses will have an opportunity to debate the matter once the Joint Committee on the Palace of Westminster has reported. The question of future scrutiny will be aired in those debates and the House of Commons Commission will listen carefully to the views expressed before making any decisions.

Peter Grant: Many of my constituents find it difficult to understand how we can consider spending billions of pounds on a palace—literally a palace—for parliamentarians when so many of them can barely afford a roof of any kind over their heads. Can we have an assurance that the Joint Committee, which so far has met entirely in private, will soon meet in public and that all documentation relating to its considerations will be made public?

Tom Brake: I am sure that the Joint Committee and the Leader of the House will have heard the hon. Gentleman's comments and will want to respond positively. It is worth underlining the fact that we have neglected the upkeep of this building for many decades and that we do need to make investment in what is, after all, a world heritage building.

Dr Cameron: I would like to thank the House of Commons Commission for contacting me, as chair of the all-party group for disability, to ensure that we are involved in plans to restore the Palace of Westminster. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that all restoration and renewal work fully addresses issues of accessibility for people who have disabilities?

Tom Brake: I do not want to pre-empt what the Joint Committee will come up with, but I am sure it will carefully consider that matter. I think that every Member of the House will agree that it would be a completely missed opportunity if these works did not also ensure that the Palace is fully accessible to anyone with disabilities.

Jake Berry (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): As well as having an opportunity to debate the R and R programme, it is hugely important that Members have an opportunity to promote businesses in their constituencies that can

take part in the works. For example, Crown Paints, based in Darwen, would be a fantastic company to provide paint and to advise at this early stage to ensure that costs are reduced.

Tom Brake: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. Clearly, a project on this scale will require the participation of small, medium and large businesses from all over the country. When the project comes forward, I hope that the initiatives used to promote opportunities for businesses in the run-up to the Olympics will be deployed for the restoration of the Palace.

Jesse Norman (Hereford and South Herefordshire) (Con): Could the House of Commons Commission and the Joint Committee consider the idea of an historic trust into which the estate could be placed in order to separate the politics of renewal from the restoration of a national asset?

Tom Brake: Again, I cannot speak for the Joint Committee, but the Leader of the House, who is one of its big players, will have heard the hon. Gentleman's point and I am sure will want to give it due consideration.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): I am all for scrutiny, public and parliamentary, but can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that a decision will definitely be reached before the end of this Parliament and that we will not waste any further time or public money debating this very important issue in the next Parliament?

Tom Brake: I am not in a position to give the hon. Gentleman that reassurance because it is for the Joint Committee to decide what it recommends as a way forward. I think that everyone in this place knows that this work must be undertaken, and it is in our interest and that of the taxpayer that it is pursued vigorously. The longer we delay, the greater the costs associated with the works.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I urge the right hon. Gentleman to look seriously, and imaginatively, at how this reconstruction is going to be funded—perhaps by public subscription through a form of crowdfunding? May I warn him not to enter into a careless public finance initiative like the one in Halifax, where £770 million has been paid back on a hospital that cost £70 million?

Tom Brake: I hope that everyone in this place has learned the lessons of PFI. Again, it is not for me to work out what the financial arrangements are going to be, but clearly PFI may well be one of the more expensive options. I hope that the Treasury will look at something that is perhaps more straightforward in funding these improvements.

Gender Equality

3. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): [903181] What steps the Commission is taking to promote gender equality on the Parliamentary estate.

Tom Brake: Equality, diversity and inclusion are core to the way in which the House of Commons service works. The Commission agreed a diversity and inclusion strategy that promotes gender equality, and receives regular updates on its delivery. Key measures include targets for the number of women in the senior pay bands, fair and open recruitment, and promotion of flexible working.

Mr Hollobone: If gender equality is core to the way in which the House of Commons works, why are only two members of the 12-member House of Commons Commission women?

Tom Brake: That is a good point, and in terms of the party appointees, it is for the political parties to respond to it. I am pleased, however, that the two lay people on the Commission are women, as the hon. Gentleman indicated.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman may remember that in the previous Parliament I raised the issue of the representation of women, both as politicians and authors, in the Parliamentary Bookshop. When perusing its bookshelves, visitors from all over the world, potential MPs among them, would gain the impression that the House was almost exclusively male and white—as they would, for that matter, when viewing the walls in the Palace of Westminster. What steps is he taking to ensure that, superficially at least, the Palace of Westminster better represents the people and diversity of this country?

Tom Brake: Again, the appropriate authorities will have heard the hon. Lady's question. Like her, I think it is important that we recognise the very important role that women have played, and continue to play, in politics, and I hope that will be reflected in what is on offer in the bookstores.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is very important that the House of Commons sets the agenda for gender equality. The right hon. Gentleman has outlined some of the things that have been done, but what more is being done to let people outside this House know that we are leading the way and setting the examples in raising gender equality issues?

Tom Brake: Independent assessments are carried out of how Parliament addresses the issue of equality. For instance, members of the public could look at Stonewall's assessment. That puts Parliament nearly in the top quarter, so progress is being made. More still could be done, but that is a very good way for members of the public to assess the progress we are making.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Leader of the House was asked—

EVEL

4. **Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): [903182] What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the English votes for English laws procedure.

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): We have fulfilled our manifesto commitment in introducing English votes for English laws, which I believe will strengthen the Union. We have undertaken two Legislative Grand Committees, and several statutory instruments have passed without Division. The House knows about the tablet issue affecting two hon. Members in the live Division on Tuesday. It was recognised immediately, and their votes were recorded, included by the Tellers and listed in *Hansard*. The Government will undertake a review of the English votes for English laws procedure later this year, and the Procedure Committee has already announced its technical review.

Chris Law: During the English votes for English laws debates, we were repeatedly assured by the Leader of the House that no legislation would pass without a double majority. On Tuesday, we voted on an England-only certified motion to annul secondary legislation. How satisfied is the Deputy Leader of the House that, had the majority of the whole House voted for the negative motion while the majority of English Members voted it down, we would have a statutory instrument that financially affects Scotland that the majority of the House had voted against?

Dr Coffey: Mr Speaker certified the statutory instrument as relating to England only, and the principle of English votes for English laws was displayed. It needs the consent of the majority both of MPs representing the nation in question and, indeed, of the House.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Half the students at Glyndwr University in my border constituency are from England and it was directly financially affected by the vote earlier this week referred to by the hon. Member for Dundee West (Chris Law). The institution is vital to my constituency and is directly affected by financial decisions made by this House, so is it not wrong in principle that my voice, on its behalf, should be taken away and that my vote counts for less than that of the hon. Lady?

Dr Coffey: The hon. Gentleman voted in the same Division as I did. It is a credit to Glyndwr University in Wrexham—a town I know well—that it manages to attract students from across the border, as well as from within Wales.

Voting System

5. **Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): What steps he is taking to modernise the voting system of the House. [903186]

7. **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): What steps he is taking to modernise the voting system of the House. [903188]

The Deputy Leader of the House of Commons (Dr Thérèse Coffey): Since October 2014 the House service has been investigating means of electronic recording of Divisions, with a view to improving the timely publication of Division lists, making Division data more accessible to the public and easier to analyse, and improving accuracy. There was a trial in the last Parliament and hon. Members

will have seen it in practice on Tuesday. Full implementation of tablet recording of Divisions is expected later in this Session.

Ms Ahmed-Sheikh: The voting system in this House is archaic, as exemplified yesterday when well over an hour was spent on four different votes on the Psychoactive Substances Bill. That cannot be a proper use of parliamentary time, particularly when it can be used to debate the substance of Bills. Can we please consider moving forward with a system of electronic voting and look to other Parliaments across the world, not least the Scottish Parliament, which uses it to great benefit?

Dr Coffey: There is an established tradition in this House. I recognise that hon. Members may have different views, but many Members value the opportunity given by the time during Divisions to see not only each other but Ministers and similar. The number of hours available in this House for scrutiny of the Government and legislation far exceeds that in other Parliaments in this country and, indeed, around the world.

Martyn Day: As we move further away from the 20th century and, by extension, the 19th century, when, if ever, does the Deputy Leader of the House see this House moving towards a more reasonable voting system, such as genuine electronic voting? We already have passes.

Dr Coffey: As I have said, there is a long-standing convention and a lot of Members value the fact not only that we link votes to debates, but that the convention of walking through the Lobbies gives them the opportunity to speak to other people. It is a matter for further debate and I am sure the hon. Gentleman will speak to the Procedure Committee in due course.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does the Deputy Leader of the House agree that the introduction of iPads to the voting process in the Lobbies is more than enough modernisation for this century?

Dr Coffey: I have always thought of my hon. Friend as a very traditional man. The other place has been using that technology for some time. It is a useful thing to do and I look forward to the electronic recording of votes being introduced into this place in due course.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I urge my hon. Friend to stick to her guns on this issue. I am sure that far more

people visit this Parliament than the Scottish Parliament, and I suspect that most people visit this Parliament to see what we do and to respect our traditions, rather than necessarily to listen to what hon. Members have to say. We should guard our traditions with great care.

Dr Coffey: I visited the Scottish Parliament as a tourist and found it to be a very interesting building. I did not see a debate while I was there. I agree with my hon. Friend. I value the tradition, as do many other Members.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): It is timely that I follow the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), because, since the election in May, Conservative Members and Ministers have denied this House a vote on exempting carers from hospital parking charges, ensuring that children learn emergency first aid and improving access to low-cost treatments for conditions such as cancer, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's. Does the Deputy Leader of the House believe that the way of voting on private Members' Bills is undemocratic, looks outdated to the public and needs to change?

Dr Coffey: I speak as somebody who has taken a private Member's Bill through the House, which is a unique way to bring in legislation not introduced by the Government. The hon. Lady will know that the Procedure Committee is looking into this matter. Frankly, it is important that legislation is properly scrutinised. The Procedure Committee will come up with recommendations on which the House can further deliberate.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I had the privilege of serving for a year on the Digital Democracy Commission that you, Mr Speaker, established. The commission, which had a majority of lay members, endorsed the principle of walking through the Lobby for the benefits it brings. However, we urged the House to come up with a proposal for electronic voting by swiping smart cards to speed up the process, to ensure our constituents can quickly see how we have voted and to begin to modernise the House. Will the Deputy Leader of the House advise us on what progress has been made on that?

Dr Coffey: I am not aware of a move to introduce swipe cards, as the hon. Lady suggests, but we believe that introducing tablet recording for Divisions will help to facilitate the provision of the kind of information for constituents to which she refers.

Business of the House

10.35 am

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Will the former leader of the Out campaign give us the business for next week?

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

MONDAY 25 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Childcare Bill [*Lords*], followed by a debate on a motion on foreign policy and development aid in central and east Africa. The subject for this debate was picked by the Backbench Business Committee.

TUESDAY 26 JANUARY—Motion to approve a Ways and Means resolution relating to the Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Bill [*Lords*], followed by the remaining stages of the Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Bill [*Lords*].

WEDNESDAY 27 JANUARY—Opposition day (17th allotted day). There will be a debate entitled “Housing benefit cuts and supported housing”, followed by a debate on prisons and probation. Both debates will arise on an Opposition motion.

THURSDAY 28 JANUARY—Debate on a motion on the NHS and a social care commission. The subject for this debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 29 JANUARY—Private Members’ Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 1 February will include:

MONDAY 1 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the Bank of England and Financial Services Bill [*Lords*], followed by a debate on a motion on the future of the Financial Conduct Authority. The subject for this debate was picked by the Backbench Business Committee.

TUESDAY 2 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the Enterprise Bill [*Lords*], followed by a motion relating to the House of Commons Commission.

WEDNESDAY 3 FEBRUARY—Opposition day (18th allotted day). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 4 FEBRUARY—Business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 5 FEBRUARY—Private Members’ Bills.

Chris Bryant: I apologise for the state of my voice, Mr Speaker. I gather that when people heard about that yesterday, several hon. Members rushed to the Table Office to table an early-day motion calling for a national day of celebration.

Mr Speaker: Order. One by-product of the hon. Gentleman’s losing his voice is that we can be sure he will not exceed his allotted time of five minutes today. It will be a five brilliant minutes, but I am sure it will not be more.

Chris Bryant: Brevity is, of course, something you are yourself used to, Mr Speaker.

What a week it has been! As we debated psychoactive substances in this House, the American Republican campaign seemed to be on psychoactive substances. Sarah Palin’s endorsement of Donald Trump must be the ultimate case of Tweedledum and Tweedledumber. Two Tory MPs have confessed to taking poppers in the

Chamber. I do not mean that they actually took the poppers in the Chamber—I do not know whether they did—but they made their confessions in the Chamber. We also learned that the Leader of the House is going to be out-outed by the Work and Pensions Secretary, who is not only an outer as far as the EU is concerned, but so determined to be out that he wants to be out of the two Out campaigns. Talk about two bald men fighting over a comb. As P. G. Wodehouse wrote in “The Small Bachelor”,

“if men were dominoes, he would be the double-blank.”

To be serious, Mr Speaker, may we have a debate about the operation of English votes for English laws? EVEL seems to be descending into farce. Last Thursday, a Committee considered the order abolishing student maintenance grants. You certified the order as an England-only one, yet two Scottish MPs and one Welsh MP were selected to sit on the Committee, in which they voted. That was fair enough, but on Tuesday, when the Labour party ensured that there was a vote of the whole House, two English MPs—the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon)—were excluded from the lists.

I have several complaints. First, last week the Leader of the House said of this measure:

“If it is prayed against, it will not pass without a vote of the whole House”.—[*Official Report*, 14 January 2016; Vol. 604, c. 1002.]

Either he meant that a vote would happen automatically, in which case he does not know the rules of the House and, frankly, he should go and get himself another job, or he meant that he would make sure that the measure was put to a vote of the whole House, in which case we have been sorely disappointed because he did no such thing and, frankly, he should go and get himself another job. Which is it? Does he not know where the Table Office is—it is just out there—or did he never intend to table a motion?

What is particularly bizarre is that because the Government used the negative process and failed to table their own motion, as they had promised, it was virtually impossible for the measure to be defeated. Even if English MPs had wanted the order to be annulled, the whole House could have overruled them because the annulment required a double majority under Standing Order No. 83P. So much for EVEL—it is nothing but an elaborately farcical pretence at democracy and we should get rid of it as fast as possible.

When are we going to have a debate on the Strathclyde report? They have had one in the House of Lords, but we have not had one here. We have seen a dramatic increase in the use of statutory instruments since this Government came to power. They are now churning out 3,043 a year, compared with 1,891 a year under Labour. That is a 60% increase. And they are on more important matters: fracking in national parks, slashing working tax credits and cutting support for poorer students. Surely it is wrong to limit the powers of the Lords in relation to statutory instruments, when 3,000 such measures are being pushed through the Commons on unamendable motions every year.

The latest of these instruments is the Recall of MPs Act 2015 (Recall Petition) Regulations 2016—a very catchy title. This is no minor piece of legislation, as I am

sure you are aware, Mr Speaker. It is 174 pages long—nearly three times longer than the original Act. Yet the Government are allowing only a 90-minute debate in Committee on Tuesday. I think that we should have a proper right of recall. That is what I voted for in the last Parliament, rather than the damp squib the Government introduced. Surely such an important measure should be considered by the whole House, line by line.

Next Wednesday is Holocaust Memorial Day. This afternoon, we will have a debate on the memorial day and remember the millions of Jews who were exterminated, the trade unionists, the Roma, the gay men, the so-called asocials, the Jehovah's Witnesses and, of course, the people with disabilities who were killed under the T4 forced euthanasia programme, which saw 9,722 men and women gassed at the Brandenburg centre in 1940 alone.

But genocide is still happening today. Daesh slaughters Yazidi women and children in Syria and Iraq. In Darfur, the Sudanese Government have been engaged in genocide for more than a decade. I am sure that the Leader of the House would agree that we must always take sides, because looking the other way helps the oppressor, encourages the tormentor and perpetuates the crime.

That brings me to Russia. Sir Robert Owen has delivered his judgment on the murder of Alexander Litvinenko. The Home Secretary will make a statement in few minutes and my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) will respond. I fully understand why the Government want to engage with Russia—she is a key player in Iran and Syria—but the one thing we know for certain about the murderous, kleptomaniac regime in Russia is that it walks all over the weak. Putin has no respect for those who let him do what he wants.

On 7 March 2012, this House declared unanimously that it wanted the Government to introduce a Magnitsky Act to ensure that nobody involved in the murder of Sergei Magnitsky or the corruption that he unveiled was able to enter this country. The USA has such an Act. Is it not time that we made it absolutely clear that Russian murderers are not welcome in this country, and that the likes of Andrey Lugovoy and Dmitry Kovtun may enter the country only if they are prepared to stand trial?

Chris Grayling: May I start with the English votes for English laws vote? I thank everyone among the House's officials who has been involved in introducing the new system. Barring the minor glitch on Tuesday, it has been done very effectively and I am grateful to all those who have been involved in making it happen. The glitch was clearly a minor human error. I, for one, do not think that it is right to start blaming those who set up the new system for that minor human error; I am surprised that the shadow Leader of the House would make that suggestion. I am grateful to all in the House who have been involved in making the new system work.

A couple of points were raised about the restoration and renewal project. Regardless of what we as a Parliament choose to do, that work would have to be carried out anyway. This is a grade I listed building and a world heritage site, and the work we are talking about has to happen regardless. The Committee will report soon, probably in spring, and it will hold sessions in public, probably after the consultation period, which—I remind hon. Members—finishes next week. I encourage everyone to take part.

I echo the comments about Holocaust Memorial Day, and I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for marking it. It has always been an important point in the parliamentary calendar, and I am grateful to the Committee for continuing the tradition.

I have announced two more Opposition days. The shadow Leader of the House has asked for debates on a variety of subjects. He will clearly have a lot of different bids for Opposition day debating time, so let me try to help him, particularly with things that he may not have time for. He did not ask me for a debate on his party's extraordinary new defence policy of sending our nuclear submarines out to sea with no missiles. Despite his comments on Daesh, he did not ask for a statement on Syria, so that his party leader can set out his plans for negotiations with the brutal murderers in that part of the world. He did not ask for a debate on his party's new policy of reopening discussions on the future of the Falkland Islands with Argentina, or for a debate on trade union law so that his party can argue for a return to the days of flying pickets and secondary strikes, putting companies out of business and workers out of jobs. If he wants additional time to debate those issues, I am sure we can look carefully at that.

I am certainly willing to provide extra time for debate on the backbone—or lack of it—of members of the shadow Cabinet, who are not brave enough to put their own jobs on the line when it comes to standing up to a Leader of the Opposition whose policies pose a real threat to this country.

The shadow Leader of the House has left the Church of England because he believes that its policies are unacceptable, but he will not do the same for the shadow Cabinet, even though its policies are clearly unacceptable. He and his colleagues have abandoned the red flag. By scrapping our defences and doing deals with our adversaries, today they are about keeping the white flag flying here, and the hon. Gentleman should be ashamed to be still sitting on that Front Bench.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): The House may wish to know that following the non-violent demonstration at Fenchurch Street station regarding c2c timetable changes, the service is now even worse. Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on matters affecting the Showmen's Guild? I have the honour to chair the all-party group on fairs and showgrounds, and I would like the House to consider issues relating to that, such as admissions and the distinction between Travellers and traveller-showmen.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend is one of Parliament's great characters, so I am not in the least surprised to discover that he fulfils that position in the all-party group. He is right: there is a world of difference between those who travel this country bringing fairgrounds and entertainment to our communities, and a great time for young people, and those who occupy public land illegally and leave behind a vast amount of mess to be cleared up at huge public expense. We should always be proud to make that distinction in this House. My hon. Friend does a great job with his work, and he is right to say that that distinction is enormously important.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing next week's business.

[Pete Wishart]

Another week, another EVEL shambles—this week the now infamous iPad malfunction. How could they possibly do that to the hon. Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell), the most English of all English Members in the House? A man who sits proudly in his Union Jack underpants and whose ringtone is, “There’ll Always Be an England”, has been treated as mere and meagre Scot and subject to the second-class status that we have in this House. “Reinstate the hon. Member for Romford” is the call from the SNP Benches. Seriously, the confusion around EVEL continues, and the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law) deserves a better response than we got from the Deputy Leader of the House—perhaps the Leader of the House can help us with that.

The Leader of the House has always characterised the double majority and the Scottish veto—or the English veto, as we call it—as something that would give consent to a particular instrument. This week we had a measure that withheld consent but that was subject to the EVEL mechanism and the double majority vote on which we were obviously subject to a English veto. What is the response of the Leader of the House to that? When we start to distinguish Members according to geography and nationality, that will always be reinterpreted and extended. By the end of this Parliament, we will have a real divide in this House. That may be the Leader of the House’s legacy as he goes off to fight one of his Euro-battles to get the country out of Europe.

Are the Government prepared to respect the House of Lords vote on the Trade Union Bill? I am not a great supporter of the House of Lords, but I note what it did this week. More important to me is whether the Leader of the House will respect the recommendation of the Scottish Parliament’s Devolution Committee that Scotland be excluded from the scope of the Bill. We do not want the Bill to destroy the very good trade union relations that we enjoy in Scotland. This is a deeply ideological Tory Bill and the Government are trying impose it on a country that does not do Tory. Can we leave it at the border and not have this Tory Trade Union Bill in Scotland?

Growing numbers of people are concerned about the situation in Yemen. Our role in equipping and advising the Saudi air force in its bombing campaign was rightly raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson). We have sold £10 billion-worth of aircraft to the Saudi air force, yet the Arms Export Controls Committee has lain dormant since the general election. Will the Leader of the House now pledge to get the Committee up and running as quickly as possible, so there is at least some form of scrutiny and oversight of arms exports to countries such as Saudi Arabia?

We heard all sorts of rumours yesterday about a possible maingate vote on Trident, which I am very disappointed to see is not in the Business Statement. We are now in a situation where all of us could make a decision about maingate. All the major parties have now got their positions, which are apparent for everybody to see. The Conservatives—the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) is nodding—want to spend billions of pounds of our money on useless obsolete weapons of mass destruction. The SNP is implacably opposed to that spending. The Labour party, of course,

has the yellow submarine option, which is maybe for and maybe against, while at the same time sending submarines out without any weaponry whatever. So we are all in a position to make a decision. Will the Leader of the House now get on with this, so we can have a proper decision and see how the parties respond?

Chris Grayling: I wish all our friends in the Scottish National party a very enjoyable Burns night next week. I do not know whether they will be piping in the haggis in quite the traditional way after our discussions last week—they should perhaps be piping in the black pudding from Stornoway; whether my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall) would agree with that is a different question—but I wish them all a very enjoyable evening of celebration next week.

On the English votes for English laws vote earlier this week, yes there was a mistake. However, I do not believe we should condemn human error in a project that has gone pretty smoothly. I do not think anybody would wish to exclude my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Andrew Rosindell) from anything, nor would he allow himself to be excluded. As the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) says, he is the ultimate English nationalist. He is also a United Kingdom nationalist as well. That, I think, is the point the hon. Gentleman misses about the Trade Union Bill. He talks about imposing something on the country. We are all part of one country. That is what the Scottish people decided in the referendum. I know it is difficult for the SNP to accept that, but the reality is that this is a United Kingdom Bill. I appreciate that SNP Members may disagree with it, but it will be voted on by the United Kingdom Parliament and I expect that it will be passed by the United Kingdom Parliament.

On Yemen, in Prime Minister’s questions the Prime Minister made it very clear, in response to the leader of the SNP at Westminster, the right hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), exactly what the position is in Saudi Arabia and exactly what our role—indeed, non-role—is in the conflict taking place in Yemen. We all want to see a solution: a proper Government who can represent all the people of Yemen. The hon. Gentleman talks about the Arms Export Controls Committee. It can, of course, meet whenever it chooses. It is a partnership of a number of Select Committees. It is not for the Government to instruct Select Committees to meet.

The hon. Gentleman was right to highlight, as I did earlier, the chaos of the Labour party’s policy on Trident. I do not know where it stands now. Does it want to build submarines but send them to sea empty? That is probably the case. At least the SNP has a clear position. The fact is that the Labour party is all over the place on this issue. When we bring it to the House, I suspect our parties will have an interesting time exposing the Labour party’s fraudulent position.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I must advise the House that no fewer than 47 right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. I am always keen to accommodate colleagues, but there are two ministerial statements to follow and two debates under the auspices of the Backbench Business Committee. There is, therefore, a premium on brevity. What is required from each Member is a single, short supplementary question without preamble and a characteristically pithy reply from the Leader of the House.

Pauline Latham (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): Derby City Council has granted planning permission on vital green wedge land in Oakwood—land that prevents the city from being an urban sprawl—in spite of substantial local opposition. The site contains very old and diverse woodland, but will become totally surrounded, preventing wildlife from entering and leaving. May we have a debate on providing corridors for wildlife in planning applications on green spaces to ensure safe havens for wildlife and to allow that wildlife to travel to and from established habitats?

Chris Grayling: I understand the concern, which was raised recently by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Oliver Colvile) with regard to his own campaign, and I know that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government has considered it carefully. We always wish for local authorities to provide a balance between the necessary development to provide housing for the people of this country and wildlife protection.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I am grateful to the Leader of the House for advance notice of the Back-Bench business debates on Thursday 4 February, but I note also that we have time allocated on Monday 25 January and Monday 1 February after Government business. Will he again consider protecting time for those debates so that we have at least three hours? I also point out to right hon. and hon. Members that the Backbench Business Committee is very much open for business.

Chris Grayling: That latter point is important because we want the Committee to have a good range of debates to consider. As I said last week, I will give careful consideration to the hon. Gentleman's point about time.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): Will the Leader of the House be good enough to give us a debate on how we can get back our country? On the immigration question, the voters absolutely have to understand how the Dublin regulation is being bulldozed, with the connivance of the Commission, through Angela Merkel's own policy, and how human rights laws are being extended to allow people in Calais to come over here. These matters go right to the heart of the referendum. Can we have our country back please?

Chris Grayling: First, as my hon. Friend knows, the broader issue will be extensively debated in both the House and the country over the coming months. On the more immediate issues, it is important, in the interim, that, when the EU takes decisions about what happens right now, it does not forget the interests of the UK simply because we are not in the Schengen area.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): May we have a debate on the lack of accountability of transport bodies, at regional and national levels, when they do not work together? We recently suffered hours of gridlock because of an accident on the motorway and a football match at the Etihad stadium—events likely to happen on the same day from time to time. The agencies involved find it impossible to work together or come up with any solutions.

Chris Grayling: It is important that transport bodies are mindful of such events. Occasionally in recent years, major national events have coincided with major engineering

works—on the railways, for example. The hon. Lady makes an important point, and I am sure the Transport Secretary will listen. He will be here to take questions next week, when she might wish to make that point again.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Is the Leader of the House aware of the heartless cuts to local library services by Labour-led Telford and Wrekin Council, and may we have a debate on the vital role that library services play in communities such as Donnington, Hadley and Newport in my constituency?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Library services remain of enormous importance to people in this country. It is striking how Conservative councils have faced the financial challenges, which all local authorities face, innovatively while still managing to deliver quality services, while Labour councils, all too often, cannot provide the efficiencies we need while protecting those services.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): Last week in Women and Equalities questions we could not ask any direct questions about the Select Committee's report on the transgender issue. Will the Leader of the House consider allowing time for Topical Questions as part of Women and Equalities Question Time?

Chris Grayling: I am happy to consider that. We review the structure of questions from time to time. The hon. Lady might also wish to take the matter to the Backbench Business Committee to secure a debate. We now make a substantial block of time available to the Committee, as we have heard today. It is a good opportunity for Select Committees to seek time for debates about reports.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): We have heard today that the Leader of the House wants a debate on the future of Trident, that the spokesman for the Scottish nationalists wants a debate on the future of Trident, and I know from personal experience that the leader of the Labour party is never afraid to have a debate on the future of Trident, so why have we not been given a date for the main gate debate and decision? Surely the Prime Minister cannot be so occupied with considerations of European negotiations as to delay this issue once more, when it was outrageously delayed for five years as part of a grubby coalition deal in 2010.

Chris Grayling: As we have heard, my right hon. Friend feels strongly that we should have such debates. He may be right about the Leader of the Opposition, but I am not sure that the rest of those on the Labour Front Bench want to have that debate any time soon. This is a matter under consideration and I hope to be able to indicate in the not too distant future the Government's plans for future debates about defence matters.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): The International Association of Athletics Federations has recently acknowledged the widespread doping in world athletics. This morning, UK Anti-Doping has asked to see Arsène Wenger because of his long-term brave outspokenness on doping in football. What are the Government going to do about this issue, and may we have a debate?

Mr Speaker: Wenger is a great man!

Chris Grayling: I think we now understand where your footballing sympathies lie, Mr Speaker. Sadly, I fear my team, Manchester United, are unlikely to overtake yours this season, but we can but hope and keep our fingers crossed. We have, of course, just had Culture, Media and Sport questions, and I am sure that the Secretary of State has already thought carefully about the issue and will continue to do so. I will make sure that the hon. Gentleman's concerns are raised. He makes an important point—doping in sport, in whatever sport, is to be roundly condemned and dealt with with the strongest possible force, when appropriate.

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con): Pursuant to yesterday's Adjournment debate, sponsored by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), may we have a debate on the entirely unsatisfactory situation whereby international banks treat Members of Parliament as persons of interest in organised crime?

Chris Grayling: I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) for bringing forward yesterday's debate and I offer my strong support for the comment that has just been made. On behalf of Members of all parties, I say that it is absolutely inappropriate for international banks to look upon Members as anything other than normal customers. The fact that they pursue a line that is, I believe, often intrusive, inappropriate and unnecessary is something that we should all clearly state we believe to be unacceptable.

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): We were all delighted in October last year when the Foreign Secretary's visit to Saudi Arabia led to the release of Karl Andree from a Saudi jail, which the Foreign Secretary attributed to the strength, breadth and depth of UK-Saudi relations. The Prime Minister said at the time:

"We have always acted on... British prisoners overseas, with all countries, not just Saudi Arabia".

We surely have strength, breadth and depth in our relationship with India, so I ask the Leader of the House for a statement outlining exactly why we could secure the release of Mr Andree from Saudi Arabia, but seemingly not of my constituent, Billy Irving, from five years' vigorous imprisonment in Tamil Nadu in India.

Chris Grayling: Let me first commend the hon. Lady for her diligence in pursuing this case. Since she last raised the matter, I have raised it with the Foreign Office and the Prime Minister. After today, I will pursue it further and try to ensure that she receives an early reply to the representations she has been making on behalf of her constituent.

Craig Whittaker (Calder Valley) (Con): The Government have been told by the insurance industry that all businesses are offered flood insurance for their businesses, but we know after devastating floods in Calder Valley over Christmas that that is not the case—and where it is, we know that the premiums and excesses are often extortionate, unaffordable and unfair. May we have a debate on flood insurance for business and on whether the Government will begin negotiations with the insurance industry on behalf of business, as they did with domestic properties and Flood Re?

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I know that the county he represents as well as his own area has been affected, and we all want to see continued progress being made in the areas affected by flooding to try to get businesses and homeowners back to normal. He knows that Flood Re was set up as a residential system in the first place, but I can assure him that Ministers are currently in discussions with the insurance industry about how to address precisely the concerns he has raised today.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): May we have a statement on criminal legal aid to clarify whether the Government still intend to go ahead with their disastrous two-tier contracts for criminal solicitors? I realise that the Leader of the House will not welcome a sixth high-profile U-turn on policies he championed when he was Lord Chancellor, but the current chaos is, in the words of the Law Society this week, "undermining access to justice for the most vulnerable in society."

Chris Grayling: Let me remind the hon. Gentleman that the Law Society endorsed the package in the first place, two years ago. Let me also remind him that we have had to make tough decisions in a variety of areas of government—including legal aid—from 2010 onwards, because we have had to sort out the right royal financial mess that was left behind by the Labour party.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Dudley council is banning dogs from the parts of Himley Park that are most easily accessible to people with visual and other disabilities. May we have a debate on facilities to allow guide dog owners and puppy-walkers to exercise their dogs properly?

Chris Grayling: It is important, as we rightly do the right thing for people with disabilities, for us to try to ensure that they are given the support that they need throughout society. My hon. Friend has made an important point about his constituency. I am sure that his comments will have been heard by his local authority, and that it will be considering whether it should, and how it could, act on them.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Some Members' votes can now be void. Chamber votes on substantive issues such as women's pensions have been voided, and votes on serious issues are increasingly avoided, by means of statutory instruments. Which of those does the Leader of the House take most pride in?

Chris Grayling: The House has followed the Government's current ways of working for decades. It did so under the last Labour Government, and it did so under the coalition Government. We have made no major changes, barring the very necessary change to provide the fairness in our devolution settlement that the English votes for English laws system represents.

Craig Williams (Cardiff North) (Con): It is with great delight that I update the House on a matter that has been raised in the Chamber many times by my predecessors. Llanishen and Lisvane reservoirs have now been taken over by Welsh Water on a very long-term lease, and I praise both Welsh Water and Celsa for signing the deal. The nub of the question, however, is how we can

recognise community groups such as the Reservoir Action Group, which has been campaigning for more than two decades with MPs and councillors. The honours system could, of course, give awards to some of its members, but how can we honour such community groups more broadly? The RAG, for instance, has made a huge contribution to Cardiff and to the reservoirs.

Chris Grayling: I should like to praise the volunteers in my hon. Friend's constituency for the work that they have done. Last week I suggested to the Backbench Business Committee that it might wish to hold a day-long debate at some point this year so that Members could praise and reflect the work done by voluntary groups in their constituencies. As my hon. Friend says, the honours system can be used to reflect the exceptionally good work done by individuals in all our constituencies, and I am sure that many of us have used the system in that way, appropriately, in the past, but the Prime Minister runs the Points of Light awards on a daily basis, and my hon. Friend might like to consider that option as well.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I am sorry to say that Sheffield remains extremely vulnerable to flooding, as it has few and inadequate flood defences. So far the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has allocated only £23 million of the £43 million that Sheffield needs to protect existing homes, businesses and prime development land, to enable new homes to be built, and to promote job creation and growth. May we have a debate in Government time on DEFRA's grant in aid programme, so that we can ensure that it recognises the substantial economic benefits of our flood defences?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady has made an important point. In all the areas that have been either directly affected by or threatened by flooding, there is now a real determination among local communities—as well as at Government level—to focus on doing all the sensible things that can be done to prevent flooding. I will ensure that the hon. Lady's concerns are passed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. She will be back in the House shortly, and the point could be put to her directly then.

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): Huddersfield Royal Infirmary, which is in my constituency, serves our growing university town. Yesterday the clinical commissioning group announced a 12-week consultation on closing our accident and emergency department and moving it to Halifax. The backdrop to that is a ruinous private finance initiative deal under which we will pay £774 million for a hospital that cost £64 million to build. May we have an urgent debate on this appalling situation?

Chris Grayling: I well understand my hon. Friend's concern about A&E services in his constituency. No doubt he will make strong representations locally, to the CCG, general practitioners and local decision-makers, but the appalling structures of PFI are, of course, a legacy that was passed to us by the last Labour Government. We look back and ask, "How on earth did they ever think those deals were a good idea?"

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Last week I described the Leader of the House as a Brexit mini-beast, but this week I should like to extend the hand of friendship to him, and invite him to join me on a Southern train. I will buy the lattes. I hope that, at the end of the journey, he will want to make time available for a debate in the House to discuss my proposal that passengers should be entitled to compensation when their trains are delayed by 15 minutes, rather than the 30 minutes that currently apply.

Chris Grayling: The right hon. Gentleman makes an important point. He does not need to invite me on Southern rail; I was on Southern last night—indeed, I am a regular traveller on Southern and on South West Trains. He makes an important point and one of the things I find frustrating is that I personally believe we should be tighter on the statistics around delays to services as well, because they can get away with being a few minutes late and that will not show up in the statistics. So the right hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and he and I will continue to argue for better services on behalf of our constituents. I am sure his comments will be listened to.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): May we have a debate on the Prime Minister's very sensible proposals this week about the importance of immigrants learning English, which is certainly an issue in Bradford among many Muslim women, to help them integrate into British society? In such a debate, perhaps we could discuss who should pay for these English lessons, because many of my constituents think it should not be the taxpayer who foots the bill; it should be the people themselves. If I decide to go and live in Spain, I would not expect the Spanish Government to teach me Spanish.

Chris Grayling: My hon. Friend makes his point eloquently, but the key to this is that it is absolutely essential that people who come to live and work in this country speak English, and our communities have ended up more divided than they should be because of the fact that so many people who come here cannot speak English. That really has to change.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): We learned from the *Evening Standard* just over an hour ago that the Government intend to devolve local metro train services in London from the Department for Transport to Transport for London, something that was dismissed by the Leader of the House as renationalisation when I pressed him on it last year. In the light of that welcome decision, can we now find time for a debate on the details of the Government's proposals, and in particular what can be done to compel operators like Southeastern, which will lose their franchises as a result, to improve their services in the interim?

Chris Grayling: Changes of this kind would be a matter for detailed discussion in this House. I have not seen what is in the *Evening Standard* so I cannot tell whether it is a rumour or otherwise. What I would say is if this Government are going to bring forward changes that affect Members of this House, we will set out details to them and listen to them.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Weetabix is a delicious and nutritious breakfast cereal the wheat for which is sourced from farms within a 50 mile radius of

[Mr Philip Hollobone]

the Weetabix factory at Burton Latimer in the borough of Kettering. The agriculture Secretary is there this morning to launch the new great British food unit to promote the export of British foodstuffs around the world. Will the Leader of the House make sure that at all his breakfast meetings, and at all the breakfast meetings arranged by the House authorities, Weetabix is made available?

Chris Grayling: Mr Speaker, I am sure that you and I, as members of the Commission that ultimately looks at catering matters, will give careful consideration to that representation. However, we may have to have a two-course breakfast as my hon. Friend will have heard from both sides of the House the call to have a cooked breakfast with black pudding afterwards.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I hope the Leader of the House is in good health and has been enjoying some of that superfood that is Stornoway black pudding as recommended in my early-day motion 936, and which is easily ordered on the internet.

[That this House welcomes the recognition of black pudding, Marag Dhubbh in Gaelic, as a superfood; notes that its calcium, iron, magnesium, potassium and protein-rich nature make the black pudding an excellent addition to a healthy, balanced diet; expresses pleasure at the economic benefits to Stornoway butchers of its EU Protected Geographical Indication, one of the many great benefits of EU membership; and encourages everyone to discover the great taste of Scottish food.]

With his health suitably fortified, will the Leader of the House look to have a debate on the suggestion of a new Act of Union in the UK by Peter Hain and other ennobled gentlemen, and maybe the Government and these gentlemen could get behind my ten-minute rule Bill on Scots votes for Scots laws and engage with Scotland's democratic representatives?

Chris Grayling: Hopefully the Stornoway superfood will provide an appropriate counterbalance to the glass of the other product that comes from the hon. Gentleman's constituency, which I suspect will be drunk in copious quantities next week on Burns night. What I would say to him is if the Scottish National party is now calling for a new Act of Union, that is definitely a new departure and one we should perhaps consider very carefully.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): May we have a debate on the export value and potential of Bury black pudding, which was raised with me when I visited the Bury Black Pudding Company last week? This will enable me to dispel the suggestion raised by some hon. Members that the black pudding made in their constituencies is in the same league as Bury black pudding. This is clearly a scurrilous suggestion that needs to be dealt with as quickly as possible.

Chris Grayling: We are clearly going to have to hold a black pudding tasting contest in this House. We will not be inviting the shadow Leader of the House to take part, because we know that he does not like black pudding—

Chris Bryant: No you don't!

Chris Grayling: But as we know, the shadow Deputy Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Melanie Onn), does like black pudding, so she can take part.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Following the point made by the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), may we have an urgent debate on cuts to funding for English for speakers of other languages? Walsall Adult Community College has had £380,000 cut from its budget for doing what the Prime Minister asked it to do. The Prime Minister has now allocated £20 million, so please can the college have its money back?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady makes a strong representation on behalf of her local college, and I am sure that the appropriate Minister will take that into account as he looks at how we use this money to the best possible effect.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Last weekend saw the celebrations of Thai Pongal and Lohri, with thousands of British citizens celebrating the winter harvest in the Indian subcontinent. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is a great cause for congratulation and that we should have a debate in this House on the variety of different community festivals that are held in this country, given that they are never debated in this Chamber?

Chris Grayling: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work he does with the different minority groups in his constituency. He raised the issue of groups in Kashmir, a part of the world in which we would all like to see a peace settlement and a lasting solution. In the meantime, he has made an important point about the different community festivals that add richness to this country and provide a fantastic means of spreading community understanding between different parts of our society.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I was disappointed to hear the Prime Minister's triumphalism on the question of employment yesterday, because unemployment has once again gone up in my constituency, as it has in many others. Of the 75 constituencies in which unemployment has risen the most, just seven are in the south of England. May we please have a debate on the continuing north-south divide, before the northern powerhouse goes the way of the big society and hug a hoodie?

Chris Grayling: I am sorry; I simply do not agree with the hon. Gentleman. Over the past five and a half years, we have seen a steady fall in unemployment and a steady rise in employment in this country, and the economy of the north is growing faster than the economy of the south. I am proud of this Government's achievement in turning around the situation: when we came into office, unemployment was forecast to rise to 3 million, but it is now around half that level.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): The Government invested £15 million of regional growth fund money to establish the largest enterprise zone in the country in order to further their ambition to make the Humber the

energy estuary, which is vital to the economy of my constituency. Progress on this seems to be rather too slow, however. May we have an urgent statement on how we might pursue this matter?

Chris Grayling: We all want to see continued economic growth in Humberside. The enterprise zone that my hon. Friend talks about is one part of our strategy for continued improvement and a continued fall in unemployment. I will ensure that the Secretary of State is made aware of his concerns and look into how we might possibly help my hon. Friend to achieve what he is trying to achieve.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): Last night, I met the mum and dad of Matthew Bass, who had a 15-year career in cabin crew before his sudden death in January 2014. Matthew, aged 34, was found to have died from chronic exposure to organophosphates. It is believed that that was caused by contaminated cabin air. Will a Minister come to the House to make a statement to ensure that air passengers are made aware of the situation and of the steps the Government are taking to ensure that air passengers are safe?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady raises an issue that has been brought up in the House on a number of occasions over the years. It has also been debated on occasions, but she might like to consider bringing forward a further debate on it. I will ensure that her concerns about this tragic death are passed on to the Secretary of State for Transport, who will be back in the House next week. She might like to put this point to him as well.

Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): In 2014, the railway line at Dawlish was cut off for six weeks because of severe storms. The Secretary of State for Transport asked the taskforce and his own Department to report in the summer on resilience in the south-west, so that we should never again be cut off. May we have a statement on how that is proceeding?

Chris Grayling: I am aware of the huge disruption that the damage at Dawlish caused. I hope that my hon. Friend believes that the Government and Network Rail responded as quickly as possible to restore the existing route, and I assure him that work is ongoing to find alternatives and to provide a contingency plan for any such event in the future. The Secretary of State for Transport will be here in the next few days, and my hon. Friend will certainly be able to raise that point with him then, but I will also ensure that his concerns are passed on and that we get that statement soon.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Earlier this week, the Prime Minister appeared to back a ban on the Muslim veil in some circumstances but not in others, and seemed to stop short of an outright ban on the facial veil. This has caused some confusion and concern among the Muslim community in my constituency. May we have a statement from the Prime Minister to clarify exactly what the Government's policy is? Will he clarify that it will not apply in devolved Scotland?

Chris Grayling: Of course the Prime Minister will be back here next week to take questions, but it is the case that there are places in our society where it is not appropriate to wear a face veil, for example, when somebody is giving evidence in court. That issue has appeared before the courts in recent years. It would be completely

wrong to have somebody giving evidence in court while wearing a full face veil. That is just one example of where it is not appropriate in our society and where it is sensible to have a balance.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): May we have a debate about the provision of in vitro fertilisation? The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's 2013 guidelines recommend that three full cycles be provided, but many clinical commissioning groups still impose restrictions. Two of my constituents have had to raise £10,000 to fund a second and third cycle. Will the Leader of the House raise with Health Ministers the need to ensure that the NICE guidance is followed?

Chris Grayling: I am happy to raise that point, but I would say that we have taken a conscious decision that the provision of services should be taken by local doctors, rather than by officials in Whitehall. That was a very conscious policy decision. It does mean that different decisions may be taken in different areas. I think that is the right thing, but I will make sure the hon. Lady's concerns are raised.

Simon Danczuk (Rochdale) (Ind): Dozens of Rochdale businesses have been without phone lines since the floods. BT Openreach is dragging its feet with the problem, so may we have a debate on whether BT is capable of delivering this essential service?

Chris Grayling: If BT has still not been able to restore phone lines to businesses, that is a matter of serious concern for all of us. I will make sure that that concern is passed on to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport this morning, as both have responsibilities in this area and this needs to be rectified pretty quickly.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The prosecution of kids who post indecent images continues to cause great concern. In Northern Ireland last week, investigations into dozens of youngsters considered for prosecution over indecent images of children have been halted because of the sensitivity of the issue and the need, I believe, for decriminalisation. Children will come forward to get help, and fewer will self-harm and commit suicide, if we look at decriminalising this. Will the Leader of the House agree to a statement on this very important issue?

Chris Grayling: One very much hopes that the prosecuting authorities, both in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, apply a degree of common sense. We have rules that are designed to protect young people from inappropriate exploitation and from revenge porn, but I think we would all take the view that if a teenager does something stupid, we would not wish to see them criminalised without good reason.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): May we have a statement from a Department for Work and Pensions Minister, because over the Christmas period a number of families in my constituency could not get any benefits or tax credits? The procedure seems to be very slow and delayed. This is a serious issue and we should have either a statement or a debate on it.

Chris Grayling: Of course tax credits are normally paid directly, through a different route from the benefits system. This will therefore depend entirely on the individual cases, but if the hon. Gentleman wishes to write to me with some more detailed examples, I will make sure that I pass his comments on to the Secretary of State so that he gets a response.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): My constituent Naheed Kausar Ali was tragically killed during the crushing incident at the Hajj in September. The Saudi authorities committed to an investigation, on which they have yet to report back. May we have a statement on what pressure can be applied and what assistance can be given to the Saudi authorities to ensure that they report back rapidly and publicly, so that lessons are learned and British pilgrims can travel to the Hajj in safety?

Chris Grayling: This was, of course, a great tragedy, and the hon. Gentleman makes an important point. By coincidence, a Minister of State at the Foreign Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington), has just arrived in the Chamber. Although he is not directly responsible for relations with Saudi Arabia, I will ask him to pass on that concern to his colleague in the Foreign Office so that the issue can be addressed. This was a tragedy for the families involved and they will want to see answers.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mark Pritchard), may we have a debate on local government finance, as that might give Ministers a chance to explain why cautious, prudent, Labour-run Cheshire West and Chester Council, having achieved a £2 million underspend this year, has seen that wiped out by incompetent Ministers applying a formula error that has lost our local council £2.3 million?

Chris Grayling: If there is a formula error, the Department will look at it. The hon. Gentleman will undoubtedly have made representations already, as will other Members from the Cheshire West area. I will ensure that the Department responds appropriately to him and to them.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): Greater Manchester's bid for enterprise zones in its town centres was refused by the Government. May we have a debate about the importance of town centres to our economies?

Chris Grayling: May I start by congratulating the hon. Gentleman on his election to this House? I am sorry that he was caught up in the glitch on Tuesday, but, as I said earlier, it was a human error and one that I am certain will not be repeated. Again, I congratulate him on his arrival in this House and say to him that he makes an important point about the town and city centres of the north-west. I am pleased to have seen the way in which the centres of Manchester and Liverpool in particular—but not just Manchester and Liverpool—have been transformed in recent years. I take his point, and I will ask the Treasury to respond to him accordingly.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): The steel crisis rumbles on. Government policy is very much pro China's market economy status, irrespective of whether or not this country remains in

the European Union. May we have a statement on the Government's argument for China's MES, or are we to believe that the Chinese communist red flag flies above No. 10?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman knows, as this issue was addressed in this House a couple of days ago, that the steel industry internationally faces enormous challenges. The problems that we are experiencing are not unique to this country; they are a factor of change around the world. We believe strongly that this country benefits economically from having proper and solid economic ties with China, which does not mean that we are not putting serious effort into trying to address the problems that the steel industry faces, but he will understand that it is an international challenge that is not easy to resolve.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): Within the past week, the Secretary of State for Scotland has made a departmental statement and then a U-turn counter-statement on post-study work visas while being fully aware that there was an ongoing investigation into this matter by the Scottish Affairs Committee. That has enraged both the Scottish media and the people of Scotland. Will the Leader of the House issue a statement saying that such behaviour undermines the cross-party work of the parliamentary Committee, the evidence submitted from the many who come before the Committee, and subsequent reports that are published? Will he also assure us that this UK Government made an abject error and will not undermine parliamentary democracy in the future?

Chris Grayling: This is an area that was not in the Smith commission report. It is also one on which we seek to do the right thing and to provide the right balance. We think the system that has been put in place provides that right balance, even though the hon. Gentleman and his party do not agree.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): May we have a debate, or even one of those nice little statutory instruments, advising local authorities of the sense of installing a small shelf in disabled toilets so that people who have ileostomies or colostomies can effectively change their bags without having to scabble on dirty floors?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady makes an important and sensible point. The Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People will be here on Monday week when she can put that point to him. It is something that I will also ensure is passed on to the Department, as she makes an interesting and valuable point.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): May we have a debate on the Government's decision to cut public health in-year budgets by £200 million, given that Simon Stevens' "Five Year Forward View" predicates that in year 5 £5 billion will be freed up from prevention? Is it not short-sighted of this Government to cut the very budgets that will allow that to happen in the future?

Chris Grayling: We face different challenges in the health world, but we continue to increase the amount of money that we spend on health in this country, and will continue to do so.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): In Prime Minister's questions on 4 November, the Prime Minister agreed to meet my constituents, Tina and Mike Trowhill, to discuss the very sad case of the baby ashes scandal. The Prime Minister said:

"I am happy to arrange that meeting."—[*Official Report*, 4 November 2015; Vol. 601, c. 964.]

Subsequently, Downing Street has transferred that meeting to a junior Minister whom the Trowhills have already met. On 11 November, I wrote to the Prime Minister expressing my concern, but to no avail. It does the reputation of this House no good when commitments given in this House and reported in good faith by the media are not kept. Will the Leader of the House see what he can do to arrange that meeting?

Chris Grayling: I will take a look at the point the hon. Lady has raised.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Further to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner), may I impress on the Leader of the House the urgency of the matter? May we have an urgent statement on aerotoxic syndrome, as there were 251 incidents of toxic gas escapes into cabins last year?

Chris Grayling: I absolutely accept the hon. Lady's point. We heard earlier from the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee, who controls a large block of the time we have in this House for debates on such subjects, that he is short of topics for the coming weeks. I urge both the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) to put that request to the Backbench Business Committee, as that would bring a Minister to the House to discuss the serious issues that they raise.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): This week, the Leader of the House made comments that again insinuated that the SNP over-predicted the price of oil. Before the referendum, the Department of Energy and Climate Change had predicted an upper forecast of \$135 a barrel for oil for this year alone. Low oil prices affect workers all over the UK and I have a constituent who at Christmas did not know whether his son would get back on to the rigs. Will the right hon. Gentleman make a statement apologising for gloating while people lose their jobs?

Chris Grayling: What the SNP cannot understand is that it is precisely because we are one United Kingdom that we can provide support to parts of our economy that are affected by such unexpected changes. If Scotland had become independent, a new Scottish Administration would right now be facing a massive financial gap because of the falling oil price. That is why Scotland was and is better off as part of the United Kingdom.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is the Leader of the House aware that 11 March marks the centenary of the birth of Harold Wilson, one of our great Prime Ministers? Will he join me in ensuring that the House recognises the life of that great Yorkshireman, who was born in my constituency of Huddersfield, and will he try to persuade the Speaker's Art Fund and perhaps even Mr Speaker that it is about time we had a proper statue of Harold Wilson on the Westminster estate? I have been in touch with every Member of Parliament, and across all parties there is an overwhelming majority in favour.

Chris Grayling: Mr Speaker will have heard the hon. Gentleman's comments, which are important. Harold Wilson, although not of my political persuasion, was one of the major figures of 20th-century politics. I think that everyone in this House, from all parties, would wish to extend to Harold Wilson's widow our congratulations on the milestone that she has just celebrated of her 100th birthday.

Steven Paterson (Stirling) (SNP): I am sure that the Leader of the House will wish to be consistent and fair—he is a reasonable guy, after all. So, when will he introduce measures to implement Scottish votes for Scottish laws to address the democratic deficit that he has created with EVEL?

Chris Grayling: I can give the hon. Gentleman an absolute assurance that we will see new developments in Scottish votes for Scottish laws this May, when we have elections to the Scottish Parliament, which delivers those Scottish votes for Scottish laws. I am confident that our strong Conservative team in Scotland will be working to make real progress and I am equally confident that the Labour party will have a difficult night in Scotland.

Litvinenko Inquiry

11.32 am

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the death of Alexander Litvinenko on 23 November 2006 and the statutory inquiry into that death, which published its findings this morning.

Mr Litvinenko's death was a deeply shocking event. Despite the ongoing police investigation and the efforts of the Crown Prosecution Service, those responsible have still not been brought to justice. In July 2014, I established a statutory inquiry to investigate the circumstances surrounding Mr Litvinenko's death, to determine responsibility for his death and to make recommendations. It was chaired by Sir Robert Owen, a retired senior High Court judge, and it had the Government's full support and access to any relevant material regardless of its sensitivity.

I welcome the inquiry's report today and would like to put on record my thanks to Sir Robert Owen for his detailed, thorough and impartial investigation into this complex and serious matter. Although the inquiry cannot assign civil or criminal liability, I hope that these findings will provide some clarity for Alexander Litvinenko's family and friends and all those affected by his death. I would particularly like to pay tribute to Mrs Marina Litvinenko and her tireless efforts to get to the truth.

The independent inquiry has found that Mr Litvinenko died on 23 November 2006, having suffered a cardiac arrest as a result of acute radiation syndrome, caused by his ingesting polonium-210 on 1 November 2006. He ingested the fatal dose of polonium-210 while drinking tea at the Pine bar of the Millennium hotel on the afternoon of 1 November 2006. The inquiry, which in the course of its investigations considered "an abundance of evidence", has found that Mr Litvinenko was deliberately poisoned by Andrey Lugovoy and Dmitry Kovtun, whom he had met at the Millennium hotel on the afternoon of that day.

The inquiry has also found that Lugovoy and Kovtun were acting on behalf of others when they poisoned Mr Litvinenko. There is a strong probability that they were acting under the direction of the Russian domestic security service, the Federal Security Service or FSB. The inquiry has found that the FSB operation to kill Mr Litvinenko was probably approved by Mr Patrushev, the then head of the FSB, and by President Putin.

The Government take these findings extremely seriously, as I am sure does every Member of this House. We are carefully considering the report's findings in detail, and their implications. In particular, the conclusion that the Russian state was probably involved in the murder of Mr Litvinenko is deeply disturbing. It goes without saying that this was a blatant and unacceptable breach of the most fundamental tenets of international law and of civilised behaviour, but we have to accept that this does not come as a surprise. The inquiry confirms the assessment of successive Governments that this was a state-sponsored act. This assessment has informed the Government's approach to date.

Since 2007 that approach has comprised a series of steps to respond to Russia and its provocation. Some of these measures were immediate, such as the expulsion

of a number of Russian embassy officials from the UK. Others are ongoing, such as the tightening of visa restrictions on Russian officials in the UK. The Metropolitan Police Service's investigation into Mr Litvinenko's murder remains open. I can tell the House today that Interpol notices and European arrest warrants are in place so that the main suspects, Andrey Lugovoy and Dmitry Kovtun, can be arrested if they travel abroad. In the light of the report's findings the Government will go further, and Treasury Ministers have today agreed to put in place asset freezes against the two individuals.

At the time, the independent Crown Prosecution Service formally requested the extradition of Mr Lugovoy from Russia. Russia refused to comply with this request and has consistently refused to do so ever since. It is now almost 10 years since Mr Litvinenko was killed. Sir Robert Owen is unequivocal in his finding that Andrey Lugovoy and Dmitry Kovtun killed him. In the light of this most serious finding, Russia's continued failure to ensure that the perpetrators of this terrible crime can be brought to justice is unacceptable. I have written to the Director of Public Prosecutions this morning asking her to consider whether any further action should be taken, in terms of both extradition and freezing criminal assets. These decisions are, of course, a matter for the independent Crown Prosecution Service, but the Government remain committed to pursuing justice in this case.

We have always made our position clear to the Russian Government, and in the strongest possible terms. We are doing so again today. We are making senior representations to the Russian Government in Moscow. At the same time we will be summoning the Russian ambassador in London to the Foreign Office, where we will express our profound displeasure at Russia's failure to co-operate and provide satisfactory answers. Specifically, we have demanded, and will continue to demand, that the Russian Government account for the role of the FSB in this case.

The threat posed by hostile states is one of the most sensitive issues that I deal with as Home Secretary. Although not often discussed in public, our security and intelligence agencies have always, dating back to their roots in the first and second world wars, had the protection of the UK from state threats at the heart of their mission. This means countering those threats in all their guises, whether from assassinations, cyber-attacks, or more traditional espionage. By its nature this work is both less visible and necessarily more secret than the police and the agencies' work against the terrorist threat, but it is every bit as important to the long-term security and prosperity of the United Kingdom.

The House will appreciate that I cannot go into detail about how we seek to protect ourselves from hostile state acts, but we make full use of the measures at our disposal, from investigatory powers right through to the visa system. The case of Mr Litvinenko demonstrates once again why it is so vital that the intelligence agencies maintain their ability to detect and disrupt such threats.

The environment in which espionage and hostile state intelligence activities take place is changing. Evolving foreign state interests and rapid technological advances mean it is imperative that we respond. Last November the Chancellor announced that we will make new funding available to the security and intelligence agencies to

provide for an additional 1,900 officers. In the same month, I published the draft Investigatory Powers Bill so that we can ensure that the intelligence agencies' capabilities keep pace with the threat and technology, while at the same time improving the oversight of, and safeguards for, the use of investigatory powers.

In the Government's recently published national security strategy and the strategic defence and security review, we set out the range of threats to the UK and our allies, including from Russia, and our comprehensive approach to countering these threats. Since publication of the previous SDSR in 2010, Russia has become more authoritarian, aggressive and nationalist. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and its destabilising actions in Ukraine have directly challenged security in the region. These actions have also served as a sobering demonstration of Russia's intent to try to undermine European security and the rules-based international order. In response, the UK, in conjunction with international partners, has imposed a package of robust measures against Russia. This includes sanctions against key Russian individuals, including Mr Patrushev, who is currently the Secretary to the Russian Security Council.

The Government are clear that we must protect the UK and her interests from Russia-based threats, working closely with our allies in the EU and NATO. This morning I have written to my counterparts in EU, NATO and "Five Eyes" countries, drawing their attention to both the report and the need to take steps to prevent such a murder being committed in their streets.

We will continue to call on President Putin for Russia, as one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, to engage responsibly and make a positive contribution to global security and stability. It can, for example, play an important role in defeating Daesh and, together with the wider international community, help Syria work towards a stable future. We face some of the same challenges, from serious crime to aviation security. We will continue to engage, guardedly, with Russia where it is strictly necessary to do so to support the UK's national interest.

Sir Robert Owen's report contains one recommendation that is within the closed section. Right hon. and hon. Members will appreciate that I cannot reveal details of that recommendation in this House, but I can assure them that the Government will respond to the inquiry's chair on that recommendation in due course.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the Government's determination to continue to seek justice for the murder of Mr Litvinenko. I would like to repeat my thanks to Sir Robert Owen and, in particular, Marina Litvinenko. As Sir Robert states in his report, she has shown "dignity and composure" and

"has demonstrated a quiet determination to establish the true facts of her husband's death that is greatly to be commended."

Mr Litvinenko's murder was a truly terrible event. I sincerely hope that for the sake of Marina and Anatoly Litvinenko, for the sake of Mr Litvinenko's wider family and friends, and for the sake of justice, those responsible can be brought to trial. I commend this statement to the House.

11.43 am

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): As the Home Secretary said, this is one of the most shocking and disturbing reports ever presented to Parliament. It confirms that

the Russian state, at its highest level, sanctioned the killing of a British citizen on the streets of our capital city and, in so doing, exposed thousands of Londoners to unacceptable levels of risk—an unparalleled act of state-sponsored terrorism that must meet with a commensurate response. So far-reaching are the implications of the report that it is important not to rush to judgment today. Time must be taken to digest its findings and consider our response. There are difficult questions that need to be asked in formulating that response, and I intend to focus on those.

First, however, I echo the Home Secretary's words of praise for Sir Robert Owen and his inquiry team, without whose painstaking work this important truth would not be known. I also extend the gratitude of Labour Members to the Metropolitan Police Service for what the report calls an "exemplary investigation" and to the Litvinenko family's legal team, particularly Ben Emmerson, who supported them on a pro bono basis, and probably without whom we would not be here today.

More importantly, I am sure the whole House will join me in sending a message of admiration, sympathy and solidarity to Marina and Anatoly Litvinenko, who have fought so courageously to make this day a reality. People will of course leap to the international and diplomatic issues that arise, but it must be remembered, first and foremost, that this was a family tragedy, and their wishes surely matter most. With that in mind, would the Home Secretary be prepared to meet Marina and Anatoly to discuss this report, its findings, and the British Government's response? I have spoken to Marina, and I know that she would welcome that.

Let me now turn to that Government response. I welcome what the Home Secretary said about renewing efforts to bring the murderers to justice, and her new approach to NATO and EU allies. However, given that these two individuals are reported to be travelling, will she go further and directly approach all EU, NATO and Commonwealth allies individually to ask for their immediate co-operation on extradition?

There may be other individuals who are British citizens and who are facing similar dangers. Will the Home Secretary provide assurances that there will be a review of the security of those most at risk? Has she reviewed the level of security that was provided to Mr Litvinenko by the British security services, and can any lessons be drawn from this in better protecting others? That is important, because there is a real possibility that this was not an isolated incident. The House may be aware of an ongoing inquest into the death of Alexander Perepilichny, a prominent Russian lawyer who dropped dead in Surrey after going for a run. While there is a limit on what we can say about an ongoing inquest, does the Home Secretary believe that there is a case for it to be upgraded and provided with extra support, possibly from Sir Robert himself?

I will now turn to potential action against the wider network of Russian interests linked to the perpetrators. Of course, no individuals commit these crimes alone, and today's report confirms that there is a network of people who will have known about and facilitated this crime. I gather that Mrs Litvinenko has prepared a list of names, to be submitted today to the Government, of people who have aided and abetted the perpetrators, and against whom she believes sanctions should be taken. This could include the freezing of UK assets and

[*Andy Burnham*]

property and travel restrictions. Will the Home Secretary give an in-principle commitment to look seriously at that list and those requests? Further, can she say whether, going forward, action of this kind would be facilitated by new legislation along the lines of the Magnitsky law in the US, and whether the Government are giving any consideration to that?

Finally, let me turn to our wider relationship with Russia. The Home Secretary indicated that there will be new diplomatic pressure, and I welcome that, but I have to say, having listened carefully to her, that I am not sure that it goes anywhere near far enough in answering the seriousness of the findings in this report. Indeed, it could send a dangerous signal to Russia that our response is too weak. What has been announced today cannot be the end of what the British Government are prepared to do.

Given what we know about the way the Russian state operates, is there not a case for a wide-ranging review of the nature and extent of this country's relations with it—diplomatic, political, economic, and cultural? Given the proven FSB involvement, will the Government consider expelling all FSB officers from Britain immediately? More broadly, can the Home Secretary say whether the Prime Minister has ever raised this case directly with Vladimir Putin, and whether he is seeking an urgent conversation with him today to discuss the findings of this report?

On parliamentary matters, it beggars belief that one of the suspected murderers is today a leading Member of the Duma and even second in command of its Security Committee. Given that fact—this may be a question for you, Mr Speaker—what is the correct relationship for this Parliament to have with its Russian counterpart?

On cultural collaboration, given what the report reveals about the Russian Government and their links to organised crime, and given what we know about corruption in FIFA, is there not a growing case for this country to engage with others in a debate about whether the 2018 World cup should go ahead in Russia? On the economy, are the Government satisfied that the current EU sanctions against Russia are adequate, and is there a case to strengthen them?

I ask those questions not because I have come to a conclusion about them, but because I believe they are the difficult but right questions that fall out of the report and that this country now needs to debate them in the light of its findings, if we are to do justice to the Litvinenko family.

There is a question about how the Government go about formulating their response and the considerations that will guide them. Although the Home Secretary ordered this review, it is important to note that she originally refused to do so, citing international issues. She has mentioned them again today, but should not it be considerations of justice, not diplomacy, that lead the Government's response? Will she give a categorical assurance to that effect? There can be no sense of the Government pulling their punches because of wider diplomatic considerations. If we were to do that, would it not send a terrible message to the world that Britain is prepared to tolerate outrageous acts of state violence on its soil and appease those who sanctioned them?

Once all those considerations are complete, will the Home Secretary commit to coming back to this House and updating it on the final package of steps that the Government will take? The Litvinenko family deserve nothing less after their courageous fight.

I wish to finish by recalling Alexander Litvinenko's last words to his son, Anatoly, who was then 12 years old. He said:

"Defend Britain to your last drop, because it has saved your family."

He believed in Britain and its tradition of justice and fairness, standing up to the mighty and for what is right. Should not we now find the courage to show his son and the world that his father's faith in us was not misplaced?

Mrs May: First, may I echo the comments made by the right hon. Member for Leigh (*Andy Burnham*) about the investigation by the Metropolitan police? As he said, it was identified by Sir Robert Owen as exemplary and, as I indicated in my statement, the investigation remains open. The right hon. Gentleman also said right at the very beginning of his comments that time needs to be taken to look at the report. It is very thorough and detailed, and he is right to say that we need to look at it carefully.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether I would be willing to meet Marina and Anatoly Litvinenko. I wrote a private letter to Marina Litvinenko yesterday and I would be very happy to meet them to discuss these and other issues that I understand she has raised today in response to the report.

The right hon. Gentleman asked a number of other questions, including about a potential Magnitsky Act. I know that the shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Rhondda (*Chris Bryant*), who is sitting next to the right hon. Gentleman, has raised that issue in the Chamber on many occasions. There are a number of actions we can take in preventing individuals from coming to the United Kingdom, but in this case, of course, we actually want Lugovoy and Kovtun to be in the United Kingdom to be able to face justice. The right hon. Gentleman said that there were reports of them travelling. There are Interpol red notices and European arrest warrants in place, which will lead to their being arrested if they travel outside Russia.

Of course, we take the security of individuals in the United Kingdom very seriously and look at and review those issues regularly. The right hon. Gentleman said that we need to review our relationship with Russia. We have just been through the exercise of the national security strategy and the strategic defence and security review. I referred to that in my statement, and that makes very clear the issues in relation to Russia. I assure him that the Prime Minister will raise the matter with President Putin at the next available opportunity. EU sanctions are of course agreed across the European Union, and the UK has actually been leading on EU sanctions and encouraging such action to be taken.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman commented on the importance of justice. We agree on this issue. Everybody in the House recognises the significance of this report's findings, and the significance of the fact that this act of murder took place on the streets of London and was state-sponsored. We want to see justice for the family:

we want those who undertook this murder in London to be brought to justice. That is something which we share, and we will make every effort to ensure that justice is found for Marina and Anatoly Litvinenko.

Dr Liam Fox (North Somerset) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for her comprehensive response to the report. Sir Robert points out not only that Lugovoy has not been extradited to the UK, but that he

“has been lionised in Russia. He has become a member of the Duma, and indeed was awarded an honour by President Putin during the course of the Inquiry’s hearings.”

This calculated snub adds insult to injury. Is it not clear that, while such a position is maintained and the suspects are not extradited, the Putin Government can never and should never be treated as an equal and full partner in global political affairs?

Mrs May: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right in his description of what has happened in relation to Lugovoy in Russia. That tells us all we need to know about Russia’s attitude to the action that took place on the streets of London. Russia does of course participate in such a way—it is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council—and, as I said in my statement, there will be national interests that require the British Government to engage guardedly with Russia. For example, there are issues relating to Syria and the resolution of the conflict there. However, I assure my right hon. Friend that we are very clear about such issues in relation to Russia. We were clear about those issues in the SDSR. That is why, when we engage with Russia, we will, as I say, do so guardedly.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): I, too, thank the Home Secretary for her statement. I pay tribute to Sir Robert Owen and his inquiry team for their work, and indeed to all those who have contributed to getting to the truth. All Members will share a sense of outrage at this cowardly and awful murder, and we again express our condolences to Mr Litvinenko’s family. As the Secretary of State has said, the apparent involvement of the Russian state at the very highest level makes this murder doubly shocking.

It will clearly take some time fully to digest all the findings and recommendations of the report and to think through its implications, but some initial questions arise. Most immediately, we need to know what more, if anything, can be done to bring Mr Litvinenko’s killers to justice. We welcome the action against Mr Kovtun and Mr Lugovoy announced today, and the request made to the Director of Public Prosecutions. However, what, if any, further options are being considered? Will we hear from the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs about what he believes to be the appropriate response?

To look back at the circumstances of the murder, will the Home Secretary say what, if any, information our security and intelligence services had about Mr Kovtun and Mr Lugovoy prior to their meeting with Mr Litvinenko? Were they aware that the meeting was taking place, and had they assessed whether it represented a risk to his life? Most importantly, what do we know about how the killers were able to acquire such a significant dose of radioactive polonium and use it in this country as a weapon? Finally, what more can be done to prevent any

such awful event from happening again in future? Has any assessment been made of the risk to those who have fled regimes and sought shelter in the UK, so that we can prevent such attacks from happening again?

Mrs May: As I have said, we all share the hon. Gentleman’s desire to bring these individuals to justice. That is why I have written to the DPP this morning to ask her to explore whether there are any other options that she can look at in relation not just to the extradition of the two individuals, but to criminal asset freezes.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should make a statement on this issue. As the hon. Gentleman can see, my right hon. Friend is present. The statement I made is obviously the view of the Government, and we have discussed the approach we are taking on these matters.

The hon. Gentleman asked about access to polonium-210. As I said earlier, this is a very detailed report, and sections of Sir Robert Owen’s report cover that particular issue. We are grateful to Sir Robert for the thoroughness with which he has conducted his inquiry.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I thank the Home Secretary for the tenor and thrust of her statement. The magisterial report written by Sir Robert Owen says in paragraph 10.16:

“The FSB operation to kill Mr Litvinenko was probably approved by Mr Patrushev and also by President Putin.”

Given the secrecy of the Russian state, I do not think we need to worry too much about the word “probably”. This is way beyond the normal civil legal requirements and what is needed to take economic, political and diplomatic action. What is certain is that the Russian state under President Putin has killed over 100 opponents—lawyers, accountants, journalists and politicians. It is a kleptocratic state that uses assassination as a policy weapon.

May I ask the Home Secretary what we intend to do about Patrushev and Putin? We cannot tolerate their ordering assassinations on the streets of our country. Will she take targeted economic sanctions against them and, where possible, travel sanctions, although obviously those are not possible with a Head of State? Will there be an expulsion of intelligence officers—both FSB and others—from the Russian embassy, which would be entirely appropriate? It has been asked whether we should encourage our allies to help us. Of course we should, but we should also tell countries such as the Bahamas, Switzerland and Cyprus—all the Russian financial boltholes—that there is no hiding place for the money of these people.

Mr Speaker: We are extremely grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for what has to be described as a comprehensive question.

Mrs May: First, on the results of the inquiry, what Sir Robert Owen has found in relation to the individuals responsible for the murder of Alexander Litvinenko and, indeed, the responsibility of the Russian state will come as no surprise, as I said in my statement, because successive Governments have made the assessment that there was state involvement in this act. That is why the Government at the time took a number of measures,

[Mrs May]

some of which remain in place today, in relation to our relationship with the Russian state. I assure my right hon. Friend that it is in no sense business as usual and that there is not the sort of relationship that we would have with most states.

As I indicated, action has already been taken against Mr Patrushev in his current role in the form of sanctions. As my right hon. Friend himself indicated in his question, relationships with a Head of State are a different matter. As I indicated earlier, the Prime Minister will raise this matter with President Putin.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Is this not proof, were any further evidence needed, that what we are dealing with in Putin's Russia is a rogue state? The British public will be aghast that the two murderers have only today had their assets frozen by the Treasury. Does that not point to complete complacency on the part of this Government? When will they take meaningful action against the dirty Russian money and property here in London that sustain the Putin kleptocracy? When will the Government implement the will of this House, which in 2012 voted overwhelmingly in favour of passing Magnitsky Act-type legislation?

Mrs May: I have answered the last point that the right hon. Gentleman made about the Magnitsky Act that exists in the United States. We have measures that we can take to prevent people from coming into the United Kingdom. In respect of the two individuals whom the inquiry found committed this murder on the streets of London, it is important that we take every step to bring them to the UK, rather than stop them coming here, because we wish to see them brought to justice. He talked about the position of Russia. As I indicated, we have seen recent examples of the increasing nationalism, authoritarianism and aggression in Russia.

The right hon. Gentleman asked why the asset freeze has been put in place only today. Obviously, I looked into what further action could be taken following the results of the inquiry by Sir Robert Owen. Of course, action was first taken in relation to this matter in 2007 as a result of the initial investigations and the initial assessments that were made by the Government and others. Asset freezes were not put in place at that time. We have looked at that and decided to do so today.

Mr Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Why was my right hon. Friend's case put to the High Court in January 2014 in the following terms:

"There was no clear public interest in the immediate establishment of a statutory inquiry to investigate the Russian state responsibility issue."

Does she regret that that was put on her behalf?

Mrs May: Successive Governments, including this one, have wanted to try to get to the truth behind this issue, but it was not until 2011 that the coroner decided that the trial was unlikely to take place, so that an inquest could go ahead. That inquest was started, and at the time we felt that the most appropriate form in which these matters should be assessed was through that inquest. It then became clear through a decision of the divisional court that certain evidence was necessary and not available to the inquest. At that stage, in order to ensure that all evidence was available and that all

matters could be considered, I decided to turn the inquest into a statutory inquiry.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Well, they'll be quaking in their boots in the Kremlin today, won't they? Putin is an unreconstructed KGB thug and gangster who murders his opponents in Russia and, as we know, on the streets of London, and nothing announced today will make the blindest bit of difference—nothing at all. We need much tougher measures to target Putin and the people around him, and those calling for a US-style Magnitsky Act are completely right. We need to target the crooks and murderers who have been involved in murders and corruption, and prevent them from coming to the UK, from keeping their money in British banks, and from buying property here in London.

Mrs May: I say once again to those who think that the creation of a Magnitsky Act and a list of people who are excluded will, in some sense, add to the strength of measures that we already have that it is already possible for us to exclude people from the United Kingdom. I repeat: we want those individuals who came to London and committed this act on its streets to be brought to the UK to face trial, so that justice can be done.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): We are constantly reminded of Russia's human rights abuses against its own citizens, and we have initiated sanctions against Russia for its abuse of human rights against citizens of other countries such as Ukraine. Surely it is now imperative that we initiate sanctions against Russia, as well as against those individuals responsible for killing a British citizen on British soil.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend's portrayal of the Russian state is right, but a number of sanctions have already been implemented in relation to this matter. As I indicated, in 2007 the then Government took a number of measures, including the expulsion of certain officials from the Russian embassy and visa sanctions, and some of those measures remain in place. Sanctions have been implemented, and further sanctions have been taken against individuals in relation to Russia's actions in the Crimea and Ukraine. We are very clear about the nature of Russia, which is why we have continued to consider steps that can be taken. Anybody who thinks that sanctions are not in place is wrong—sanctions are in place.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): The Home Secretary and Parliament have before them a report that sets out that the Russian state probably sponsored and sanctioned the murder by nuclear material of a UK citizen, just a couple of miles from this building. Does the Secretary of State agree that her refusal to act strongly in response to that, including taking the matter to the United Nations Security Council, will be seen as a sign of British Government weakness by Putin?

Mrs May: I am not sure what action the hon. Lady thinks the United Nations Security Council, of which Russia is a permanent member, would take in relation to this matter. I have drawn the issue to the attention of a wide variety of colleagues in the European Union, the "Five Eyes" countries and NATO, to ensure that they are aware of the findings of this inquiry and its potential implications for them.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): The public inquiry has been a triumph for Marina Litvinenko and the British justice system. It has established in the open what the Government have either known or certainly assumed for the past decade about the nature of the current Russian state. Will the Home Secretary confirm that the current state of relations with Russia is already heavily conditioned by that understanding? The challenge remains, with this as the background, to advance our remaining common interests, not least in the fight against violent Islamic extremism and in bringing to an end a bloody civil war in Syria. That challenge, answering the difficult questions posed by the shadow Home Secretary, is at the core of the Foreign Affairs Committee's current inquiry into the British-Russian relationship.

Mrs May: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the fact that his Committee is undertaking that important review into the British-Russian relationship. He is absolutely right. Our relationship with Russia is already heavily conditioned. As I indicated earlier, shortly after the murder took place sanctions of various sorts were put in place, including visa sanctions. Those have remained. Our relationship with Russia is, as he said, heavily conditioned. As I said earlier, it is also the case—he is absolutely right—that there are issues in the British national interest on which a guarded engagement with Russia may be important. Of course, the future of Syria and resolving the conflict in Syria is just one of those issues.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): A slap on the wrist for Russia won't do it. President Putin's heart will not miss a beat if the UK cancels a trade mission here or a cultural visit there, but it will if we expand the scope of the sanctions already in force because of Russia's illegal activities in Ukraine. Will the UK Government now ban any other Russians implicated in the murder, however senior, from travelling to the UK and freeze their assets? An assault on our sovereignty, which saw a British citizen murdered on British soil in a nuclear attack, requires nothing less.

Mrs May: As we have said, it is of course right that we take extremely seriously the nature of the attack that took place and the findings of the inquiry. As I indicated, this is not something that comes as a surprise. An assessment has been made by successive Governments of the responsibility and involvement of the Russian state in the act, as well as of the two individuals who have been named as undertaking the act here in the United Kingdom. We have a series of sanctions in place. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the reaction to Ukraine. I indicated earlier that it is in fact the United Kingdom that has been leading the European Union effort in placing sanctions on individuals in Russia.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Russia's incremental bilateral relations are improving on the issues of Syria, Iran and global counter-terrorism. Is it not the case that, while that is welcome, the diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and Russia can never be fully re-set until there has been justice over what the Home Secretary has rightly said is state-sponsored murder on the streets of London?

Mrs May: We are very clear that it is not business as usual with the Russian state. Our relationship with Russia is heavily conditioned. As I have indicated, there may be

some issues on which it is necessary to engage with Russia very carefully, but it is not the case that we are lifting or changing the relationship. Successive Governments have been clear since 2007 that it was necessary to take action. That action has remained.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): What we are looking at here is an act of terrorism sponsored and carried out by the Russian Government. The report leads only to one possible conclusion: we now have to regard the Russian state as an organisation actively involved in commissioning, funding, supporting and directing acts of terrorism against UK citizens within the United Kingdom.

I appreciate that the Home Secretary cannot go into detail about everything that is happening in response to that, but may we have an assurance that, in the pursuit of justice, the Russian terrorist organisation and those involved in directing it will be pursued with exactly the same vigour as anyone else who directs acts of terrorism against United Kingdom citizens?

Mrs May: We are very clear that we want to ensure that those responsible for the murder are brought to justice. That is why, as I have indicated, every effort is being made in relation to the two individuals named in the report as having conducted the act here in London. The investigation is ongoing and every effort is being made to ensure that they can be arrested and brought to justice here in the UK.

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): I, too, was struck by the reported final words of Mr Litvinenko to his son, Anatoly. What an assured and articulate man he has grown into, as we saw on the TV recently. To repay the confidence of Mr Litvinenko in this country, may I ask the Home Secretary to go further? In particular, will she respond in detail to Mrs Litvinenko's request regarding the additional names she has prepared with Ben Emmerson, and whether those individuals should be banned and sanctions taken against them?

Mrs May: I echo my hon. Friend's comments about Anatoly Litvinenko. His demeanour in the interview on television last night showed a fine young man who has grown up in this country against a background of very difficult circumstances, given what happened to his father. As I indicated earlier to the shadow Home Secretary, I would be happy to meet Marina and Anatoly Litvinenko. Obviously, that would provide an opportunity to discuss the matters my hon. Friend raises.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Bill Browder, a British citizen, wrote his book "Red Notice" explaining how he took the Magnitsky Act to the United States, because he could get no interest in it here in the UK. Is it not now time for the Home Secretary to meet Bill Browder, look at how the Magnitsky Act has made such a huge difference and consider what the United Kingdom can do to introduce the Act here in the UK?

Mrs May: I apologise, Mr Deputy Speaker, because I will repeat what I have said to a number of Members who raised the issue of the Magnitsky Act. The Act excludes or stops certain individuals from coming into a country, in this case the United States. We already have powers that are at least as robust, if not more so, than

[Mrs May]

the powers in the Magnitsky Act. It is on that basis that I think we have the powers we need to exclude people. I repeat the point I made earlier: if people think that introducing the Magnitsky Act will mean that those who perpetrated this heinous crime will be brought to justice, they are very wrong.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): A unilateral boycott of any sporting event in Russia by this country would be futile. There is no denying that delivering the world athletics championships, the winter Olympics and the 2020 World cup, while behaving like an international pariah, is a major propaganda coup for Putin. What does the Home Secretary think we can do to work with sympathetic nations to ensure that Putin cannot deliver these sorts of propaganda coups in future?

Mrs May: I recognise that a number of Members have indicated their desire for the Government to intervene in decisions taken by various sporting authorities. I have set out that a number of decisions have been taken by the Government. Sanctions have been put in place over a period of time in a number of different ways against the Russian Government. We are very clear that we maintain measures started under the Labour Government in 2007. As I have indicated, we are looking to see what further action can be taken against Lugovoy and Kovtun as a result of the report.

Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary's report and I look forward to seeing what extra measures and actions she takes as a result of it. I am very concerned about people currently living in this country who have spoken out against the Putin regime. We already knew they were in a dangerous position, but clearly it has now been proven that they are in a dangerous position. Will she look at their security arrangements? Will she review how the polonium-210 came in, and how secure we are living in a city with the threat of it just wandering around our streets?

Mrs May: We look very carefully at the measures taken on our borders in relation to goods and individuals coming into the United Kingdom. On sanctions or other actions taken against individuals and the Russian state, I have answered that question on a number of occasions already.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): The House should pay tribute to the great British scientists without whose

dedication and expertise it is widely accepted we would not have come to the truth. Will the Home Secretary join me in thanking them?

Mrs May: I thank the hon. Lady for giving me the opportunity to do just that. The work of the Atomic Weapons Establishment played an important part. The scientists who helped to investigate and get to the truth of the matter did a very important job.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): I am sure I speak on behalf of my constituents and the whole nation when I say that my thoughts are with the Litvinenko family and that everything must and should be done to ensure they have justice. My constituents will be extremely concerned that a foreign nation could have come to our country—to our heartland of London—and, bearing in mind how it killed Litvinenko, put our citizens at risk. Based on what my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) and others have said, can the Home Secretary honestly say she is doing everything she can to keep our citizens safe?

Mrs May: I can assure the hon. Lady that the Government take extremely seriously their prime responsibility for maintaining the safety and security of British citizens. We have, for example, introduced legislative proposals, and continue to do so, to ensure that our security and intelligence and law enforcement agencies have the powers they need to keep us safe.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Last but certainly not least, I call Jim Shannon.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for her statement. Given the revelation that President Putin most likely signed off on the assassination of Alexander Litvinenko and the fact that decency and moral correctness mean nothing to the Russian authorities, does she agree about the importance of sanctions? That said, many people inside and outside the House, and perhaps she herself, are frustrated that sanctions do not seem to be biting in the way they should. Will she outline what new and unique sanctions are in place to make these people more accountable?

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman invites me to comment again on the sanctions put in place against the Russian state and individuals. I repeat that we continue with the visa sanctions introduced in 2007. As I indicated, the UK led the economic sanctions that resulted from the EU discussions that followed Russia's action in Ukraine, and of course any sanctions applied at EU level require agreement throughout the EU.

Infected Blood

12.22 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): In the urgent question on 16 December, I committed to publishing the consultation on infected blood scheme reform in January. I am pleased, therefore, to announce the launch of that consultation. I recognise that for some this will come too late. I cannot right the pain and distress of 30 years, and the truth is that no amount of money could ever make up for the impact that this tragedy has had on people's lives. As I have said before, for legal reasons, in the majority of cases, it is not appropriate to talk about compensation payments, but I would like to echo what has been said before in the House and say sorry on behalf of the Government to every person affected by this tragedy.

Scheme reform is a priority for me and the Government, and for that reason I can announce that the Department of Health has identified £100 million from its budget for the proposals in the consultation. This is in addition to the current spend and the £25 million announced in March 2015, and it will more than double our annual spend on the scheme over the next five years. This is significantly more than any previous Government have been able to provide for those affected by this tragedy.

I know all too well of the ill health and other impacts on many of those affected by the tragedy of infected blood. I have corresponded with many of those affected and their MPs—they each have their own story to tell—and I have reflected carefully on all this in developing the principles on which the consultation will be based. These are: that we focus on those infected; that we can respond to new advances in medicine; that we provide choice where possible; and that we maintain annual payments to everyone currently receiving them. The consultation is an opportunity for all those affected to have their say, and it is important that it extends to the quieter voices from whom we hear less often.

It is not appropriate, and I do not have time, to go through the whole consultation document today, but I would like to highlight some of its key components. A large population within the infected blood community currently does not receive any regular financial support. These are the people with hepatitis C. I believe it is important that everybody receives support from the new scheme and that it be linked to the impact infection has on their health. I therefore propose that all those registered with the schemes with hepatitis C at current stage 1 be offered an individual health-based assessment, completion of which would determine the level of annual payment received. This would also apply to anyone who newly joins the scheme.

The consultation document outlines our proposal that those currently receiving annual support should have their payments uplifted to £15,000 a year. Those who are co-infected and currently receive double payments would continue to do so. I often hear that people are unhappy about applying for discretionary charitable payments. I hope that the introduction of new regular annual payments will remove this requirement. I am keen that those who respond to the consultation take the opportunity to answer all the questions about the support proposed so that I can make informed final decisions on the shape of any new scheme once all the responses have been collected and analysed.

During the urgent question, I said I was interested in the opportunities offered by the advent of simpler and more effective treatments that can cure some people of hepatitis C. The NHS is at the start of its programme to roll out the new hepatitis C treatments previously approved by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. As Members will know, the NHS must prioritise treatment on clinical need and not on route of infection, which means that, although some in the infected blood community will be eligible for treatment right away, others might have to wait.

More than anything, I want, if we can, to give the chance to limit the impact of hepatitis C on the infected community by making an offer of treatment. Over recent months, I have received many letters from people expressing a wish to halt the progress of their infection—one of the many letters that particularly struck me asked simply: "Please make me well"—so my intention is that the new scheme will provide an opportunity to enhance access to treatment, especially for those who fall just short of the current NHS criteria. I hope that we can treat more people if finances allow. That is why the consultation is seeking views on offering treatment to those with hepatitis C in the infected blood community not yet receiving treatment on the NHS.

In keeping with the principle of offering choice where possible, I am pleased to announce that we are consulting on a choice of options for the bereaved. Currently, bereaved partners or spouses are eligible to apply for means-tested support from the charities. As I have said, I have heard concerns from many people who do not like having to apply for charity. With that in mind, the consultation offers the choice of continued access to discretionary support or a one-off lump-sum payment for the bereaved based on a multiple of their current discretionary support. There are questions on this in the consultation document, and I am keen to hear from those affected so that I can understand their preference.

Having listened to concerns about the complex nature of the five schemes, the consultation proposes that, following reform, there will be one scheme run by a single body with access to expert advice, including from National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, so that we can keep pace with any new advances in treatment for hepatitis C and HIV that emerge.

On the next steps, the consultation will be published today on gov.uk and will run until 15 April. This is a 12-week consultation to ensure that all those who wish to respond have time to do so. The consultation document contains questions about the proposals on which I would welcome views. I recognise that there has been disappointment that we have not consulted sooner, but the outcome of the consultation will be crucial to informing our final decisions about how to proceed, and I give the House, and those affected, my commitment that we will proceed as rapidly as possible to implementation thereafter.

We need, as a priority, to make progress in rolling out the health assessments as quickly as possible to ensure that people get access to the support and clinical advice they need. I should be clear, however, that my intention is that annual payments for the current stage 1 cohort should be backdated to April 2016, regardless of when each individual's assessment takes place.

This is the first time that the Government are consulting fully and widely with the entire affected community and all those who might have an interest on the future

[Jane Ellison]

reform of the scheme. In developing the proposals to include within the consultation, I have taken account of points I have heard in debates here, of correspondence sent to me, of my discussions with the all-party group and of views gathered during pre-consultation engagement. The consultation is now open and it is my hope that all those affected by this tragedy will respond, and that we can move forward from here. I commend the statement to the House.

12.30 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement and particularly for advance notice of her intention to give it and for providing me with early sight of it.

I appreciate that this is a difficult issue, but I think that the Minister's approach today has been the right one, and we will welcome what she has said. She was right to apologise on behalf of the Government, and I would like to echo that apology, because successive Governments of all colours have failed to respond adequately to this scandal. In many ways, this failure has only deepened the injustice felt by the victims.

I want to pay tribute to all Members who have been a strong voice for the victims of contaminated blood. I would like to mention, in particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), the hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie), the right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) and indeed my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham).

This scandal saw thousands of people die, and thousands of families destroyed through the negligence of public bodies. Although the Minister was absolutely right to say that no amount of money could ever make up for the impact this tragedy has had on people's lives, we all owe to those still living with the consequences the dignity of a lasting settlement. With that in mind, I want to press the Minister on four points.

First, on funding, it was claimed that one reason for delaying the announcement of this consultation was to achieve clarity about how much funding would be available, following the comprehensive spending review. The Minister appeared to announce an additional £100 million for the new scheme, so for further clarity, will she set out the total amount that will be available over the lifetime of the new scheme, and how that compares to the previous scheme?

Secondly, we welcome the fact that the consultation will offer the choice of a one-off lump sum payment for the bereaved, but will the Minister say a bit more about how that might be implemented? As she knows, these payments will enable choice, and it is important that we get this right.

Thirdly, will the Minister say a bit more about widows and widowers? She will know that the Scottish review group recommended that widows should get some form of pension for the first time. Has she considered this option? It is important to recognise that widows and widowers are suffering not only from an immediate loss of income from their partner, but from the inability of their partner to save for a pension or get life insurance over the past few decades.

My final question is about the status of hepatitis C sufferers who have not developed liver cirrhosis. We welcome the possibility of ongoing payments, but can the Minister say how the assessments will work? In particular, it is important that these assessments take account of the longer-term health impacts of living with hepatitis C. Does the Minister have any figures on how many of these individuals will not have access to the new hepatitis C treatments? Given that the NHS made these people ill, and the NHS has the drugs available to help these patients, it does seem wrong that we are denying some of these people treatment—the treatment that they both need and, frankly, deserve. Will the Minister say a bit more about how the Government intend to improve access to treatment specifically for these individuals?

I hope that everyone affected will be able to take part in this consultation and have their say on the future reform of the scheme. The Minister will have our full support in implementing that new scheme and doing what we can to provide relief for the victims of this terrible injustice.

Jane Ellison: I thank the shadow Minister for responding in those terms. It is much appreciated. As he says, we all want to try to move forward with a consensus in support of the people affected by this tragedy. I will try to respond to his questions, although I might have to write to him on one of them because my on-the-spot maths is not quite good enough.

On funding, as I have made clear several times before, the money will come from the Department of Health budget, and we have identified an additional £100 million over this spending review period, which allows us to double the current spend on the existing schemes. This is in addition to the £25 million announced in March 2015. Spend to date is £390 million and the projected future spend is £570 million, so together with the £100 million and the £25 million, that amounts to more than £1 billion over the lifetime of the scheme. I hope that provides the hon. Gentleman with some clarity on funding.

The hon. Gentleman asked about lump sums. It can be seen in the consultation documents that we are consulting on options for both those already bereaved and those who will be bereaved in the future, and we are asking people how they feel about continuing with a discretionary approach or taking a one-off payment that would be based on a multiple of the discretionary payment they get in the current financial year—or indeed a hybrid of the two. We are trying to be as open as possible, so people can give us their views on how they see the way forward.

I have seen the Scottish proposals and I had a conversation with my opposite number in Scotland this morning before I came to the House. Because one of the options for bereaved people is an ongoing payment, albeit a discretionary one, I would not compare it with what I understand the reference group in Scotland has put forward as a pension. Obviously, we are talking about access to ongoing but discretionary payments. Again, I look forward to hearing the views expressed during the consultation on that issue.

It might be helpful for Members to know that 160,000 people in England have hepatitis C. Those affected by this tragedy make up fewer than 2% of the hepatitis C population in England. The NHS has to treat people on

the basis of clinical need. The treatments are in the region of £40,000 each—quite expensive treatments. However, we believe more treatments are in the pipeline, which is one reason why I am so keen to ensure that clinical expertise is embedded within the new scheme. We are particularly keen to understand, in respect of the people who do not quite reach the current NICE guidelines for rolling out treatment in the NHS, whether, by recognising the unique circumstances of the people affected by this tragedy, we can do something within the scheme to support them. We need to understand how many people will be interested. Members might find it helpful to know that while not every genome type of hepatitis C is susceptible to the new treatment, the majority, thankfully, are. For some people, none of the new treatments is clinically appropriate.

I think I have dealt with the key questions that the hon. Gentleman asked me. I would be happy to carry on working in the spirit in which he responded to my statement and come back to him with any further clarity that he seeks subsequent to this debate.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I thank the Minister for her statement and for the measures she has outlined today, as well as for her continuing commitment to seek justice for the victims of contaminated blood, including some in my constituency. When it comes to looking at drugs for the future, will the Minister commit to continuing investment in molecular diagnostics as the way forward for victims in the future?

Jane Ellison: The Government and the NHS have made it very clear that we greatly welcome what we see as a rapidly changing landscape. There is huge commitment on this issue. I am joined on the Government Front Bench by the Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman), who is doing a great deal to accelerate some of the newest treatments and their adoption within the NHS. I can absolutely give that commitment that we always want to stay at the cutting edge of medicine. One reason for delaying this consultation, perhaps to the frustration of some, is that we now have a fuller picture of the current state of the available treatments. The last three treatments that are to be rolled out in the NHS were not approved by NICE until 25 November. I want to ensure that we are always up to date with the treatment landscape as it evolves, as we hope it will continue to do.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): We understand the terrible situation of those who have been affected by the infected blood tragedy, and empathise greatly with them. It is imperative that we take every possible action to compensate where we can, although no amount of money can truly compensate the individuals whose lives have been affected.

It appears from the Minister's statement that what is being proposed is a step in the right direction, but we must focus on the needs of those affected, offer choice, and ensure that there is medical advancement and evidence-based practice. I understand that payments are made through a United Kingdom scheme, but there is clearly considerable involvement on the part of Health Departments in devolved Administrations.

Let me end by reiterating our support for those affected, and by asking the Minister what discussions she has had with devolved Administrations about

consultation arrangements, scheme reform, payments including those recommended for widows or widowers, and other support that is urgently required.

Jane Ellison: The consultation is being undertaken by the Department of Health in England, but anyone in the United Kingdom can respond, and we continue to work with all the UK Health Departments. My officials have been working closely for months with officials in devolved Administrations. I offered to speak to my ministerial counterparts on the phone this morning, and had a helpful conversation with both Shona Robison and the Welsh deputy chief medical officer. I note that the chief medical officer for England also contacted her opposite numbers.

As I have said, we are in touch with all the devolved Administrations. Because health is now a devolved matter, they are responsible for providing financial support for those affected in each country, and I know that Scotland is consulting on scheme reform in its own right. However, all the devolved Administrations will have the option of joining our new scheme in the future, and an assessment will be made of the financial contribution that is necessary. I had a useful conversation with Shona Robison about some of the transitional arrangements, and about how we can work together. I said that we would try to be as helpful and supportive as possible, and I have every confidence that we will continue in that spirit.

Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con): I welcome the statement, I welcome the consultation, and I certainly welcome, on behalf of my constituents, the extra money that seems to be available.

The Minister has said that she wants the widest-ranging consultation. Every Member will have received letters from their constituents about this issue, and those letters have been passed on to the Department. My constituent Matthew Harris, for instance, has been campaigning actively for a very long time. Will the Department be able to contact those constituents, and ensure that those who are directly affected, and with whom the Minister has already been in contact, can take part in the consultation?

Jane Ellison: I assure my hon. Friend that we will make every effort to reach people. My officials have already put in place extensive plans to publicise the consultation—they have met the heads of the charities and those running the current schemes, and will be writing to those who are registered with those schemes—and we will make it as easy as possible for people to get involved. One of our reasons for organising a 12-week consultation is that we recognise that some people may not be online, and we want to make sure that everyone has a chance to comment.

I will reflect on what my hon. Friend has said about direct contact. That may already be being pursued through some of our plans, but, as I have said, we have extensive plans to publicise the consultation, and it goes live today. Of course I shall welcome Members' contributions on behalf of their constituents.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her statement. I am sure that the all-party parliamentary group on haemophilia and contaminated blood will want to study the details in the coming weeks, and to take part in the consultation.

[Diana Johnson]

At first glance it appears that the Minister's proposals are not as generous as those that are being discussed in Scotland, although I accept that as yet the Scottish Government have not accepted those proposals. However, I want to raise the specific issue of health assessments of those who are in stage 1 of hepatitis C. A number of those people have been living with the condition for a great many years, and even if their viral load is now cleared, they will not be able to resume their lives as if they had never been infected. Will the Minister assure me that that will be taken into account in any health assessments and in any subsequent financial arrangements?

Jane Ellison: Let me first thank the hon. Lady for all the campaigning work that she has done, for which she has rightly been recognised by others. Although we have not always been able to agree on everything, I have been greatly informed by what she has brought to our discussions, and I take on board many of the reports that the all-party group has produced over the years.

The recommendations that are being discussed in Scotland were made by a reference group and not by the Scottish Government, who have yet to respond to them. Shona Robison indicated that they would respond in due course, but that, obviously, is a matter for them.

It is a little too early to specify exactly how the individual health assessments will be carried out, but we will be asking an expert advisory group to advise on the criteria and the evidence. As I said in my statement, it is a question of recognising the impact of ill health, and also the fact that some people's health fluctuates. I think that we can be assured that everyone will be included in the scheme, and that everyone will receive an annual payment. I should add that we expect people's own clinicians to be involved in the individual assessments.

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): I welcome the Minister's personal determination to see this through, and the progress that she has already achieved. I know we all agree that it has long been needed. I welcome the Government's apology, the level of funding that has been secured, the format of the annual payments, and, in particular, the backdating offer. However, may I also urge the Minister to focus on fulfilling her promise of treatment for hepatitis C at every level of the NHS? A great deal of bureaucracy lies ahead, and our constituents have no appetite for putting up with it.

Jane Ellison: I thank my hon. Friend for what she has said. I am glad that she feels that we are making progress.

The NHS is just beginning to roll out many of the new hepatitis C drugs, although some people have already been treated, and obviously many more will be treated in the future. One of the benefits of individual health assessments for everyone in stage 1 of the scheme is that we shall be able to understand not just clinical need, but problems such as those described by my hon. Friend. The consultation may help us to establish whether help with navigating the health system is one of the non-financial aspects of support that people might seek.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I thank the Minister for her statement, and welcome the consultation. It is an important step forward.

The individual health assessment clearly marks quite an important moment for people with hepatitis C—a condition that other Members have raised—because the Minister has talked about linking it to payments. Does she envisage an entirely discretionary payment linked to the assessment, or a system involving payment bands? How will the scheme work, and will there be a right of challenge? What does the Minister mean by “enhanced” access to treatment? Is there still a risk that some people will not have immediate access to it?

Jane Ellison: As have I said, we will ask an expert advisory group to consider what the criteria for the health assessments should be, and we expect people's own clinicians to be involved. Broadly speaking, we probably envisage payment bands, but that too will be subject to the consultation. We want to be able to combine speed and fairness.

People with hepatitis C are receiving NHS treatment based on NICE guidelines, but we understand that there will always be people who fall a little short of that at any one time, and we hope to be able to offer treatment to them within the scheme. Within the overall envelope of funding, however, we will not know exactly what the balance is until after the consultation. I do not know what affected individuals' views are about the balance between treatment and some of the other options in the consultation. I genuinely want to see what they think, and how attractive the treatment offer is to them, before we reach our final conclusions.

Mr Geoffrey Cox (Torrige and West Devon) (Con): I thank the Minister for the work she has been doing on this issue. I also thank her and her ministerial colleague my right hon. Friend the Minister for Community and Social Care for the impressive way this is being handled. We should never forget that this is a simple matter of justice, and it is time, after all the apologies, that those affected should feel we are doing justice to that injustice. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree with me that one of the important needs is that any scheme should be simple, comprehensive, predictable and consistent, and that it is absolutely essential that the bewildering variety of current provision is resolved into that single clear scheme. Will she give me the undertaking that, whatever emerges at the outcome of this process, that will be the Government's abiding priority?

Jane Ellison: I certainly think I can give my hon. and learned Friend some comfort in that regard. The area on which there was the greatest consensus right across the infected blood community and this House is on precisely what he describes: the complexity of the schemes and the fact that they are a mixture of regular payments and discretionary means-tested payments. Obviously we need to wait for the end of the consultation to see exactly what everyone's views are, but we will not waste time. We will begin a scoping exercise on scheme reform while the consultation is under way in anticipation of finalising plans at the end of the consultation. I agree that we need a scheme that is straightforward, simple and sustainable, both giving regular support to those infected and allowing this Government and future Governments to be able to plan and sustain the support.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Like many other hon. Members, I have met constituents who have been affected by this tragedy,

and it is a simple matter of justice that needs to be righted, so I welcome much of what has been said from both Front Benches today. Has the Minister met or spoken to the Welsh Health Minister over the past few days to discuss the matter and how it will operate in Wales, specifically with regard to financing and the availability of the drugs? Will Welsh sufferers have to travel to England to take part in the assessments or will arrangements be made for them to take place in Wales?

Jane Ellison: One or two of those questions are probably a little too detailed to comment on now, but it is worth reiterating what I said about the devolved Administrations. I have not been able to speak to the Welsh Health Minister; we offered the opportunity of a call with other Ministers, including the Scottish Minister, but the Welsh Minister knows that he can get in touch. One of his officials was on the call this morning, and our offices have been talking to each other. I am happy to pick this up with the Welsh Health Minister if he wants to do so.

This consultation is for the scheme in England, but we have been working with counterparts in the devolved Administrations. While everyone in the UK is welcome to respond to the consultation and say what they think, health is now a devolved matter—that is different from when the first schemes were set up—so the devolved Administrations are responsible for providing financial support for those affected from each country. Treatment within the NHS is obviously a matter for the NHS in Wales, and I will look at some of the other points the hon. Gentleman made. We are happy to talk to him about the devolved aspects and write to him afterwards.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I thank the Minister for the consultation, the additional money, the scheme consolidation and the work that both she and the Minister for Community and Social Care have undertaken. I also thank, of course, the all-party group and my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson). Will the Minister concede that, for those of us who have worked closely with individual victims for a number of years, the resolution has to be, as far as possible, to put them in the financial position they would have been in but for the grievous harm done to them, and that that may in some cases mean a bespoke solution for individual victims—we are not dealing with unlimited numbers of people here?

Jane Ellison: That is clearly the hon. Gentleman's view and I invite him to submit it to the consultation. This is exactly why we are consulting. We have made some proposals, but some of the questions are very open, and we will look at what comes back from the consultation. I urge him and other Members to take part in the consultation.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I welcome the statement and commend the shadow Minister's tone. Victims in Northern Ireland share the compound frustration that we have heard from other Members on behalf of their constituents, but maybe feel more pointedly the contrast with their friends in the south of Ireland, who have had a path of justice available to them over many years. I know the Minister is absolutely sincere in her commitment to the issue of treatment, but will she give assurances that the effort she is putting into making sure people

can be made well will not detract or distract from the obligation we still have to make good this travesty that people have suffered?

Jane Ellison: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question and his sustained interest over such a long time, speaking on behalf of people from his area. Based on our previous conversations, I recognise there might be aspects of the proposals that the hon. Gentleman does not feel meet his own aspirations, so again I invite him to respond to the consultation. I will take note of his—and all other Members'—views. These are our proposals. Some of the questions are very open and people can give us their views. I recognise that something different happened in the Republic of Ireland, and it is down to another Government to make those decisions. The circumstances were different for reasons I have gone into previously from this Dispatch Box.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): The Minister will know that some of the cases go back many years and the medical records may have been destroyed. Can she say in a little more detail what evidence is required both at the assessment stage and for those applying to the discretionary fund?

Jane Ellison: In truth, it is a little too early for me to give that level of detail. We want to ask for expert advice on that in order to get it right and, as I said in the statement, we are looking at the impact on people's health now. We do not want this to be an invasive or onerous process for the people, who have gone through so much already, so we envisage involving people's own clinicians as well as gathering other evidence. This is something we will ask experts to advise us on and we will come back at the end of the consultation.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I commend the Minister for her work on this and thank her for her statement today. We know her as a compassionate person totally committed to this case; I do not think that anyone in the House has any doubts about what she is trying to deliver, and we thank her for that.

Some 7,500 people have been contaminated by blood. Last year, the Prime Minister gave a commitment of £25 million and this morning the Minister has given a commitment of a further £100 million, which is good news. Some 10 people have passed away. The European Commissioner for Human Rights has recently ruled that Italy must pay compensation immediately to all those who received contaminated blood. I know there is a consultation process, but when will we see the money actually getting to the victims? Is there a timescale? There has not been any commitment, as I understand it, with the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Minister, Simon Hamilton. What, if any, discussions have taken place?

Jane Ellison: As I set out earlier, we offered a phone call this morning with the Minister in Northern Ireland, but I am more than happy to pick up on that. Our officials have been working quite closely together for some time on this, so I am more than happy should my opposite number want to have a conversation. The circumstances in Italy are different and, as I said in answer to the last question, other Governments must make decisions for themselves. I am aware of that case, but I think some of the circumstances are quite different.

[Jane Ellison]

On timescale, our priority is to move forward the individual health assessments, and at the same time we will do some scoping work around reform of the schemes themselves. I cannot yet say how long that will take, but I obviously want to do it as quickly as possible. As I mentioned in my statement, I want to reassure Members that whenever we undertake those assessments, people will not miss out just because they are towards the end of the process. We will backdate all those annual payments, once they are awarded, to April 2016.

Point of Order

12.59 pm

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. At business questions earlier today, I pressed the Leader of the House for a full debate on the Government's proposal to allow Transport for London to run all the local metro train services in our capital, including those operated by Southeastern in my constituency. However, I and many other hon. Members representing London constituencies were amazed to learn of this announcement and of the Secretary of State for Transport's supporting statement, not in this House but in an online article that appeared this morning on the website of the *Evening Standard*. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) was obviously aware of it, because he was at a press event with the Secretary of State, but the Leader of the House did not seem to be aware of what had taken place. Can you assure me, Mr Deputy Speaker, that the Secretary of State has at least had the courtesy to inform the House through your good offices of this welcome proposal, which will have serious implications, not least financial ones, for London?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I can tell the hon. Gentleman that there has been no written statement, and that I was not aware of this. He has certainly got his point on the record, however. As he knows, the Chair frowns upon statements being made outside the House before they have been made in the House. I hope that the Government will take on board the fact that this House is the place where statements should be made first.

Backbench Business

Childhood Obesity Strategy

[Relevant document: First Report from the Health Committee, Session 2015-16. Childhood obesity—brave and bold action, HC 465.]

1 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House calls on the Government to bring forward a bold and effective strategy to tackle childhood obesity.

I want to thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting time for this debate. I also want to thank all my colleagues from across the House who are members of the Health Select Committee—and the staff of the Committee, particularly Laura Daniels—for their work on the report on childhood obesity that was published recently. Outside this House, there are also many organisations and individuals who have campaigned tirelessly to improve children's health.

Perhaps we can start by looking at the example of Team GB and their success in the Olympics. On the morning of their track cycling victory, the architect of the team's success, Sir David Brailsford, put their success down to the principle of marginal gains and their relentless pursuit of identifying every efficiency in the rider, the bike, the environment around them and their training regime. All those marginal gains were added together to win gold for Team GB in the Olympics. I think we need to adopt the same principle when it comes to tackling childhood obesity.

Too often, I hear people saying that it is all about education, or about getting children to move more in PE at school, but I would say that there is no single measure. We all know that this is an extremely complex problem that requires action at every level. I therefore call on the Minister to look at every single aspect of tackling childhood obesity. If we were running a cycling team hoping to win the Olympics, we would realise that we could not achieve success if we left any of the factors out, so let us apply that principle here.

Let me set the scene by telling the House why this subject matters so much. We know from the child measurement programme in our schools that around one in five of our children who enter reception class are either obese or overweight. However, by the time they leave in year 6, a third of our children are either obese or overweight. Perhaps even more worrying are the stark data on the health inequality of obesity. A quarter of the children from the most disadvantaged groups in our society are leaving school not just overweight but obese, which is now more than twice the rate among children from the most advantaged families. My first question for the Minister is this: will the childhood obesity strategy not only tackle the overall levels of obesity but seek to narrow that yawning and growing gap in our society between the least and most advantaged children? Any strategy that fails to narrow that gap will have failed our children.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Lady agree that some of the overall problem can be explained by the fact that people do not know how much sugar is in their food? She will know that women are supposed to have no more than six spoonfuls

a day, and men no more than nine. Only today, when I was in Portcullis House, I bought three items: a Snickers bar, which has five spoonfuls of sugar; a yoghurt with seven spoonfuls; and a Coke with nine. She will be glad to hear that I did not eat any of them; perhaps I was just removing them from other people. Does she agree that an awareness of how much sugar we are eating is very important if we are to manage our diets?

Dr Wollaston: Indeed. I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman, and I shall come on to that subject later. I am relieved to hear that he is not on a sugar high for the debate.

I want to set out not only the scale of the problem but its consequences. It has consequences for the whole lifetime of our children, in relation to their physical and emotional health. They also suffer the impact of bullying at school, as they are too often stigmatised in the classroom because of their weight. There is increasing evidence that obesity is a factor in causing many preventable cancers, and it also has an impact on conditions such as diabetes and heart disease. This has a cost not only to individuals but to wider society and to the NHS.

The Minister will know how essential it is that, as part of the "Five Year Forward View", we tackle the issue of prevention. We cannot do that without tackling obesity, particularly among children, given the lifetime impact and consequences of the condition. She will know that 9p in every £1 we spend in the NHS is spent on diabetes. We estimate from the evidence that the Health Committee took during our hearings that the overall cost of obesity to the NHS is now £5.1 billion a year, and the wider costs to society have been estimated to be as high as £27 billion, although the estimates vary. We simply cannot afford to take no action.

Physical activity is of course extraordinarily important and I am confident that it will feature strongly in the Government's strategy, but it is no good focusing solely on that. Physical activity is good for children, whatever their weight. Indeed, it is good for all of us, whatever our age. However, any strategy that assumes that we can tackle childhood obesity solely through physical activity will simply be ignoring the overwhelming evidence that most of the gain will be in reducing calories. That is not just about sugar, however. It is easy to be accused of demonising sugar. The fact is that children have more than three times the recommended amount of sugar in their diet, but that is perhaps the easiest aspect of the problem to tackle. The Minister will recognise the fact that we are talking about overall calories, which also include fats.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): I need to declare an interest here; it is a fairly well-known one. My union has been pressing me to remind my hon. Friend that sugar intake has a disastrous effect on the teeth and causes tooth decay. Is she aware that the most common cause of hospital admissions among five to nine-year-olds is tooth decay? Every week, almost 900 children in this country require hospital treatment for tooth decay, and the biggest single factor is sugar.

Dr Wollaston: I thank my hon. Friend for mentioning that. I was going to come on to that point and he has saved me from doing so. I completely agree that we must not forget the impact of sugar on children's teeth. He will recognise that there are great health inequalities relating to that issue as well.

[Dr Wollaston]

So how should we tackle this? I have spoken many times about a sugary drinks tax, but I recognise that that is not where the greatest gain lies when it comes to tackling childhood obesity. As the Minister will recognise from the evidence presented by Public Health England, price promotions will need to form an extraordinarily important part of the childhood obesity strategy if it is to be effective. It is a staggering fact that around 40% of what we spend on our consumption of food and drink at home is spent on price promotions. Unfortunately, however, they do not save us as much money as we assume. They encourage us to consume more. In British supermarkets, a huge number of those promotions relate to sugary and other unhealthy products. I call on the Government to tackle that as part of their strategy. We need a level playing field as we seek to rebalance price promotions, but that has to be done in a way that does not simply drive us towards promoting other products such as alcohol. We need to take a careful, evidence-based look at all this.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I am delighted that the hon. Lady is pursuing this issue. Has she looked at whether there could be a tax on the ingredient “sugar” in products, so that we create an incentive to reformulate, in order to reduce sugar content not just in fizzy drinks but across foods and drinks generally? Could that be a way to get the industry to start to think about the content of its food?

Dr Wollaston: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his point, which prompts me to address the issue of a sugary drinks tax. We looked at examples of where taxation can be applied across sugar more broadly, perhaps to incentivise reductions within reformulation, as some countries have done. However, we wanted to address the single biggest component of sugar in children’s diets, which is sugary drinks. The Committee recommended a sugary drinks tax rather than a wider sugar tax, and there are several reasons for doing that. First, we know that it works. Secondly, it addresses that point about health inequality.

Mexico introduced a 1 peso per litre tax on sugary drinks and by the end of the year the greatest reduction in use—17% by the end of the year—was among the highest consumers of sugary drinks. The tax drove a change in behaviour. The whole point of this sugary drinks tax is that nobody should have to pay it at all. To those who say it is regressive, I say no it is not; the regressive situation is the current one, where the greatest harms fall on the least advantaged in society. As we have seen with the plastic bag tax, the tax aims to nudge a change in behaviour among parents, with a simple price differential between a product that is full of sugar, and causes all the harms that we have heard about, including to children’s teeth, and an identical but sugar-free product—or, better still, water.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate and on her work in this area. We do not really have to wait for a tax; we can take what the Mayor of London has done in City Hall as an example. He has made sugary drinks more expensive, and therefore people have that choice immediately. In the presence of the Chairman of the Administration

Committee, the House’s greatest living dentist, who is participating in this debate, may I say that it is possible for this House to put up the price of sugary drinks so that those who go to the Tea Room will then have that choice?

Dr Wollaston: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that and welcome what he describes. That movement is not just happening in City Hall, because it is being recommended within the NHS by Simon Stevens. I also congratulate Jamie Oliver and the many other outlets that are introducing such an approach. The other point to make is about public acceptability, because all the money raised goes towards good causes. As we have seen with the plastic bag tax, the fact that the levy is going to good causes increases its public support. That levy has been extraordinarily effective, as plastic bag usage has dropped by 78%. That is partly because we all knew we needed to change but we just needed that final nudge. That is what this is about: that final nudge to change people to a different pattern of buying. It has a halo effect, because it adds a health education message and that is part of its effectiveness.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I am a fellow member of the Health Committee, in which we also discussed ring-fencing the sugary drinks tax so that money could be put back into health education about obesity, particularly in schools, to prevent child obesity in the future. Could my hon. Friend speak a little more about that?

Dr Wollaston: I thank my hon. Friend and fellow member of the Health Committee for her intervention. At a time of shrinking public health budgets, there is a huge additional benefit from having this kind of levy, in that many of the other measures that the Minister will want to see in the strategy—on exercise in schools, teaching in cookery lessons and health education—could be funded in part through a sugary drinks tax. I hope she will look carefully at this idea and consider introducing it.

Geraint Davies *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. It is meant to be a 15-minute opening speech. Mr Davies will want to speak and he will not want me to take any minutes off him, so I am sure this will be a very quick intervention.

Geraint Davies: The debate is often between reformulation and tax. I agree with the tax on fizzy drinks, but if we had a tax on overall sugar input—for the sake of argument, let us suppose that sugar makes up half a Hobnob and the tax is at 10%—that would give an incentive to the manufacturers to reformulate without the price going up and we could get the sugar content down.

Dr Wollaston: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that, which brings me on to reformulation. It should also form a core part of the strategy. Our view was that we should have a centrally led programme of reformulation across foods and drinks, and that what manufacturers want is a level playing field. The trouble with reformulation is that it takes time; there has been an effective programme on salt, but that has happened very gradually, over a 10-year period. There is no reason why these things should be mutually exclusive; I come back to that point

about marginal gains and say let us do all of the above. I know that the Minister is looking closely at reformulation and understands how powerful it will be. The evidence we heard was that it could take 6% of the sugar out of children's diets. Reformulation, alongside other programmes, will play a part, but it will not work on its own and, unfortunately, it will take longer.

We also need to examine the pervasive effect of marketing and promotion. Do I want to have a kilogram of chocolate for almost nothing when I buy my newspaper? Of course I do, but please do not offer it to me. Please do not make me walk past the chicanes of sugar at the checkout or when I am queuing to pay for petrol. We know that 37% of all the confectionary we buy is bought on impulse. It does not matter how much we are intending not to buy it, if it is presented to us on impulse, we buy it, as impulse is an extraordinarily powerful driver. I therefore hope that any strategy will tackle that part of consumption, along with portion sizing. The supersizing of our society is in part down to the supersizing of portions and offers. All of this needs to be included in our approach, as does dealing with advertising. This advertising is pervasive and it is hitting our children everywhere they go, on television, online and through the influence of "advergaming". We know that this is very powerful in driving choices for children, so I hope the Minister will look carefully at that. She will have seen our recommendation of a watershed of 9 pm.

Time is running short, so I shall close my remarks, as I know other Members will want to cover many other aspects, such as exercise, the effect of what local authorities do, how much more powerful they could be in their roles if we gave them greater planning powers, and so on. Early intervention, research, education, teaspoon labelling—please do it all. We need a bold, brave and effective strategy, and we need to learn from British cycling and the law of marginal gains.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. With an eight-minute limit, I call Sharon Hodgson.

1.18 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on proposing and securing this important debate, and she will be pleased to hear that I agreed with almost everything she said. Many here in the Chamber will be aware of my strongly held passion to provide all children with a hot and healthy school meal, especially one that is free. The debate around the Government's impending childhood obesity strategy, both here in Parliament and in the outside world, has focused on the reformulation of foods that are high in sugar and salt and the introduction of a sugar tax. Although I support those measures, I want quickly to discuss how school food can play a significant role in addressing the obesity crisis facing our children today.

I want to say at the outset—I am sure people are thinking this, if not here then definitely on social media—that I am rather overweight myself and that some may say I should practise what I preach. I do try. But that is why I am so passionate about this agenda: I know how much harder this becomes as you get older. I was

allowed to adopt bad habits that are hard to break, and that shows why we need to educate the next generation to do much better.

School food has played a role in public policy for more than 100 years. It was first discussed in this place in 1906 when Fred Jowett, former Member of Parliament for Bradford West, used his maiden speech in the Chamber to launch his campaign to introduce free school meals when compulsory education was being rolled out. That led to the passing of the Education (Provision of Meals) Act 1906, which was originally Jowett's private Member's Bill.

Jowett's campaign was driven by his experience as a member of the Bradford school board, where he witnessed the malnourishment of children who then fell behind their more affluent peers. Here we are, more than 100 years later, and those arguments are still being made today.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I was just thinking the same as my hon. Friend about how far we have come in some respects but not in others. She will be aware of the private Member's Bill of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field). Does she support it?

Mrs Hodgson: Yes, that private Member's Bill is an excellent initiative, and should be adopted by the Government and local authorities. It is very simple to share the data that we already have on families who are entitled to benefits, to ensure that the entitlement of their children to the pupil premium is not lost when universal free school meals are rolled out. That is a very important point.

Although we do not always think about obesity in this way, it is a form of malnourishment. What we are seeing today is very similar to what we saw more than 100 years ago, with children lacking the right nutrients to see them living a healthy childhood and growing into healthy adults. That is especially concerning given that today more than one third of children are leaving school overweight or obese.

The school setting is one of the most important interventions in a child's life; it is where we nurture and educate future generations. Why should we not feed these children so that they are fuelled to receive the best education and life chances possible? That notion was strongly supported by the previous Labour Government, who introduced a raft of measures that addressed the food eaten by children in our schools. They included nutrition-based school food standards that provide children with the proper nutrition to learn, fully costed plans to extend our universal free school meal pilots, and the introduction of healthy, practical cooking on the national curriculum.

Although much, or all, of those measures were scrapped when the coalition Government were formed in 2010, it was very welcome when, in 2013, the school food plan was published, calling for the reinstatement of lots of those measures as well as new and improved measures in our schools to address the health of our children. Those included introducing food-based standards for all schools, training head teachers in the benefits of food and nutrition, improving Ofsted inspections on school food, and the roll-out of universal free school meals for primary school children, when funding was found.

[Mrs Hodgson]

As we know, that funding was found, thanks to David Laws and the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg). Fortunately, universal infant free school meals were secured by the Chancellor in the comprehensive spending review. All those measures came out of concerns for the health of our children and the growing obesity crisis, especially given that 57% of children were not eating school lunches. Some were opting to take in packed lunches, only 1% of which met the nutritional standards of a hot lunch, while others were opting to go off site to eat junk food at local takeaways.

As research has found, health problems associated with being overweight or obese cost the NHS more than £5 billion a year, and, with obesity rates continuing to rise for 11 to 15-year-olds, especially in deprived areas, it is now clearer than ever that we need seriously to address childhood obesity.

Giving children a healthy and balanced diet during the school day can only be a positive intervention in helping to address obesity. I cannot stress how strongly I believe that one of the most important interventions to help address health issues in childhood is universal free school meals.

Helen Whatley (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): The hon. Lady mentioned that children are consuming junk food from outlets near schools. Does she believe that councils should have powers, as part of planning guidance, to take action on junk food outlets being so close to schools?

Mrs Hodgson: Yes, I do. I really welcome that intervention, because it not only makes the point, but stresses it very strongly. Some councils are very good and introduce byelaws to ensure that burger vans cannot pull up outside a school, and that, if there is already a number of takeaway shops nearby, no more can open. Matters such as that need to be addressed by councils.

The pilots introduced by the previous Labour Government in Durham and Newham to look into the benefits of universal free school meals found many benefits to a child's health, and research continues now that we have universal infant school meals. The pilots in Durham and Newham found a 23% uptake in vegetable consumption at lunchtime and a steep decline in the typical unhealthy packed lunch foods. For example, there was a 16% decline in soft drinks and an 18% decline in crisps. Those are all-important figures that the Government should remember, and both the Department of Health and Department for Education should look further into how best they can use the vehicle of universal free school meals to help improve children's health.

Although universal free school meals are protected in the Government's comprehensive spending review—this followed a concerted campaign by school food campaigners, myself and others in the House—there is another area that the Government must consider when looking to improve the health of our children: holiday hunger. Children are in school for just 190 days of the year, and the rest—a total of 170 days—is totally down to their parents. Some may say that that is how it should be and that when we lock the school gates for the holidays it is none of our business what children eat, whether they eat or what they get up to. None the less, with the

growing use of food banks in school holidays and the reports that children return from the longer school holidays noticeably thinner and unhealthier, the issue is one that we can no longer ignore.

If there is a push for better food provision in our schools, then we need to be doing much more during the holidays so as not to undo the hard work that goes into improving the life chances of children during term time. That is why the school food all-party group, which I chair, has established a holiday hunger task group, which last year launched its "Filling the Holiday Gap" guidelines to provide organisations and local authorities wishing to provide food during holidays with the resources to offer healthy and nutritious food. Late last year, it published its update report, which called for action to be taken by the Government.

When the Government's childhood obesity strategy is published, I hope that there will be significant mention of the benefits that school food, especially universal free school meals, can have on a child's health, and of how it can be used to address the growing childhood obesity crisis. There is evidence out there to support using universal free school meal provision to its fullest, instead of squandering its potential, to improve the health of our children.

This is a moment when the Government can really make a difference to children's lives and I hope that all options and avenues will be pursued so that children are given the healthy food that they need to fuel their education and to make them as healthy a version of themselves as possible so that they grow into fit and healthy adults.

1.27 pm

Will Quince (Colchester) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson). I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) for calling this important debate. I am sure that Members can all see that I am a man who likes his food, and that I am not particularly in a position to lecture others on obesity. At the same time, I cannot ignore the fact that too many children in this country are obese, that poor children are more likely to be obese than rich children—boys and girls in the lowest quintile are three times more likely to be obese as those in the highest quintile—and that those living in towns are more likely to be obese than those living in rural areas. Those are unpalatable facts. It is right and proper that we investigate, and, where we have clear evidence, take the appropriate action.

However, the evidence does not suggest that childhood obesity is a problem that is getting significantly worse. The proportion of obese children in year 6 is higher than it was in 2006-07, but for reception children the proportion has fallen over the same period. Moreover, there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of British children, aged two to 10, who are obese.

Dr Wollaston: Will my hon. Friend go back and look at those figures in more detail? What he will see is that, although those figures are falling for the wealthiest children, they are rising for the most disadvantaged children. We are seeing a widening of the gap, which masks the underlying problem.

Will Quince: My hon. Friend makes a very good point, and I will come on to that in a bit more detail. The important element is that any approach we take must be evidence-based. I absolutely agree with her that we need to look at all the evidence.

I stated that the proportion of those aged two to 10 who were obese had gone from 17% in 2005 to 13% in 2013. The evidence suggests that childhood obesity rose quickly in the mid-2000s and has slightly fallen ever since. That is an important fact for two reasons. First, it suggests that our education programmes in our schools and the Government-backed campaigns on obesity within the last decade have had a positive impact in halting the increase in childhood obesity. Secondly, it undermines the scaremongering that suggests that childhood obesity is rocketing year on year. It simply is not; the reality is much more complex.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes has already mentioned, there is a growing clamour for a sugar tax on soft drinks to combat childhood obesity. She has called in a recent article for a 20% tax on sugary drinks as part of that overall solution. Her calls have been echoed by the British Medical Association and other public health campaigners. I have huge respect for my hon. Friend, but I think that a sugar tax is completely the wrong answer. A sugar tax is illiberal and patronising—in my view, nanny statism at its worst.

Given how sugar tax campaigners argue, one might think that consumption of sugar in the UK is at a record high. It is not. Consumption of sugar per head in the UK is falling, from a high of more than 50 kg a year in the 1980s to less than 40 kg a year now. What is more, soft drink consumption in the UK is falling. The latest household food survey from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs shows that household soft drink consumption purchases have fallen by 5.2% since 2011 and by 19% for high-calorie soft drinks in the same period. Regular soft drink purchases are now at their lowest level since 1992.

Geraint Davies: Does not the hon. Gentleman agree, though, that a sugar tax would be eminently fiscally responsible? It would gather revenue, increase life chances, increase health and reduce health costs. From the point of view of the Exchequer, it would be very sensible. Can he not come up with other sensible ideas like that?

Will Quince: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point and, of course, that would make sense if the evidence suggested that a soft drink tax implemented anywhere else in the world had actually worked and had the effect that he suggests. He is right to suggest that there are a lot of other measures that we as a Government and that businesses and organisations can take to address this issue; I do not believe that the sugar tax is the right one.

Sugar tax advocates have pointed out the introduction of a sugar tax in Mexico and the corresponding 6% decline in soft drink sales since the tax was introduced. However, research in *The BMJ* does not show evidence of a link between the introduction of the tax and the small decline in soft drinks consumption. Further taxes on non-essential energy dense foods were also introduced at the same time as the sugar tax, and they accounted for a higher proportion of Mexicans' daily calorific intake. As the authors of the research admitted, "we cannot determine the independent role of each"

of the taxes. The research even acknowledges that there is a lack of information on nutritional data for packaged drinks in Mexico, which means that researchers cannot see what the fall in soft drink consumption meant for a decline in sugar intake.

As many Members may know, Mexico does not have safe drinking water. As a high-profile advocate of the sugar tax in Mexico, Alejandro Calvillo, stated:

"We know that there are people who drink a lot of sodas and they don't have access to drinking water."

How can we possibly compare the results in a developing country that has unclear, unsafe drinking water with how a tax might operate here in the United Kingdom? Instead, let us compare like with like. When sugar taxes have been tried in developed nations such as France, they have had a negligible effect on reducing consumption. Denmark scrapped its sugar tax on soft drinks in 2014 and labelled it an expensive failure. The Danish Ministry of Taxation labelled food and drink taxes as "misguided at best and may be counter-productive at worst".

They even described it as an expensive liability for business, and, as we all know, a sugar tax would be a very bitter pill for British businesses to swallow.

Study after study on soft drinks taxes in the USA also shows that they have a negligible impact on sugary drink intake and calorie consumption. What is more, the small decline in sugary drinks is almost entirely offset by consumption of other sugary products.

Dr Wollaston: My hon. Friend is very generous to give way again. I wonder whether he has had an opportunity to look again in detail at the article in *The BMJ* to which he refers. He is citing the figure of 6%, but the article makes it clear that by the end of the year the decline was 12% overall, and—more importantly, if we are to address the issue of health inequality—17% among the heaviest users. He might wish to update himself. I am happy to share the paper with him.

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend and I would be delighted to take another look at that piece of research.

My hon. Friend has made a case for the sugar tax to protect the poorest, and I think that that was the point that she was just making. As I have mentioned, and this is a good point, the poorest children are the most likely to be obese. However, the statistics show that, in low-income households in Britain, soft drink purchases dropped by 14% between 2007 and 2013. Perhaps a 20% sugar tax on soft drinks is not very much to celebrity chefs such as Jamie Oliver and some of those who are pushing the idea of a sugar tax, but for those on the lowest incomes—who we know, proportionally, buy these products—about 12p a can or 37p per 2 litre bottle is a massive amount of money.

Maggie Throup: I think that the point is that we are talking about a tax on sugary drinks and there are alternatives, such as drinks with artificial sweeteners. We are not making it so that these people do not have a choice. There are two different sides of the argument.

Will Quince: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. As someone who spent five years working in the soft drinks industry, I think she makes a valuable point. We need to question what we want our children—and adults

[Will Quince]

—to drink. Do we want them drinking sugar or sodium benzoate, acesulfame and aspartame? That is a whole separate debate that we can have. I tend to choose to drink diet variants myself, but those options are there and the industry is driving people towards those lower calorie drinks. Let us take Britvic Soft Drinks as an example. Members will notice that they can buy a 600 ml bottle of diet Pepsi or Tango for the same price as a 500 ml full-sugar variant. The industry is already encouraging behavioural change.

To return to the Mexican experiment, 63% of sugar tax receipts have been collected from low-income households and 37.5% of receipts came from those in poverty. As I mentioned before, particularly with soft drinks but across the board, labelling has never been better, nor has the choice for consumers. The industry is doing a huge amount of work to encourage behavioural change and do the right thing.

I am conscious of the time and that lots of Members would like to speak, so I will conclude. I welcome a debate on childhood obesity and a clear strategy to reduce it. There are a huge number of measures that we as a Government could take ourselves and that we could encourage businesses and organisations to take, but let us ensure that the strategy is based on solid evidence. I strongly believe that a sugar tax is not the answer.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. Before I call the next, very experienced, Member to speak, let me remind less experienced Members that when there are time limits, the first two interventions are compensated for and the clock stops, but after that the clock continues. I just want to ensure that no one gets a horrible fright.

1.38 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I will stick to my eight minutes, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I will not give way, if that helps—[*Interruption.*] All right, I will give way.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince). He is hard on himself; he is not obese, just very well built. I know that his enthusiasm for curry is known throughout Colchester, so that might be a contributing factor. It is a pleasure to speak in the debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) not just on how she chairs the Select Committee on Health but on how she brings issues to the House, especially this critical issue of childhood obesity. I am delighted to see the Minister at the Dispatch Box, as she gets it. She is the Minister responsible for diabetes and whenever we in the all-party group on diabetes ask her to deal with these issues, she has always been very open and transparent. I think that she is on the same page as the rest of us.

That helps me put aside at least half of my speech because I do not need to repeat the statistics that Members who are experienced in these matters know all about—the cost of diabetes to the national health service, the worry that over half a million people have type 2 diabetes and are not aware of it, the need for prevention and awareness, and the importance of protecting our children. The figures given by the hon. Member for

Totnes are clear. The problem gets worse as children get older and the figures are so worrying that if we just stand still, the crisis of childhood obesity will continue.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): With reference to standing still, the debate today has largely focused on sugar and our intake of it. One of the key things we need to do to tackle the challenge of childhood obesity is to focus on activity—getting people to be physically active, through sport or, as I increasingly believe, outdoor recreation. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport sports strategy, which focuses more on outcomes and includes outdoor recreation, could help to tackle the crisis that we are facing. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree?

Keith Vaz: Absolutely. The hon. Gentleman is looking at someone who constantly tells people to move more, but prefers to go by car rather than walk. It is a wonderful thing to say, but it is a different matter to get us on to those bicycles, on to our feet and involved in physical activities. My physical activity extends to table tennis, which is not the best way of losing weight and ensuring that my type 2 diabetes is under control. The hon. Gentleman is right—those lifestyle changes are necessary and they need to happen at a very young age. Schools, teachers, kids and parents need to be involved in ensuring that there is more activity because that will help in the long run.

We should be pretty dramatic in the way we deal with the problem. As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker—as you have no doubt shown the film to your children at some stage—Mary Poppins thought that a spoonful of sugar helped the medicine go down, but a spoonful of sugar, or nine teaspoons of sugar in a can of Coca-Cola, does not help the medicine go down—it makes matters worse.

In the short time available, I shall concentrate on the need to ensure that retailers do their bit to bring down the sugar content in sugary drinks. I am full of praise for the Mayor of London, the hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), for going one step further than waiting for a sugar tax, which I understand is still on the agenda. There was a feeling that the Government had rejected that, but there were newspaper reports that the Prime Minister was still considering the matter. Perhaps the Minister can tell us when she winds up.

The retailers, having been invited by the previous Secretary of State for Health to be part of a voluntary arrangement, did not keep their side of the bargain. Despite the great declarations that were made by the previous Secretary of State, which I am sure were well intentioned, it is difficult to control global empires to ensure that they reduce the amount of sugar in drinks. We therefore have to take drastic measures. That is why I support a sugar tax, as enunciated by the Chair and other members of the Health Committee. We need to do that. We also need to do what the Mayor has done. Putting up the price of sugary drinks in City Hall is an extremely important way of sending out a clear message. Simon Stevens has said that he would do the same thing at NHS hospitals. How many of us turn up at local hospitals and see vending machines openly trying to sell us sugary drinks such as Coca-Cola?

I recently returned from a holiday in India. Whenever I asked for water or Diet Pepsi or Diet Coke, I was told it was not available. There is an interesting read-across

to other Government Departments. The big retailers may be more conscious of the fact that the British House of Commons is interested in the issue, but in countries outside western Europe and the United States, they may feel that they can dump their sugary products without offering an alternative. Before we get to the issue of the sugar tax, which, as I said, I support, there is much that retailers can do.

I recently visited a branch of Waitrose in West Bromwich. I was interested to see that all the sugar-free products had been put in one kiosk in the middle of the store, so when people walked in they were not overwhelmed by the promotion of two-litre bottles of Coca-Cola for the price of one—they looked at the kiosk, where there were only no-sugar products. That is a way of encouraging those who purchase—I am not saying dads do not do it, but in most cases mums—to go to the kiosk and try to think positively about buying products that are free of sugar.

As I said in an intervention, there are things we can do. If we go to the Tea Room to have our lunch after this great debate, what is on offer? Club biscuits, Jaffa cakes, the most fantastic Victoria sponge—marvellous stuff that the Administration Committee offers us. The fruit is at the side, between the refrigerated drinks and the till. By the time I get there, even I, with my type 2 diabetes, am sometimes tempted to go for the sugary products and the chocolate. Why do we not promote the food and drinks that are healthy?

That is why, like others, I commend what Jamie Oliver has done. We need people like that, who have captured the imagination of the British people, to ensure that the public and the press help in the efforts to reduce sugar. Finally, I lavish praise on my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), who has introduced a Bill to provide for better labelling. We still do not have effective product labelling. It is important that we see such information because it will enable us to make informed choices.

If we do nothing, the obesity crisis will get much worse. We are not drinking at the last-chance saloon. That is now closed. We are outside and we are ready for firm Government action. That is our request to the Minister. Because of her own commitment to these issues, I know she will react positively.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. I am afraid I have to lower the time limit on speeches to seven minutes now.

1.47 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I am delighted to take part in this important debate and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on securing it.

As we have been hearing all afternoon, we are facing a crisis of obesity among our children. That is storing up trouble for the future for our nation, as it has implications for the personal health of those individuals, and will create wider social problems and economic challenges—loss of productivity because of ill health and the cost to the NHS, as we have heard. It is therefore right that the Government take the issue seriously and develop a comprehensive plan to address it.

We need to be realistic. The issue is complex and there is no silver bullet that will solve the problem of childhood obesity in one hit. There needs to be a comprehensive plan and a combination of measures to encourage greater activity and participation in sport and to address aspects such as diet, labelling and lifestyle. Parents must be at the heart of any strategy. We cannot replace their role and responsibility in raising their children and deciding what is best for their children's welfare and future. We must never lose sight of that. Many parents feel that they are fighting a losing battle. The greatest influence on many children growing up today is no longer the parents and the household, but the media and the marketing budgets of multinational companies. Even the simple fact that in most shops a bottle of water is more expensive than an equivalent-sized can of fizzy, sugary drink—I think that is the case even in this place, so perhaps we should address that here—is evidence of the losing battle that many parents feel they are fighting in teaching and enabling their children to make the best choices.

In the time remaining I want to address the sugar tax. I am privileged to have one of Jamie Oliver's Fifteen restaurants in my constituency. Only a few days after my election, the restaurant got in contact and asked me to lead a campaign for the introduction of a sugar tax. I have to say that my first response was to say no, because I am at heart a low-tax, small-state Conservative; my natural inclination is never to raise taxes. In fact, I want to cut taxes and have fewer taxes, so I did not particularly warm to the idea of introducing a new tax. Also, I do not want to see the state interfering in people's lives, and particularly family life, any more than is absolutely necessary. Members will also be able to tell from my physique that I am not renowned for being a diet fanatic. In fact, I have been on only one diet in my life, and that was when my wife persuaded me to try the Atkins diet, with the bribe that I could eat as much bacon as I liked.

However, having looked at the evidence, I have come around and now believe that the Government should seriously consider introducing a sugar tax, because it would send a clear message about what is right and help people to make the right choices. In this country we have many taxes that are designed not only to raise revenue, but to educate and to influence people in the choices they make. I think that a sugar tax would be another step towards helping people, and particularly helping parents to help their children, to make the right choices. It would send a clear message that sugary drinks are not good for us. The Government would also be seen to be providing leadership on the issue, making a very clear and bold statement.

A tax on sugary drinks is not a silver bullet. It needs to be part of an overall package and a comprehensive strategy that includes better labelling, as we have heard, better education and encouraging physical activity. But I have been convinced that it needs to be seriously considered as part of the strategy to send that clear message and help parents make the right choice. I welcome the fact that, as the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) suggested, there might have been a little movement in the Government's position. I encourage the Minister to take back the clear message that the Government should seriously consider introducing a

[Steve Double]

tax on sugary drinks as part of the overall strategy. It is something we need to see move forward, and a clear message needs to be sent.

1.53 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am pleased to be called to speak in this debate. I thank the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) for setting the scene so comprehensively, and for speaking along the lines that I and, I hope, most Members in the Chamber agree with. I declare an interest, because I am a type 2 diabetic, as is my friend and colleague the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz). He and I have many things in common. We are both type 2 diabetics and we both support Leicester City football club—who would have believed that Leicester City would be top of the league? They are equal with Arsenal now, so there we are. I am very pleased to share that as well.

Obesity is at epidemic levels across the nation. Although strategies and responses have been developed, achieving results and driving down levels of obesity appear to be very difficult, which is disappointing. I am not here to argue or fall out with anyone—that is not my form—but I do not agree with some of the things that have been said today. For example, I am in favour of a sugar tax. My colleague, Simon Hamilton, who is the Health Minister in Northern Ireland, is against a sugar tax. I am in favour of it because I think that it would be the best thing. I think that sometimes we have to make decisions for people and that we have to do what is right. We have the power in this House to bring in legislation that hopefully can be used for the benefit of all.

Northern Ireland has the worst levels of obesity in the United Kingdom. Just over 24% of the 1,300 children from Northern Ireland who were surveyed by researchers at the Institute of Education in London were found to be not just overweight, but obese. We all know that the Ulsterman and the Ulsterwoman are fond of an Ulster fry. I used to be, but now I am allowed a fry only once a week because I am a diabetic. Believe it or not, as a diabetic I used to weigh 17 stone, but now I weigh 13 stone, so we can address the issue if we put our minds to it. Had I known what diabetes was about before I became a diabetic, I think I would have taken steps to change. I did not know it then because I was not interested. I did not know it because I did not realise there was anything wrong, but things were wrong. Sometimes we have to educate ourselves and take important steps and move forward by legislative means.

Members have referred to a balanced meal. Some people who carry a bit of weight think that a balanced meal means one hamburger in each hand. We have to think about this seriously. A balanced meal is not two hamburgers and big bottle of Coke; it is much less than that.

Obesity levels for 11-year-olds are higher in Northern Ireland than they are in other parts of the United Kingdom; in Wales the figure is 23%, in England it is 20%, and in Scotland it is 19%. It was reported in the news the week before last that every child in the United Kingdom will eat their body weight in sugar each year. Just think about what that means. That is four or five stones of sugar. Adults probably eat their body weight in sugar as well—not me, though, because I am a diabetic.

Will Quince: I am interested to know why sugary soft drinks, in particular, are being targeted. Why are we not looking at cereals, biscuits and cakes as well? Why is it just sugary drinks?

Jim Shannon: I am happy to look at sugary drinks because we have to start somewhere, but I will happily look at cornflakes and other foods as well, so they should not think that we are going to let them off. The issue is that there are nine teaspoons of sugar in a can of fizzy drink, so we need to address the issue where it starts.

We cannot ignore the statistics, because they are very clear. The fact that by age 11 a quarter of children in Northern Ireland are not just overweight, but obese is an alarming statistic. I think that a comprehensive and robust approach will be required if we are to address that. One way to doing that is through education in schools. I think that we need to bring that education in at an early stage. I think that the Minister will probably respond along those lines.

I fully support having a tax on sugar, which I think would be a step in the right direction. If we do that, we can move things forward and address the issue of obesity and people being overweight very early. Without addressing this serious health issue at the earliest stage possible, it will lead to problems for the health of the person in question, and for public health and society as a whole. I found some statistics on obesity the other day. The obesity epidemic in Northern Ireland has led to a doubling in just three years in the number of callouts for firefighters to help obese people. Those are startling figures. We can sit and ignore those and say, “No, we’re not going to tax sugar,” or we can address the issue early on. I say that we should do it early on. Let us do it now.

Dr Hilary Cass, president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, has said that if the problem is not tackled now, it will rapidly get worse. She said:

“We should be worried because if we do not fix this problem now, we will see unhealthy kids turning into unhealthy adults with diabetes, heart disease and kidney problems.”

Why is it that it tends to be those on low incomes who are overweight or obese? It is quite clear to me, but perhaps it is not clear to others. I think that it is because their income dictates what they buy. If they do not have much money, they will buy the cheapest food they can, even if it is not the healthiest food, and more often than not cheap food contains levels of fat and sugar that are far too high. The issue of low incomes is therefore something we have to address as well, for those whose food choices are dictated by what is in their pockets.

We should be tackling these issues now not only because that is the right thing to do morally, but because it makes economic sense. The right hon. Member for Leicester East referred to the supermarket that had all the chocolate and sugary foods in one aisle in the middle of the shop. That is where they should be. They should not be at the checkout, where kids will see them and want their chocolate bar or their bottle of Coke. We have to address that issue as well.

Despite greater education on food and nutrition, there is still an obesity epidemic. Children are getting too many of their calories from sugars—on average, three times the Government’s recommended amount. That only contributes to an overall overconsumption of calories. One in three children are overweight or obese

by the time they start secondary school, and that is a very clear problem that needs to be addressed. Childhood obesity is associated with conditions such as insulin resistance, hypertension, asthma, sleep problems, poor mental health—we cannot ignore that in children; we cannot think that they do not have it, because they do—early signs of heart disease, and an increased risk of developing cancer. The hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince) referred to the need to have more physical activity in schools, and that issue could be addressed. Ministers mentioned it during this morning's Culture, Media and Sport questions, so they recognise it as well. I have mentioned just a small number of the health costs of not acting to address this epidemic.

It is not just health that suffers because of inaction on this epidemic. Health problems associated with being overweight or obese cost the NHS more than £5 billion annually. Poor dental hygiene costs the NHS £3.4 billion a year, of which £30 million alone is spent on hospital-based extractions of children's teeth. The total societal cost of obesity in the UK in 2012, including lost productivity, was £47 billion. The evidence is clear.

There can be no one solution to this complex issue. We need to enhance our nutritional education strategy, tackle poor diets through legislation, and encourage greater physical activity among our children. Given the shocking statistics that we have all spoken about, it is clear that despite health being a devolved issue, obesity, and obesity in our children, is truly a national problem. As such, it will require a national solution and a comprehensive approach.

2.1 pm

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): I, too, pay tribute to the Health Committee for its great work. I pay tribute particularly to the Chairman of that Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), and to my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) for her work in the all-party obesity group.

This is a very important topic. It is also a very emotive one, as we have heard, especially for those of us who are generally instinctively against Government interference and taxation, and want small government. I have wrestled with that, like my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), but I have come round to the idea that when it is necessary to interfere, and when we have to balance out these freedoms with doing the right thing by our children, then we do need to consider all options. I have been slowly persuaded, but am now comfortably persuaded, on issues such as the sugar tax. So unfortunately, probably for the first time ever, I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince). However, I am sure that it will be the first of many such times over coming years.

The evidence is overwhelming. Like the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), in researching this topic I found that the numbers are astounding. The figures are overwhelming, and very alarming. I will not repeat them, but the report contains many such figures, and it is well worth a read.

One of the issues that comes up again and again is food marketing. Research tells us that children as young as 18 months can be influenced and are capable of recognising brands, which is a truly astounding fact.

The House will be aware that current regulations on TV advertising mean that foods high in fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar are banned from being advertised during children's programming, but many organisations, as well as the report, have suggested that that should extend up to the 9 pm watershed, and with considerable reason, given the evidence. The latest Ofcom figures show that two thirds of children watch television during what is considered adult airtime, with peak viewing for children between 7 pm and 8 pm. The British Heart Foundation found last year that during just one episode of "The X Factor", a programme that is quite popular with children, there were no fewer than 13 junk food adverts. The issue is even more acute with online advertising, where adverts are often attached to videos, including music videos. That is probably worthy of a debate in itself.

Let me turn to food standards in schools, where there has been a tremendous breakthrough over the past few years. Those of us who visit schools look on with envy at the school meals now compared with the ones that many of us had to suffer years ago. Yet in many schools up and down the country, we have the farcical situation where lunches provided by schools are generally very healthy, but the food children themselves bring into schools, or is provided by their parents, is often not healthy. We can only imagine how frustrating it is for teachers, and indeed everybody who works in schools, including my wife, to see children filling themselves up with junk food at school and knowing there is little they can do about it. We need more co-operation between schools, and between parents and teachers. I back the Committee's proposal that nutritional guidelines should be published for packed lunches and that, where necessary, teachers should be able to have, perhaps robust, conversations with parents so that these guidelines are followed.

Of course, diet is very important, but so is physical activity, as has been mentioned many times. I back up the supportive comments about the DCMS's sports strategy. In *The Times* on Monday we saw a snack guide that included information on how long it would take to burn off the calories of various foods. It is easy to laugh at things like this, but it showed that a chocolate bar, bag of crisps and a bottle of Coke would require almost one hour of running or more than two hours of walking to burn off. How many children, or indeed parents, know that? Given that a child could consume all those things on top of, or instead of, a healthy meal, while doing no exercise, it is a really alarming picture. We must do more to encourage and enable exercise.

I am blessed to represent a primarily rural constituency. It is very easy for me and my family to get outdoors, to go on bike rides, and to go on public pathways. I am well aware that not everybody in the country has those privileges. Councils and local government need to do much more to enable access to healthy outdoor living and sports facilities. Planning plays a part in this too. When I see planning proposals for housing developments, I find it remarkable how little provision there is for recreational facilities, or indeed access to countryside. Cities fare far worse than the countryside in this regard.

Helen Whately: My hon. Friend is making an important speech covering a wide range of actions that need to be taken to tackle the obesity problem. Does he agree that

[Helen Whately]

this is not just about the sugar tax or product placement? The scale of the problem is such that we need a whole range of steps where the Government take a lead in showing how serious the problem is, and a whole range of actions to make sure that a difference is made quickly.

Nigel Huddleston: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention; I could not agree more. Indeed, she has stolen my conclusion. It is absolutely the case that this is a very complex matter that covers so many areas that it is difficult to fine tune it. I hope that we can avoid focusing purely on the sugar tax, as important as it is.

We must recognise and praise the fact that up and down the country there are some great experiments going on, with schools practising innovative ways to encourage physical activity. For example, Commando Joe's goes into schools and encourages team building and physical activity. I give credit to Bengeworth academy in Evesham in my constituency where we have our own Commando Joe—a gentleman called Chris Parry who works alongside staff and children having previously done four tours of Afghanistan with the Marines. He is doing great work, and long may that continue.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid Kent (Helen Whately) said, this is not just about healthy eating. It is also about planning, education, labelling, and information, and the cost in healthcare if we do not do anything—we need to cover so many areas. If the aim of this debate was to give the Government ideas about what they could do to help in this area, then I am sure that by the end of it that will have been achieved.

2.7 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston). I agreed with everything he said, including his disagreement with the hon. Member for Colchester (Will Quince). I also agree with the points made by the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). We are both members of the SAS—Surfers Against Sewage, that is, before people get the wrong idea.

I congratulate the Chair of the Health Committee, the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), on introducing this debate. As she will know, I have been active in this area, not least in the Sugar in Food and Drinks (Targets, Labelling and Advertising) Bill, which has its Second Reading tomorrow. The Bill basically asks for sugar labelling because people do not realise how much sugar they are eating. As I said earlier, this morning I bought three products from Portcullis House: a can of Coke, which has nine spoonfuls of sugar, the daily limit for a man; a container of yogurt, which has seven spoonfuls, more than a woman is allowed; and a Snickers bar, which has five spoonfuls.

The reason for a focus on fizzy drinks, other than the reasons set by the Chair of the Health Committee, is that they represent a very large proportion of the overall sugar intake of children, and so they represent an easy big hit, early on. There was a trading of statistics about the efficacy of sugar taxes, but we need only look at the elasticity of demand for fizzy drinks. Part of my background

is in marketing products in multinational companies—not these products. I was the marketing manager for Colgate, for example. People have talked about the impact on teeth. When I was at Colgate, we thought that with the advent of fluoride we were going to see the end of tooth decay. However, there has been such a big increase in the consumption of fizzy drinks through focused marketing, that we have turned the corner and gone into reverse, and people's teeth are dropping out. The point about marketing aimed at children highlights some of the demographic differences in the impact of sugar, because high consumers of television tend to be less well-off people who pick up brand awareness from watching it and then follow those brands.

I am in favour of labels noting the number of spoonfuls of sugar. I know that the Minister will say that there are issues with packaging in Europe, but my understanding is that, while there is a European competence, we have a national opportunity to do our own thing, and that is what we should do. Jamie Oliver and the Health Committee are following up on that. Retailers could put pressure on manufacturers to take voluntary action, but, sadly, even though retailers claim they are doing so, they are not taking proper responsibility, certainly not on cola drinks, which is a massive problem.

At one point in my distant past, I promoted the School Meals and Nutrition Bill. Its suggestions that Ofsted should be required to audit nutrition in schools and to get rid of unhealthy vending were agreed. I also still stand by its suggestion to gate children in schools so that they could not run to McDonald's or elsewhere at lunchtime.

Obesity is costing the economy about £47 billion a year. This is not just about diabetes and the cost to the NHS, which is terribly important; the overall economy is suffering. Members have mentioned bullying in school, but obesity also has an effect on people's quality of life. It is uncomfortable and those who are obese live shorter lives. If people know that one jar of pasta sauce has six teaspoonfuls of sugar and another has three, they will be able to make a rational choice; otherwise they will pick the one that is sweeter. The mechanisms available are simple. Members have also mentioned the need to encourage exercise, which is clearly very important.

On the main thrust of the debate, I agree with a fizzy drinks tax, but I want us to move towards an ingredient tax, which would mesh into the reformulation. Professor Graham MacGregor, who is now working with Action on Sugar, has been instrumental in getting the salt content down through reformulation. As I have said, if a 10% tax is put on a Hobnob, for example, the producer could reduce the amount of sugar and the price would not go up.

There are concerns about regressive taxation. The sad fact is that poorer people find it more difficult to afford fresh foods. People poo-hoo that argument, but if various products are mashed up with sugar, salt and fat and then frozen, they will stay on the shelf for months on end. However, if produce has to be sold within a week because it is going to decay, it will be more expensive, which causes problems. There is a case to be made for taking the revenues from the tax and hypothecating it to provide easier access to fresh foods for people with less money. As well as putting up the

prices of sugar-rich products, we need to provide information. We have a battery of opportunity to confront this difficult task.

It has been suggested that multinationals have been helping. Such companies are rational, focused and see the lie of the land. They know that people have cottoned on to the fact that sugar consumption is costing the country an arm and a leg, sometimes literally. Productivity is down and costs are up, and they know that the Government will ultimately take action, so they are following a rational trajectory. We need to encourage them to do so.

We have heard stories about elasticity of demand before. As every economist knows, when the price is put up, demand goes down. That is not a point of argument. Certain manufacturers used to say that there was nothing wrong with smoking. We know there is a problem with sugar. The emerging science suggests that if, for example, I and the hon. Member for Colchester both consumed 2,000 calories a day but I took in more sugar than him, over time I would develop a predisposition that meant that more of the calories I consumed would settle as fat. I would then feel hungry and listless and become obese. There are, therefore, other issues associated with sugar consumption.

The World Health Organisation has said that the sugar calorie intake should be 5%. Those of us here know that that means six spoonfuls for women and nine spoonfuls for men, but people out there do not realise how much sugar they are supposed to have, and even if they did they are not able to calculate it. Public Health England has produced an app that enables people to scan products with their phone to find out how many cubes of sugar they are consuming. It is difficult to calculate how much sugar is in one chunk of chocolate and in the bar as a whole. It would be better if it was all clearly labelled, without having to go through that process. The app is helpful and I welcome it, but it is not a serious solution.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): I concur with the hon. Gentleman on labelling. Does he agree that, whether we label a chocolate bar or fruit, we need information on sucrose, glucose and fructose? We need to know how many of those chemicals are in everything we consume, including fruit.

Geraint Davies: I agree that people should be aware of that. My big beef, as it were, is that people do not know how much added sugar they are consuming. For instance, they do not know if there is twice as much sugar in one jar of pasta sauce than another. People need to know how much sugar they are taking in. To a certain extent, people prefer naturally occurring sugar in bananas and similar products, but I agree with the hon. Lady that people should know what they are eating.

The manufacturers argue that they have done everything they can. The back of a packet of Frosties has all the information, so long as people have a PhD and a lens through which to read the data. Products are packaged in such a way as to give the impression that they are healthy. The Bill that I am promoting tomorrow argues that products should not be allowed to be promoted as low fat when they are in fact high in sugar, because people infer from that that they are healthy. It also

proposes an overall, aggregate sugar target—similar to a carbon target—so that the Government can see how much sugar we are consuming overall and gradually manage strategies to get it down.

2.16 pm

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): May I join other Members in applauding my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) for securing this important debate? I did not come across paediatric type 2 diabetes when I was a medical student. Perhaps her experience was similar to mine. Like many people, I was shocked to find at the turn of the century that there were instances in this country of childhood type 2 diabetes. There are now more than 100 cases a year in this country of that incredibly serious condition. Just a few months ago, a three-year-old in America was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. The treatment involved decreasing the weight of the child, who was obese.

I believe that the Minister's strategy should be cultural. The papers show that more evidence is emerging and it is prescient. It involves not just genetics, but nurture. Studies of children who have been adopted by obese parents show that there is a risk that they will have childhood obesity.

On culture, I, like others, have seen many households with a TV room but no dining room. Families do not eat at a dining table in the same way as previous generations did. Members have talked in depth about the cultural change relating to exercise. I applaud the head of St Ninians in Stirling, who introduced a 1-mile-a-day idea for the primary schoolchildren. Interestingly, obesity levels on entry to the school are not as high as those in other schools; the figure a few years ago was one in 10. There is now an association—we are not talking about causation—between the 1 mile a day and pupils leaving St Ninians without being obese. That lady has rightly been given Pride of Britain awards. I want that culture change to continue and for the House to applaud it.

At the moment, I am not in favour of new taxation. In our culture, we can access such information. I absolutely agree with what everybody has said about better labelling, and we need more of it. However, as I said to the hon. Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), we need information about all the foods we eat—about fruit and vegetables, as well as about fast food. There is a debate about using sucrose as opposed to fructose, but we need to be aware of all such chemicals. In our culture today, we can give people that information. I would like to have such information myself.

As we get more evidence, the treatment and management of, as well as education about, childhood obesity will rise to the levels available for adult obesity. For many people, the concern is not about the obesity itself, but about its medical consequences. An obese adult who goes to their GP can look at the algorithm or the chart, and discuss the five or 10-year risk of their developing cardiovascular problems. If we give parents such information about their child, they will, in time, change their family habits. They do not want their child to have an increased five or 10-year risk of cardiovascular complications.

Geraint Davies: On that basis, does the hon. Lady advocate removing the tax on cigarettes?

Dr Mathias: The hon. Gentleman is testing me. I would say yes if I followed the argument all the way through, but I would not now go back on the tax on cigarettes. In my experience, education and information are the most powerful factors. Sadly, all GPs have treated people who later died from lung cancer. In my limited experience, it is information, not the effect on their pocket, that will change such people's behaviour. I want an obesity strategy that will provide such information, because I trust the patient to make an informed choice. For me, the facts and the evidence are key.

We need to hold up a mirror to our culture at the moment. We have a culture of fast food and little exercise. I want that to flip to become a culture of slow food and more exercise. I encourage the Minister to look at such a culture, rather than at taxation.

2.22 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Before I begin, I want to add my voice to those of other Members in thanking the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) for securing this debate.

Childhood obesity is a problem across the UK, and the devolved legislatures as well as the UK Government must do all they can to tackle the problem, both in the short and the long term, for the benefit of our children and tomorrow's citizens, to relieve the health problems obesity all too often creates, and for our long-term economic sustainability, as has been outlined this afternoon. All corners of the UK can learn from each other, and I hope they will. The Scottish Government have been working hard on this concern by taking forward a number of initiatives to enable people more easily to become active, to eat more healthily and generally to find ways of feeling better through an improved lifestyle.

There is no silver bullet, as we all know. We all agree that there is a significant problem. We must take into account the clear socioeconomic considerations that have a direct effect on the health of our children in general and on obesity in particular. The SNP Scottish Government are implementing several measures both to combat and to prevent childhood, and indeed adult, obesity. However, there are far too many to mention in the limited time available.

It is worth remembering that fruit and vegetable consumption among the poorest 20% has fallen by 20% since the recession began, with children's diets being hit hard. On a number of national indicators of obesity and childhood obesity in Scotland, performance is improving or being maintained. In particular, physical activity performance has improved. The SNP Scottish Government are working well with schools and local authorities to ensure that children are more physically active. My local authority, North Ayrshire Council, has developed its own outdoor access strategy.

Much has been made today about imposing a sugar tax. The food we consume all too often contains significant quantities of sugar, of which many of us are seldom aware. I know that both the UK and the Scottish Government are considering a sugar tax. It is certainly an option that we are quite right to consider, but we must be careful about a tax that may, disproportionately, hit the poorest hardest. We all know that eating healthily is not always affordable for families on a tight budget, and a sugar tax must not be held up as a panacea for a

very complex problem. If it is introduced, we must be certain that it has a positive impact on our health, without the unintended consequence of increasing inequalities.

We pay the price for our poor choices. We pay the price with our health and with our life expectancy, due to the development of serious health problems such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer. This puts more demands on our health services, and those demands will become greater unless we tackle this problem. The Health Committee has recently heard that the cost to society of this problem is £27 billion.

Beyond the cost in pounds, shillings and pence, overweight children face other problems, such as bullying, social exclusion, lack of self-confidence, unfulfilled potential and underachievement in school, which plague them long into adulthood and feed into their job prospects for many years afterwards. In Scotland, about 31% of children were at risk of becoming overweight in 2014, and 17% were at risk of obesity. Although those figures have stabilised in recent years, they are still worryingly high.

Research in Scotland shows that factors associated with children being overweight or obese include snacking on crisps or sweets between meals, skipping breakfast, not eating in a dining room at home and a lack of parental supervision, not enough physical activity and greater social deprivation. A higher proportion of children are at risk of obesity in Scotland's most deprived areas—22% in 2014, compared with 13% for the least deprived. Any action to tackle this problem must be sensitive to that fact. Any debate about how to make our children healthier must avoid wagging fingers at parents, who, often in very difficult circumstances, are doing the very best they can. It is important to support people to make healthy choices where possible, not to shake our heads at them in righteous condemnation.

I end by making an important point for us all. Food labelling must be part of the solution. Although labels telling us what is in our food have improved over the years, in my view they are still too complex. One should not need to be a pseudo-scientist to understand what is in the food one buys. Labels must be clearer for shoppers so that parents are fully informed about what is in the food they eat and in the food they feed to their children.

There is no doubt that there are challenges ahead, but we must take people with us in this debate. How and what people feed their children can be a sensitive matter. Parents of course want the best for their children, and we must support and enable all parents to make the best choices for their children. Otherwise, regardless of what we say in this place, they just will not swallow it.

2.28 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewhash) (Con): I am pleased to contribute to this debate as chair of the newly reformed all-party group on adult and childhood obesity. The group has been set up to bring together Members of both Houses and parliamentarians of all parties who want to explore the best ways to lower the obesity rate. There is no doubt that such a group is needed. It barely needs repeating, but two thirds of adults are obese or overweight, as are more than a third of children. Such a pressing public policy issue demands the constructive involvement of parliamentarians, and I welcome today's debate as a means of highlighting the need for action. My vision is for the all-party group to become a forum

for lively discussion of practical ways in which we can support people both to live healthier lives themselves and to help their children grow up healthy.

I understand why the role of the Government is a tricky one when it comes to tackling obesity. Some Government involvement is vital, but a Government cannot simply pass a law to make people eat healthier food and give healthier food to their children or legislate for a certain amount of exercise each day. What the Government can do is produce strategies, ideally for both children and adults, that lay out a longer-term solution for what is a long-term problem.

The worst thing that a Government could do would be to publish such proposals and then forget about them. Fortunately, the APPG will be there to keep an eye on the progress that is made, or not, and to work with the Government to promote what works and point out what does not work. I hope that Members on both sides of the House this afternoon, including my hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince), with whom I usually agree, are interested in getting involved in the group, because all are welcome.

Let us focus specifically on childhood obesity, not forgetting that adults are role models. Our children are our future and it would be irresponsible as legislators not to take the future health of our nation extremely seriously. We must take whatever action is needed to address this issue. We can see the impact of obesity on the lives of adults in an increased risk of heart disease, diabetes and the life-changing complications that go with it, and cancer. All those medical conditions are life-limiting. Why would obesity have a different effect on children from the one it has on adults? It does not.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) said, the Health Committee report on childhood obesity called for “brave and bold action”. That brave and bold action is needed from Government, the food and drinks industry, food outlets, educators and healthcare professionals. But let us not forget that all that will be wasted unless people take personal responsibility. This is a huge issue and fiddling at the edges will not work.

Today, there has been a lot of focus on the proposal for a sugary drinks tax. I was originally against it, but when I saw the compelling evidence, I changed my opinion, like my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). A sugary drinks tax should be just one of a range of measures. I believe that the food and drink industry can and should implement many of the measures that are needed without the need for legislation. The industry can make changes without legislation, given the will, and that is already happening.

In the run-up to this debate, I received many emails from organisations on both sides of the argument. I had one email from a leading supermarket, outlining the measures that it is taking. Those include reducing sugar in its range of breakfast cereals, chilled juices, fizzy drinks and yoghurts. I know that reformulations do not happen overnight, but I would like to think that the extra focus on obesity over recent months, including in Jamie Oliver’s campaign, has embarrassed manufacturers into making changes to their formulations in their own way, rather than as a result of legislation.

There is still more to be done. I am sure that we have all bought a newspaper from a well-known high street newsagents and been offered a mega-sized bar of chocolate

at a special price. I do not know about my fellow Members, but if I want a bar of chocolate to eat while reading my newspaper, I will buy one without being asked—not that I do that, of course! What I am saying is that some manufacturers and retailers are taking the current and future health of our nation seriously and acting responsibly, but sadly others are not.

The causes of obesity are extremely complex and numerous, so it would be wrong of me just to focus on sugar. Fats, saturated fats and salt all have an impact on our weight, as does exercise. For adults—not for children, I hasten to add—alcohol also has an effect. It is because of this complexity that we cannot rely on just one measure. The Health Committee has made a range of recommendations, as has been outlined.

Regular exercise has a role to play. One of my local primary schools, Ladywood in Kirk Hallam, makes exercise fun. It is a member of the Erewash school sports partnership, it has active dinner playtimes and it links up with the secondary school, Kirk Hallam Community Academy, to take part in “This Girl Can”. We need to inspire young people at an early stage to make exercise a part of their way of life.

We must not forget that we need to consider cure as well as prevention. I have spoken to a number of healthcare professionals about this matter. Although it is important to recognise that people need to take personal responsibility for their own lifestyle, it is important not to stigmatise people who are obese. We must ensure that people recognise it as a condition, as they would with any other medical condition.

Obesity is a ticking time bomb. As politicians, we have a responsibility for the current and future health of our nation. I am ready to address it straight on.

2.35 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I am glad to be able to speak in this debate and hope that what I say will provide a different kind of insight into the debate on childhood obesity.

I am a great enthusiast for breastfeeding. Breast milk has many exceptional qualities, the most obvious being that it is exactly the right thing for infants to be eating. In the beginning, there is the double cream of breast milk, colostrum, which appears before a baby is even born in preparation for those first feeds. The milk that comes thereafter changes and adapts over time as the baby’s needs change. Breast milk has everything that a baby needs and, taken directly from source, it has the advantage of being at the correct temperature. It is easily absorbed by the infant gut. It is a miracle of nature.

What breastfeeding contributes to this debate is the impact that it can have on reducing childhood obesity. An excellent study was pulled together by UNICEF a few years ago called, “Preventing disease and saving resources: the potential contribution of increasing breastfeeding rates in the UK”. The report analysed data from many studies to ensure that there was a sound scientific basis for the claims that it made. Although I accept that giving precise figures and modelling on this is difficult, the UNICEF report estimates that:

“A modest increase in breastfeeding rates could result in a reduction in childhood obesity by circa 5%. If this was the case, the number of obese young children would fall by approximately 16,300, and annual health-care expenditures would reduce by circa £1.63 million.”

[Alison Thewliss]

That would be no mean contribution. Breastfeeding starts babies off on the right track and, with the accompanying health benefits, such an increase could result in a generation of healthier babies and young people.

The Government should bear that in mind and ensure that services to promote, protect and support breastfeeding are well maintained. This is too important to be left to the good will of the wonderful network of voluntary organisations across the country. It needs to be an identified priority of this Government. The newly formed all-party parliamentary group on infant feeding and inequalities, which I established this week with colleagues from across the House, aims to examine the matter further. We will consider the issues of inequality, because there are multiple deprivation issues, with lower rates of breastfeeding in deprived communities.

What is less well known about infant formula is the specific contents of that product. It takes a complex chemical process to produce formula that involves either dry blending or wet mixing and spray drying, in which cow's milk is treated with added lactose or other carbohydrates, vegetable and other oils, vitamins and minerals. According to the First Steps Nutrition Trust, the current regulations require infant formula and follow-on formula to have an energy content of between 60 kcal and 70 kcal per 100 ml. Those figures are based on the energy content of breast milk, but, as I mentioned earlier, breast milk composition changes in response to the baby as it grows. Breast milk also has more unsaturated fats than cow's milk and the fats in infant formula tend to come from the vegetable oil. If anyone has an interest in finding out more about this, I recommend that they seek out the "Infant milks in the UK" report that is produced by the First Steps Nutrition Trust. The level of detail is fascinating.

There are differences between the growth curves of breastfed and formula-fed babies, with the formula-fed babies gaining more weight in the first year. Some studies suggest that that may, in part, contribute to childhood obesity. Pressure is also put on mothers to ensure that their baby is gaining the correct amount of weight. We should consider how formula milk is delivered. I have heard many people describe how many millilitres of formula their baby has drunk at any given time, comparing and contrasting this with others. There is an expectation of how much is normal.

There is a risk in the making up of formula milk, because one must ensure that the correct dosage of powder is dissolved in the water. If this is not done accurately, there is a risk of babies being overfed or, indeed, underfed. The risk of that is far lower for breastfed babies, although I admit that I could only really tell how much breast milk my babies had by the amount that they both threw up all over me. There is not really any other way of telling.

Mrs Hodgson: I agree with everything the hon. Lady has said so far. As she knows, I took part in the debate that she led in Westminster Hall on this issue. The point that she is making is very important. I was an evangelical breastfeeder myself and still encourage everyone to do it in every which way they can. She makes the point that breastfed babies feed on demand, so they take as much or as little as they need, whereas when babies are bottle fed, there is an obsession with whether they have taken half a bottle, 8 ml or whatever. Parents inadvertently

force-feed their baby the amount they think they should have, rather than what the baby needs, so babies get used to being full. As we all know, that is not necessarily good and can lead to the bad habits in adulthood that I spoke about earlier.

Alison Thewliss: I absolutely agree with what my good friend says. Bottle feeding tends to be at a set time—"Is it time for the baby's feed yet?"—rather than when the baby actually needs to be fed, whereas breastfed babies are fed little and often on demand, which is a slightly better habit to get into.

There is also a beneficial effect on breastfeeding mothers. As well as reducing the risk of cancer and diabetes, breastfeeding burns calories and helps to get mothers back to their pre-maternity weight—for me the prospect of burning an extra 400 to 500 calories just by breastfeeding my baby was very attractive, and it certainly helped me to fit back into the clothes that I wore before I had my children, both of whom were breastfed for two years.

I was interested in the findings of the Select Committee report, and I particularly note the points about marketing and sugar content in foods. I was a wee bit disappointed that it does not contain much discussion on baby foods and toddler milks, as there are significant issues in that area regarding the advertising and the content of the products. In evidence to the Committee, Dr Colin Michie of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health stated:

"Follow-on formulas are not necessary for human beings, but it would not seem so if you watch television. The problem is we are all very convinced by the stories. There are other issues that have parallels for what was said earlier in that the milk companies sponsor education, training, events and an awful lot of professional activities, which again does exactly, to our minds, what we heard it does to infants' minds: when we see brand names, we equate certain things with them. It is an insidious business that we know enough of to be very wary of."

The artificial creation of a market for follow-on or toddler milks is of some concern, because those products are not subject to the same level of scrutiny as formulas for very young babies. Research gathered by the First Steps Nutrition Trust suggests that

"Growing-up milks and toddler milks contain almost twice as much sugar per 100 ml as cow's milk, and some Aptamil and Cow & Gate growing-up milks and all SMA growing-up milks contain vanilla flavouring. It is unclear whether repeated exposure to sweet drinks in infancy and toddlerhood might contribute to the development of a preference for sweet drinks in later life."

It is important to take cognisance of that and consider the issue as part of the obesity strategy.

Dr Wollaston: I thank the hon. Lady for her powerful contribution, and I completely agree with what she says. I also agree that the advertising of follow-on milks is a covert form of advertising infant formula. Does she feel that that should be completely banned?

Alison Thewliss: Absolutely, and a lot of the advertising is very—I supposed we could say cunning. Products are made to look the same on the shelves and to match the adverts for follow-on milks, rather than those for the younger infant formulas, and more needs to be done about that.

The sugars in follow-on milks are not always made clear on the packaging, and that should certainly be of concern to us in this House. Establishing a sugar habit at such an early age should be discouraged, and as was said earlier, that also has an impact on the teeth of a

growing child. Baby Milk Action has campaigned tirelessly on the marketing of formula, and it has been involved in challenging those issues in the European Parliament. There are related issues concerning the marketing and composition of baby food, and about the jars and packets found in supermarkets, which are often marketed at babies under six months, contrary to World Health Organisation advice.

Pressure from groups such as Baby Milk Action, and actions by MEPs such as the Green MEP Keith Taylor, led yesterday to the European Parliament rejecting draft EU rules on baby food. If they had been approved, they would have allowed baby foods to contain high levels of sugar, and products to be labelled for use from four months of age, rather than from six months, which is the advice. As a result, the Commission has been forced back to the drawing board to bring the regulations in line with recommendations of the WHO and the World Health Assembly, and to fit better with the international code on such issues. I would like further debate on the composition of baby foods, how they are marketed, where they are placed in supermarkets, and what advice is given to parents. Again, the sugar content and the rationale behind waiting until six months before bringing babies on to solid foods is not always made clear to parents.

Advice on such matters has changed over the years and has sometimes been conflicting, and well-meaning advice from family members can cause doubt in the minds of new parents. People need to have the best advice on feeding. All agencies should be clear about the advice that they give out, and we must guard the most vulnerable babies in our society against the vested interests of wealthy baby food and formula companies that seek to exert influence on professionals and groups giving out that advice. I hope that these issues will be given due consideration in the debate on obesity, and that thought will be given to the contribution that breastfeeding can make to improving infant and maternal health.

2.45 pm

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), who has established the fantastic all-party group on infant feeding and inequalities. I am looking forward to being part of that as it progresses, and I thank her for setting it up.

The chief executive of NHS England describes obesity as “the new smoking”, and in many ways he is right. Obesity leads to a multitude of health complications, ranging from lack of mobility to cancer. There are also many hidden health risks for people who are obese or severely overweight. Obesity can lead to a lack of self-worth or depression, and it can affect relationships and careers. Because of the growing obesity problem, and the very serious threat to our children’s futures, I am happy that this debate is taking place, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) on securing it.

In my constituency of Portsmouth South, 20% of children and 25% of adults are obese, which is above the average for England. In other ways, obesity is unlike smoking—there is no “vaping” technology for people who struggle to maintain a healthy diet. We know that fast food is an immediate satisfaction, whereas healthy food can take longer to prepare. I am concerned, however, that some studies suggest that healthy food is more

expensive than the fast and unhealthy food that we see on offer every day, or positioned conveniently at supermarket checkouts.

I am particularly concerned by a fairly recent report by the University of Cambridge, which found that healthy food was three times more expensive than unhealthy food. I would dispute that. It is perfectly possible to eat healthily on a low budget. As Baroness Jenkin from the other place has shown, someone can live healthily on £1 a day, and I know from my own busy household that it is possible to live healthily on a very small budget. At the local food bank where I volunteered before the election we handed out healthy recipes for the food that was provided, which should have lasted people for three days. I am sure that I do not need to repeat what that issue means for those living in deprived areas, except to say that in my constituency of Portsmouth South, where deprivation is higher than the English average, the challenge to encourage people to eat healthy food is even greater.

The whole House will agree that today our nation’s children are more susceptible and at risk of becoming obese. Children do not control their diets—it is the parents who do the weekly shop—and we would never blame a child for their poor dietary choices. Children who develop obesity at a young age are at risk of developing lifelong conditions, some of which are also life-limiting; as we have heard, cases of diabetes are increasing. During childhood, people develop habits that can last the rest of their lives. A lot of facts have been flying around in this debate, and although I understand the financial burden that a growing obesity problem poses for our NHS, the human cost cannot be quantified.

The solution to this problem is not simply more money. As other Members have said, it requires the energy and commitment of central and local government, health organisations, and our local charities, to educate the population on how to live on a low wage. I am really pleased that the Roberts Centre in my constituency is a family-focused charity. It offers a range of services offering support and assistance, including making healthier lifestyle choices, to some of the most disadvantaged families in the city.

Mrs Hodgson: On the hon. Lady’s point about living healthily on a low wage, I take on board that it is very possible to make healthy food very cheaply, but people need the skills and knowledge to be able to do that. I wonder whether she will say a bit more about that. The School Food Plan says that education should start with children learning the skills they need to be able to look after themselves as adults.

Mrs Drummond: That is exactly what I was going to come on to, so I thank the hon. Lady very much indeed.

Last week, I met Home Start, a national family charity with a strong presence in Portsmouth. It has an army of volunteers who offer unconditional help and support to all families who need help in getting it right, and show them how to cook healthily. There is, however, a major role for our schools in tackling obesity. The school where I am a governor, Milton Park primary, is taking the lead locally in educating children about healthier choices. The cooks at the school have won awards and I can recommend their so-called “chocolate muffins,” which in fact are made of beetroot.

[Mrs Drummond]

I would like to see cooking classes become mandatory in schools. I know it would be difficult to re-establish kitchens, but the rewards would be worth it. I see that as the only way to prevent future generations from continuing poor eating habits. The only way to do that is by teaching them how to cook healthily and how to budget. Like some of my colleagues, I was against a sugar tax to start with. If we can use the sugar tax to fund cooking classes in schools, however, then I am all for it.

In Portsmouth, there are a number of charitable organisations actively engaging with the community to help to tackle obesity through a more active lifestyle. Affiliated with Portsmouth football club, Pompey in the Community provides education and opportunities for children in the city.

Geraint Davies: The hon. Lady makes some interesting points about the relationship between nutrition and poverty. Does she agree that it is a good idea to provide free school breakfasts in school? They help poorer children in particular to achieve and to know what good food tastes like.

Mrs Drummond: I totally agree. I also back the attempt by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) to get free school meals for everybody receiving the pupil premium. That is a very good point; I am thinking particularly of a healthy breakfast with porridge, not necessarily sugar-laden cereals.

Not only does Pompey in the Community provide a lot of the physical education curriculum in local schools, but it runs a number of out-of-school and holiday clubs. There are plenty of sports clubs in Portsmouth. I would like to see a lot more outreach from sports clubs to children from low-income families. The Portsmouth Sail Training Trust does this with sailing, focusing solely on children from low-income backgrounds. More sports clubs need to get out and do this, too. Perhaps we could use the sugar tax to help to fund some of those sports activities. I would also like to see more sport in the curriculum, with the possibility of at least one hour of activity every day. We heard about a school doing one mile a day. Every school should be doing that. I would like the Department for Education and the Department of Health to lead on more sport in school, perhaps with extended days to fit it in.

Often the simplest changes are the most effective. By encouraging our children to walk to school, and by continuing to develop nutritional education, I am sure we will see more positive results. Members on both sides of the House talk a lot about tackling deprivation in our communities. It is crystal clear that the House must now turn its energy towards fighting the terrible problem of obesity, through education and providing more opportunities for an active lifestyle.

2.52 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) for securing this extremely important debate. It is not listed in my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, but I must declare a terrible sweet tooth, which gives me great experience from which to speak in this debate.

Over preceding decades, there have been profound changes in the UK in the relationship we have with food. Historically, the public health challenges we faced tended to relate to under-nutrition and unsafe food and water. However, in modern society, those issues have largely been replaced by the risks of poor diet. Food is now more readily available and there have been significant changes in how we eat, the type of foods we consume, and how they are produced and marketed. Busy lifestyles and easy access to convenience and processed foods have helped them to become a staple part of many families' diets.

In general, we over-consume foods high in fat, sugar and salt, and we do not eat enough fruit, vegetables, fibre and oily fish. Our type of diet underlies many of the chronic diseases that cause considerable suffering, ill health and premature death. It is also a major factor in the issue of childhood obesity, heart disease and type 2 diabetes. The recently published findings from the Health Committee's investigation into childhood obesity highlighted that one in five children is overweight or obese when they begin school. That figure was found to rise to one in three by the end of primary school. There was also evidence of inequality between different sectors of society, with those from deprived backgrounds found to fare significantly worse and to be twice as likely as their more affluent counterparts to be overweight or obese.

These figures are extremely concerning. Obesity is a serious problem that has significant implications, both on the long-term wellbeing of the individual child and on society as a whole. Many of the most serious and potentially life-shortening physical health risks that accompany obesity are well publicised and have been raised already in the Chamber today. I will not, therefore, go into them again.

Instead, I will highlight the detrimental social effects that can impact on individuals' overall wellbeing and life chances. Research indicates that childhood obesity is associated with mental health issues in both children and adults, such as depression, low self-esteem, social isolation, self-harm and behavioural problems. It is also associated with stigma and bullying. In addition to obesity, a poor diet that includes too much sugar and acidic food substances can lead to oral health issues, which can impact on an individual's ability to eat and socialise, and this again can adversely affect their mental health and contribute to their social isolation.

Addressing these issues will require a concerted effort to alter health choices, to address cultural and lifestyle issues and to improve our relationship with exercise and sport. It will require a multifaceted response; no single measure will do the trick. We need a response from private enterprise to improve choices and healthy options that are appealing and, importantly, cheap, as was highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson). We need to address the effect that marketing can have on children and parents and make sure it is done responsibly, as was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss). We need to enhance skills gained at school and home in cooking healthy meals, and this must be role-modelled at school, with fruit bars, water and other healthy choices that are low in fat, salt and sugar, as was discussed in detail by the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson).

Childhood obesity must also be addressed by local commissioning in areas where fast-food outlets are placed near to schools. In one of my local areas, refuse staff are in place at school lunch times to clear up fast-food packages left by school children in shopping squares. This must be addressed and must not be encouraged. Wider Government initiatives are also required to improve food labelling. We need labelling that is understandable to families and ordinary people and which does not look like gobbledygook.

As debated today, taxation should be considered as part of an evidence-based approach. We also require an increased focus on sports, exercise and healthy pursuits as being integral to our lifestyle; increased funding; and an emphasis on engaging children and young adults in these activities and making them affordable to people from all walks of life. We know from psychological research that education, in itself, does little to change behaviour. We therefore require a Government strategy to reinforce healthy choices. This would be cost-effective in the long term for our health service and quality of life.

Geraint Davies: The hon. Lady is making a powerful and excellent speech. She might know that in Mexico the average consumption of Coca-Cola is 0.5 litres a day per person and that children are being fed Coke in baby bottles. Does she agree that the Government need to take action not just on pricing but on marketing? We cannot have this situation where people can buy two litres for 5% more, so that we have these huge stocks of Coke that people feel they have to get rid of before it loses its fizz, and everybody's teeth fall out.

Dr Cameron: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I have pinpointed the need to address the effect of marketing on children and parents' healthy choices.

A clear strategy would benefit our children, society as a whole and future generations. That is surely Parliament's job. We should not shy away from a bold and effective obesity strategy.

2.58 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I pay tribute to the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time for such an important debate and to the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) for her eloquent opening speech. I also extend my thanks to the entire Health Select Committee for producing such a comprehensive report on childhood obesity. She was dead right to entitle it, "Childhood obesity—brave and bold action", because that is precisely what is needed. I would also like to thank for their contributions my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea West (Geraint Davies) and the hon. Members for Colchester (Will Quince), for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), for Strangford (Jim Shannon), for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston), for Twickenham (Dr Mathias), for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), for Erewash (Maggie Throup), for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) and for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron)—I am sure I pronounced that kind of right.

Returning to the Select Committee report, the starting point has to be the scale and the consequences of the problem, and this requires looking at doing things differently. Failure to act will make the problem worse—not just for the individuals concerned, but for the public purse, which will, frankly, struggle to cope with the health inequalities that we are exacerbating.

The statistics are clear. Childhood obesity is strongly linked to deprivation, almost reversing the trend of the entire history of the human race whereby malnourishment, not obesity, was the key indicator of poverty. As we know from the statistics of Public Health England, the most deprived children are twice as likely to be obese at reception and at year 6 than the least deprived children—and that gap is widening, as the hon. Member for Totnes set out.

We often get into the habit of praising the fact that a debate is even taking place here, but in this instance, the timeliness of the debate really cannot be overstated. It is no understatement to say that the Government's strategy has been a long time coming. Although we are debating obesity today, I hope that this is not a sign that the document is being slimmed down. Today's debate has suffered from the slight disadvantage of addressing the contents of a document that does not yet exist. Perhaps the Minister will give some certainty—perhaps even a date—on when we can expect publication of the strategy. This also presents a rare opportunity, hopefully, to influence what will eventually be published in that strategy. It is important to remember that Government can do immense good when it comes to public health.

If we think about some of the great strides in public health that we have taken in recent years—from the banning of smoking in public places to reducing the rates of teenage pregnancy—we realise that these moves came about, in part, as a result of Members putting difficult issues on to the political agenda. With that in mind, I shall focus my remarks today around the key issue of obesity and diet.

I believe that we need action to tackle the problem at the supply side on the part of food and drink companies, and also action to tackle it on the demand side, with a need for far better education on how we could be looking after ourselves, as well as give people the means to eat healthier food. We believe a comprehensive and broad approach is necessary to help families, schools and children to make the right decisions. I commend the work of my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West, who has long been a champion of better standards of food in our schools.

In November, the Health and Social Care Information Centre released data showing that one in every five children leaving primary school are classified as obese, and one in every three children are either obese or overweight. Frankly, those figures should shame each and every one of us. Although there has been a shift in providing healthier, more nutritious meals at schools, so many of the problems start before school or at least outside of school hours.

Between April and September 2015, Trussell Trust food banks in Greater Manchester, which includes my constituency, gave 22,739 three-day emergency food supplies to people in crisis. Some 8,666 of those three-day emergency food supplies were given to children. When so many families are having to rely on food banks to feed their children, they may be limited in their ability

[Andrew Gwynne]

to provide fresh and healthy meals. In these upsetting circumstances, feeding their child something is better than seeing them go hungry. Wider problems of poverty must be addressed to ensure that people have access to good diets. How does the Minister plan to help families who are having to rely on food banks to improve their diets?

Funding is a crucial side issue. Following the removal of protected status from all Department of Health budgets that are not controlled by NHS England, the pot of money that pays for public health will be subjected to huge cuts in the coming years. That will have a significant impact on Public Health England, and could put at risk our ability to tackle obesity to the necessary extent. It could also put at risk the future of public awareness campaigns, many of which have been a great success. The cuts in the public health grant to local authorities could drastically reduce the amount of support that is available locally to those who want to lose weight or have a healthier lifestyle. I should be interested to hear from the Minister how the public health cuts in the coming years are consistent with the emphasis on prevention in the “Five Year Forward View”, and, in particular, whether the crucial issue of funding will be addressed in the forthcoming strategy.

Geraint Davies: Obviously funds are tight, but does my hon. Friend agree that if we introduce a sugar tax, it will ease the burden and enable us to focus our fire on reducing obesity in other ways?

Andrew Gwynne: That may well be the case, but we must of course ensure that any income raised by such a tax is reinvested in public health.

It is also important to increase levels of physical activity among adults and children throughout the United Kingdom. Inactivity is a key factor in ill health, and it is important that we encourage children to maintain active lifestyles from an early age. I believe that increasing the opportunities for young people to get involved in physical activity is just as important as improving diets. Treating obesity and its consequences alone currently costs the NHS £5.1 billion every year. Given that nearly 25% of adults, 10% of four to five-year-olds and 19% of 10 to 11-year-olds in England are classified as obese, the human and financial cost of inaction is significant. We must do much more to ingrain physical activity in our daily lives, whether that means walking instead of driving or taking the stairs instead of the lift. Every little helps.

A number of Members have touched on a point that is crucial to the debate. Many people have argued that the Government should introduce some form of tax on sugary products, particularly soft drinks, and the debate on that issue goes far beyond the Chamber. Public figures such as Jamie Oliver have come out in support of a sugar tax, and he has made a compelling case. However, the issue is complex, and I do not think that the answer is necessarily straightforward. Labour Members have always feared that a sugar tax, in itself, could be regressive, and that it would focus attention on consumers, many of whom are addicted to sugar, rather than manufacturers, who should be reducing the amount of sugar in their products. That said, however, I suggest to the Minister that it is right for us to look at the emerging

evidence from other countries, which has shown that where similar taxes have been introduced they have had a positive effect, not least in changing behaviour.

Will Quince: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Gwynne: I am afraid not. I do not have time.

It has not escaped my attention that the Prime Minister has effectively gone from ruling out a sugar tax to not ruling out a sugar tax. I hope that the Minister will clarify the Government’s position, but, in any event, it seems that the forthcoming strategy will mark a departure from the ineffective voluntary approach that they have favoured in recent years. The public health responsibility deal has seen firms making all sorts of promises and then hijacking the agenda to promote their own products, ultimately failing to fulfil their pledges. At the time of its introduction, organisations such as the Royal College of Physicians and Alcohol Concern complained that the pledges were not specific or measurable, and that the food and drink industry had simply dictated the Government’s policy.

I hope that the Government will take a much stronger line with industry than it has taken previously, because it must be incumbent on industry to reduce the amount of sugar in products, including comparable products in the European Union that are boxed in exactly the same way, but contain significantly different amounts of sugar and other ingredients. I also hope that if the Government are forthcoming with a fiscal solution, that is part of a much larger and comprehensive strategy of measures. I do not think anyone would try to argue that a sugar tax on its own is a silver bullet. I want food and drinks manufacturers to reduce sugar in their products, and we need to ensure that that happens.

I thank everyone who has spoken in the debate, and I hope the Minister will consider the many excellent contributions when the Government put the final touches to the childhood obesity strategy.

3.10 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): I am delighted to respond to the debate on behalf of the Government, and, following on from what the shadow Minister just said, I welcome the opportunity to take forward all the points made in the many excellent and well-informed—although occasionally a little confessional—contributions. It is a timely debate that will make a valuable contribution as we finalise our strategy.

The House is at a slight advantage as it has the chance to influence, but I am at a disadvantage as we have yet to publish the strategy and therefore I have to talk in slightly more general terms.

I welcome the Health Committee’s recent report, which we have debated once already, and its previous report, “Impact of physical activity and diet on health”. We will be formally responding to the Health Committee’s most recent report soon.

There is no denying that in England, and indeed globally, we have an obesity problem. Many shocking statistics have been given in this debate and I will not repeat them, but many Members on both sides of the House dwelled on the health inequalities issue—the gap that is emerging—and I will come back to that. My hon. Friend the Member for Colchester (Will Quince)

drew our attention to what is, in effect, a stabilising of childhood obesity statistics, although it is at far too high a level. As he acknowledged, there is a pronounced gap between different income groups.

Once weight is gained, it can be difficult to lose and obese children are much more likely to become obese adults. In adulthood, obesity is a leading cause of serious diseases such as type 2 diabetes—as the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) and others mentioned—heart disease and cancer. It is also a major risk factor for non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.

We also know that eating too much sugar is linked to tooth decay; it was good to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) make that point. In 2013-14 over 62,000 children were admitted to hospital for the extraction of teeth. This is a serious procedure that frequently requires a general anaesthetic. Children should not have to go through this.

Many Members highlighted—I think there is consensus on this—that there is no silver bullet to tackle obesity. That means that in order to reduce rates we need a range of measures and all of us, and all the parts of our society mentioned in the debate, have a part to play, as our forthcoming strategy will make clear.

Sometimes in the national debate around obesity people question the role of the state and how it should intervene to drive change. In the face of such high obesity rates, with such significant implications for the life chances of a generation, it is right that tackling obesity, particularly in children, is one of this Government's major priorities, and we showed the priority we place on the issue by making it a manifesto commitment.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) said, the human cost is enormous. Young children in particular have limited influence over their choices and Government have a history of intervening to protect them: we do not question the requirement that younger children use car seats on the grounds of safety, for example. Children deserve protecting from the effects of obesity, for their current and future health and wellbeing and to ensure they have the same life chances as other children, especially those in better-off parts of our society.

As I have said, I was struck by how many Members alluded to the health inequalities issue. There is strong evidence of a link between obesity and lower income groups. The obesity prevalence among reception year children living in the most deprived areas was 12% compared with 5.7%, and that gap rose to 25% as against 11.5% respectively by the time they leave primary school. That is not acceptable, and we must take action to tackle it.

Any Government with a state-funded health service also have a responsibility to take an interest in the nation's health to ensure the sustainability of the NHS. The huge cost of treating lifestyle-related type 2 diabetes has been mentioned by a number of Members. Our election manifesto supported the programme for prevention set out in the NHS England's "Five Year Forward View", which states 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."

Tackling obesity is a key component of this work. I accept the challenge from the shadow Minister on budgets,

but I can give him the assurance that over the spending review period we are still going to be spending £16 billion on public health. We can complement local action with national initiatives, and we will talk more about that when we publish our strategy.

We are continuing to invest in the Change4Life campaign, which has been going on for many years. We have learned a lot from it, and we now have valuable evidence about what works and what provides motivation and support for families to make small but significant improvements. On 4 January, we launched the new Sugar Smart app to encourage parents to take control of how much sugar their children eat and drink. Members have described how people can scan the barcode on any of the thousands of everyday products that are catered for by the algorithm. This allows people to visualise the number of 4 gram sugar cubes the product contains. In the first 10 days of the campaign, about 800,000 people downloaded the sugar app. That is a great success, and an example of how we can empower families with information so that they can make decisions about their diet. A number of Members made that point, including my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), who talked about the role of families.

Geraint Davies: Will the Minister give way?

Jane Ellison: I do not think I have time. I think I know what the hon. Gentleman is about to say, and we have had the teaspoon discussion before. I recommend the sugar app to him; he acknowledged its introduction in his speech, for which I am grateful.

The Sugar Smart app builds on the Change4Life Sugar Swaps campaign, from which we learned a lot. More than 410,000 families registered with the campaign. However, we know that public health messaging and support are not enough. That is why our childhood obesity strategy will be wide ranging and involve Government action across a range of areas.

The food and drink industry also has a role to play, as many Members have said, and I am pleased that it has made progress in recent years. My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) alluded to that fact earlier. Under the voluntary partnership arrangements and the responsibility deal, there has been a focus on calorie reduction, of which sugar has been a big part. We have made progress. Some retailers have also played their part by removing sweets from checkouts, which we welcome. We urge others to follow suit. Importantly, parents and customers have strongly welcomed that change and supported the measures being taken by the industry. But the challenge to the industry to make further substantial progress remains.

Providing clear information to consumers is vital if we are going to help them to make healthier choices. That has been a theme of the debate. The voluntary front-of-pack nutrition labelling scheme, introduced in 2013, plays a vital part in our work to encourage healthier eating and to reduce levels of obesity and other conditions. The scheme enables consumers to make healthier and more balanced choices by helping them to better understand the nutrient content of food and drinks. It is popular with consumers and provides information on the calories and nutrients in various foodstuffs. Businesses that have decided to adopt the scheme account for two thirds of the market for pre-packed foods and drinks.

[Jane Ellison]

As a Conservative and a former retailer I believe in customer choice, but if consumers are to make an informed choice they need information. Informed consumers can of course shape markets and drive change, as my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr Mathias) pointed out in her thoughtful speech. That point came out strongly in the debate, and I shall reflect on it a great deal.

I want to say a little about physical activity, which is also a key theme. We are very clear that for those who are overweight and obese, eating and drinking less is key to weight loss, but we know that physical activity has a role to play in maintaining a healthy weight. It is also hugely beneficial in many other ways. For children it is a vital part of growing into a healthy, happy adult, so it has been great to hear about the work being done in schools up and down the country. We heard examples of that from my hon. Friends the Members for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) and for Erewash. That is why raising levels of participation in sport and exercise among children and young people is an area the Government are keen to make further progress on.

The Department worked closely with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on the new sports strategy, published just before Christmas. We will be working with DCMS, Sport England and Public Health England in the coming months to implement the strategy. The Minister for sport and I have worked closely together on both the obesity agenda and her agenda on physical activity. We are also working to raise awareness of the UK chief medical officer's physical activity guidelines. We have already developed an infographic for health professionals to use when they discuss physical activity with adults, but we want to go further and work on further infographics to raise awareness of the daily activity levels required for children and young people, including the under-fives. We hope that that will be a useful resource, not only for families, but for the leisure sector and for many more who have a key role in encouraging people to be more active.

A slightly different point was made by the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), but it was an important one and she spoke knowledgeably about nutrition in the very early years and during pregnancy. I commend to her the recent chief medical officer's report on women's health, as it contained a

number of chapters that I think she would find of huge interest if she has not already had the chance to look at them.

There has been a consensus on a number of facts, although a key one stood out: obesity is a complex issue, which the Government cannot tackle alone. Businesses, health professionals, schools, local authorities, families and individuals all have a role to play, as does Parliament. We were all struck by the contribution made by the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), who spoke so passionately about the need to tackle health inequalities. She spoke about the influence of a good start in life and how that works all the way through one's life. Parliament does have a role to play, so I welcome the engagement of so many Members from all parts of the House. I would be happy to provide more information if it is ever of help to Members about key public health indicators in their own local areas and how they can help to take this agenda forward. Local leadership will be important as we seek to make the critical leap forward on preventive health action described in the NHS "Five Year Forward View".

This has been a great debate and I thank Members for their contributions. I look forward to discussing this issue further when we publish our comprehensive childhood obesity strategy.

3.21 pm

Dr Wollaston: I thank all Members who have contributed to today's debate, including the Minister, who rightly said that the action the Government take now will affect the life chances of a whole generation. I am grateful for her recognition of the importance of not only obesity in itself, but the pressing concern that everyone has about how health inequality affects this issue. I am also grateful that she is going to include that at the heart of the Government's obesity strategy.

In conclusion, we are looking for bold, brave and, most importantly, effective action. I would like to finish as I started by saying that we should take a leaf out of the book of British Cycling, because there is no silver bullet and we need to follow the principle of marginal gains—let's do everything.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House calls on the Government to bring forward a bold and effective strategy to tackle childhood obesity.

Holocaust Memorial Day

3.23 pm

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Holocaust Memorial Day 2016.

As we begin, I would like to thank those who gave their support to enable this debate to take place, particularly the hon. Members for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay) and for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes), and the Backbench Business Committee for granting our request.

The theme of this year's Holocaust Memorial Day, which will take place in just under a week's time, on 27 January, is "Don't stand by". The holocaust did not begin with the systematic slaughter of Jews in Europe or even with a brick through the window of a Jewish shop during the Kristallnacht of 1938. It began with a simple idea that our differences mark us out as superior or inferior to one another. That simple idea spawned a hateful ideology, expressed through Hitler's Nazism, that the Jews were at the centre of a global conspiracy to control the world at the expense of Aryan destiny. Some 6 million Jews were murdered by the Nazis, among them 1 million Jewish children. It was pre-meditated slaughter on an industrial scale never before witnessed in human history. Alongside innocent Jewish men, women and children were political prisoners, Romanis, Slavs, gay people, Jehovah's Witnesses, Russian prisoners of war and many others. They met their fate on the streets, where they were beaten sometimes to death; in concentration camps, where they were often worked or starved to the point where they lost their lives; and, most chillingly, in the gas chambers of the Nazi death camps. It is estimated that some 42,500 facilities in German and Nazi-occupied territory were used to concentrate victims, and around 200,000 people were perpetrators of the holocaust planned by Nazi leaders at Wannsee.

This year's theme for Holocaust Memorial Day is not about leaders; it is about bystanders. I am talking about the bystanders who said nothing as Nazi propaganda targeted the Jews; the bystanders who watched as Jewish homes and businesses were ransacked by the Nazis; and the bystanders who looked the other way, even as the sickly smell of burning human flesh from the ovens was carried by prevailing winds from the chimneys of the Nazi death camps to surrounding homes.

Although we might reflect today on the unique crimes of the Nazi holocaust, we should never avert our eyes from the most uncomfortable truth of all—that its perpetrators were not unique. They were ordinary men and women carrying out acts of extraordinary evil.

If the holocaust demonstrated the very worst of human nature, its survivors represent the very best. The crimes they witnessed and the evil to which they were subjected are impossible to imagine, but through their courage we are able to reflect on the horrors of the holocaust so that we might learn the right lessons as we strive towards a world free from hatred, persecution and genocide.

Many of us will have personal experience of listening to the testimony of survivors, and I am delighted that so many of them were recognised in the new year's honours list. I pay particular tribute to my constituent Ivor

Pearl, who received the British Empire Medal for services to holocaust education and awareness. On accepting the honour, Ivor said:

"I think I can speak for most of us when I say that when I give talks I feel all the victims are there behind me looking over my shoulder and as such I accept this honour on their behalf as well".

Another resident of Ilford North, Bob Obuchowski, would surely be among them. Bob lived in Clayhall and passed away in 2014. His double act with his daughter, Sue Bermange, was almost legendary. She supported Bob in sharing his testimony and continues his work today.

In that context, I champion the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust. Led by the indomitable Karen Pollock, its outstanding work keeps the memory of those remarkable holocaust survivors alive so that each generation can bear witness to their extraordinary fortitude and reflect on how it was that ordinary men and women unleashed the horror of the Nazi holocaust. Its "Lessons from Auschwitz" project has now taken more than 28,000 students and teachers from across the UK to the Nazi concentration and death camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau. They include students from my own constituency, most recently from King Solomon High School and Woodbridge High School, who travelled to Poland in October 2015.

I pay tribute to successive Labour, coalition and Conservative Governments for funding those visits, and I hope that the Minister may be able to give us some good news about continued funding for this important project this afternoon, or at least take away from the debate the desire of this House to see that funding continue.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I rise to pay great tribute to Karen Pollock. As someone who established the Srebrenica safe area in March-April 1993, I am deeply appreciative of the fact that she said that the Holocaust Memorial Fund also refers to the 8,373 Bosnian Muslims who were killed in a holocaust much closer to our time. I appreciate very much that the Holocaust Memorial Fund cares about those people just as much as it does about the victims of the foul Nazis.

Wes Streeting: I share the sentiments expressed by the hon. Gentleman. I will talk about other genocides later in my speech.

I know from my community in Redbridge that schools across the country are doing some outstanding work to deliver holocaust education as part of the national curriculum, including, of course, acknowledgement of other genocides. It is vital that holocaust education remains a compulsory part of the national curriculum at key stage 3 to ensure that all young people receive this valuable education. I also congratulate the Prime Minister on his initiative of establishing the Holocaust Commission and on the appointment of the right hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles) as the Government's special envoy for post-holocaust issues. I know that he is respected on both sides of the House for his commitment and determination and for how he goes about his work in that role.

With the onward march of time, the number of survivors left to bear living witness to the crimes of the holocaust diminishes, and so with every new generation comes an even greater responsibility to ensure that their warning from history is never forgotten. Of course, even as they rebuilt their lives, many continued to suffer,

[*Wes Streeting*]

whether through silence because the crimes they suffered were unspeakable, premature death as a result of the injuries they sustained, or the ongoing persecution they experienced as a result of being different. Among them were those who were branded with the pink triangle, the Nazi mark of the homosexual. Like other victims of the Nazi holocaust, gay men and women were rounded up by the Gestapo. Many were imprisoned, and some were castrated and subjected to cruel medical experiments. Others met their end in the gas chambers of the death camps.

For many of those people, the end of the second world war did not bring about their liberation. Nazi law remained in place and their suffering at the hands of the state continued. Some were even sent back to prison by the very same judges who had sent them off to concentration camps under the Nazis. I do not mind telling the House that I wept last summer in Berlin as I read the stories of those LGBT survivors of the holocaust who later went to their graves unable to share their story, shunned by their Governments and without any acknowledgement of the suffering they had experienced under the Nazis and, I am afraid, under the subsequent Governments of West and East Germany.

I am inspired by holocaust survivors such as Rudolf Brazda, the last known concentration camp survivor to be deported specifically for homosexuality. Before the Nazis came to power, he and his boyfriend had been accepted in an increasingly tolerant society. A Jehovah's Witness accepted them as her tenants and Brazda's family acted as witnesses to a symbolic marriage ceremony in their home.

As Berlin's thriving lesbian and gay scene was dismantled by the Nazi regime, Brazda and his partner were arrested and they never saw each other again. Brazda served a six-month sentence before being deported to Czechoslovakia. He was arrested again in 1941 and was forced to serve another 14-month prison term. In August 1942, he was deported to the Buchenwald concentration camp and there he was beaten, once having his teeth knocked out. He was subjected to forced labour and survived only through a combination of strength and luck.

It was not until 2008, ahead of the unveiling of the memorial to homosexual victims of Nazism in Berlin, that he felt able to speak out. Those countries that continue illegally to discriminate against LGBT people and those that would have those countries continue to discriminate against LGBT people should reflect on his words before his death in 2011. He said:

"If I finally speak, it's for people to know what we, homosexuals, had to endure in Hitler's days...it shouldn't happen again."

I pay tribute to all those communities targeted by Nazi hatred and to their survival. In particular, I pay tribute to Jewish communities in the United Kingdom, the state of Israel and countries around the world that stand tall in lasting defiance of Hitler's evil ideology. I am proud of the Jewish community I represent in Ilford North. Though smaller in number than it has been in previous decades, the Jewish community in Redbridge continues to flourish. Chabad Lubavitch, led by Rabbi Sufirin, has expanded its activities within Redbridge and out into Essex. I recently attended shul with Redbridge United Synagogue, which now meets at the Redbridge

Jewish Community Centre. Sinclair House is the largest community centre of its kind in western Europe, delivering social, welfare, education and community programmes to more than 2,000 people every week. Wohl Ilford Jewish Primary School, Clore Tikva Primary School and King Solomon High School provide high-quality education to children from all our diverse communities while maintaining their proud Jewish heritage and traditions.

Next week, as we do every year, people from all parts of the community will gather at the Holocaust Memorial Garden in Valentines Park in Ilford, thanks to the initiative led by Councillor Alan Weinberg to provide a lasting memorial for the victims of the holocaust. Though the Jewish community in Redbridge and elsewhere continues to thrive, we cannot be complacent about the threat posed by modern anti-Semitism, whether it manifests itself on the right or the left of the political spectrum. I am proud to be a vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group against anti-Semitism, under the exceptional leadership of my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann).

Successive reports published by the Community Security Trust, to whom I pay tribute, show a continual increase in anti-Semitic incidents across the United Kingdom, including violent attacks. Last year, a delegation from the APPG visited France, to look at the rise in anti-Semitism there, where thousands had taken to the streets to pronounce "Je Suis Juif" in the wake of the murder of Jews on the streets of Paris.

We know that although Jewish people make a great contribution to public life here, too many Jews in politics are targets for anti-Semitism, both online and offline. Many right hon. and hon. Members will recall my predecessor, Lee Scott, speaking powerfully in this debate last year about his experience of receiving abuse and death threats because he was Jewish, and I pay tribute to him again for his courage and unshakeable commitment in standing up against that anti-Semitism.

"Never again" is a common refrain at events to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day, but I am afraid these words ring hollow. "Never again" will find meaning only when Jews can live freely and safely in all parts of the world. "Never again" will find meaning only when difference and diversity is celebrated, rather than denigrated. "Never again" will find meaning only when genocide is confined to history.

I want to end with a reflection on our responsibility, both as individuals and as the state. I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) in his place. He is chair of the all-party parliamentary group for genocide prevention. Often debates in this place about Britain's foreign policy consider the consequences of action under the shadow of previous mistakes. But as Holocaust Memorial Day is used to commemorate all victims of genocide, and as a vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group for genocide prevention, I hope that in its future deliberations this House will also consider the consequences of introspection and inaction. The genocide in Cambodia, the genocide in Rwanda, the genocide in Darfur—each should rest on the consciences of powerful nations who chose to look the other way.

Closer to home, it is for every citizen to reflect on those occasions where we have looked the other way: when someone was called a name, when someone was

mistreated, when someone was bullied, beaten or even murdered, because they were different. Yehuda Bauer said:

“Thou shalt not be a victim, thou shalt not be a perpetrator, but, above all, thou shalt not be a bystander.”

It is fitting as the theme of this year’s Holocaust Memorial Day and an exhortation for this House and for every citizen we are sent here to represent.

3.38 pm

Sir Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I am grateful to follow the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), and I am grateful to him for his tribute to Lee Scott, his predecessor. I, along with a number of Lee’s friends, recognise the enormous personal risk that Lee took and endured, and we appreciate the hon. Gentleman’s acknowledgment of that.

I associate myself with the intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), who has spoken many times in this Chamber about Srebrenica and the genocide there, and he does well to remind us of that today.

The hon. Member for Ilford North mentioned that we travelled together to France in autumn last year to look at anti-Semitism there. I vividly recall meeting Jewish students and hearing them talk of how frightened and wary they were on their campuses. I cannot help reflecting on the disgraceful attack on Jewish students at King’s College London just two nights ago. A peaceful meeting—it was literally about peace—was broken up with obscenities, the breaking of a window and the offering of violence. Frankly, we have seen broken glass before, at Kristallnacht. If we need to know who the new fascists are, we need only look at those who perpetrated that attack.

I associate myself with all the remarks that have been made about the Holocaust Education Trust and Holocaust Memorial Day. In September I had the honour of being appointed the UK’s post-holocaust envoy. I took over from Sir Andrew Burns, who held the job for the previous five years. I had the opportunity of working with Andrew on many occasions when I was at the Department for Communities and Local Government. He is a very distinguished man and is very well respected across Europe and around the world. It is a genuine honour to follow him in that role.

I want to concentrate my remarks on what “Don’t stand by”, the theme of this year’s Holocaust Memorial Day, is really about. I will look at that through two of the organisations for which I am responsible in the UK. The first is the tracing service. It began as a way of reuniting people who had been separated during the holocaust, but now it focuses on finding and returning property that was stolen by the Nazis. In addition to the Nazis’ enthusiasm for violence, bigotry and anti-Semitism, running through their DNA was corruption and theft. Essentially, the Nazis were thieves. They stole people’s jobs, their equipment for doing their jobs, their possessions, their property and their identity. They tried to steal the very existence of the people they sought to destroy. Because there is no honour among thieves, they stole from themselves.

Even now, more than 70 years after the end of the war, we are still trying to reunite people with their stolen property. There are many Governments across Europe

who have wonderful equal opportunities policies and marvellous remembrance of the holocaust but who fight tooth and nail with obfuscation to prevent people from getting their property back. The Nuremberg laws still reign more than 70 years after Hitler’s death. We must not go away with the idea that this is just about stolen Picassos and Klimts, because sometimes it is about very small objects. It might be a book with the signature of a long-lost grandparent or mother, and that might be the only piece of paper that has their signature on it. But still various Governments refuse to hand them back.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): I am extremely glad to hear what my right hon. Friend is saying. I associate myself, in particular, with the remarks of the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), who opened the debate. My right hon. Friend might be aware that a very important book, “Post-War Lives”, by a distinguished German historian exposes the extent to which the 8 million people in Germany involved in the run-up to the war remained on the files, which were only discovered afterwards, and that in the post-war period, despite the fact that they were known to be accredited Nazis, a significant number of them were regrettably appointed to the West German authorities and to the Government. Is he aware that there might be some connection between that fact and what he is saying?

Sir Eric Pickles: I am certainly aware of a particular property—I might want to say something about it outside the Chamber—that was stolen from a Jewish family. It actually went through the hands of Adolf Hitler, who gave it to his favourite photographer, who kept it. After the war, the Bavarian authorities, because they could not find the original Jewish owners, decided to give it back to the Nazi who stole it, which was an extraordinary thing to do. There are a number of files still closed in this country with regard to people to whom we gave an amnesty. My ambition and hope, which I know is shared by the Prime Minister, is that we will at last open those files and answer some of my hon. Friend’s questions. It is important that we press hard. In this country we have a pretty good system with regard to disputes that is worthy of export, but until that property is returned to the people it was stolen from and acknowledged as theirs, the rule of Hitler continues.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): I pay tribute to the excellent opening speech by the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting). I also pay tribute to my right hon. Friend, not least for his chairmanship of Conservative Friends of Israel. On the eve of the invasion of Poland on 22 August 1939, Adolf Hitler said to his generals:

“It’s a matter of indifference to me what a weak western European civilization will say about me.”

He also made reference to a previous genocide that was largely forgotten in 1939, saying:

“Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?”

Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is very important that the west keeps a very strong defence; that we, the British, and indeed the whole of Europe, do not stand by if we come across any examples of genocide; and that the message we send to any tyrant thinking of committing genocide is that they will be held to account in future?

Sir Eric Pickles: My hon. Friend makes a very powerful point that I obviously endorse and agree with. However, these events often start not with an invasion but with small things, and we need to be vigilant about the small things as well. I am in no way diminishing the excellent point that he makes.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance is an organisation comprising 30-odd nations that deals with holocaust remembrance. It has done an excellent job in starting to map the killing fields—the various killing sites. Auschwitz tends to dominate our view, and a visit there is truly heart-breaking, but it represents only some 15% of the numbers murdered. Someone was just as likely to have been shot in a ditch or killed in a field, or, to use Himmler's dreadful expression, “annihilated through labour”. A lot of people died in the quarries and building the camps, and it is important that we remember their graves. We are living in a decade when a number of countries are not so keen to register where those places are. Over the coming decade, we need to have a very comprehensive understanding of where they are.

Our view of the holocaust has been refined over 70 years—the past 10 years have been very influential—but for a number of countries in central Europe it is still very much a contemporary event, in the sense that they had significant anti-Jewish laws similar to the Nuremberg laws and were willing participants in them. In coming to terms with the holocaust, it is important to recognise that. We are sometimes guilty of complacency. We talk about the people who did not stand by and who did the right thing, and say, “Of course, that's us—we'd do that”, but the truth is that most people did not. It is impossible seriously to contend that people did not know what was going on.

I think there were various reasons why people did not interfere. First and obviously, they might have been anti-Semitic. They might have been indifferent. They might have been ambitious. After all, to be a successful Nazi, people had to show that they believed in the programme. They did not want to be denounced by their neighbours. Of course, it was also the law, and people like to obey the law. It is possible, however, that they rather enjoyed the loot and the auctions of Jewish goods and properties; they might have enjoyed looting their neighbours' properties and benefiting from their hard luck.

Bob Stewart: I thank my right hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene and to reinforce what he is saying. I have dealt with people who carried out what was clearly a holocaust, and the one thing that rings all the way through with most of them is that they are normal people but they carried out obnoxious crimes. One day, I hope we will understand what it is that makes normal people—I have had dinner with them in Bosnia—do such foul things. I hope very much that the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust will try to ascertain what does that to people who one might actually like.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Before the right hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles) continues, I should say that I did not want to interrupt any of the hon. Members who have made interventions, because they are making very careful, balanced points, but we cannot have long interventions, because there is not much time left for the debate.

Sir Eric Pickles: I will not detain the House for much longer, Madam Deputy Speaker. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). If he will forgive me, I would timidly suggest that Primo Levi made the same point when he said:

“Monsters exist, but they are too few in number to be truly dangerous. More dangerous are the common men, the functionaries ready to believe and to act without asking questions”.

It is fair to say that the holocaust was not committed by monsters, but that monsters were created out of that very process.

In case we are feeling a little smug, let us consider this: in the latter part, people were allowed to take a bag containing 20 kg of their possessions. That is roughly the amount we are allowed to take as luggage on a flight. What happened to the rest of their possessions?

I was in Jersey in September and visited the German hospital, which has done a marvellous job in making a timeline. I listened to the testimony of a family who, when the Germans occupied Jersey, had not been able to decide whether to leave and go to the United Kingdom or whether to stay. They decided that they would leave, but when they got to the docks they changed their minds. When they got back to their farm, they found that it had been completely stripped by their neighbours. It had been completely looted, including the furniture, carpets and fixtures off the wall.

We need to understand and appreciate that it could have happened—and could happen—here. It is important to be vigilant, to speak out and to acknowledge that what happened at King's College was a disgrace. When the Minister replies to the debate, I hope he will tell us what we are going to do to protect free speech in our universities and colleges, to ensure that people can go about their business without fearing that they are going to be attacked. I look forward to the Government saying that.

Finally, Martin Gilbert ended the preface to his excellent book “The Righteous” with an old Jewish saying:

“Whoever saves one life, it is as if he saved the entire world.”

I salute those who did the right thing. I salute those who stood up against the Nazis. We will remember forever those who died in such a cruel and wicked system.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. There is not much time, so I must put on a time limit of five minutes.

3.55 pm

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) and my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) for securing this important debate. It is a privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles).

On 1 November 2005, the UN General Assembly designated 27 January as international holocaust remembrance day. In Britain, we mark it as Holocaust Memorial Day, and we have done so since 2001. It is a national day of commemoration of the millions of Jews and others killed during the holocaust. The lives of 6 million Jews and many other minority groups who perished at the hands of the Nazis must be remembered. It is a time of remembrance for all the victims—the

Roma, the gays, the Sinti, the mentally and physically disabled—as well as all the victims of more recent genocides.

Genocide does not take place on its own; it is a process that can begin if racism, discrimination and hatred are not challenged and prevented. Today, we are part of that remembering, as well as part of that challenge and prevention. Over the coming week, there will be commemorations, services and events across the UK. Such remembrance is as important now as it has ever been.

I speak as one who has been moved by the tragedy of the holocaust. I have had the privilege to speak to survivors from Auschwitz-Birkenau. The scale of their suffering shows the savagery of which humanity is capable, but the survivors show us how magnificent and courageous the human spirit can be. As each year passes, however, there are fewer survivors able to share their testimony. By educating future generations, we are ensuring that their memory lives on, and that the holocaust never becomes another detail of history.

The work of organisations such as the Holocaust Educational Trust, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and the Holocaust Commission is therefore vital in keeping these memories alive. The holocaust is perhaps the greatest moral lesson against racism, hate and prejudice, and the establishment of a new holocaust learning centre and national memorial is an important part of that.

Holocaust Memorial Day does more than commemorate and recount the human suffering; it is also a time to pledge that it will never ever happen again. In recent years, Europe has seen a rise in Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, fuelled by the rise of extreme right groups in countries such as France, Hungary and Greece. I and others have been troubled by the reports of French Jews moving to Britain in search of safety. We should not, however, imagine that Britain is free of anti-Semitism; we know only too well that it is not. We must stand up against prejudice and discrimination of any kind, whatever form it takes, and we must heed the lessons of the holocaust.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Given the increase in both anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic attacks, will my right hon. Friend join me in celebrating the incredible work done by the Community Security Trust and Tell MAMA to ensure that the words “Never again” actually ring true?

Joan Ryan: I absolutely join my hon. Friend in paying such a tribute and in giving such support. All the organisations we have mentioned today need and deserve our support.

We must do all in our power to prevent future genocide around the world. The theme of this year’s commemoration is “Don’t stand by”. Elie Wiesel said that he

“swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

The holocaust saw many examples of heroism, sacrifice and altruism. I would like to mention the late Sir Nicholas Winton, who sadly passed away last year. He organised the safe passage of children from Czechoslovakia to Britain before the war broke out. His act of magnanimity saved the lives of at least 669 children and thousands of their descendants.

It is inspiring, too, that World Jewish Relief, which was instrumental in rescuing tens of thousands of Jewish refugees through the Kindertransport, last week committed itself to supporting the integration of Syrian refugees into the UK. The organisation will provide employment and language support to some of the 20,000 Syrian refugees that Britain accepts.

Finally, as we approach the centenary of the Balfour declaration, it is my view that the holocaust truly demonstrated the need for a state for the Jewish people. I would like to reaffirm the state of Israel’s right to exist.

We must speak up and not be bystanders in the face of genocide and persecution. We must have courage and not look the other way. I do not underestimate how hard that can be, but it is easier if we all speak up, stand together and accept that we must not stand by. I pay tribute to the Jewish community here in London and the UK for their significant and positive contribution and engagement. They will not bow down to anti-Semitism and discrimination, and we will stand with them.

4.1 pm

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): I align myself with every word that my neighbour, the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan), said. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) and my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Craig Mackinlay) for securing this debate.

Like many other hon. Members, I begin by paying tribute to the Holocaust Educational Trust, which does such great work with schools, colleges and communities across the United Kingdom to educate us all about the holocaust and its contemporary relevance.

The memories of my own visit to Auschwitz with a local school will always remain with me: the industrial scale of the extermination programme, which affected people at all levels, including very normal people, as has been said in this debate; the individual lives that were lost to their families and communities; and the terror, horror and depravity that underpinned the 20th century’s greatest act of evil. Although it is essential to remember every one of the lives lost in the holocaust, we ought to keep in mind those who survived. We must remember those heroes who managed to escape and who helped others to escape the fate that the Nazis had in store for them—those who did not stand by.

Corrie ten Boom is one such example. Her inspirational book “The Hiding Place” recalls not only her horrific ordeal, but her miraculous release. Corrie tells of how, when the Nazis began persecuting Jews in the Netherlands, a member of the Dutch resistance designed a hidden room behind a false wall, where the ten Boom family and others could hide. That hidden room, which was some 30 inches deep—the size of a medium wardrobe—provided a sanctuary from the Nazis. When the Nazis raided the ten Boom household in 1944, six people were using the hiding place, but hundreds of Jews before them had managed to escape the Nazis’ clutches.

Such examples show that, amid the terror, communities rallied. Despite the threats that they faced, families remained strong and stuck together. Before she died in a Nazi concentration camp, Corrie’s sister Betsie spoke words of comfort to her:

“There is no pit so deep that He is not deeper still.”

[Mr David Burrowes]

Even in those darkest of hours, people facing unimaginable horror kept faith in God and in one another. It is my honour and privilege to be hosting a dramatisation of the life and works of Corrie ten Boom on Monday evening in Parliament. I invite all hon. Members to join me for what will be a moving event.

We must remember the holocaust and everything about it, honour those who died and learn the lessons. As has been said in this debate, we have often said, “Never again,” and we still do so today. We must learn from the examples of Corrie ten Boom, her sister Betsie and others. Corrie opened her home to refugees, both Jews and others, who were members of the resistance movement—men and women who were being sought by the Gestapo and its Dutch counterpart. As refugees flee persecution, and indeed genocide, in other countries, we must search our consciences and ask what we are doing to help those in need. How can we be more like Corrie ten Boom? How can we ensure that we do not stand by?

Sadly, this year and in recent years we have witnessed genocide in other lands, and a deliberate attempt to eradicate whole communities because of their faith. In Syria and Iraq, Yazidis and Christians have been persecuted and murdered. To our shame, the response of the international community has been slow and ineffective. Before Christmas, I and 60 other parliamentarians wrote to the Prime Minister to request that the United Kingdom recognise the genocide that is being perpetrated and our responsibility to take action. We must call this what it is: genocide. That is not a matter of semantics; it is because the United Nations, and others, need to ensure that, post-holocaust, there is accountability to ensure that we bring the perpetrators to account, so that they will at some stage face justice. We must also encourage those 127 countries to face up to their duty to take necessary action to prevent and punish the perpetrators of these evil acts.

Another famous holocaust survivor, Simon Wiesenthal, who later became a Nazi hunter, sought to absolve the blame from human beings by saying:

“God must have been on leave during the Holocaust”.

I do not take that view. I believe that humanity was on leave during the holocaust—on leave from its senses, its duty and its morality. We must ensure that we learn the lessons of the holocaust, and as we remember what happened 70 years ago and see what at times is happening now, we must provide shelter and protection for those who need sheltering. We must not be on leave during another genocide.

4.6 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in this debate to mark the 71st anniversary of the liberation of the concentration and death camps, particularly in light of the fact that fewer and fewer holocaust survivors are able to share their stories. It is important that their stories, their experience and their horror are never forgotten.

We live in an increasingly dangerous world, and the story of the holocaust is not just the story of the Jewish people, but a terrible and chilling indictment of mankind itself, and the cruelty and barbarity of which it is capable. As a former English teacher with more than

20 years’ experience, I am particularly grateful for the excellent work carried out by the Holocaust Educational Trust. Since 2006, the “Lessons from Auschwitz” project has enabled 3,000 pupils and teachers in Scotland to learn and remember the lessons of this brutal part of our recent past.

The importance of teaching this shameful episode from the past to our young people cannot be overestimated. I recall teaching a second-year class in Airdrie Academy in north Lanarkshire more than 20 years ago about this part of history, when we studied the novel “Friedrich” by Hans Peter Richter. It is a moving story set in 1930s Germany of friendship between two young boys—one German and one a German Jewish boy. As Nazi hatred permeates their world, their neighbourhood and their friendship, the German boy finds himself increasingly estranged from his Jewish friend, which leads to tragedy.

As part of teaching children about that period, I was successful in securing a visit from the late Reverend Ernest Levy, himself a survivor of Auschwitz, although his father, brother and sister did not survive. Despite his advanced age and frailty, he made the trip from his home in Giffnock, Glasgow, to Airdrie Academy to meet the children and tell his story, which he still found hard to do almost 50 years later. He talked of the continuing lack of tolerance in an angry world, and he set out his experiences and his will to survive the brutality of Auschwitz in his book, “Just One More Dance”. I am honoured to have met this man of huge courage and gentleness. I will never forget him, and I do not think that the young people who met him ever will either.

Indeed, I said a silent prayer for Reverend Ernest Levy and all those who were so brutally and cruelly killed when I visited Sachsenhausen camp just outside Berlin, again when I visited Auschwitz some years later after his death, and a few years later in the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust. It is some comfort to know that he spent the last 48 years of his life happily in Scotland, after his surviving brother and sister persuaded him to settle there, telling him about the welcoming nature of Glaswegians and the freedom for Jewish people to worship in peace. There was anti-Semitism, they said, but it came from ignorance, not hatred. They believed that he could help to alter that, and he spent the rest of his life doing so. He went on to become a leading figure in the Scottish-Jewish community, and a passionate advocate of interfaith dialogue. A testament to the relationships that he built between faiths was evident in the outpourings of tributes, grief and deep respect that he received from leaders of all faiths on his death.

Despite the enormous human suffering, the unspeakable waste of human life, the unimaginable cruelty and inhumane barbarism of the holocaust, it is extremely depressing to think that tolerance in societies around the world is still a challenge. As Holocaust Memorial Day events take place across Scotland and the UK, we must remember these terrible events and reflect on the fact that as a species we have not moved very far forward at all. We have seen other people subject to genocidal attacks, such as those in Rwanda, Cambodia, Bosnia, Darfur and other places. Commemorating the holocaust is essential for our past, but it is even more important for our future. It is right that this House should debate it and highlight the importance of never forgetting and not standing by.

I will end with the thought that UK poet laureate, Scotland's own Carol Ann Duffy, put in her poem "Shooting Stars":

"...Remember.

Remember these appalling days which make the world
Forever bad".

The future is not yet written. The world need not be forever bad. The question is what we are prepared to do to make the world good.

4.10 pm

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): It is an honour to follow the very moving speech from the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson). I congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) on introducing the debate.

As a statistic, 6 million people dying is hard to fathom. I think for many of us it is hard to imagine how any human being could murder that number of people, so it is vital that we bring it back to individuals. I pay tribute to the work the Yad Vashem museum has done to capture the personal testimonials of the survivors, so we can see for posterity what happened in Nazi Germany and try to learn the lessons. I first went to Yad Vashem 24 years ago and I have been back six times since. I have never left there without tears in my eyes. It is a deeply emotional experience. I urge hon. Members on all sides to go there and to see for themselves what happened and the history of the Nazi persecution.

I pay tribute to the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust. It does such wonderful work in informing young people of the misery, torture and brutality of the Nazi regime. It is vital that we continue that work, because for everyone, particularly younger generations, it is hard to fathom how human beings could do this to other human beings. I remember going—it is seared in my consciousness—to Auschwitz-Birkenau and seeing at first hand where the great synagogue used to exist. It is now just a set of trees. I saw the work camps where people were crowded in absolutely inhumane conditions, and the terrible railway that brought people to their deaths. They were brought there at the point of a gun and absolutely dehumanised by the people who murdered them.

It is not so much the piles of shoes or spectacles that I remember; it is the walk across the park where they put the ashes after they had burnt the bodies. Nature has a way of demonstrating what happened. As one crosses that park, the birds do not sing. There is no form of animal activity or birdlife at all. There is total silence. That will live with me forever. I well remember going with students who started the day in a buoyant mood. As the day went on, they became more and more depressed and silent. It brings it all home. I pay tribute to the Holocaust Educational Trust. I hope its work goes from strength to strength as we seek to educate the young.

We have heard about other terrible events across the world: Rwanda, Cambodia and others. I just want to highlight one. It is the 26th anniversary this week of another genocide—one that is never talked about. I am talking about the Kashmiri Pandits, who were forced from their homes, in which they had lived for hundreds of years, at the point of a gun. The women were raped or forced to convert to another religion, just because they supposedly had the wrong religion. The issue is never spoken about or debated for some bizarre reason,

although I had the honour this week of participating in seminars and meetings at the Indian high commission pointing this out to the world. We must continue to highlight it.

There is another danger that has not been mentioned. I mean the holocaust deniers—the people who claim it never happened. We need only look at this country for people who deny it ever happened. They need to be exposed and re-educated. We also have to combat the countries that deny it ever happened. We should remember that only 60 years ago the Jewish population in Arab countries was 2.3 million. It is now less than 100,000. They have been forced to leave their homes and are now refugees. That was another form of genocide and forced evacuation. It is clearly wrong. We must always stand up for those people and make sure that we do not stand idly by.

4.15 pm

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): I am grateful for the chance to contribute to possibly the most important debate we will have this year. There can be few subjects as fundamentally important to the survival of the human race as learning the lessons of this dreadful period of history.

I commend the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) for an exceptional and passionate speech, and I forgive him for stealing some of what I intended to say, because it makes it easier for me to keep within the time limit. I am also happy to associate myself entirely with the praise offered to organisations such as the Holocaust Educational Trust, particularly now that, as others have said, there will soon be no one left with first-hand eyewitness experience of what happened. The Holocaust is moving out of our collective memory into our collective history. It is vital that, while the events are behind us, the lessons remain always in front of us.

I echo the hon. Gentleman's comment about how the Holocaust was committed by ordinary people. I remember watching the groundbreaking documentary series "The World at War" in my early teens. It included interviews not only with military personnel and the victims of German bombs in London, Coventry and elsewhere, but with people who had taken part in the Holocaust and contributed to the genocide, some of whom had served time in prison for their crimes. Some 20 or 30 years later, they had understood that what they had done was wrong and had gone back to being perfectly ordinary, decent human beings. The single most important lesson is that ordinary people can do genuinely diabolical and hellish things to each other if the circumstances are right.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I saw that in Rwanda one time. I came across a reconciliation village where a man who had been involved in the genocide but had moved on in life was a babysitter—believe it or not—for a woman whose family had been annihilated in the genocide. It was a powerful experience, and it echoes the point made by the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) about very ordinary people doing ghastly things.

Peter Grant: I think the best example we will ever see of reconciliation in the aftermath of such dreadful things is that set by the late Nelson Mandela. People could

[Peter Grant]

look at the experience of truth and reconciliation in South Africa in trying to move on from conflicts in other parts of the world.

As others have said, this year we are being asked to reflect in particular on the ordinary people who allowed the Holocaust to happen, sometimes through active participation but more often through passive compliance and by doing nothing. Again, the fact that these were ordinary people should serve as a warning to us. It happened not so long ago, not so far away from here, and it could happen here—and it will happen here if we allow circumstances to develop in which ordinary people begin by not speaking out when they see anti-Semitic or racial abuse. Within a few years, they find themselves actively participating in acts of violence and murder—acts of such depravity that they cannot be adequately described in words.

Whether it be the anti-Semitic racism that we see in the far right in parts of Europe, the Islamophobic racism that we see on the far right here in the United Kingdom or the white supremacist racism of the Ku Klux Klan, the message must always be that there is no such thing as an acceptable level of, or an acceptable type of, racism. To defend oneself against a charge of racism by accusing someone else of the same thing simply does not wash. A racist is a racist; racism is wrong without exception. The tolerance level for racism is and must always be absolutely zero.

One way to help combat racism is by taking small steps to encourage a spirit and atmosphere of what is sometimes described as “tolerance”. However, I do not like that term much. I do not think we should “tolerate” the diversity of our society; I want to celebrate it. Tolerance is what one does to things that are not all that good; celebrate is what one does about things that make our lives and our world better. We should celebrate the fact that there are so many different faiths, so many different positions, so many different personal choices that people make about how they are going to live their lives and with whom they are going to live them.

As one small example and as part of the celebration of diversity, a decision was taken in the early days of the Scottish Parliament to begin each day with a “time for reflection” that was not exclusively dominated by the predominant religion in Scotland, so that all religions and all faiths would have a chance to lead that celebration. Indeed, people who did not publicly identify with any faith group or religion but had something important to say were equally welcome. That is a practice that I would tentatively suggest this House might want to look at, possibly in addition to the more traditional prayer service with which we open each day.

I am enormously proud of the fact that next week, on the 71st anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, the Scottish Parliament’s time for reflection will be led by two pupils from Auchmuty high school in Glenrothes. Lauren Galloway and Brandon Low recently visited Auschwitz-Birkenau as part of the Lessons from Auschwitz scheme. I hope that politicians in Holyrood, London and elsewhere will listen to the lessons that those young people have brought back for us to hear. I know I speak for everyone here when I say I long to see the day when “never again” is not a prayer or a promise, but a statement of fact delivered for the benefit of future generations.

4.22 pm

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): Seventy-four years ago yesterday, a group of men—and they were, sadly, all men—met at Wannsee, a nice lake and idyllic location in Berlin, and decided systematically to murder 11 million-plus Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals and the like. As a result of discovering that fact when I was young, I developed a rather morbid fascination with the holocaust. I could not quite understand why a sophisticated country that had given birth to famous chemists, philosophers, historians and composers could find itself hosting a conference at which such dreadful deeds were planned.

The sheer industrial scale of what happened is seen in the places of Chelmno, Sobibor, Treblinka and Auschwitz. Another particularly dreadful episode happened at Babi Yar in Ukraine, where over 33,000 men, women and children were shot over the course of two days, just 29 years before I was born. I had this fascination, and I could not understand the word “holocaust”, meaning “holo” or whole and “caustos” or burned. I could not understand how intelligent, sophisticated, educated people could design purpose-built gas chambers and commit such a crime.

When I was practising as a doctor in Aylesbury, I had two patients who had survived Auschwitz. I clearly remember the lady with the tattoo on her arm, and I particularly remember the man who came in suffering from serious depression. Ten hours after I admitted him, he committed suicide, rather shockingly, on the ward. I think that that personal experience was what drove me to visit Yad Vashem for the first time in 1998; subsequently, like many other Members, I visited Auschwitz with the Holocaust Educational Trust. It drove me to try to understand, as best I could.

I agree with those who have said today that it is important to remember other genocides. I am thinking of, for instance, the genocide of 1915 in Armenia, of what was done by the Khmer Rouge between 1975 and 1979, when almost 25% of the population died, and of the more recent genocide in Rwanda, when the killing rate actually topped that of the Nazis: some 600,000 people were killed within six to eight weeks of the start.

Of course it is important to reflect and remember, but I think the most important thing that we should do is try to understand. I have long thought that killing the people who were convicted at Nuremberg was a mistake. I think that we should have kept those people alive, and tried to understand what on earth drove them to behave in such a way. And what of justice? Of course it is important to bring people to justice, but fewer than 10% of people were ever charged with any crime in connection with the holocaust. The numbers are not much better when it comes to the Khmer Rouge, and certainly not when it comes to the Armenian genocide of 1915.

We need to understand how people could do those things by day, and then be normal by night. There are famous photographs of Hungarian Jews arriving in June and July 1944, when 12,000 a day were being gassed, and there is the Höcker album showing SS men and women partying in the evenings and afternoons in the intervals between gassing thousands of people. How can that have been?

It is very easy to stand here and make speeches. It is very easy to say that we should not be bystanders, but should act. It is very easy to say that we should not do

this and we should not do that. Forgive me, but we have stood idly by in the case of Rwanda, idly by in the case of Darfur, idly by in the case of Syria, and in the case of the Yazidis in particular. We are not doing much better than our predecessors. Indeed, I suspect that we do not have the determination and courage of some of our predecessors, who actually went to war to defeat evil. I think it is about time that this country rediscovered that determination, that courage, and that strong belief in the values of freedom and the equality of people, irrespective of their faith, gender or sexuality. It is about time that Britain, France and, yes, Germany—and America—rediscovered that courage, because otherwise such genocides will continue to happen in the future, and I very much hope that they will not.

4.27 pm

Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con): So much has already been said during this extremely powerful and thoughtful debate, but let me add two stories from my own life and my constituency.

I recently took my parents-in-law, who were visiting us for the holidays, to a museum in my constituency of which some Members may be aware. Remarkably, the National Holocaust Centre, a few miles north of Newark, is the only museum dedicated to the holocaust in this country, although I hope that that will change in the near future.

My parents-in-law are the children of holocaust survivors. My wife's grandfather and grandmother were Jews who lived in a village near the city of Pinsk. The Nazis came to their village. At the time, Pinsk was 90% Jewish; today it is 0.05% Jewish. The Nazis rounded up the able-bodied young men and took them to labour camps. The young men were told that if they tried to escape, their families back in the village would be killed. As we can imagine, however, word came to the camp pretty quickly that everyone in the village had been shot. Most had actually been burnt to death, and their bodies had been dumped in an open grave outside the village.

Furnished with that reality, my grandfather-in-law narrowly succeeded in escaping from the camp, and spent the remainder of the war fighting as a partisan in the forests of what is now Belarus. At the end of the war he returned to the smouldering ruins of his former village, amid the wreckage of his former life, and discovered that every single member of his family had been killed. Remarkably, the following day he met my wife's grandmother, who was herself a holocaust survivor with a similar story, and every single one of whose family had also been killed, most of them at Auschwitz. They fell in love, and the rest, of course, is history. My mother-in-law, my wife and my three daughters are the result. So it is a great privilege for me to represent that museum.

Let me tell the House briefly about the two founders of the museum. Their story is not as well known as perhaps it should be, and it is worth retelling today. Twenty years ago, two brothers from Nottinghamshire, who are not Jewish and have no family connection with the holocaust, visited Israel to study and were captivated—if that is the right word—by Yad Vashem, which was being constructed at the time. On returning to their parents' farmhouse in a remote area north of Newark, they persuaded their parents, who were extremely socially aware individuals themselves, to convert their farm into

a holocaust education centre and over the next 20 years they have done exactly that. They have realised a remarkable vision and James and Stephen Smith—those two constituents of mine—are now among the most extraordinary individuals leading in holocaust education and genocide prevention around the world. They have founded the Aegis Foundation that works to prevent genocides and runs the genocide museum in Kigali in Rwanda, which is partly funded by the Department for International Development. They also run Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation, which is now attempting to create 3D visualisations of remaining holocaust survivors so future generations can hear, to some extent first-hand, the stories when survivors have long departed.

The brothers had two profound driving ideas behind their mission. The first was that when the survivors are gone, we need to be able to tell the story—that although there are many museums all over the country, and even in my own rural constituency, at least one museum should be our conscience. It should be here for future generations, and I hope it will be. Secondly, they believed this museum should remind us of our common humanity by showing that whatever motivated the attacks on the Jews was a virus—a virus that exists in all of us and which exists in the world today. We see that alive and well, as we have heard already—in ISIS, in Boko Haram, and in anti-Semitism in Paris and in this country.

As an individual who grew up in the Church of England and walked through my village in Shropshire to Sunday school classes, it is a deep sadness and a shame to me to take my children to Hebrew classes and have to knock on the door and pass through security and sophisticated alarms so they can join four and five-year-olds learning a bit about their Jewish heritage. That is what we are fighting for today—to remember, to keep the flame alive, and to try at least to ensure that it does not happen again.

4.32 pm

Kirsten Oswald (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): It is an honour to be speaking in this debate today. We have heard many very moving and thoughtful contributions from Members across the House, and it is evident that this is a topic of great concern to all of us. I must add my voice to those commending the outstanding work of the Holocaust Educational Trust.

It is an honour for me to represent East Renfrewshire. My constituency is home to Scotland's largest Jewish population, as well as to other engaged and active faith groups. Their congregations and leaders add so much to our local communities, promoting positive relations and the importance of working together and learning lessons from the past.

As a number of Members have rightly pointed out, as fewer and fewer holocaust survivors are able to share their story, it is more important than ever that we take steps to make sure that their stories continue to be told, and it is fitting that the theme of this year's commemoration is "Don't stand by". The message this gives could not be clearer or more important. It is about us all: we must not stand by—and we must also be aware, as we have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) and others, that these terrible acts often involved ordinary people.

[Kirsten Oswald]

I am very proud of the diversity of modern Scotland. It makes us all better to live in a diverse, vibrant country, but we can never take the diversity and tolerance of our society for granted. Scotland's Jewish community is a vital and important part of our society. Every member of that community has the right to feel safe and we on the SNP Benches join the others here today who have condemned anti-Semitism; it is wholly unacceptable.

We have heard about our duties to refugees from the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) and, as Europe struggles to get a grip on the refugee crisis stemming from Syria, we must not stand by and ignore cries for help from men, women and children fleeing not only the barbaric control of Daesh, but the evil regime of Assad.

In 1999, the then Prime Minister Tony Blair asked Jewish community leaders in Britain whether they felt it would be a good idea to have a Holocaust Memorial Day. They told him that they themselves did not need one, because Jews already had Yom HaShoah, a memorial day on which the whole community remembered all those who had been lost. However, they pointed out that it was important for our whole society to have a Holocaust Memorial Day for the Jewish people and for the other victims of the holocaust, including Roma people, trade unionists, people with disabilities, gay people and Jehovah's Witnesses—all those who, along with the Jews, were so terribly singled out for the crime of being different, as the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) said. This is important for wider society too, so that we have the opportunity to listen and to learn.

It was a huge honour for me to be invited to march with the Jewish war veterans at the Remembrance day service in Newton Mearns in November and then to join the community at the Newton Mearns synagogue for an excellent, thoughtful service at which their brave and selfless contributions and the losses and sacrifices of so many were remembered.

We must remember not only the horrors of the second world war but the subsequent genocides, including those in Rwanda, Cambodia and Bosnia. This year marks the 21st anniversary of the genocide at Srebrenica, which has been mentioned by the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). The cemetery there has more than 8,000 obelisks marking Muslim graves. Organisations including Remembering Srebrenica and the Mothers of Srebrenica work to ensure that we remember and help us to try to learn.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I attended the Srebrenica memorial service last year, and one of the most moving parts of the service was when I went out at the end and saw the thousands of schoolchildren who had gathered in the nave of Westminster Abbey to learn and to witness that remembrance. Does my hon. Friend agree with the other Members who have spoken in this moving debate about the importance of educating future generations, and young children in particular, so that we and they never forget and never stand by?

Kirsten Oswald: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I entirely agree with him.

I am pleased that in Scotland our Government have made a clear commitment to understanding and protecting faith through education, and to the importance of holocaust education. Our young people must have the opportunity to really understand what happened. We have heard about Scottish students and teachers participating in the Holocaust Educational Trust's valuable Lessons from Auschwitz project. I have met some of those young people, and their commitment to understanding and sharing the story of the holocaust is very important.

Our First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, reflecting on our annual Scottish interfaith week, described Scotland as a country where all people can live together in harmony, follow their religion or belief and achieve their potential. Our diversity is a strength, as the First Minister emphasised when she recently came to speak to the Scottish Jewish community at the Giffnock and Newlands synagogue. She said that with that strength comes the responsibility on us all not to stand by but to speak up against anti-Semitism and discrimination in all its forms.

Holocaust Memorial Day allows schools, colleges, faith groups and communities all over Scotland to consider that, and to remember the 6 million men, women and children who were murdered by the Nazi regime in occupied Europe. Six million people. That is more than the entire population of Denmark. But even when I make comparisons such as these, it is still impossible to comprehend the numbers. As the hon. Member for Ilford North pointed out, however, we really need to try to do so, so that we can understand the terror and magnitude of that genocide, and its repercussions and impact on all of us, on those who survived and on the generations who came after, such as the family of the hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick).

This time last year, I was fortunate enough to be at a holocaust memorial service at the Giffnock reform synagogue, where I heard the son of a holocaust survivor speak movingly about the impact of his father's experience on him as a person. It was an incredibly moving testimony, and it illustrated very well the broad effects of the holocaust, which extend much further than even the terrible magnitude of the number of victims would suggest.

Yesterday, I visited the Kindertransport statue at Liverpool Street station. There is no doubt that the Kindertransport saved many thousands of young Jewish lives, and those children and their families have added greatly to our society and made huge contributions to our understanding. But it was heart-breaking to learn that at the end of the war, when the British Government committed to taking in another 1,000 unaccompanied children, they could not do so because only 732 orphaned children remained.

The plight of children at that time also exercised the mind of Jane Haining, a farmer's daughter from Dunscore in rural Dumfriesshire. A devout Christian, she was inspired by a job advert she saw in Queen's Park church for the post of matron in a Budapest school run by the Church of Scotland's Mission to the Jews. The school was popular with Jewish parents because of the quality of education that all children, particularly girls, received. As the political situation in Hungary became increasingly precarious, with the Jewish population steadily stripped of its freedoms, the Church of Scotland sent her repeated letters urging her to return home to Scotland for her own safety. Jane refused, and wrote back saying:

"If these children needed me in days of sunshine, how much more do they need me in these days of darkness?"

As Hitler's troops marched into Hungary, Jane Haining is said to have wept as she sewed yellow stars on to her charges' clothes. This sympathy was known, and very soon she was informed upon, arrested and held in a local prison. She was soon moved to Auschwitz and taken to the labour camps. The treatment being so brutal, she survived for just two months before dying at the age of 47. Many years afterwards, after a 10-year investigation and an initiative by Queen's Park church, Jane was named as Righteous Among Nations in Jerusalem's sacred Yad Vashem, recognising her quiet sacrifice for her Jewish children.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson), I want to talk briefly about the late Rev. Ernest Levy, previously the cantor of the Giffnock and Newlands synagogue in my constituency. In 1938, when he was a child, he and his family had to flee to Hungary from their home in Bratislava. When Germany invaded Hungary, they were deported to the concentration camps. Ernest was held in seven concentration camps in all, including Auschwitz. His brothers had to dig their own graves. His sister was gassed to death. Ernest only just survived and he was found lying in the dust in Bergen-Belsen. He ultimately returned to Budapest, before making his home in Scotland, marrying Kathy Freeman, a fellow concentration camp survivor, in 1965.

Rev. Levy worked with the Holocaust Educational Trust to launch his holocaust testimony, "The Single Light", in the Scottish Parliament. He brought a sardine tin with him. This tin had literally been his guiding light. During a forced march to Belsen, towards the end of the war, he picked up the tin, discarded by a German guard, made it into a wick and lit a flame. He and his fellow inmates gathered round the flame to sing a hymn. In Holyrood, he again lit the wick in the sardine tin, telling assembled MSPs and guests:

"We sang, and it gave us hope. This tin gave us light."

4.41 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): It is an honour to be able to contribute to this debate. I thank all hon. Members for their contributions today and I thank the Backbench Business Committee for bringing the debate to the House. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) for his eloquent and moving opening speech. Like many Members, he pointed out that the holocaust was perpetrated by ordinary men and women carrying out acts of extraordinary evil.

I thank the right hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles) for highlighting, among many issues, the disgraceful recent attack on Jewish students in King's College. I thank the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) for bringing his experience and knowledge of conflict to the debate. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) for emphasising the need to preserve the memories of survivors. I thank the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrows) for speaking of the courage of those who did not stand by. I thank the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) for bringing us her experience as a teacher and highlighting the importance of holocaust education. I thank the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) for his passionate speech and for highlighting the work of Yad Vashem. I thank the hon. Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant) for, again,

emphasising that ordinary people are capable, in the wrong circumstances, of diabolical acts, and I thank the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) for giving us his personal experience as a doctor with holocaust survivors. I thank the hon. Member for Newark (Robert Jenrick) for his very personal speech and his support for the National Holocaust Centre. Finally, I thank the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) for her comments on the importance of learning lessons from the past.

The UK played a leading role in establishing Holocaust Memorial Day as an international day of commemoration in 2000, when 46 Governments signed the Stockholm declaration. Our first Holocaust Memorial Day was held on 27 January 2001. In the weeks leading up to and after Holocaust Memorial Day, thousands of commemorative events are arranged by schools, faith groups and community organisations across the country, remembering all the victims of the holocaust and of subsequent genocides. It is vital that we continue to remember and to learn from the appalling events of the holocaust, as well as ensuring that we continue to challenge anti-Semitism and all forms of bigotry. This year's theme is "Don't Stand By". Bystanders are encouraged to speak out against persecution to prevent the horrors of the holocaust and other genocides from ever happening again.

The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust is the charity that promotes and supports Holocaust Memorial Day. The UK Government, through the Home Office, had the responsibility of running the Holocaust Memorial Day from 2001 to 2005. In May 2005, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust was registered as a charity, and the then Home Secretary, David Blunkett, appointed trustees for the first time.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has funded the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust's work since 2007, and, to date, HMDT has overseen massive growth of Holocaust Memorial Day activities. More than 3,600 activities took place across the UK on Holocaust Memorial Day last year. Independent opinion polling in February 2015 showed that 83% of UK adults are aware of Holocaust Memorial Day, and 31% say that they know it well. Some 1.3 million people watched the 2015 UK commemorative event on BBC 2.

Many Members have paid tribute to the work of the Holocaust Educational Trust, which aims to educate young people from every background about the holocaust and the important lessons to be learned for today. The trust works in schools, universities and the community to raise awareness and understanding of the holocaust, providing teacher training, an outreach programme for schools, teaching aids and resource material. It continues to play a leading role in training teachers on how best to teach the holocaust.

I was very proud to sign the Holocaust Educational Trust's book of commitment, thereby honouring those who were murdered during the holocaust and paying tribute to the extraordinary holocaust survivors who work tirelessly to educate young people.

I wish to say a few words about the connection between the European convention on human rights and the holocaust. The ECHR was the first international instrument designed to bring into effect, through a dedicated court, the rights contained in the 1948 universal declaration of human rights. The convention came into force in 1953 and now applies to all 47 countries of its parent organisation, the Council of Europe.

[Liz McInnes]

The convention aimed to prevent a recurrence of the horrors and atrocities of the second world war. It followed on from the UDHR, which was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948. It is easy to forget that, until then, there was almost no system that enabled criticism of, let alone action against, Governments who mistreated people within their borders if their own law allowed such abuses.

Professor Francesca Klug, commissioner of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, notes that

“however morally repugnant, Nazi Germany’s racial purity policies were all in accordance with the law.”

It is from the universal declaration of human rights that the international system of human rights protections was born.

As the UDHR was being drafted, European leaders drew up the European convention on human rights. During that time, Winston Churchill spoke about the strength derived from our “sense of common values” and of such a convention being

“guarded by freedom and sustained by law”,

which ensured that people owned the Government, and not the Government the people.

When the UK Parliament passed the Human Rights Act in 1998, it made our human rights more accessible for people here in the UK. There is now a duty on all our public bodies—not just central Government, but the police, NHS, social services, housing and education—to respect, protect and fulfil our human rights. The legal protection of human rights for all is a direct and lasting legacy to emerge from the horrors of the holocaust.

4.49 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): I am grateful to hon. Members on both sides of the House for their wise, passionate and insightful contributions to the debate. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) and the hon. Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) for securing this important debate.

Last year, the Prime Minister marked the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau by pledging to build a new national holocaust memorial and learning centre. What was unique about the announcement was that it had cross-party support. That support has continued with the creation of the United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial Foundation, which is turning the recommendations made to the Prime Minister’s Holocaust Commission into reality.

Today is as much about remembering other genocides as it is about Jewish persecution. This year marks 21 years since the genocide in Srebrenica. It is important to remember the innocent lives lost in the holocaust, in the killing fields of Cambodia, in the churches of Rwanda, in the camps of Bosnia and in the arid desert of Darfur. This year’s Holocaust Memorial Day theme, “Don’t Stand By”, is all the more poignant if we think of all the hatred and prejudice in the world today, some of which has been mentioned in the debate.

Survivors of the holocaust and other genocides would not be here today if it were not for those who did not stand by: people such as Robert Townsend Smallbones, consul-general in Frankfurt, who worked night and day

to issue Jewish families with visas as he knew that a visa meant the difference between life and death; or Captain Mbaye Diagne, a Senegalese military officer and a United Nations military observer during the 1994 Rwandan genocide who saved many lives during his time in Rwanda through nearly continuous rescue missions, at great peril to himself.

This year’s theme focuses on the contemporary relevance of the holocaust and subsequent genocides. We are asked to consider our individual responsibilities. We are asked not to be bystanders to hate crime and prejudice. In 2009, I joined a number of Conservative colleagues on a visit to Srebrenica, where more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were massacred during the 1990s. It truly brought home to me the scale of this merciless atrocity, which took place on our continent just a few years ago. While in Srebrenica, we undertook a number of projects, one of which was installing a computer suite at a local school. I mention that project because I think that schools are vital in the context of this debate as education has the power to bring communities together.

Holocaust education matters. It brings to life the names, the memories and the identities of those who suffered, but none of that would be possible without the dedication of survivors and their families, who visit schools and communities up and down the country urging us to take a stand against hatred and prejudice. A number of survivors were honoured in the new years’ honours list and I want to take this opportunity to mention them each in turn. Zigi Shipper works tirelessly in schools and universities up and down the country. He is so popular and inspiring that students set up a fan page on Facebook. Susan Pollack sees herself as part of a dedicated team ensuring that the lessons from the holocaust and more recent genocides are never forgotten. Ivor Perl gave evidence in the trial of Oskar Gröning, a former SS guard known as the “bookkeeper of Auschwitz”. Lily Ebert ensures that our young people are aware of the dangers of hatred and intolerance and is an inspiration to us all. Jack Kagan played an inspirational role on the Prime Minister’s Holocaust Commission in 2014. Renee Salt was recognised for her commitment to holocaust education and awareness. Rudi Oppenheimer visits schools up and down the country and spoke at a Holocaust Memorial Day event in my own Department a couple of years ago. Agnes Grunwald-Spier has served as trustee of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and earlier this week published her book entitled “Who Betrayed the Jews? The Realities of Nazi Persecution in the Holocaust.” Freddie Knoller, at 95, still talks to young people about the horrors of the holocaust and encourages them not to stand by. Finally, Chaim Ferster is a survivor of Auschwitz, who uses his experiences to educate others to ensure that we never forget.

I echo the tributes paid today to Karen Pollock, the chief executive officer of the Holocaust Educational Trust who, along with her team, is an inspiration to all of us. I pay tribute to the work of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and its CEO, Olivia Marks-Woldman, who with her team delivered the most successful Holocaust Memorial Day to date last year, with over 3,600 local events. I would like to mention some of the other holocaust remembrance, education and survivor organisations that enrich the work we do, such as the Holocaust Survivors Centre in Hendon, the Anne Frank Trust, which uses Anne’s diary to fight hatred and prejudice in schools,

the Wiener Library, the Association of Jewish Refugees, and the National Holocaust Centre in Newark, Nottinghamshire.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the work of the Prime Minister's new envoy for post-holocaust issues, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles), who made an excellent contribution to the debate. I am glad to hear that he will be focusing on the restitution of property and art, the opening of archives and the role of bystanders as collaborators. My right hon. Friend replaced Sir Andrew Burns, and I hope this House will join me in thanking Sir Andrew, the UK's first post-holocaust issues envoy, for his wisdom and guidance over the past five years.

I do not have time to mention all the contributions, but I shall reply to questions asked in the debate. First, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar referred to the terrible incident at King's College this week. I concur with his comments. The actions of a few at King's College were unacceptable and we expect the police and the university authorities to take the incident extremely seriously, fully investigate what happened and hold to account the perpetrators of that awful action. As my right hon. Friend will know, my Department hosts a cross-Government working group on anti-Semitism, which will be taking the issue very seriously in its future work. In response to the hon. Member for Ilford North, I can assure him that we will continue to do all we can to promote, support and fund the teaching of the holocaust.

It is clear from the contributions made today by hon. Members that we can never be complacent, especially when we continue to see the growth of anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim hatred in Europe and on our own shores. I can only echo what Simon Wiesenthal, a holocaust survivor turned Nazi-hunter after the war, said so eloquently:

"For evil to flourish, it only requires good men to do nothing."

4.58 pm

Wes Streeting: I would like to place on record my thanks to all the right hon. and hon. Members who

spoke so passionately, eloquently and thoughtfully in this afternoon's debate. As we draw the debate to a close, I want to leave us with the words of Primo Levi:

"It happened, therefore it can happen again".

Those words are a lesson for all of us to reflect upon, with reference to our individual actions and taking up the challenge presented by the hon. Member for Bracknell (Dr Lee) in his speech. It is for the House to think about how this country can rediscover the best of its internationalist traditions. That is something for all of us to think on in the days, weeks, months and years ahead.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Holocaust Memorial Day 2016.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): The House has been so well disciplined that I find myself with a spare 30 seconds. It just occurs to me that a pause is very unusual, but perhaps—

Wes Streeting: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would just like to place on the record, as a new Member of the House, my apologies for not realising that I really should have spoken until 5 pm precisely, so as not to put you in the awkward position of having to find something to say from the Chair in order to take us through to the Adjournment debate, which I am sure we will hear very shortly. It is on the important matter of transport for vulnerable adults, and will be led by my hon. Friend the Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey). Although I am unable to stay for the debate, I for one am looking forward to seeing her rise to her feet imminently.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That was an excellent point of order. The hon. Gentleman has done absolutely nothing wrong. On the contrary, he has made not one but two excellent speeches this afternoon.

Vulnerable Adults: Transport

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Charlie Elphicke.*)

5 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): Before my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (West Streeting) leaves the Chamber, I would like to wish him a very happy birthday and congratulate him on his point of order.

I thank the Minister for attending what I have no doubt will be a lively and informative debate. It might be helpful if I first define what specific kind of transport I am focusing my comments on today. Adults with special educational needs often attend day centres or schools. Until recently, many councils have provided accessible transport to allow the most vulnerable to access these facilities, often by way of a bus or the provision of a driver plus an expert escort on board to ensure safety. That support is a vital service in many communities, providing independence for those with special needs and peace of mind for their parents and carers. It also provides a much-needed break for the unsung heroes of social care who struggle with the commitments of family life and work alongside caring for their loved ones.

Let me set a backdrop for the harrowing tale I am about to tell. In 2014 my local council, Salford City Council, was ordered by the Government to find £25 million of so-called savings in its budget. That was in addition to £97 million in spending cuts that it had already suffered since 2010. As an already efficient and well-respected council, it had already sought to find every possible means of saving money through genuine efficiency gains. It had fought for four years to find ways to save money or reduce spending here and there in order to ensure that all services for the most vulnerable residents across Salford were unaffected. By 2014 the council was way beyond being able to salami-slice budgets and, as a result, was forced to look at making real changes to a wide range of services. Our mayor, councillors and council officers were put in the agonising position of having to prioritise which types of care they provided and to determine who was the most vulnerable, instead of simply protecting all the vulnerable, as it had done before.

Angela Rayner (Ashton-under-Lyne) (Lab): This year, £16.4 million has been taken out of Tameside council's budget for adult social services, £11.1 million has been taken out of Oldham council's budget for adult social services and a deficit of over £20 million has been forecast for Tameside general hospital. Cuts to front-line local services not only cost more in terms of the quality of life for the individuals affected, but cost us all more in the long run. Does my hon. Friend agree that these cuts are really short-sighted and damage not only our local services, but our NHS, which has to pick up the pieces afterwards?

Rebecca Long Bailey: I thank my hon. Friend for those helpful comments. I completely agree. As she will hear, Tameside is not alone in suffering such savage cuts.

Salford City Council had to face the difficult decision to cut the in-house provision of vulnerable adult transport for over 200 families across the city, amounting to a £500,000 cut in transport support for those with special

needs. That was alongside the £400,000 that the Government's cuts took from the provision of adult social care support to those with learning difficulties in the same year. I must add that prior to the cuts the transport service was rated excellent as a council service. It was not inefficient and there were no plans to cut it had the funding been available.

Commenting on the Government cuts at the time, our mayor, Ian Stewart, stated that

"this is not about efficiencies any more. These cuts will cause untold damage to the services we provide".

Even in this desperate funding crisis, the council worked hard to make the best of a terrible financial situation. In partnership with the individuals affected and their carers, appropriate alternative arrangements were made. Transport was not ended for anyone until suitable alternative arrangements had been agreed. The good news is that a number of parents were generally happy with the council's new arrangements, because they can individualise their journey times. That means that they are not spending significant amounts of time on transport, which previously resulted in some people arriving at the day centre in an agitated mood. The council is very much aware that the change is not universally popular, and it continues to work with any individuals who express concern. The fact remains, however, that it does not hold sufficient funding to provide an in-house passenger transport service as it was provided.

I have spoken at length to some of the families affected. I have heard their tales of despair and their worry about which other services that they rely on might be cut in future. I have listened to the mayor, our councillors and council officers, who have frankly lost faith in the Government's commitment to provide a welfare system, which should be there to look after the vulnerable. In the wider context, for the 2014-15 financial year, a total of £4 million had to be cut from community health and social care, £2.4 million from public health, £4.7 million from support services, £5.6 million from education, and £4 million from environment and community safety. These are not "efficiency savings"—they are cuts to front-line services.

Perhaps in 2010 there were areas where genuine savings could be made with minimal knock-on effects on front-line services, but by the time £97 million has been taken from the budget, there is nothing left to cut but vital front-line services. Even the Prime Minister's own council leader had to explain this principle to him following the now infamous letter in which he criticised his local council's cuts to front-line services. By 2016-17, Salford City Council will have to make budget cuts of £188 million in order to balance its budget; £83 million of that sum alone is the amount by which the Government grant has been cut. That is a cut of over 43%, but in real terms the figure is much higher.

This is not just an issue for Salford City Council. Every council has faced vast reductions in funding from central Government, and my local council is not alone in having to cut transport for those with special educational needs. Countless numbers of local authorities have reduced or completely ceased to provide transport for vulnerable adults. It is rather tenuous, therefore, for the Government to argue that all these councils have made the choice to cut such an important service when they could instead have made efficiency savings in their back offices. These councils have no such choice any more.

When my constituents visited me about this issue, my first reaction was to try to locate funding elsewhere. What about the northern powerhouse, I thought, all that money that is supposedly being unlocked in the north—surely Salford's vulnerable people deserve a piece of that? When I examined the detail I became even more disillusioned. We have often heard the Chancellor wax lyrical about his so-called devolution revolution, which he argues will enable areas such as Salford to raise and spend revenues locally, but he fails to acknowledge that councils in poorer areas have very limited revenue-raising capacities.

For instance, the policy to allow councils to set and retain their own business rates without the safeguard of a grant scheme has the potential to create severe inequalities among different areas of Britain. Indeed, the director of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research has said that while he agrees with the principle, it would be “inconceivable” not to keep a grant scheme. He stated: “does this have the potential to disadvantage deprived areas and advantaged rich ones?...Absolutely!”

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has expressed concern that such a move would create winners and losers, with poorer areas seeing a fall in revenue. Let us not forget that we are already seeing disparities between local authority cuts. Between 2010 and 2015, Salford saw cuts of £210 per head, while authorities such as Epsom and Ewell saw only a £15 per head decrease. With local government funding being cut in terms of the grant by 56% by the end of this Parliament, it is frankly terrifying for Members like me whose local councils will see even more significant reductions in their spending power.

The same issue arises with regard to the social care precept, which would allow councils to raise council tax by 2% in order to fund social care. The president of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services has warned:

“The Council Tax precept will raise least money in areas of greatest need which risks heightening inequality.”

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): My hon. Friend and parliamentary neighbour is making a great speech in support of our local council and about the difficulties it faces. On the social care precept, does she agree that a council such as ours, which has lost £15 million from its adult social care budget, will be able to raise, at most, only £1.5 million to £1.6 million? The gap is enormous. We no longer want to hear Ministers saying that they have put extra funding into social care, because, frankly, they have not.

Rebecca Long Bailey: My hon. Friend is right: councils in deprived areas will have the greatest social care needs, yet they will raise less than a third of what more affluent areas raise through this approach. I really fear that any revenue we raise across the city of Salford will barely touch the sides of the funding crisis in social care. Sadly, the Minister may be hoping to say that services such as in-house transport for vulnerable adults could be funded through a future increase in the social care precept, but that is not likely to be an option for Salford City Council. As I have outlined, councils in deprived areas have already been hit the hardest, and they will be hit worst again by the measures in the latest spending review.

The Government have had since 2010 to convince us that their argument for local government austerity is necessary. In that time, they have slashed the budgets

available to councils for vulnerable adult transport and other essential services, while at the same time handing out tax breaks for millionaires, slashing inheritance tax and, despite their rhetoric, doing very little to crack down on tax avoidance. In fact, only in December we heard that five of the largest banks in the UK paid no corporation tax at all in 2014, despite making billions of pounds in profits.

The Prime Minister gave the game away in an interview on Monday morning, when he said that “if you are a Conservative, you don't believe in a big state”.

I fear that that is what these cuts are all about: rolling back the state and going back to a time when the vulnerable relied on the philanthropic donations of wealthy people with a conscience.

The cuts that have been inflicted on my city are clearly a political choice, not an economic necessity. My and my hon. Friend's city is living in fear, with the sword of Damocles hanging over our heads, waiting for the next savage cut to drop.

I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments and I hope he will be able to reassure me that my fears are unfounded. I also hope that as a result of this debate he will ensure that there is a much-needed boost to local government funding, in order to provide essential services such as the one I have outlined. I hope he amazes me with what he is about to say.

5.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Life Sciences (George Freeman): I congratulate the hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey) on securing this debate and thank her for allowing me, on behalf of the Government, to put the record straight on some important issues relating to funding for care generally and for this group of vulnerable patients in particular. I will start by setting the scene of how our reforms have changed the way in which funding is provided, and I will then address some of the detailed local issues in Salford.

The way we look after some of our most vulnerable people is a benchmark of how civilised we are as a society. For that reason, the Government have tried, in a very difficult funding round, to make sure that funding for the most vulnerable is protected and ring-fenced. We understand that everybody in the country is tightening their belts to pay off the debts that previous generations and Governments have left us, but we have tried to be as careful as possible and to make sure that we protect the most vulnerable in our society who have no choice and are completely reliant on public services. That is why, through the Care Act 2014, we now have a reformed care system that is already leaving local authorities in a better position to meet the care needs of their people as they see best and to target resources at those who most need them.

Councils now have greater flexibility to arrange care, as well as to give greater choice and control to individuals. We have given councils freedom on how to use the money they receive and allowed them to work with their residents to decide how best to arrange their spending, based on local priorities and need. I am not pretending for a minute that local government has not faced real pressures on its finances over the past five years. However, when local authorities account for a quarter of the Government's entire public spending budget, it is only

[George Freeman]

right that local government must find its share of the savings that we all need to make to reduce the deficit we inherited from the Labour Government in 2010. It is a tribute to local government across the country, including Labour councils, that the vast majority of them have managed to deliver more with less. It was good to hear the hon. Lady acknowledge that there was fat in the system in 2010, and that councils could do a lot to deliver more for less. Many councils have indeed done so.

Angela Rayner: I want to reiterate that I welcome the fact that Tameside is a pilot area for the Government's proposed integrated care model. I mentioned the figures earlier, including the forecast £20 million deficit in Tameside general hospital's budget. Does the Minister not think that that will completely undermine the fantastic and innovative work such areas are trying to do to ensure that people who need care can get it in the right place and at the right time? These savage cuts undermine all the proposals for an integrated care model.

George Freeman: If the hon. Lady had asked her question in slightly more moderate terms, I might have been able to agree, but when she talks about "savage cuts" completely undermining any progress on integration, I cannot agree with her. That extreme language does not tally with the rather better numbers—I am not pretending that there are not challenges, because there are—but I will come to them in a minute.

Barbara Keeley: Will the Minister give way?

George Freeman: I will give way briefly, but I want to answer the questions that have already been asked.

Barbara Keeley: Like my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour the Member for Salford and Eccles (Rebecca Long Bailey), I want to talk about Salford. It was one of the last authorities in the country that managed to hold on to moderate eligibility for social care, but the cuts that my hon. Friend spoke about mean that we have had to move from moderate to substantial. There is not the funding in the system that the Minister is outlining.

George Freeman: I will come on to the numbers for Salford. I rang Salford this morning to get the very latest numbers, and they make quite interesting listening.

Let me just set the scene on the settlement. In the context of the tough public sector finances, we listened to local government and took steps to protect social care services. In the spending review, we reflected that by introducing a 2% social care precept to the council tax for authorities with social care responsibilities. It is ring-fenced: it has to be spent on social care. The precept could mean up to £2 billion of additional funding for social care by 2019-20, which would be enough to support more than 50,000 people in care homes or 200,000 people in their own homes. In addition, we have secured a further £1.5 billion by 2019-20 through extra funding for the better care fund, which brings that funding to a total of £5.3 billion. Those resources are secure, and they are in the hands of local authorities.

Let me turn to transport for disabled people in Salford. Rightly in my view, the provision of social care and the question of how to meet local need are very much matters for the local authority, as I think hon. Members

would agree. That is at the heart of this issue. I understand that Salford City Council has decided that the transport needs of people who require support to get to local day care and respite care services can best be met, in the patients' interests, by closing the in-house passenger transport unit and providing suitable alternatives for individuals.

I also understand from the local authority that a significant number of parents and carers have commented on how much better the arrangements are because they can individualise journey times. Instead of having to wait and then sit on the council bus to get to services, going on very long routes, the vast majority of users are getting a much more personal and bespoke service. It means that the users of the service do not spend significant amounts of time on transport, which used to result in some of them arriving at a day centre or home upset, agitated, delayed and frustrated.

The council has worked hard to resolve the concerns that have been expressed by care users and their families. Having spoken to the council this morning, I understand that all have now accepted the new arrangements. Indeed, the director of adult social services at Salford City Council has told me that he considers the change to be "a success both in terms of outcomes for individuals and in delivering a saving to the council budget."

Rebecca Long Bailey: The Minister is quite right in what he says. The ability of my local authority to do more with less has been extremely amazing, but the fact remains that the review of special needs transport would not have occurred to this extent had the funding not been taken away. I do not dispute that it is right to review the service and the needs of individuals on an ongoing basis, but it should not have been done in such a forthright and extreme way. That would not have occurred had the funding not been taken away.

George Freeman: I am not sure what the question was. It is interesting that the hon. Lady is saying that the review was the right thing to do and the service has improved, but the rationale for doing it was wrong. I beg to differ. If the rationale that we have to deliver more for less leads good councils, in this case Salford, to find a better way to deliver services that uses less money and provides a better service, that is good. It is exactly what we want councils across the country to do.

For far too long, local government has been hidebound by receiving far too much of its funding from central Government. For me, as a localist, it is anathema that the majority of local government spending comes from central Government. That is why we have begun the process of seriously rebalancing the funding settlement by providing more powers and freedoms locally to raise money that can be spent on locally agreed priorities. The social care precept and the retention of business rates locally are powerful things for which many of us have campaigned for years.

If Salford uses the full social care precept flexibility that we have just provided, it could raise £7.6 million in 2019-20. That will be on top of Salford's additional income from the better care fund of £10.5 million in 2019-20.

This is not about cuts. It is about a Labour council making prudent decisions that not only improve the way in which services for vulnerable people with disabilities

are delivered, but do so in the most cost-effective way. The council's prudence extends to its decision to nearly double its non-ring-fenced reserves from £29.7 million in 2010 to £56.5 million at the end of 2014-15. I will just say that again: the council doubled its reserves to £56.5 million over the course of the coalition Government.

Barbara Keeley: The Minister is being rather complacent in the way that he is responding to this debate. Salford City Council has announced this week that it is having to use its reserves for flood victims, when the Prime Minister will not even apply to the EU solidarity fund for funds. On the point that the Minister makes about social care, the Prime Minister heard this week from the Conservative leader of Essex County Council, who pleaded with him to bring the money forward. The Minister is talking about money for 2019-20. We have to get through the time until then. The money is back-loaded and it is not enough. The situation is risky and uncertain because the money will be provided so late. I should tell him that council leaders are very worried about 2017-18.

George Freeman: I will take the question as being, what do I think about that statement? The hon. Lady is right that the funding ramps up, but she is not right in saying that it does not come on stream until 2020. Indeed, I have looked at the figures for Salford. The money that will go to Salford from the better care fund will be £1.1 million in 2017-18, £6.1 million in 2018-19 and £10.5 million in 2019-20. Similarly, the precept will rise over the course of this Parliament, depending on Salford's decisions on raising it.

Salford's reserves have gone from being £29.7 million in 2010 to £56.5 million. Those reserves are public money that is there to be used prudently. In this period when we are all having to make sure that our children do not inherit ever more debts, I do not think the fact that Salford City Council is having to dip into its reserves to ensure that it is able to provide services—which, remember, are costing less but delivering better quality—is the savage crisis that the hon. Lady referred to.

Rebecca Long Bailey: I invite the Minister to visit the city of Salford. He will see the extent of the damage that this Government have done to local authority services. It is not just social care that is experiencing a large funding gap. Salford is experiencing a large-scale regeneration and is coming out of its post-industrial decline, but all that is at risk. He made the fantastic comment that we have increased our reserves, but there is much more that needs to be done in Salford.

George Freeman: I would happily welcome the chance to debate more widely the economic regeneration of Salford, which I hugely welcome. Since the floods have been mentioned, may I extend my sympathy, and that of the Government, to those who have been affected? However, this debate is on transport for vulnerable adults and when I spoke to Salford Council this morning, it told me that all those affected—I believe there are 200 families—are happy with the new service and believe that it is providing a better service for vulnerable adults in Salford.

The hon. Lady has cleverly used the debate to make wider points about the Government's approach to care, which is perfectly within her rights. I have tried to deal with them. She says that we are underfunding local government, but in the recent comprehensive spending review, local government made clear to central Government that it foresaw a shortage of £2.9 billion that it was worried would not be met. That is why we gave local government a funding settlement of £3.5 billion, to ensure that the shortage we were warned about was properly met. We went further and gave local government the right to raise up to what will equal £2 billion in 2020 to fund that care gap, and a four-year settlement so that it can plan ahead—one of the other key asks. We have put an extra £1.5 billion into the better care fund, which now totals £5.3 billion for the integration of health and care.

The plea may go up that that is not enough, but money does not grow on trees and we can only fund what we can from our strongly recovering economy. However, I do not believe that that fits the pattern of "savage cuts" described earlier. I merely repeat that if the picture that the hon. Lady painted about transport for vulnerable people in Salford were true, I would be very concerned. However, when I spoke to the Labour-run council, it told me that it believes it is delivering better services at a more efficient cost, and that all those in the families involved have settled and are happy with that. The council's reserves are up substantially on where the Labour Government left them, to the extent that over the next one or two years, while the extra money that we have put in comes on stream, it will have those reserves that it built up during the coalition Government. I simply do not recognise the picture of savage cuts and austerity that the hon. Lady presents.

Rebecca Long Bailey: I am quite concerned about the Minister's comments. I spoke to the council this week and received similar comments, including notification that large numbers of the families were happy with the new service—I outlined that in my speech. I also highlighted that the council was aware that some families are not happy with the amended service, and it continues to work with them to try to reach a sensible conclusion on the matter. That is why I have raised this issue in the Chamber today.

George Freeman: I am delighted that we close on a point of unanimity: we agree that Salford council is doing a good job and has managed well the issue of transport for vulnerable adults. I was merely dealing with the wider points that the hon. Lady sought to make about the Government's more general approach to care, to which it is my duty to respond. I welcome the work that Salford council is doing to look after its most vulnerable citizens, and I hugely support it in that. The Government's vision is to give councils more freedoms and funding to provide for local people in the way that they see fit; in that way, all councils can do what Salford has done and deliver more for less.

Question put and agreed to.

5.28 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 21 January 2016

[MR CHARLES WALKER *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

UK Steel Industry

1.30 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of the UK steel industry.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting this important debate. I also thank the Minister and all my colleagues for coming to support it—it is a fantastic turnout.

As we all know, this has been a big week for the British steel industry—but, unfortunately, for all the wrong reasons. Yesterday, jobs were lost at Sheffield Forgemasters, and the week began with Tata Steel's announcement of more than 1,000 job losses across the country. That was bad news for everybody, but it was particularly devastating for my constituency, where the Port Talbot steelworks are located. Some 750 people who woke up with a job at the Tata steelworks in Port Talbot on Monday morning no longer have a job. The steelworks are the beating heart of the economy and the community in Port Talbot, and the job losses will affect not just those being made redundant, or those in connected industries, but their families, their friends and the entire community.

What immediate action will the Government take to support those who have been made redundant? There will need to be training and support so that they can make the transition into other jobs, and the local community will need help to support those affected and their families, as well as those in connected businesses. If the Government do not act, my community will pay the price for generations to come.

However, this is not just about Monday's announcement. The Government must act to support the steel industry and to prevent further job losses, and they must do so now. There are a number of things that I, my colleagues inside and outside this Chamber and, most notably, the Community union and Tata Steel itself want to know. We want to know why the Government have done nothing. They have talked a big game, but their warm words have been matched by frozen actions.

First, we have called for changes in UK business rates, which are up to 10 times higher than those of many of our European competitors. Will the Minister commit to consulting the Welsh Government and other devolved bodies on cutting business rates for capital-intensive industries such as steel by removing plant and machinery from business rate calculations?

Secondly, the promised Government compensation for energy-intensive industries has still not materialised. In the light of Monday's announcement, will the Minister commit the Government to the more rapid implementation of measures on energy-intensive industries and to a deadline by which moneys will actually be available? We cannot have more of the cheque being lost in the post.

Thirdly, on procurement, we asked the Government to introduce guidelines that properly recognise social issues, local value for money and local content in projects with a major steel component. However, all that their November procurement policy note says is that steel requirements should be “openly advertised” to allow UK firms to compete. Will the Minister explain why they will not go further in using Government procurement to support the British steel industry?

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): Can my hon. Friend begin to understand what got into the Government's mind when they handed over the nuclear industry in perpetuity to the Chinese? Because of their infatuation with them, they are allowing them to prosper, while our industry crumbles. We have a policy of deindustrialisation, with our industry being colonised by the Chinese.

Stephen Kinnock: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's long and illustrious history in the steel industry. He was a steelworker himself, so he speaks with particular experience and expertise. I absolutely agree with his point about the nuclear industry. I would bring everybody's attention to the outrage of EDF telling a well-known British steel producer that it was not allowed to tender to make turbines that it is absolutely qualified to provide, thus denying it the opportunity of a multimillion-pound contract. The idea that this country's procurement policies are somehow changing is a myth, and that experience of EDF and that steelmaker is a case in point.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): While my hon. Friend is on the issue of procurement, will he say whether he is as dismayed as I am that the Ministry of Defence is commissioning steel hardware from Scandinavian plants? Does that not speak to a lack of joined-up thinking and a lack of Government focus on innovation, and on research and development, into new products needed by the MOD?

Stephen Kinnock: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. What is interesting about the MOD angle is that we are talking about national security. The steel industry plays a critical role as a foundation industry, whether we are talking about the homes we live in, the offices we work in, the knives and forks we use to eat our meals or the incredibly important contribution the industry makes to our armed forces across the world. This is, therefore, not just an issue of the economy or of pounds, shillings and pence. Our national security is at stake.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Is he aware of the contribution that steel makes to the submarine supply chain? That led the Community union to argue forcefully that the Labour party should continue to support it. Furthermore, Graham Honeyman, the managing director of Sheffield Forgemasters, is clear that the company cannot survive if it loses the order for the Successor submarine programme.

Stephen Kinnock: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. He will be aware that a debate is taking place in the Labour party, but I can assure him of which side of that debate I fall on. There are a number of reasons why I fall on that side of the debate, but saving our

[Stephen Kinnock]

manufacturing industry—up to 20,000 jobs rely on the nuclear programme to which he refers—is critical. I will certainly contribute forcefully to the debate in our party from that perspective.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. The estimated capital cost of Trident could be up to £165 billion. Is he seriously saying that if the UK Government redirected that amount of capital investment, we would be able to produce only 20,000 jobs?

Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair): Order. I am not allowing Members to get into a debate on Trident. Mr Kinnock, can you continue, please?

Stephen Kinnock: Thank you, Mr Walker. I defer to your better judgment, but I would be more than happy to continue that debate outside the Chamber.

In the light of what we are discussing, will the Minister explain why the Government will not go further in using Government procurement to support the British steel industry? It is one thing to put in place procurement guidelines, but driving the message home across Government, let alone the private sector as well, is another matter. Words are easy, but actions are far more difficult, and those actions require leadership. With Hinkley Point B, the Government have a real chance to show leadership by using procurement to support British industry. However, they seem to be squandering that opportunity, with no British steel due to be used on the project.

I would also like to ask the Government about the Swansea bay tidal lagoon. First, they need to get on and approve the project—each day of delay is costing months or years of progress on it. However, I also ask them to show some leadership and to commit to sourcing all the steel for the turbines, or as much of it as possible, from the United Kingdom steel industry. The tidal lagoon not only provides the entire Swansea bay area with job opportunities, which are desperately needed in the light of Monday's announcement, but supports local jobs at the Port Talbot Tata Steel plant.

British steel is among the highest-quality steel in the world, and we should make better use of it. British-based certifiers have among the most robust standard regimes, particularly on environmental and social impact, so it is unusual to say the least that the Government appear to favour BES 6001, rather than the far more robust BS 8902, as the standard for reinforcing steel. No Chinese steel meets the stringent quality and sourcing criteria of BS 8902, so its adoption as the Government standard would help to protect against Chinese steel dumping and support high-quality British steel.

The fourth area on which we have repeatedly called on the Government to act is the dumping of Chinese steel on the British market, which is the greatest challenge facing the British steel industry. The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills is no fan of the European Union, but he seems to be a fan of hiding behind it. The Secretary of State and the Minister know that far more can be done to support the steel industry without the Government's breaching state aid rules. The Government must work with Europe to deal with

the issue of Chinese steel dumping. Last year, China produced 441 million tonnes of steel more than it consumed, much of which was dumped in the UK.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an extremely strong speech. I congratulate him on securing this debate. Given that a number of us have been raising the issue of Chinese dumping and providing detailed statistics and examples for years, not just months, is he surprised that the Government have taken so long to take action?

Stephen Kinnock: I am surprised. I believe that the Secretary of State had to look up Brussels on a map to work out how to get there last year.

The critical point is that the European Union sets the rules of the game, and it is up to the member states to invoke those rules and deploy defensive trade instruments. I would like to share something with my hon. Friend. I read a very interesting interview from 2012, which was posted on Twitter by Laura Kuenssberg. She interviewed the then managing director of Tata Steel in Port Talbot—*[Interruption.]* I know my hon. Friend is well acquainted with it. I apologise for that connection; I assure him that it was completely coincidental. Guess what the managing director of Tata Steel asked for? He asked for action on anti-dumping, on high energy costs, on public procurement and on business rates. We have had four years of inaction, and here we are again. It is like a nightmare version of "Groundhog Day".

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): I commend my hon. Friend for securing this debate and for the way he is outlining the practical things that can be done. May I draw Members' attention to the House of Commons Library assessment of the state aid interventions by other European countries, which are within the rules? We are allowed to do that. Germany's bona fide support—it is not giving handouts—for its industry is twice the level of the UK's. Does my hon. Friend agree that we are not doing what we can for the steel industry?

Stephen Kinnock: I agree entirely. I feel that our Government are not acting as they should because they are driven by a dogmatic, laissez-faire ideology that has nothing to do with standing up for British steel, British industry and the British economy. That laissez-faire ideology will never enable us to act as we should.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): It is worse than standing still. Over the past few years, the British Government have led a blocking minority on further reform of trade defence mechanisms. They are still doing so, despite Ministers' denials in the Chamber. The Minister should explain to the House and the country why they are doing that.

Stephen Kinnock: An explanation would be very much in order. My hon. Friend makes a very interesting point about something I will come to shortly: market economy status for China. How is it possible for the Government to justify on the one hand saying, "We are standing up for British steel and British industry," and on the other being China's chief cheerleader in Europe and actively agitating for it to have market economy status? I look forward to the Minister's explanation of that entirely illogical and unjustifiable position.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): I want to reflect on the fact that Ministers are so terrified of the EU state aid rules, but seem to have breached EU public procurement rules by failing to tender for Hinkley Point C. Will my hon. Friend reflect on that discrepancy?

Stephen Kinnock: My understanding is that a very prominent and well-known producer of British steel has been informed by EDF that they are not allowed to tender on the basis of what appear to be spurious health and safety grounds. I encourage the Government immediately to carry out an independent evaluation of why that producer was not allowed to tender. Let us hear it from an independent evaluator, because at the moment it is somebody's word against somebody else's. It is the Government's responsibility to step in once again and stand up for British industry, rather than sell it off to foreign bidders.

The rise in the market share of Chinese rebar, which went from zero four years ago to 45% of the UK market now, can be explained only by Beijing's distortion of the market. Some 70% of Chinese steelmakers are state-owned, and the remaining 30% benefit from tax rebates that amount to a state subsidy. We are asking the Government not for special treatment for British steel, but for a level playing field and action to correct the market distortions. We are seeing not the forces of supply and demand working away, but a marketplace that has been hijacked by subsidised Chinese state steel that has been dumped in a previously perfectly well-functioning marketplace.

The Government should take action and show leadership, but they have been asleep at the wheel. Will the Minister explain what action the Government will take against Chinese dumping? Specifically, can she tell us whether the British Government support China's being granted market economy status? A yes or no answer will do fine.

Just over a week ago, the Foreign Secretary said on the Floor of the House that

"it is through the prism of steel"—[*Official Report*, 12 January 2016; Vol. 604, c. 694.]

that Chinese market economy status should be judged. On that basis, we should say a clear and resounding no to market economy status for China. Time and again, the Government have acted as China's chief cheerleaders in Europe—particularly on market economy status. They know that MES will cost British jobs and limit our ability to impose tariffs on dumped goods, but they are more interested in cosyng up to China and making Britain, in the Chancellor's words, "the western hub" for Chinese trading.

Andy McDonald: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way yet again; he is being very generous. Does he share my concerns about the prospects for HS2? We hear that the Chancellor has had active discussions with the Chinese about the steel that will be used in that project.

Stephen Kinnock: I have heard the Minister and many of her colleagues assure us on the Floor of the House that a large portion of the steel used in the HS2 project will be British. I can only go on the Minister's words. We shall see, as we have seen before, whether the Government's words and actions match up.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that, to ensure that UK steel is in a position to gain such contracts in the future, it is important that skills and new technologies are in place? There is a role for Government in that, too.

Stephen Kinnock: I agree entirely. There are two elements to this crisis. One is the short-term perfect storm that we are facing. The lack of Government support for building the industry's resilience is a major contributing factor to that. The other element is equally worrying in many ways: the complete absence of a long-term strategy—nothing on research and development and innovation, nothing on investment, nothing on building our skills base and nothing on the long-term sustainability of such a foundation industry. As long as that long-term strategy is missing, short-term action will simply be trading water and running to stand still. We are in desperate need of a Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills who is prepared to use the words "industrial strategy" and then to do something about it. The issue of market economy status for China is a chance for the Government to stand up for British jobs, for British industry and for Britain.

Finally, all those failures clearly come together into a single issue, to which my hon. Friend referred: the absence of a long-term industrial strategy for the steel industry, with a commitment to strategic investment in skills, infrastructure, energy, and R and D. Why have the Minister and her Department still not produced such a strategy—a strategy to save British steel, to save British jobs and to save communities such as mine? In the first half of 2015, the Minister almost never appeared in public without talking about her Government's "long-term economic plan". She now has the chance to show that that was not all hot air. Now is the time for the Government to produce a long-term plan for steel.

Back in October I said it was 10 to midnight for the British steel industry. I finish by asking the Minister what time she thinks it is now.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Charles Walker (in the Chair): Order. Many Members are standing to catch my eye. If all Members limit themselves to 10 minutes, everyone will get in.

1.51 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Walker. It is a privilege to speak in this debate—yet another one on steel in this House. I apologise that I will have to leave part way through the debate for a meeting elsewhere about steel in Scunthorpe. The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) is coming as well, so we give our apologies.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on securing the debate and on his good opening speech. As he said, the campaign for the steel industry has been going on for a long while—the challenges facing the industry are not new at all. We have known about them since I was elected in 2010. Even since the steel summit in October—to give credit to the Minister, she was largely responsible for taking the energy from both Government and Opposition Members and moving the summit forward—the situation has become much worse. At the end of the summit we

[*Nic Dakin*]

learned about the loss of jobs at Long Products, including in Scunthorpe. Since then we have had job losses in Rotherham and at Caparo Merchant Bar, and this week in south Wales and at Forgemasters in Sheffield. Things are getting significantly worse, not better, so the Government need to step up even more to the plate than they have done so far.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on securing this important and timely debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin) referred to the steel summit in October. Does he agree that there were five very specific asks on that day that the Government could have implemented on the next Monday morning? Instead, they set up working groups, which appear to be little more than talking shops. Concrete action has been extremely limited.

Nic Dakin: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of the pressures for the steel summit was the awful news of what happened in Redcar, which really focused minds.

To be fair to the Government, in many ways we have a good Minister. She puts her shoulder to the wheel and tries to move things forward. I am sure that the situation is as tough for her inside Government as it is for us outside, but one of the Opposition's jobs is to push even harder from outside—that is our responsibility.

Let us look at the five asks. Things have been delivered on energy costs, although the Government promised delivery of the mitigations three years ago, so it took them three years. That is not a track record of fast delivery; on the other hand, it is welcome that that delivery has taken place. There is still more to do. The funding from the energy mitigation is still not immediately getting to the people it needs to reach, so that one has still not been forced through completely, although it is welcome and the Government's movement on that should be recognised.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): Beyond the five industrial asks, which my hon. Friend is going into, another issue is the timeline for Long Products. Before Christmas, in autumn last year, the chief executive of Tata Europe, Karl-Ulrich Köhler, put a specific timeline on when Tata would say whether it would own, or not, every single Long Products site—that includes Dalzell, Clydebridge, TBM, Skinningrove, and Scunthorpe and all the sections within—and that was April this year. What does my hon. Friend think that the Minister feels about the pressing timeline, as well as the five industrial asks?

Nic Dakin: That timeline is pressing and the Government will be as alert to it as everyone else is in the Chamber or, most importantly, among our constituents. It is good to remind us of the timeline, because it is there and the clock is ticking.

The second industrial ask is about supporting local content in major construction projects. Again, the Government are to be congratulated on making progress. Much stronger guidance is now in place, which has the potential to make real changes. I stress “has the potential”—we need to see the guidance driven through, so there

is a job for Government to do: to force it through. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon said, this needs to be driven through Government and other contractor organisations, otherwise it will remain a nice bit of guidance sat on a shelf somewhere, which will be no good to anyone. Although we recognise that the Government have moved forward on that, they need to move further—the job is started, but not done. The energy costs job was started, but it took us three years to get it done, so we need to keep up the pressure and keep our shoulders to the wheel.

The next industrial ask is about business rates and finding a way of not penalising capital investment in energy-intensive—or any other—industries. The Government admit that they have kicked any review of business rates into the long grass, but the issue needs to be addressed urgently. Business rates in the UK are up to 10 times higher than in France or Germany, which is significantly anti-competitive.

Let me turn to the industrial ask about taking anti-dumping measures. As my hon. Friends have said, the Government have been slow to get behind the wheel and get good trade defence instruments in place. At the moment the concern in Europe is about the issue of a profit margin of 1.5%, because that is a dangerous line to pursue and would not be beneficial to steel producers in the UK or elsewhere in the EU. I hope the Minister will encourage the Secretary of State to phone Commissioner Malmström to make the UK's position clear about the need to support anti-dumping. Perhaps he has already called her, in which case it would be positive to hear what the Minister can report.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon has already said much about the threat to the UK if market economy status for China is not handled properly. The UK needs to put itself in a leadership role in Europe. The Minister often shows leadership in the House of Commons on many issues, and she and her colleagues need to show that sort of leadership in Europe to ensure that the UK steel industry has a decent future.

Finally, support for research and development and environmental improvements is a big area of need. We need the Government to look at ways in which investment can be made so that the UK steel industry produces the right quality and type of steel to win the contracts of the future. That needs investment in R and D and in future skills, and that needs to happen now. We cannot wait until those opportunities are there; we need to be in a position to take advantage of them.

I hope the Government are looking at ways to make grants available or at using contra-cyclical loans or other imaginative ways to allow such investment to take place. Unless that happens, there will not be a UK steel industry in the future. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon said in his summing up, we need a steel strategy that takes those industrial asks into account. We have ticks in boxes that show that that has started, but we now need to move that forward and get it finished. That needs more time and effort from all of us in the Chamber, including the Minister.

2 pm

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker. I was not planning to speak, for the reason given by my neighbour,

the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), but I could not deny the Chamber the opportunity to have some wise words put on the record—that may be a subjective statement, but I agree with it. Like him, I will have to pop out of the debate at 2.30 pm to go to a meeting organised by Baroness Redfern with Greybull Capital, which will hopefully take over the site at Scunthorpe. We may be back with some asks from them for the Minister before the end of the debate—who knows?

I agree with a lot of what the hon. Gentleman had to say in what was a sensible contribution, as is usual for his comments on this subject. I do not need to go into the history and value of the Scunthorpe steelworks to our area and the thousands of people who work in it, but it is vital to the economy of not only north Lincolnshire but the whole of the Humber.

I want to thank and pay tribute to the Minister, who has bitten the bullet and given us, the workers and others in the industry a lot of confidence that she is on our side in the fight to retain the steelworks at Scunthorpe. I thank her for what she has done on that. A lot of work has already been done. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have done a lot with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr Letwin), in his role in the Cabinet Office and he in turn has done a lot of work with Shareholder Executive and all the rest of it to try, with the necessary support from the Government, to facilitate the sale, which we hope will happen for Scunthorpe.

I agreed with some of the content of what the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnoek), who opened the debate, had to say, but not necessarily with some of the political points made. It is frustrating that the energy-intensive industries compensation scheme took so long to implement and get approval for through the European channels—the Minister and I will be on different sides of a debate on Europe in a few months' time, so I will not labour that point—but that cannot be laid at the Government's door. We welcome that support and the approval for it. I echo the comments that we want to see that paid as quickly as possible—we are all on the same page.

As for business rates, this is not as simple as some Opposition Members have tried to make out. As lawyers have told us repeatedly at the taskforce, a bespoke package for the steel industry will not be allowable under EU rules, and a review of a more general change to industry across the UK is complex and expensive, as we all know. It is therefore not as simple—as has sometimes been presented locally—as the local council writing off business rates. It cannot do that, because that is not legal under EU rules, so we should be honest about that. It is not the panacea that some have presented it as—“If only we had action on business rates, everything would be fine.” That is not the case.

I welcome the change in the procurement rules. I remind the House that this Government renewed the Network Rail contract, which was really important for Scunthorpe. I think we will all be in agreement in wanting to see as much of the High Speed 2 work as possible, along with other infrastructure projects, delivered out of Scunthorpe. To have the knowledge that that is in the pipeline will be really important in the decision that Greybull Capital makes with regard to Scunthorpe. I therefore agree with the comments made about that.

We also need to pay tribute to North Lincolnshire Council and Baroness Redfern, who have really engaged with the Government on every level. In particular, they have made some innovative proposals on how we can make better use of what is a very large site at Scunthorpe. I always remind the hon. Member for Scunthorpe that the site is so big that it is split across our constituencies. He has all the plant, but an awful lot of the site that is not utilised lies in my constituency and it could help secure its future, whether that is through looking at a use for renewable energy or at a business and enterprise zone. The council has been open to that and it has been impressive to hear how much other parties have welcomed its approach. The Minister and everyone involved in the ongoing discussions can be assured that whatever the council can do, it will do, to realise the asset in that site, which we hope will give some comfort to Greybull, the preferred bidder at the moment.

As for Chinese dumping, we have to remember—this is sometimes lost in some of the stuff that comes from the Labour party—that this is the first Government to have taken action on Chinese dumping. That is a change in approach and it has come under this Government, which is important.

Stephen Kinnoek: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Percy: I will not, because I have only got a few minutes and other people want to speak.

Yesterday, at the Canadian high commission I sat down with a group to discuss the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. The Canadians—one of their chief negotiators was there—see such agreements as a potential mechanism for creating a defensive bloc against the practices that have been going on, particularly in the economies of that region. That is a message for the Labour party. I do not know what its official policy is, because I know technically it does not have one any more—the shadow Cabinet certainly does not have one—but on TTIP and CETA it needs to get into the right place, because they are a way to build a defensive bloc. I urge Labour to embrace agreements such as CETA and TTIP.

Tom Blenkinsop *rose*—

Andrew Percy: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman because he has not given a speech.

Tom Blenkinsop: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. The Government's policy is to support China's market economy status, whether inside the European Union or outside. Of course, that comes after the recent negotiations in Paris, at which China promised to meet its own internal emissions trading scheme. The Government's position is to support market economy status before China implements any reduction in production or emissions, but I think we should use MES as a leverage tool before any agreement.

Andrew Percy: As I think the Minister said in the statement on Monday, the Government have not determined what our policy will be, and it is a matter that will have to be decided at a European level, anyway.

I agree with the comments that the hon. Member for Scunthorpe made about R and D. I do not need to repeat them, but I would have said something similar.

[Andrew Percy]

There has already been some political knockabout and, as the Minister reminded us on Monday, Labour's record on steel is not necessarily great either. The steel workforce was halved and, during Labour's period in government, we lost workforce and plant in Scunthorpe and thousands of steelworkers were sacked.

Trident is really important for the industry. That is a message to the Labour party—its more sensible Members will understand its importance. An important issue raised by the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) at the steel summit was our position on the future of fracking and whether it provides a market for the steel industry, as it has in the United States. I am somewhat in two minds about fracking, not least because there are eight potential sites in my constituency at the moment. We need to get a grip on that industry and make a decision on where we are policy-wise.

I will end by thanking the Minister. When she has come to Scunthorpe and met us, it has always been on a cross-party basis. I was disappointed to see the Leader of the Opposition appear at a meeting that we were not invited to. When the Minister has visited, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe has always been invited. Clearly, a political game is going on there. That is not what steelworkers need. We do not need people coming up and giving simple platitudes, saying, "The Government can just do more." Things are not that simple. The Government have committed to us to do everything they can. I am pleased to hear the Prime Minister talk about Scunthorpe being of strategic importance to the United Kingdom.

There will always be politics in this place, but visits such as the one made by the Leader of the Opposition, who turned up to the constituency and gave steelworkers a false impression of the simplicity of the issue, are not fair to anybody—especially not steelworkers. We have to remain on the same page on this issue. I welcome the work that the Government have done. There is more to be done, as I think the Minister understands, and we hope that everything will be done to support the sale to Greybull Capital.

2.11 pm

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore) (Lab): May I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) and other hon. Members for their contributions? The speech made by the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) in defence of the Government was very bold; it was also very wrong. I do not say that politically, however. Every word I say today is based on the importance of the steel industry for not only the United Kingdom and south Wales, but the constituents of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon and those in Neath, Bridgend and Ogmore. The industry is important for not simply those directly employed by it but, as my hon. Friend knows from his area, those who are indirectly employed by it in the supply chain, which is around 1,200 people in our area. It is also important for every café owner, pub owner, plumber, electrician and tradesman who relies on the steel pound.

Do not accuse me today of making political points for the sake of it. I will speak from the heart, and I will speak on behalf of constituents who are very worried at this moment in time. I want to put that on record.

The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole said that politics was being played, but I am not playing politics. I believe in the future of a viable, vibrant steel industry and the importance of that for the United Kingdom. I know he does as well, and while we may argue, we will do so on the basis that we firmly believe in the future of a steel industry.

The Minister has been credited in this debate and others as being doughty, feisty and a fighter with real capability. I agree, but I say to her quite directly that her important role in battling for the steel industry looks at the moment like an impotent one. I am sorry to say that, because there have been many good words spoken, and taskforces have been set up, belatedly.

The Government recognised late in the day that when they imposed carbon taxes three or four years ago—I say this as a strong environmentalist—they did not put in place the mitigation measures needed for energy-intensive industries. That should have been done at the same time for not only the steel industry, but ceramics, the paper industry and others. A thinking Chancellor would have worked that out and not waited three years. The approach has damaged the steel industry, and we need to put it right.

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend made an incredibly important point about environmental matters and carbon efficiency. Would it not be absolutely absurd for the UK's highly carbon-efficient steel industry—whether in my own constituency, Port Talbot or elsewhere—to see its jobs offshored to the less carbon-efficient China?

Huw Irranca-Davies: Indeed; my hon. Friend makes a wise point. I commend the Government for their high-level negotiations at COP21 in Paris—tremendous. The UK led the high-level coalition of ambition. The EU led as well, and yet we could end up in a situation in which we are not only offshoring jobs, but offshoring them to countries that do not have the same standards of energy efficiency that we have at Tata Steel in Port Talbot and throughout the UK. It is in the interests of the climate to keep those jobs here in this country.

Tom Blenkinsop: There is another interesting factor here because if we look at Tata's profits right up until the financial year 2007-08, nearly every slab coming off each site that Tata owned was being absorbed by the world market. China was consuming so much steel during the 12% to 13% growth period that the argument that China has been eroding British jobs over the past 20 or 30 years is false. This is a very recent phenomenon—it is in the past four years—and measures need to be taken now.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Indeed. I believe that if any Government Minister could batter down doors and argue for a fully engaged, fully proactive and serious strategy that looks at the steel industry five, 10 and 20 years hence, this Minister could do it. I sense she is trying to do her best, but I suspect she is having some arguments thrown back in her face by others.

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry) *indicated dissent.*

Huw Irranca-Davies: The Minister will shake her head and say, "No, of course we're all lined up on this," but the Government need to lay out the industrial

strategy for steel, and lay it out with urgency, setting the timescale in which a range of measures will be delivered. The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole was absolutely right that no one measure will do this. There should be a package of measures on the table right now, and that includes at a European Union level. I know, as a former Minister who used to go to Europe, how difficult it is to negotiate out there.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon and others outlined the issue of market economy status for China. In an open letter to the Minister, the general secretary of the steelworkers' union Community, Roy Rickhuss, wrote: "senior industry figures... have told me that if China does achieve Market Economy Status it will be a catastrophe for our industry and most likely the final nail in the coffin for UK steelmaking."

The Minister does not want to see that, and I do not want to see that. In that case, we need to get this absolutely right. I need to hear—all of our constituents need to hear—from the Minister the approach of the UK Government to that matter.

The reality of granting China MES status was outlined in a study by the Washington-based Economic Policy Institute that was published last September. It stated:

"an EU decision to unilaterally grant MES to China would put between 1.7 million and 3.5 million EU jobs at risk"

by curbing the ability to impose any interventions on those dumped goods. That is the scale of risk, so we have the situation that we are already dealing with, and then we have that.

I know that the Government have been accused of being a cheerleader for China. Let me put it in a different way. Unless we hear something different from the Minister today, it will seem to many people that the Government either are proactively encouraging the opening up of markets at all costs, without any regard for not only steel but other industries, or are simply failing to realise—for whatever reason, whether ideological or otherwise—the importance of the steel industry to this country and our communities.

Let me close on this point. The steel industry has to be more competitive, as we know. When I was a little toddler in shorts, my grandfather would take me to the Baldwins steelworks in Gowerton. It was the most outdated steelworks—crikey! I remember the smell and the smoke, and the danger and the excitement of it. Those works are long gone, but Tata Steel Port Talbot and the other plants throughout the UK should have a future. They need an actively engaged Government who say, "Not only do we believe in the industry, and not only do we have the words, but here are the five or six measures that the industry, unions and the steel group of MPs are calling for." Just do it, and we will throw our weight behind you.

2.19 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): May I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on securing the debate? The support and turnout from Opposition Members speaks volumes about its importance. My hon. Friend articulately and ably made the case for more Government intervention on steel. I welcome the opportunity to talk about the impact of this week's job losses, primarily on Llanwern steelworks, although I am mindful of the contribution made in my constituency by Tata's Orb works and Liberty Steel.

The Prime Minister made great play of the employment figures at yesterday's Prime Minister's questions. I know that Opposition Members and people outside the Chamber who were watching him and hearing his words would very much have been thinking of the steelworkers, their families and those directly affected by the announcements this week. They are waiting anxiously as they watch the industry in crisis.

There was a statement in the Welsh Assembly yesterday. Edwina Hart, the Welsh Government Minister with responsibility for business, said:

"Behind each of the job losses announced is an individual, and in many cases a family, whose life has been changed"

by this week's announcement. These jobs are predominantly outside London and the south-east, and they come with above-average salaries in areas of below-average income.

As my hon. Friends have said, steel is very much part of our heritage in Wales. Steelworkers, as we all know, take huge pride in the work that they do and what they produce. My hon. Friends in the Chamber know that all too well, not only because we represent steelworkers, but because many, like me, have family connections with the steel industry. I believe that the father of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) worked at Llanwern steelworks.

The job losses at Port Talbot that were announced this week affect Llanwern, too. The overall figures for job losses at Llanwern were not announced by Tata in this week's press release, but that forms part of Port Talbot Strip Products. The people affected include those who were seconded to Port Talbot from Llanwern last year when the hot strip mill was mothballed. Any solutions should recognise that the future of Llanwern is very much tied up with the future of Port Talbot. In addition to the 750 jobs that are being lost across the sites—the majority are in Port Talbot, but Llanwern is also affected—there are job losses to come in support services and management. Any action to support steelworkers, technical staff and support staff should be mindful of the impact on the Llanwern site.

I welcome yesterday's statement by the Welsh Government about what they can do to help. There is the taskforce, in which I hope the UK Government will play their part, action to help affected employees now, and a recognition that businesses in the supply chain will be hit, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore mentioned, along with local suppliers. The Welsh Government are looking at what can be done immediately and then at what they can do in the future on research and development, skills and training, business rates, for which they are responsible, and procurement, as was clearly set out in yesterday's statement. The Welsh Government can and will do what they can to help, but they can only do so much. As my hon. Friends have ably articulated, we need UK Ministers to make good on the actions that were laid out extremely clearly by the industry and the unions at the steel summit, and to do so quickly.

Energy costs were discussed earlier today. The recent action involving compensation has been acknowledged, but UK Steel says that nobody is going to receive significant benefit until April. That is too slow, given the years that have been spent waiting for delivery, during which costs have increased again and again.

I wholeheartedly back the call for the Government to support anti-dumping action at an EU level. The UK

[Jessica Morden]

should play a strong role in EU decisions over China and market economy status, and I fully support the comments that have been made so far on that.

Although there are new procurement guidelines, the Government must ensure that they are met, or we will let the benefit slip away to other nations. It is worth pointing out that Roy Rickhuss, the general secretary of the Community union, has said that the Welsh Government have a better track record on procurement than other Administrations in terms of prioritising community benefits. Perhaps UK Ministers could look at that and learn lessons from Wales.

From talking to Llanwern steelworkers this week, it is clear that their overall impression is that the Government have acted far too slowly. They have played their part with the unions in weathering the storm during difficult times to help to increase productivity in the business. My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon put it well: we are used to the Government parroting the line about a long-term economic plan, but we need to see action from the Government, not just words, and steel must be at the heart of that.

2.25 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): It is a huge pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker, and to follow some of the excellent speeches we have had this afternoon, not least the very passionate speech we heard from the hon. Member for Ogmored (Huw Irranca-Davies). If he succeeds in his ambition of gaining the seat in the Assembly for his constituency, he will be a great loss to this place, although I understand his aspirations to return home to the motherland once and for all.

We face two distinct choices as policy makers: first, do we just accept that the days of the domestic steel industry are over, that production in the UK cannot compete with cheaper production elsewhere, and that, in a global market, only the fittest will survive? Or secondly, do we stand firm in the belief that steel production is a vital strategic industry in Wales and in the UK, and that all options must be explored and taken to save the industry, much in the same way that the Treasury responded to the banking crisis in 2008?

Plaid Cymru and I are firmly of the second view, because it is difficult to comprehend the impact on the Welsh economy if steel production was to cease in our communities. Tata and its supply chain supports nearly 20,000 jobs in south Wales and, according to the Welsh economy research unit at Cardiff University, its operations are worth £3.2 billion annually to the Welsh economy.

The industry is undoubtedly facing a perfect storm of a glut of cheap imports from China, Turkey and Russia, as well as falling prices and rising energy costs. Reuters recently reported that Chinese imports of reinforcement bar steel have increased from zero to 250,000 tonnes a year since 2012—a quarter of the market, directly undermining Celsa in Cardiff which specialises in that product. I think the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) mentioned the figure of 45%, which is 20% more than the figure that I mentioned. That just shows the impact of dumping by Chinese steel producers.

We need action, as the hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) said, at all tiers of Government—at Welsh, UK and European levels—if we are serious about saving the industry. The Welsh Government are probably in the best place to move swiftly, and I welcome the establishment of the taskforce, although I hope it will be more about coming up with ideas as opposed to being seen to do something.

Employment costs are obviously one major cost for steel producers. Tata contributes £30 million in business rates across its three Welsh sites, with 40% being measured on plant and machinery. Business rates are devolved and a Welsh Government-funded business rate relief scheme based on plant and machinery is one obvious possibility, saving around £12 million. The choice is quite simply a 40% hit on business rates from Tata on a temporary basis or a 100% hit if its Welsh plants go.

Secondly, the Welsh Government should be considering a Welsh public stake in Tata's Welsh steel operations. I notice that a similar policy is Labour's UK answer to the difficulties of the industry, yet at a Welsh level, the First Minister has ruled that option out. I do not particularly want to make partisan political points today, but if Labour is not prepared to pursue that policy in Wales where it has the power to do so, why should anyone take their UK policy position seriously? Our position, which we have put forward this week in the Welsh media, has been supported by Gerry Holtham, a member of the Labour party and perhaps the closest to a rock-star economist that we have in Wales.

A public-private partnership to develop the planned power plant at Tata's Port Talbot site would be a huge vote of confidence in the plant, making it more sustainable. The planning process would need to be streamlined—perhaps the hon. Member for Aberavon will want to talk about that when he winds up, given the discussion we had privately a few days ago.

I notice that the UK Government are willing to loan £400 million to Greycapital, a private equity firm, to help it purchase Tata's Scunthorpe site. The UK Government should be looking at similar support for Tata in Port Talbot—or to the Welsh Government, or on a combined basis. That sort of intervention would constitute an environmental improvement and therefore, in my understanding, would be legal under state aid rules. If the UK Government do not pursue that idea, many in Wales will be left wondering why they are willing to support steel plants in England and not in Wales.

The Welsh Government must radically change their procurement policy to promote domestic steel—I disagree somewhat on that with the hon. Member for Newport East. They have by far the worst record of the Governments of the UK. Again, state aid rules should not be used as an excuse. Domestic producers are competing against heavily subsidised and state-owned Chinese steel. In other words, it is not a fair and open competitive market in the first place.

At UK Government level, we need a clear indication that Ministers are on the side of the industry. I note that only one Conservative Back Bencher is present, none from the Liberal Democrats, some from the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru, and many from the Labour party. If there were a groundswell of support for the industry from Government Back Benchers in a debate such as this, I can imagine what effect it would have on the Government's mindset.

Stephen Kinnoek: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the important issue of the power plant at Port Talbot, which has a green light for its planning. I understand that construction of the plant and its operation would save between £25 million and £30 million a year on energy bills for the Port Talbot plant, so it would be a huge saving and a great boost to the plant. Does he agree that it would be welcome if the UK Government and the Welsh Government came together in a dialogue, pooled resources and gave some support to Tata Steel, both financial and in kind, to facilitate construction of that plant?

Jonathan Edwards: I fully agree with the hon. Gentleman. That was the point I was endeavouring to make. A one-off capital cash injection could have tangible benefits and would be a huge vote of confidence in Tata at Port Talbot and the communities of south Wales.

I challenged the Prime Minister yesterday about the huge contradiction in cheerleading the case for China to have World Trade Organisation market economy status, which would make it impossible to impose tariffs on steel, while at the same time belatedly calling for unfair price tariffs against China. Many hon. Members have spoken about that so I will move on to my next point.

The UK Government have a defining choice. Do they put the interests of the City first and deliver their wish that London becomes a centre for trading in the Chinese currency, or do they protect manufacturing workers? I hope that, for once, they will put the communities I serve before the City of London.

Port Talbot, Trostre and most of the supply chain are in a tier 1 European Union assisted area. As I told the Minister during the debate on a statement last week, the UK Government should be looking at innovative operating aids to reduce employment costs, such as a national insurance contributions holiday. State aid is permissible under EU law if there is unfair competition or market failure, as is the case in this instance. We should be taking action now and pressuring the European Commission for a derogation. We cannot afford to wait years for a decision.

Similar to what the Welsh Government are doing, the UK Government should be looking at its procurement policies to ensure that domestic steel is used in large infrastructure projects. The hon. Member for Aberavon made a valid point about EDF.

The difficulties facing the industry are not, of course, confined to Wales. The UK Government should introduce a temporary reduction in business rates for steel in England. That would trigger consequential funding for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to help their industries within the devolved Government areas.

At European level, the Commission must wake up and smell the coffee. China is producing steel, selling it at below production cost and dumping it on the European market. It is a purely aggressive strategy aimed at decimating steel production in the EU. The Commission's job is to act. We can contrast that with the response of the US Government who, according to Bloomberg, are taking steps to impose a 265% tariff on Chinese steel. As I have said, it is the UK Government's job to press the Commission. If they refuse, my party's call for the Welsh

Government to have a direct role in EU decision-making processes to protect Welsh interests will become a battering ram.

The Commission's investigations into Chinese steel dumping are taking far too long and its recommendations have been pitiful. For reinforced bar steel products, it recommended a measly tariff of only 9%. It is estimated that an investigation into coiled steel, which is made at Port Talbot, will take a year. The US—I am not usually a cheerleader for the US Government—takes only 45 days to conclude such investigations.

While European bureaucrats dither, Welsh workers are losing their jobs and the pace of action is simply not good enough. To those who argue that a Brexit is the solution to my complaint, I respond by telling them to look at what happened to the coal industry—we would be leaving the steel industry in the hands of a Westminster Government.

In reality, the steel industry in Wales faces massive challenges. I am informed that Tata in Port Talbot does not produce specialised products and therefore faces the brunt of the exports from China and other economies. The transition to a more modernised production system creating specialised steel will not be easy. It will require significant capital investment, but if we are serious about securing a future for steel production in Wales and across the UK, we need a range of temporary interventions to create breathing space for the necessary investment to be delivered.

In conclusion, this has been a deeply troubling week for Wales and our economy. The ongoing problems have been highlighted for a long time, yet the Labour-run Administration in Cardiff seem to stand passively by and do precious little, apart from blaming the UK Government. The Tory Westminster Government seem more interested in helping their friends in the City than in helping the working communities that I represent.

2.35 pm

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Walker, for what seems the umpteenth time. My mother sends her regards again—private joke.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnoek) on securing this important debate. The situation in his constituency at Port Talbot is grave, with devastating consequences for the community he represents, the prosperity of his local economy and the entire Welsh economy. It is also another body blow for the UK steel industry, which has suffered punch after punch in recent months. Since August last year, the industry has seen 5,000 job losses. One in six of all jobs in British steel have been lost in less than six months and there have been major site closures. We have seen redundancies and reductions in capacity in Redcar, Scunthorpe and Lanarkshire, as well as further job losses this week at Port Talbot, Corby, Sheffield Forgemasters, and in my constituency at the Tata Steel pipe mill.

In response to the acute crisis facing the steel industry, in autumn 2015, the Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills conducted an inquiry into the Government's response. We published our report just before Christmas, saying that at the time of publication, and as a result of site closures and job losses, the steel industry was on the verge of terminal decline.

[Mr Iain Wright]

The announcements this week make a serious matter even worse and run the risk of pushing British steel over the edge and facing a truly existential threat in a matter of weeks or months.

The Committee found that although the Government identified the steel industry as being of vital importance—a point that the Minister established and reiterated during her evidence—they were not alert to the many warning systems being raised by the industry and issues that had been raised for years. We found a lack of action at EU level and a failure by UK Governments to push for a co-ordinated EU approach. Other countries have safeguarded their steel industries against the onslaught of cheap Chinese imports in recognition of the strategic importance of their domestic steel making capability. The UK has not done that, leaving this country and its steel industry particularly exposed.

Anna Turley: My hon. Friend is making some extremely important points about the role of the EU in this crisis. As the situation was unfolding in Redcar, the Government made great play of saying they could do nothing to intervene because of state aid rules. My hon. Friend will share my concern that we have had agreement from the European Commission that research and development, developing innovation, supporting training and, crucially, employment, and protecting and enhancing the environment are all grounds on which our Government could have intervened. The Government have done too little, too late for Redcar, but I hope that for other areas they will step up and use those opportunities to get through the state aid rules they hid behind in Redcar.

Mr Wright: My hon. Friend has been a fantastic champion of the steel industry generally, and particularly in fighting for SSI and for it to be retained. She will know that EU state aid rules are often a smokescreen for lack of political will. An excellent programme on BBC 1 this week, “Inside Out North East and Cumbria”, looked at the plant closures here and compared them with how the Italian Government could keep steel plants open. There is a lack of political will, because that could have been done. SSI could have been at least mothballed.

Anna Soubry: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Wright: I certainly will, because I was interviewed for the programme and I know the Minister was too.

Anna Soubry: Yes, I was. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Italian steel plant was not a blast furnace? The blast furnace had been mothballed.

Mr Wright: I will come to mothballing of blast furnaces, because that is another key finding by the BIS Committee. We found that job losses, plant closures and factors that have worsened since we published our report just before Christmas mean that the prospect of any future growth in the steel sector had been irrevocably damaged. We regretted that Ministers were unable to prioritise preserving existing capability and retaining skills in the steel sector in particular.

The Minister talks about a blast furnace. The blast furnace at Redcar was one of the most efficient in Europe. My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) talks about it as having been second only to Dunkirk, and he knows more about steel than anyone else I know. However, it has now been lost forever to the British manufacturing base. Why was it not considered for mothballing rather than cold closure? The cost of cleaning up the site is destined to be in the region of half a billion pounds, and that is likely to fall to the taxpayer. It is an absolute disgrace, and our manufacturing base has been forever undermined as a result.

Huw Irranca-Davies: What are my hon. Friend’s thoughts about the fact that there was a vote in the European Parliament last Tuesday, when a Labour motion was passed, thank goodness, to look at reviewing the effect on steel of European state aid rules, whereas last December when there was a similar motion—looking at the European state aid rules, but also at the dumping of Chinese steel—Conservative Members of the European Parliament voted it down? What is going on? Why are we catching up? What does it say about the Government that they say one thing here and another in Europe?

Mr Wright: That is an absolute disgrace. We should all, regardless of where we sit and to which party we belong, be identifying steel as a major and important foundation industry for the British manufacturing base and having a co-ordinated approach to ensure that we can safeguard and retain those assets and, crucially, those skills as much as possible. If we are moving towards the high-value-steel end, where we are producing steel, metals, and materials that are stronger, more flexible and lighter, we need the skills to be able to do that. The 2,000 people in Redcar are not coming back to the steel industry. The 750 people in Port Talbot will in all likelihood not come back to the steel industry. And the hundreds of jobs in the steel industry that have been lost in my constituency will not come back. That is to the detriment of the British manufacturing base and the future competitiveness of the UK steel industry.

Tom Blenkinsop: My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) has said that if I was ever on “Mastermind”, my specialist subject would of course be blast furnaces, given that I dealt with the mothballing of the Redcar blast furnace back in 2010. That was mainly down to the expertise of the area and people such as Dave Cox, who is a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Anna Turley). The real issue now—this sticks in the throat of most people—is the costs of having to maintain that site, which are about a quarter of a million pounds a week. Over the period of a year, that would have been approximately the same amount of money as it would have taken to pay for the three grades of coke that were sitting on a vessel just outside Teesport and which could have been brought in to save the Redcar coke ovens.

Mr Wright: Despite the fact that my hon. Friend says that his specialist subject would be blast furnaces, he is still a great colleague to go for a pint with. He makes a very important point, and I do worry about this. It is not just this Government but successive Governments who have placed short-term cost considerations over

long-term value for our economy and society. That is incredibly important. For an industry that has been deemed to be strategic by the Minister, who has been a champion of this sector, the process seems to be one of chaotic yet managed decline. Can the Minister outline how much further she thinks the British steel industry will slide and what, for a strategic industrial sector such as steel, the right level of employment, capability and production is, both now and in the future?

We on the Select Committee acknowledged that the Government had recently woken up to the crisis and begun to take action, but today, exactly a month after the publication of our report and over three months after the closure of SSI and the steel summit on 16 October, no concrete steps have been taken. I am not suggesting that a silver bullet—or a steel bullet—could be fired to withstand the massive global forces affecting world steel demand and production, but swift action on the five asks from the steel industry could have provided a buffer for British-based steelmaking plants. I therefore have specific questions for the Minister with regard to some of the five asks. Can she outline how much extra cash has been provided to steel firms since the steel summit, in the light of the decision made on energy-intensive industries compensation? If steel is a strategic industry, why can a special exemption not be given for steel manufacturers in relation to business rates to retain some capacity?

Anna Soubry: It's state aid rules. You know that.

Mr Wright: If the Minister will allow me to continue, why can investment in plant and machinery not be exempt for an uplift in valuation? On the issue of procurement, the Minister issued new guidelines in the immediate aftermath of the steel summit. Three months on, can she outline the value of the contracts that have been awarded to British-based steel firms as a result of those changes? Has work actually been put into steel plants as a result? What has the Minister done to talk to sectoral groups, such as the Aerospace Growth Partnership and the Automotive Council, to maximise the proportion of British steel used in successful industrial sectors such as aerospace and automobiles? I am very pleased to see a Sunderland MP, my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland Central (Julie Elliott), with us today. We on the Select Committee were told during our inquiry that Nissan in Sunderland—a great example of cost-efficient car production anywhere in Europe, if not the world—uses 75% British-sourced steel in the production of its Juke model. If Nissan can do that, why cannot others? What is the Minister doing to cajole others within supply chains?

Anna Soubry: Force them?

Mr Wright: No, talk to them in a strategic manner rather than force them.

When it comes to moving research and development into new technologies, renewables are a great way to secure a real, viable UK steel industry for the future, yet the Government seem hell-bent on ensuring that we cannot do anything. One example is carbon capture and storage. Real help could have been provided, certainly for steel on Teesside, yet that has not been provided. That is a shame. What can the Minister do to ensure real co-ordination for what is meant to be a strategic industry?

I want to finish on constituency matters. This week in Hartlepool, 62 job losses were confirmed at Tata's steel plant. That is on top of the 80 jobs lost at the end of October, when Caparo Industries' Hartlepool forging plant went into administration. Although Caparo, the national group, has been sold, the factory in my constituency remains closed. Unemployment in Hartlepool rose in December, and the jobless rate is two and a half times the national average. In Hartlepool, we simply cannot afford to lose these jobs and these skills from our strong manufacturing base.

I understand that the redundancies affecting Hartlepool are not on the same scale as those affecting Redcar and Port Talbot, but as I have just outlined to the House, the employment situation in Hartlepool is precarious. Given the real problem with the global price of oil going down to something like \$28 a barrel and given that the Tata Steel plant in Hartlepool is a provider, in the supply chain, to the oil and gas industry, we are going to see even more problems, so what is the Minister doing to be alert to these warning signs in order to retain capacity? I have previously written to her, asking whether the same level of support could be provided to Hartlepool workers affected by Caparo's closure as was the case with SSI. The Minister replied that that could not be granted, but I ask now, in the light of this week's redundancies affecting Hartlepool, whether that decision by the Minister can be looked at again.

Jonathan Edwards: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his speech. He has come up with some very interesting ideas and spoken with great passion. What would be his advice to his colleagues in the Welsh Government, who are deliberating on these issues now? If he was a Member of the Welsh Government—of course, a Labour Government—what things would he be directly calling for now?

Mr Wright: One thing that strikes me about these issues is this. As I said, these are global forces. The price of steel has halved. However, there seems to be a remarkable consensus from industry, unions, MPs and devolved Administrations about what could be provided as a buffer to help to safeguard the steel industry. The five asks from the industry are achievable and realistic and could be provided, but they have not been provided. It is a case of finding out from the Minister in her winding-up speech whether that will be the case.

The British steel industry is incredibly important as a foundation sector for much added value throughout our manufacturing base. If we lose the steel sector, we lose a large part of manufacturing. We cannot allow it to slide any further. We need to be acting. We needed to act years ago; we needed to act in the aftermath of SSI; and we certainly need to act now, in the light of further real trauma in the steel industry this week.

2.49 pm

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): I do not intend to take up too much time, because there are hon. Friends wishing to speak who have had job losses in their constituencies in the last week or so in the ongoing steel crisis. However, I do want to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) and to the Backbench Business Committee for allowing us to have the debate.

[Tom Blenkinsop]

I also praise my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) for his excellent speech, and the fantastic BIS Committee report on steel. That excellent piece of work illuminated many points that we needed to look at and raise. It is because the all-party parliamentary group for the steel and metal related industry is one of the most effective APPGs in Parliament, especially for using Parliament's time to raise issues in the steel industry over the past four or five years, that so many Members have spoken today on this important issue.

In the past week there have been redundancies in Port Talbot, Llanwern, Hartlepool, Trostre, Corby, Sheffield and South Yorkshire. As a former union officer for the trade union, Community, I know some of those sites well and some of the people individually. The redundancies come off the back of a situation relating to Tata long products and, of course, the well documented and tragic events in Redcar at SSI.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden), who raised a lot of issues about strip products. I will go into a few issues that my colleagues have gone into, but I want to check what industry is doing. I will be making critical comments about what the Government have and have not done but, as a trade unionist, I still wear my trade union hat and I still want to question what industry is doing. Employees trust employers to hang in there. I know that is very difficult for the industry at the moment. The five industrial asks are acute and critical, but I often ask myself what Tata—just one example—is doing regarding its relationship with this country.

I ask myself about Tata's integrated industrial strategy in relation to Port Talbot, Llanwern and its own automotive sector. Jaguar Land Rover, as well as the rest of the automotive sector, is growing, developing and doing well but, irrespective of the fact that both companies are owned by the same parent company, one does not necessarily procure from the other. The Government have to step in and, not necessarily force, but certainly induce and use clever mechanisms to try to encourage ways and means by which that relationship could be bettered for workers in the steel industry. I find it hard—I am sure that colleagues do too—to make the argument that a parent company is not procuring from its own site. It is for not just the Government, but the very industries that sit in our nation to justify their industrial actions and procurement policies.

I have spoken at the Sheffield rally, as have my colleagues. A year ago, I managed to get our Front-Bench team to lead the debate on the UK steel industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) spoke from the Front Bench in that landmark debate. I believe that the issue of steel had not been brought forward as an Opposition day debate for some time, so it was a significant indicator of how bad the situation was getting.

Stephen Kinnoch: On chronology, we hear very often from the Government that all the problems have existed for a long time and that many were building up on Labour's watch from 1997 to 2010. I accept that point, but there was no Chinese rebar in the British market in 2011. Today, 45% of rebar is Chinese. In the past four years we have seen a total absence of action. The Government

have been asleep at the wheel and the crisis has come to a head. It is important, for the record, that we recognise that the situation has come to a head over the past three to four years.

Tom Blenkinsop: Until 2008, which was a big year for the steel industry, profits were massive. Everything coming out of any plant was getting bought up. The demand in the world was so high because it was driven by Chinese growth. Any bit of steel—slab or whatever—was being absorbed by the Chinese market. Steel producers made very good profits, as did their workforce, who made very good bonuses. I remember negotiating terms and conditions, and pay and pensions for those workers at the time and they did very well.

The anticipation after that was that the lull in the market would pick up at some time but, if anything, it has remained the same. It has flatlined—never picked up. It is usually an indicator of world economic performance, and nothing has happened. In many ways, the best-laid plans always go awry. The real issue is the ability of Governments to react. For some time now, there has not been a proper reaction. There has just been an expectancy or a desire—a hope and a prayer—that the market would pick up again. If anything, it has been quite clear that the domestic policy in China has been to prop up its own industry while that market stays at such a low, with ever-increasing production and increasing emissions.

We must talk about the backdrop. The big factor, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool mentioned, is the “sheikhs versus shale” argument. There is a global, geopolitical war going on between oil and shale gas, as well as the onstream effects of renewables. They have forced down the price of oil, which has been a key factor for steel, whether that is in procuring contracts or gaining work, particularly at Hartlepool or Corby, where tubes are made.

There is a mismatch, in that the new markets developing for potential steel contracts and the R and D that could be invested in them differ very much from the steel sites that already exist. If we are looking at the new future for a tube site, it is more than likely going to be non-conventional onshore or offshore gas. The industry—we will be talking about this next week in a separate debate—requires a different type of tube, which is non-welded. There are no non-welded tube sites in Britain. At some governmental level, there has to be liaison with industry to find out what new industries are coming and to ask whether we are investing and helping those industries or potential suppliers to put in the new factories that will supply the product they require to develop that market.

This is the issue: steel or a steel strategy is one thing; what we really require is a real, integrated industrial strategy. That strategy should look across the piece and across regions to work out who needs to liaise with who to make whatever happen in the future. It should identify which industrial partners to bring on board and what they want to see, and ensure that investment is solid and sound and that we bring investors along with us to make those decisions work in our nation's favour. There just does not seem to be any of that.

In the Chancellor's autumn statement we heard that an announcement to the stock exchange had been made about the withdrawal of the last £1 billion to support

carbon capture and storage. That is integral to any future of shale or non-conventional gas. In a world in which oil has fallen below \$30 a barrel and the world market will retrench and retain fossil fuels for the current period, CCS should, in many ways—mainly because of the emissions targets that we are all now signed up to—precede renewables as the step for any nation to take to develop its power generation if, indeed, that country is going to buy in cheap fossil fuels while shale, oil and conventional gas all fight one another for customers. That is a massive opportunity for the steel sector to take hold of.

I have spoken so much about the steel sector, in relation to my local area and the whole UK. There is a positive story to be made for British steel, if we have an integrated industrial strategy. The Government could roll up their sleeves and actively engage with bodies, partners, business and finance to invest in the country. The right and adequate policy could be put down, with long-term futures secured, so that people know that their investments are sound and can deliver. However, in every single situation—for example, after the Paris climate change talks, when the world is looking at CCS as the future, and it is going to develop, the Government removed funding for it—we run away and concede the ground to competitors, which gives completely the wrong message to the industry we are talking about today.

Stephen Doughty: Signals.

Tom Blenkinsop: Exactly. We need to send market signals to potential investors to demonstrate that we have industries that link up with each other.

That brings me to defence. The future of sites such as Dalzell and Clydebridge in Scotland, which are linked to long products, is not certain. They produce the sonar-specific coated plate for the renewal of the four nuclear submarines, but they also produce the plate used for offshore renewable technology. That is where we have to shoot some sacred cows. There is no dichotomy between renewables—the green argument—and, say, the four nuclear submarines. Often the technologies are shared and cross over different markets.

We have to reassure steelworkers at those sites that we will be making the case for their industries and the products they make. However, their future is uncertain. Although the Government make a strong argument for the nuclear deterrent, I am not entirely sure where they are going to procure the plate from. What is the future for Dalzell and Clydebridge? Where is the sonar-specific plate going to come from if those sites are not bought and kept running? At the moment, Tata's plan is to mothball them both. The certainty that the Prime Minister gives at the Dispatch Box about national security certainly is not there, and he has big questions to answer on national defence because those two sites do not have a certain future.

[ANDREW ROSINDELL *in the Chair*]

On long products and the future of Skinningrove and Lackenby beam mill—TBM—in Redcar, we know that Greybull Capital is interested. We want those sites to have a successful future, and there is now a better prospect than under Klesch. However, I have not heard any certain clarification about long products per se. Most of what I read second hand is about the Scunthorpe site. The APPG has already pre-empted that in wanting

to talk to Greybull to hear its intentions for Longs, but I want clarity for the men and women who work across all the Longs sites.

3.3 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I pay tribute to the previous Chairman, Mr Walker, for his handling of today's proceedings. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) for securing this high-quality debate, during which important and passionate points have been made. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

The industry, as we have heard repeatedly, has gone through the most difficult and catastrophic times in recent years, but it is important to stop and reflect for a moment. Obviously, the ultimate tragedy for anyone in the steel industry is the loss or injury of a loved one, so I start by paying tribute to Peter O'Brien and Mark Sim, the two workers who were tragically killed at the Celsa plant in my constituency—it was a terrible day when I was informed of that. The plant is close to where I live in Splott. I have visited it many times, and it really is at the heart of the Cardiff South community. To hear of those deaths and the other injuries was a deep shock to everybody involved, and I pay tribute to those workers, their families and the entire Celsa workforce.

I will now reflect on the workforce in the steel industry as a whole. We have heard from many hon. Members about workers' sacrifices and effort. Whether by accepting wage restraint or changes to shift patterns, they have done their bit to ensure that the industry has a viable future while it is buffeted by global market forces. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) spoke passionately about the role that steel plays not only across the UK, but particularly in south Wales. There is a backbone of steel running through south Wales from Llanelli and Carmarthenshire through Swansea and Port Talbot, through Bridgend and Ogmore, through Cardiff bay and into Newport. That is reflected on the Opposition Benches today.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab) *rose*—

Stephen Doughty: It runs into Neath, too.

Christina Rees: Approximately 1,000 of my constituents work either at Tata in Port Talbot or at Trostre, and they are waiting to find out whether they will be affected, which would be devastating for them. Neath constituency is still reeling after what happened with coal.

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend sets out clearly how the situation affects her constituents. The impact on not only the directly employed workforce in all the plants and operations across south Wales and the UK, but all those working in the associated industries, cannot be overemphasised.

While we have the steel backbone that I described, we also have steel veins and arteries running out into many other industries—related manufacturing, training and expertise, and engineering. The loss of highly skilled jobs in the plants themselves has a knock-on effect on communities right across south Wales and the UK.

[Stephen Doughty]

I pay tribute to the trade unions and especially Community, which plays a constructive role not only in these debates, but in facilitating the relationship between us and workforces in the plants to enable us to understand what is happening on the floor of the melt shop, and in the rod and bar mill, so that we can see with our own eyes the efforts that the workforces are putting in.

I will not reiterate a lot of points that I have made in previous steel debates, whether from the Front or the Back Benches. Instead I shall emphasise several of the points that have been made and ask specific questions of the Minister. I will focus on constructive solutions. I praise the work of the current steel Minister, and the Secretary of State for Wales has been open about and engaged on this matter with me and other south Wales Members but, to be honest, a lot of this is far too little, far too late. When I was elected in November 2012, one of my first meetings was about the steel industry. The Celsa management and I went to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to meet senior officials and Ministers. We presented detailed and carefully constructed warnings about what was happening in the market in terms of Chinese dumping and energy costs. We presented thought-through solutions, and we wanted to work together co-operatively and in partnership to find solutions. Unfortunately, a lot of the warnings were ignored.

I think back to a particular meeting I had in November 2014 in the Wales Office with the Secretary of State for Wales and the then steel Minister, who is now the Minister for the Cabinet Office. To be fair, the Secretary of State made an effort—I genuinely think that he cares about the future of the industry in south Wales—but I am sorry to say that that was simply not matched by the former steel Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and officials in the Treasury and elsewhere. There has been a constant battle between those in government who genuinely accept that there is a problem and want to do something, including the current steel Minister, and others who either act with typical Whitehall caution, saying, “Oh, we can’t do this, Minister. We can’t do that, Minister,” or are actively not interested at all and are pursuing a *laissez-faire* ideology.

Stephen Kinnoch: The promises, and the lack of delivery on those promises, specifically on market economy status for China, have been a constant theme. China’s current non-market economy status will be up for review in December 2016. The first step in reaching a decision will be the European Commission making a recommendation. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is time for the British Commissioner, Lord Hill, to stand up for British interests in Brussels and to make it absolutely clear that the British Government will not support market economy status for China? Surely it is time for that promise to be made and, for once, not to be broken.

Stephen Doughty: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend, who is absolutely right. Such promises have been the hallmark of much of the relationship with Europe of this Government and the previous one. There has been a lack of engagement. We can argue about the reasons why, but things have not been followed through until far too late in the day. I know that the

Minister will talk about the actions she took, which were very welcome—I praised her for them publicly—but that was the first action after many similar requests in terms of our relationship with Europe.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon talked about market economy status, and my biggest concern is China. It is basic economics. The statistics show that Chinese steel exports have increased every year—they rose in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015. If we look specifically at statistics for the EU, we see an upward trend of Chinese exports since the start of 2011. In 2014, they increased by 53%. They peaked in quarter 4 of 2014 at 27.1 million tonnes, but in quarter 3 of 2015, a new record was set of 29.4 million tonnes, which was an increase of 17% in one quarter.

Tom Blenkinsop: To return to the point about MES, there is the issue of what our allies are doing and what China demands. China wants MES almost automatically, without debate. On the flip side, there was an OECD steel committee meeting before Christmas at which nations from around the world wanted to talk specifically to the Chinese delegation about the amount of dumped steel in their markets—this is not just a European Union phenomenon; it is a global one—and China did not attend. Those factors need to be raised by the British Government with the European Union. We should be looking seriously at MES, not just taking it for granted.

Stephen Doughty: I agree wholeheartedly. We have already heard about a letter from Roy Rickhuss, the general secretary of the union Community, to the Minister. The letter, which he made public, says clearly:

“As you will know, it is widely understood that the UK Government has taken a decision to support China’s bid to receive market economy status from Europe. This would be a complete disaster for our steel industry, as it would make it even harder for European producers to gain protection from unfairly traded Chinese imports.”

This is not just about what we have seen, as there are also issues involving the Chinese currency. Many experts agree that the recent devaluation suggests that there is an increased chance of further growth in Chinese steel exports and dumping into markets. We have discussed this in many debates, but there is also a problem that if China is exporting all that steel, and certain other countries and Administrations around the world are taking measures to prevent imports of that steel, the impact on the UK market will be even greater.

Jonathan Edwards: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the point about currency devaluation. We have been in huge market turmoil since the new year. It is likely that the Chinese Government will devalue the currency further. If that happens, the problem is likely to get even worse.

Stephen Doughty: Absolutely. I would certainly be interested to hear the views of the Minister and experts within the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills about what impact that might have, and whether it is likely to increase the pressure further.

Tom Blenkinsop: To what extent does my hon. Friend think that the deal allowing Chinese currency to be exchanged in the City of London is affecting the Government’s decision to support Chinese MES?

Stephen Doughty: I would certainly be interested to hear the Minister's response to that point. My hon. Friend rightly talked about an industrial strategy and having an overall strategic look at these industries and their interaction in the globalised economy that we face. There are tensions in government between the Treasury, BIS and the Department of Energy and Climate Change. The Minister may shake her head and wave her hands, but she knows that those tensions are there, and that there is not one voice on these matters in government. She works for a Secretary of State who, as we know, would not utter the words "industrial strategy".

Tom Blenkinsop: Does my hon. Friend believe that maybe, just maybe, we need Treasury Ministers to attend these debates? Despite all the confidence that we have in this Minister, we are now in a situation in which, if we are to talk adequately about UK steel, we need to hear Treasury Ministers justifying decisions and views on things such as MES.

Stephen Doughty: That is important, because a whole-Government approach is needed. We saw the disjunction between DECC and BIS about the package for energy-intensive industries and the measures that were taken. The approach needs to be co-ordinated. The Chancellor has been warned repeatedly, and I have letter after letter from Celsa to him and Treasury officials. We ensured that we always kept them informed, but there was very little engagement by the Treasury.

I would be grateful if the Minister would respond to a number of questions. Given the welcome steps that have been taken on compensation, exemptions and so on, after all the changes come through, will companies be paying more tax or less? What will be the net impact of the introduction of the compensations and exemptions? This has been a key concern for the industry when big figures are bandied around. What will be the net impact on their balance sheets?

Secondly, on procurement—other colleagues have asked this, but I would also like to know—since the Government announced their various procurement measures on a UK level, has any work been given to UK steel producers that would not otherwise have taken place or that had not already been contracted? That point is crucial. Celsa played a crucial role in supplying rebar—I think it supplied some 45% of it—to the construction industry for the Crossrail project. Unless the infrastructure pipeline goes through, and without a commitment from the UK Government that major infrastructure projects—whether in defence, construction or major energy—will support UK steel, we will have a serious problem.

Finally, as the Chair of the BIS Committee and others have mentioned, what does the Minister think is the acceptable bottoming out of the steel industry in the UK? Does she have a sense of where it ends, or is this, frankly, just a managed decline? People want to know and understand the situation. If we do not have clarity of vision from the Government, we unfortunately risk continuing to be buffeted. We will lurch from one crisis and set of job losses to another, as has happened over the past few months, which we warned would happen. Can we prevent any further loss of the expertise, skill and national security provided by our steel industry, let alone the productivity?

I made this point in an intervention, but I cannot emphasise it enough. As somebody who believes in tackling global climate change, operating sustainably and having responsible industry, I find it absurd that we would offshore from this country steel jobs and production involving the most carbon-efficient methods, because that will result in more global carbon production and an increased chance of climate change, less security of steel supply in our own country, and less quality and safety of supply. Those are serious points that we must be aware of, which is why a strategic approach is required across Departments, with people all singing from the same hymn sheet.

I am proud of what the Welsh Government are doing to respond to the immediate crisis in Wales. I am proud of what the Economy Minister said this week and I am proud of what Carwyn Jones has been doing to respond, but a fundamental change in approach on working together is needed from the UK Government, because otherwise I do not know where we are heading.

3.17 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): We have had an amazing debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) for securing it, and for the leadership he has shown to Members from south Wales who are deeply concerned about what is happening.

The Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills has produced one of the best reports on the future of the UK steel industry and the Government's response to the crisis that we could have asked for. It sets out everything clearly and succinctly. What I do not understand is why the Government are not grabbing it with both hands and running with it, saying, "Here's the template. We know what to do; let's get on with it."

We have also had wonderful support from the UK steel industry in its briefings. Dear God—if any of us needed a clear example of what is happening in the world of steel, the briefings have laid it out succinctly. The charts are brilliant and demonstrate the decline that has been coming over the years, growing and growing and being ignored, and the crisis that is now upon us.

Perhaps one night I too will be able to go for a pint with my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) and find out the totally fascinating character that I am told he is—a raconteur on the issue of blast furnaces. I look forward to that drink and conversation.

My constituency of Bridgend is right next door to Aberavon. One of my communities, which used to be a large council estate, in North Cornelly, was built to house workers for the newly established steelworks of Port Talbot, when it was expanding. I live in Porthcawl, and the town is full of people who used to work in the steel industry and who chose to retire there having worked in that industry. I was in a meeting on Friday with the First Minister, talking about how we would be dealing with the crisis—that is what it is. I hope the Minister takes on board what a crisis it is for ordinary families across south Wales.

Among the people who came to see me was a lady called Jen Smith. She has emailed me and talked to me about the issue, and about her fears. Her son works at the steel company. He has just bought his first house. She is worried about what will happen to his family and home if he loses his job. The family had plans to work

[Mrs Madeleine Moon]

on the house and develop it. They had a plan for perhaps a new kitchen or bathroom, and for decoration. All the small companies that my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) mentioned will lose that work; so it is not just the steel industry—everyone else in the south Wales business community will be devastated by the job losses. There is an impact on people's sense of security and worth. Their trust that work will be there for them in future has been undermined. That is the huge worry that we are here to talk about: not just the steelworks but the confidence of people in Britain that manufacturing jobs are safe jobs. That is a huge and frightening problem.

The excellent report from the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, which I cannot commend enough, talks about steel being supplied to

“multiple strategic manufacturing and construction supply chains”.

I spend a lot of my time talking about defence and security issues, and in that context we often talk about the importance of sovereign capability: the things that Britain needs to maintain, to be safe and secure—things that we cannot let go. I have to ask Members whether they can imagine Britain in 1913 and 1914 saying, “We can let the steel industry go. We can allow our capability to manufacture our own defence capability slip.” No, they cannot imagine that.

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly important point about national security capability. Celsa in my constituency produces rebar, which is used in reinforcing steel, and that is often used to reinforce important buildings. I know that Celsa tests it rigidly, and knows exactly what goes into it. There is regular testing—I have seen the steel being tested. How will we have those assurances if we import stuff from China, where there are not the same safeguards, particularly in relation to defence and security projects?

Mrs Moon: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, who has done valuable work fighting for his constituents, to make sure our cherished and valued capabilities stay within our national infrastructure. I cannot imagine how we would have fought the second world war if we had not had our steel industry and been able to manufacture the steel that kept our fleets and troops going, and our tanks rolling across the countryside.

We must stop thinking of the issue in terms of China and its need to dump its excess supply of steel on the European market. I understand what China is doing. It faces its own economic crisis and needs to keep its workforce going, because it does not want instability.

Stephen Kinnock: We understand, of course, that the Chinese economy needs to grow, and China has every right to do that, but does my hon. Friend agree that potentially there is an agenda about dumping? That agenda is to dump the steel, drag the price down, kill the British steel industry and, as soon as that has happened, move in and put the prices up: profits go back up and we are nowhere to be found.

Mrs Moon: My hon. Friend has stolen my best line. That is exactly where I was going in my speech. The dumping is helping China in the short term to keep a

workforce going, but let us be honest: it has a long-term agenda of destabilising not only the British but the European steel industry. We are our own worst enemies, because we are allowing that to happen. It is time we were realistic and said no. There are opportunities that we can take, and there is a simple one: we can say no to the Chinese market economy status. We can say that; we can do that; we can fight for that. I do not understand why we are not doing it.

Huw Irranca-Davies: I referred in my speech to the Washington-based Economic Policy Institute, which looked at the scale on which jobs would be lost if we gave pure unilateral market economy status to the Chinese. The work also showed that the impact could be as much as 1% or 2% of GDP across the European Union. If that is not cause for Ministers to go out and argue and play hardball, what is? It is a question of jobs and economic growth—all of that. There is a time when we must stand up. If we agree that the issue is strategically important, we fight for it tooth and nail.

Mrs Moon: What is inspiring today is the fact that we are all here doing that—fighting tooth and nail. I know the Minister. We have worked together on defence matters and have a history of sparring across the Chamber, but we also have a history of working together constructively. I hope we are able to carry that on, because there is an unfairness of status in this situation. China can ignore climate change in a way we cannot. It is not bound by the high cost of energy, because it subsidises its companies in the use of energy. It has quadrupled its output of steel since 2000, so its plan has been quite a long-term one. We must deal with the market distortion and think about how we protect our own industries.

The wonderful Business, Innovation and Skills Committee report points out that over the past four decades production in the UK has fallen behind production in France, Spain, Italy and Germany, and that, in those countries, support within the European rules has protected their critical steelmaking skills and industries, helping them to withstand some of the global competition much more efficiently and effectively than we have in the UK. It is important that we look at the five asks. Those are not the Labour party's five asks. They are the steel industry's five asks. The issue is not a party political one. The steel industry says, “Give us these, and we have the opportunity to move forward.”

On business rates I want to raise one issue. I was deeply concerned about this at the statement on Monday. My hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith) and I both raised the issue of assistance in terms of business rates. The Minister replied, saying, in relation to the Welsh Assembly: “They wanted that”—business rates—

“as part of their devolution settlement, of course. There is a good argument that if one gets what one asks for, one has to take the consequences.”—[*Official Report*, 18 January 2016; Vol. 604, c. 1144.]

Well, the Welsh Assembly cannot make the changes to business rates that will bring the exemption for plant, equipment and machinery, which is what we are asking for, and therefore we need the Minister to address that issue and take it forward constructively.

Anna Soubry: Can the hon. Lady tell us why the Welsh Assembly cannot do it?

Mrs Moon: Because the legislation is primary legislation that will come out of the Westminster Government.

I do not want to take up additional time, Mr Rosindell, but if we can meet the five asks, we can save an industry that we all know we need, not only for this country's economic future and economic stability but for its strategic defence and security.

3.30 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Rosindell, for calling me to speak, and I also thank Mr Walker, our previous Chair.

I could stand here and individually thank all the Members who have contributed so much to this debate, but I will refrain from doing that. I will just thank them collectively, and then thank one or two of them especially. First, I thank the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) for securing the debate with the backing of fellow colleagues on the all-party group on steel and metal related industries.

Ravenscraig, which is in my constituency of Motherwell and Wishaw, was once the beating heart of the European steel industry and on closure much of the plant was sold to China. The Ravenscraig site is still mostly a barren wasteland, which is an issue we continue to deal with on a daily basis. All that remains of our steelworks is the Dalzell plant, which is only minutes from my office, and the Clydebridge works, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier).

As well as providing jobs to the communities across Lanarkshire directly and indirectly for generations, our steelworks are a source of pride. Some of the finest steel in the world was produced in Motherwell and it was still being produced until recently. For people in Lanarkshire, our steelworks are iconic and represent the decades of industry that are the foundations of our community. Our legacy is now in danger and so, too, is the legacy of towns in both England and Wales that also have a proud industrial past.

The reaction of the UK Government to the crisis that we face will determine whether or not steel will merely be a memory in our towns and villages or an industry that can remain for generations to come. The Scottish Government have some of this responsibility as well. However, I believe that both Governments starkly contrast with one another in their reaction to the steel crisis.

The Scottish Government reacted within four days of the announcement of the closure of Dalzell and Clydebridge. They set up a steel taskforce, which I am a member of, to find a buyer for the plants, emphasising our commitment not only to strengthening and building our steel industry but to the wider manufacturing sector. Working with the community, Unite, GMB, Tata Steel, Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Enterprise, Transport Scotland, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, the UK Government, North and South Lanarkshire Councils, the Scottish Trades Union Congress and others, the Scottish Government have vowed to leave no stone unturned in finding a new owner for our steelworks. They have invested £195,000 in a support package to retain and upskill key staff, to ensure that plants can reopen quickly as and when production resumes. Working with Skills Development Scotland, those workers will

also be upskilled. The training will provide them with a mix of skills in varying fields, including management and new processes.

For workers who have unfortunately worked their last shift at Dalzell and Clydebridge, the Scottish Government have created a project to get ex-steelworkers back into work through the Partnership Action for Continuing Employment scheme. The Scottish Government have agreed with the business rates assessor to ensure that the state of the business will be taken into account in the 2017 revaluation. The Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board is open to agreeing and pre-agreeing the 2017 valuation with any new operator, to save the plants hundreds of thousands of pounds.

The Scottish Government have also looked at the efforts of other steelworks to reduce energy costs by using renewable energy and investing in energy-efficient furnaces. Scottish Enterprise has been invaluable in that process. It has been working with Tata since before the plants' closure in an effort to bring down energy costs.

Holyrood has almost exhausted the powers available to it to aid our steel industry. Already, two potential buyers have expressed an interest in our Lanarkshire plants, which is surely testament to the hard work of the Scottish Government's steel taskforce. We recognise that it is essential that our domestic economy is diverse, so that it can provide employment to those with differing skill sets and aspirations, and not just to those with the skills for the service sector.

Steel in particular is an essential, strategic resource required for a range of purposes, and I thank the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) for referring to both Scottish plants and the contribution they make in that regard. However, the importance of steel in realising those interests is continuously ignored by the UK Government. Time and time again, they fail to take the urgent action that is required, putting further steelworks at risk, as per Port Talbot, Redcar and other plants that are extremely vulnerable and that have suffered great losses.

The Scottish Government have made tremendous efforts to find a new owner for the Dalzell and Clydebridge works, but the powers to resolve the underlying problems facing our steel industry do not lie in Edinburgh; they lie here in London. For years, trade unions and the steel sector have warned both this Government and the previous one about the fragility of the steel sector and the challenges affecting it, but those warnings fell on deaf ears. The dumping of inferior Chinese steel on the markets and extortionate energy prices have crippled the steel industry.

Even now, the British Government merely respond with too little, too late, to aid our steelworkers. They have finally gained EU approval for rebates under the energy-intensive industries compensation scheme, but where is the cash? I remind the House that there was no such delay in intervening to save the lavish lifestyles of London bankers. There is no urgency to save the livelihoods of steelworkers in Lanarkshire and across the rest of the UK.

Last year, the Prime Minister welcomed the Chinese President to the UK to seek ever-closer ties and to discuss trade as our steelworks went into meltdown. He gave only the promise that he would raise the issue of Chinese steel being dumped in Europe and gave

[*Marion Fellows*]

no indication as to how strongly he would defend our steelworks. We should not seek to open our markets further to China or allow China to gain market economy status, as alluded to—

Anna Soubry: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Marion Fellows: No. I would like to continue at the moment.

As I was saying, we should not allow China to gain market economy status, as alluded to by the hon. Member for Aberavon. To do so would make it near-impossible for our workers to compete, pitting worker against worker in an impossible race to the bottom. Have the Government sought to address that imbalance by strangling our trade unions and attempting to repeal the Human Rights Act, all in the hope that we may finally be able to compete with the Chinese, who have an atrocious record on workers' rights? The Tories have embarked on an ideological crusade to roll back the state and to deregulate our economy, allowing big business and executives to decide what is important to the country and what is not.

Tom Blenkinsop: As part of the future for Dalzell and Clydebridge, does the hon. Lady see the integrated nature of Scunthorpe, Dalzell and Clydebridge being maintained in order that we retain virgin steel creation within the United Kingdom?

Marion Fellows: I think there is an issue about whether Dalzell and Clydebridge will be maintained by one of the buyers as part of the deal to buy long products. That will be important, but the real issue that the plants face is rising costs, and that is what the Scottish Government have been trying hard to cover.

Tom Blenkinsop: I made that point because the integrated nature of long products sustains each mill. In effect, we have one site spread over a geographical distance, and in many ways that reflects the United Kingdom. That is why I am asking the hon. Lady whether she thinks it important for us to keep that blast furnace link from Scunthorpe to Dalzell and Clydebridge, through which we can help sustain virgin steelmaking in blast furnaces in the United Kingdom.

Marion Fellows: To answer the hon. Gentleman, I have doubts about and issues with what he says. I want production to continue, but I want Dalzell and Clydebridge to be able to continue in any case. It may be that the best route for them is another road if someone does not want to buy the whole long products division.

The laissez-faire approach is endangering our steelworks and our manufacturing base. I hope the Prime Minister, in his future negotiations on the UK's position within the EU, seeks radical reform to state aid rules and the ability for states to favour domestic products in the tendering process. As the hon. Member for Aberavon said, the Secretary of State needs a map to find Europe while Scottish Ministers are battering on the door to represent UK fishing rights, for example, where they have real expertise and experience. I do not believe the UK Government are constrained from developing and bolstering a strong steel sector. I believe that what

constrains them from saving our steel is their priorities, which are mainly raising their military profile, cutting public services and cutting tax for the richest while the poor are hammered.

The Prime Minister was willing to grant an audience with the Chinese President and Lincolnshire MPs, but when he was asked to meet Lanarkshire MPs, he gave no such courtesy. I very much enjoyed meeting the Minister in his stead, and thank her for her time. The Government show contempt for steelworkers in Scotland. In an address to the House, the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills failed even to mention the Scottish plants. More recently, the Minister referred to the UK's steel industry as consisting basically of Scunthorpe, Port Talbot and "other bits and bobs". Those "other bits and bobs" are a source of pride and livelihood for communities across the UK, from Motherwell to Redcar to Port Talbot.

I hope for the sake of my constituency that a new owner is found for our steelworks. The Scottish Government have gone to unprecedented lengths to secure a future for Scottish steel. I give my sympathies to people elsewhere facing a similar uncertain future. The UK Government should note that people in Scotland are watching this Parliament. The UK Government saw no issue or hindrance in bailing out bankers, but they see only roadblocks to intervening and saving our steelworks. They are allowing a core industry of my community and this country to crumble. I hold in my hand a copy of the strategic framework for supporting the steel sector in Scotland. The UK Government should have an equivalent. Do they? I don't think so.

Anna Soubry: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair): Order. Has the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw finished?

Marion Fellows: Yes, I have. Thank you.

Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair): The hon. Lady did not give way. I call Kevin Barron.

3.43 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Thank you very much, Mr Rosindell. It is not the first time I have been called Kevin Barron, even though that is not my name. On one occasion I was briefly knighted by the *Daily Mail* online, much to my surprise. I am not Sir Kevin Barron; I am much more shovelry than chivalry.

Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair): Order. I apologise.

Kevin Brennan: We are very grateful, despite that slight slip on your part, Mr Rosindell—it was very uncharacteristic—that you are chairing our proceedings today. You are very welcome in this Welsh-majority debate. I know that you were left off the list of English MPs the other night when we had the first vote under the execrable new English votes for English laws arrangements in the House of Commons. I hope you feel you are receiving a warm welcome from your Welsh colleagues, who would like to be on an equal basis with you as MPs. Perhaps we can change that ridiculous rule in the future.

Let us get to the debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), who made an excellent start in kicking off the debate. He speaks from great knowledge, given the location of the Port Talbot steelworks in his constituency. He described the Government's approach to this issue as "warm words" and "frozen actions". He made a powerful case, I thought, on the Government's failure to act on dumping and on market economy status for China. He challenged the Minister to say how close we were to midnight in terms of the future of the steel industry, and we would very much like to hear her response.

We also had a contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), who pointed out that the situation facing the industry has got much worse since the steel summit on 16 October. He listed all the jobs lost in the steel industry since then. He speaks with tremendous expertise on the industry, and he should be listened to.

We had a contribution from the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy). In making a political speech, he seemed to be criticising politics being carried out in the House of Commons. When he expressed shock, or feigned shock, about politics occurring in this place, he reminded me a bit of Captain Renault in "Casablanca" complaining about gambling at Rick's establishment. The hon. Gentleman, however, has a close constituency interest in the subject and, when we are not jousting across the Chamber, he works closely and across parties with colleagues in the interests of his local steelworks.

The next speech was a passionate one by my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies). He will be a great loss to this place when, we hope, he becomes the Assembly Member for Ogmore in the near future. He spoke well about why the Government had not introduced the necessary mitigating measures at the same time as the carbon tax. They should have been introduced at the same time, and he outlined the scale of the consequences if market economy status is awarded to China without any attempt to leverage from the Chinese an end to the dumping of steel in European markets.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) sent a note to me, as she did to you, Mr Rosindell, saying that she could not stay for the whole debate. She is the Member of Parliament for the Llanwern steelworks and she, too, spoke passionately. She mentioned the work of the Community trade union and Roy Rickhuss, whom I first worked with many years ago on the Allied Steel and Wire pension problems when I first became a constituency MP. She also mentioned the work being undertaken by the Welsh Government.

The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) made an important point about the small 9% tariff that the European Union appears to be planning in relation to rebar. That is too little and too late. I saw the Minister nodding when the hon. Gentleman made that criticism, so I hope she will tell us what the Government are doing to persuade the Commission that it has not done enough on those short-term measures. At the same time it would be nice to hear about what is really going on with the long-term reform of trade defence mechanisms and what the UK Government's game is in that. The Minister shakes her head from time to time, but the Government have been

involved in organising a blocking minority in the European Union on the long-term reform of trade defence mechanisms. If we are to have a future for our steel industry, that reform will be vital.

We also heard from the excellent Chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright), whose excellent report is available at £10 from good bookshops and Her Majesty's Stationery Office. *[Interruption.]* I am sure he will tell us it is also free online. He spoke with tremendous knowledge, expertise and passion about the failure of the UK Government to push for a co-ordinated European Union approach, and about the failure to retain blast furnace capacity at Redcar, which has been lost, as he pointed out, because of the lack of effort by the Government. *[Interruption.]* From a sedentary position, the Minister suggests that she is considering nationalising the steel industry to achieve these aims.

Nationalisation is not necessary. This is not a choice between inaction and a laissez-faire approach to the steel industry and the full-scale command economy ownership of all of the means of production in the steel industry. It is about an active industrial policy and Ministers using all the levers at their disposal, including their influence and every Government Department, including the Treasury, and using their imaginations in working with industry to bring about the saving of the capacity of this country to produce steel. That is what is at the heart of this debate. There is a question that the Minister will have to answer at some point about the Government's view on the minimum strategic capacity that they believe they can allow the industry to go no further beyond. However, I will come to that question further into my remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) talked about blast furnaces. If there was a professorship of the blast furnace, he would be the professor. He raised very appropriate questions about what industry is doing. In his remarks, which bear reading and studying, he showed a real vision for the future of the British steel industry that the Minister would do well to listen to.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), who is also my neighbour, who is literally a doughty defender of his constituents, rightly referred to the tragedy at the Celsa plant and the deaths of two of the workers there. He also raised the big question about the strategic level at which the British steel industry should be protected. My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon) spoke well and with clarity and passion, as always, about the human impact of the job losses at Port Talbot, and the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) spoke with sincerity about her constituents and about the impact the changes will have on them. Also, perhaps not purposefully, she showed the importance of the UK for the future of the steel industry, because for us to have a strategic steel industry there has to be a certain level of scale and integration, as my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland pointed out.

Now, who have I missed out? *[Interruption.]* I think only one Conservative spoke and I have referred to him.

Like many people here—anyone from south Wales probably has links to the steel industry—I come from a family whose life chances were pretty much determined

[Kevin Brennan]

by and strongly influenced by the steel industry. My father was part of the group of people who helped to build Llanwern steelworks in 1962. On my birth certificate, his occupation is listed as a platelayer. He was involved in bringing the railway line that was necessary for an integrated steel plant into Llanwern steelworks, and then he stayed there and got employment at the new steelworks for the rest of his working life. Indeed, before I went to university, I had an opportunity to work at Llanwern steelworks for six months, where I worked mainly in the steel plant, but also as a platelayer, which was a rather nice rounded end to that period of my life—as a platelayer, replacing and maintaining railway lines within the steelworks at Llanwern. That is why we hear—I know the Minister understands this—the passion that comes from my hon. Friends and colleagues. They understand how steel underpinned their life chances and the life chances of their constituents and their communities. The availability of well-paid, stable employment in their areas was the foundation of the creation of the life chances of many of my hon. Friends here today.

Mr Iain Wright: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Christina Rees: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Kevin Brennan: I will give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Christina Rees) first, who I forgot to mention, but who intervened on behalf of her constituents.

Christina Rees: I totally agree with my hon. Friend about life chances. My father worked at the site of the Steel Company of Wales. The Abbey went into the Steel Company of Wales, which moved on to Tata. When I was a schoolchild I played hockey at the Steel Company of Wales—it was the centre of the community. As for life chances, it put food on our plates at home. The threat of the closure of Trostre and Port Talbot is more than I can contemplate, given the devastating effect on communities.

Kevin Brennan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I know that the Minister understands this, but it is important to make it clear why Members feel so passionately about the importance of maintaining the steel industry both as a strategic asset to the country, and as the underpinning foundation of many of the communities we represent.

Mr Iain Wright: My hon. Friend is making an incredibly eloquent and moving point about how steel is in his blood, as it is in the blood of other hon. Members. Both my grandfathers were steelworkers in Hartlepool, so this is important for me personally, as well as for my local community. However, can we not fall into the trap of talking about the British steel industry as somehow in the past? It is vital to ensure that we have a vibrant and competitive steel industry for the future to make sure that we remain competitive in the world markets for manufacturing and much of our supply chain.

Kevin Brennan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. One of my central points is that the British steel industry is competitive. I freely admit that the British steel industry of the past often was not competitive, often had poor

industrial relations and weak management, and sometimes had, in the distant past, very low productivity. However, over the years, it has become one of the most efficient industries anywhere, with some of the best working relationships between workers and employers, because of their understanding of the common interests that bind them together, and because of the workforce's desire to ensure that the British steel industry has a future, with them often prepared to make real sacrifices to enable that to happen. That is why we have such a competitive steel industry. The only sense in which it is not competitive is because of the issue raised by many Members today: Chinese dumping of steel at well below what it costs China to produce.

China's steelmakers, 70% of which are state owned, are not profitable, and, according to our UK Steel briefing, are believed to lose close to \$34 per tonne on all crude steel produced in China. In 2015, they produced 441 million tonnes more steel than China itself consumed. China's 101 biggest steel firms lost \$11 billion in the first 10 months of 2015. In 2003, China exported 7.2 million tonnes of steel, which was 5% of the steel trade between the main global regions; by 2015, total export levels from China had exceeded 107 million tonnes.

It is impossible for the highly competitive and efficient British steel industry to compete with a state entity of that size—the country contains one in five of the world's population—that is determined to use that capacity to kill off its competitors and to destroy the British steel industry. That was what was going on while Ministers were talking to Chinese officials when they were over in the autumn. At the same time as its officials are smiling and talking about future trade deals, China is pursuing a policy of deliberately killing off the British steel industry.

Mrs Moon: Does my hon. Friend agree that if we do not successfully beat this back in relation to steel, other industries will follow? It is not just about steel; it is about Britain and Europe saying no and defending our industries.

Kevin Brennan: I fear that my hon. Friend may well be right. It is clear that the Chinese state is absorbing the losses to kill off the competition, which is why it is essential that we have a UK Government who understand that and are prepared to take the action necessary to protect the strategic asset that is the UK steel industry.

Tom Blenkinsop: It is worth remembering that the Redcar blast furnace was constructed by the Callaghan Government in 1978 and 1979. There was supposed to be a second furnace, but that mysteriously disappeared after the change of Government. The current world market is effectively a free market for China, and it is interesting that the one nation with a state-owned steel industry is dominating the market. That is not a defence of a nationalised steel industry, but it is certainly something that Ministers should pore over when they consider which policies, regulation, instruments of trade defence they should be implementing in the steel market.

Kevin Brennan: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I listened carefully to what the Prime Minister said about market economy status in yesterday's Prime Minister's questions. It was clear from his tone, demeanour and

words that the Government have already made up their mind that they are going to ease the path to market economy status for China, rather than putting up a real fight for the British steel industry.

Anna Soubry: Oh God!

Kevin Brennan: We all like the Minister immensely, but although she sighs and she huffs and she puffs, anybody with two eyes and two ears could see and hear what was going on at Prime Minister's questions yesterday.

Nic Dakin: My hon. Friend will have heard the Foreign Secretary say last week that market economy status will be judged through the prism of steel. We need to hold the Government to those words.

Kevin Brennan: Indeed. We need to know what is going on regarding market economy status. Let us have some transparency from the Minister. I visited Brussels last week with the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), to talk to officials, including Britain's European Commissioner, to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon referred, along with representatives from UKRep, officials from the Commission and Members of the European Parliament. Following that visit, it was absolutely clear to us that the UK Government have the door to Chinese market economy status wide open.

Stephen Kinnock: Another important avenue to explore is exactly what deal the Prime Minister did with President Xi Jinping on the China visit.

Kevin Brennan: Indeed. I am not sure whether the Minister was party to that deal, but it would be interesting to hear what she knows about it.

As hon. Members have said, the Government must give a much clearer signal about their position on the minimum strategic capacity of the British steel industry.

Jonathan Edwards: The hon. Gentleman is making important points, but will he help me out with something? In November last year, at Labour's eastern regional conference, the leader of the Labour party was calling for direct Government intervention in the steel industry. That is common sense, given the problems in the industry, yet the First Minister of Wales has completely ruled it out. As a Welsh MP, does he support the position of his leader in Westminster or that of the First Minister of Wales?

Kevin Brennan: I do not think that anything the hon. Gentleman said is going to solve the dumping problem we are discussing now. We all understand how Plaid Cymru works on these matters. Its only interest is not speaking up for UK steelworkers throughout England, Wales and Scotland, but trying to drive a wedge between people to make its argument for a separate Wales, which incidentally would mean, as I said earlier, along with a separate Scotland, the end of any kind of strategic capacity for steelmaking in this country.

Jonathan Edwards: You should be ashamed of yourself.

Kevin Brennan: The hon. Gentleman does not like it up him, unfortunately, but he is going to get it if he tries that tactic on me.

I shall turn to my concluding remarks so that I can leave plenty of time for the Minister to answer the many questions that have been put. As well as answering those questions, will she explain the UK Government's position—

Anna Soubry: With all the time that you have left me?

Kevin Brennan: The Minister has 25 minutes. Will she explain the Government's position on the blocking minority that they have been exercising in the European Union in relation to the longer-term reform of trade defence mechanisms? She has said throughout—certainly many times from a sedentary position—that all five of the asks from the—

Anna Soubry: No, I did not. Do not misrepresent me. I said four of the five.

Kevin Brennan: Oh, now it is four of the five. The Minister has said that four of the five asks have been completely delivered. I am afraid that that is not the view of UK Steel which, in its briefing for the debate, agrees that there has been some good progress—we can all agree with that—but sets out clearly five actions that must be taken: more action on anti-dumping measures; action on the market economy status issue, which has been emphasised in the debate; bringing business rates for capital-intensive firms in line with their competitors in France and Germany—

Anna Soubry: Quite right.

Kevin Brennan: The Minister says that, but we need to know when it is going to happen. The final two actions that UK Steel called for were support for much more local content in major construction projects, and direct funding for the sector on research and development and environmental improvements. We need to hear the Government's position on that.

In order to leave enough time for the Minister, I will finish on this point—

Jonathan Edwards: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Kevin Brennan: No, I will not give way. The hon. Gentleman and I can have a chat later, if he wants.

Will the Minister finally answer the question that she has been asked many times, and that I asked her in the debate in October: what is her and the Government's view about what represents the minimum capacity for steelmaking in the UK's strategic interests? If she can answer that question and give us clarity, everybody will be extremely grateful.

4.7 pm

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell, as it was to have Mr Walker in the Chair before you. I congratulate the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) on securing the debate through the Backbench Business Committee. It is pertinent

[Anna Soubry]

that it is being held in this very sad week when, yet again, we have seen a huge number of job losses at Port Talbot and other parts of south Wales, followed by yesterday's news that Sheffield Forgemasters will be making 100 of its employees redundant.

I apologise, Mr Rosindell, for often not even chuntering but speaking quite loudly from a sedentary position, but I get somewhat agitated because I am a little tired of Opposition Members consistently misrepresenting not only my own views—there is nothing that makes me more cross than when somebody tells me what I think—but the views of the Government, and questioning our determination and all that we have achieved to secure the future of a sustainable steel industry. Nobody but nobody has a monopoly on compassion, support and care for any of the workers in this country. We all come to this place—at least I hope we all do; this is certainly my experience—with the same passion and care for all our constituents and, indeed, everyone. Where we disagree is on how we achieve the things that, by and large, we all want.

Jonathan Edwards: Will the Minister give way?

Anna Soubry: In a moment.

I want to put something on record. I do not know whether it is significant, but my great-grandfather worked as a cutler in Sheffield. He then became a teacher, and then music teacher. In fact, he was knighted, but those are matters that do not concern us.

Mr Iain Wright: Just like Kevin.

Anna Soubry: Just like the shadow Minister, apparently, although not if he wants a future in his party, if he holds a pro-Trident view and is at odds with his leader on many other matters.

Mr Wright: You can do better than that.

Anna Soubry: I can do better than that, and I intend to.

My grandmother came from south Wales. We do not know much about her history, but we believe that her family also worked in the steelworks. Many of us can draw on our family experience, which is perhaps why I have a passion for securing the future of the steel industry, as does my Prime Minister. When I was appointed in May, one of the things that he asked me to do, apart from effectively being the Cabinet representative for small businesses, was to help to support and assist the steel industry in difficult times.

Jonathan Edwards: Based on the Minister's opening remarks and the disgraceful comments from the Labour Front-Bench spokesman, will she explain why during Prime Minister's questions yesterday the leader of the Labour party had six opportunities to ask about steel, but did not raise the issue once? It was left to Plaid Cymru to raise the matter during the most important parliamentary event of the week.

Anna Soubry: The hon. Gentleman has put all that on record.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) quite rightly said that some of this should be well above party politics. It is tedious that Opposition Members do not understand that they judge everyone by their own standards; the Government are genuinely not as tribal. Opposition Members—

Kevin Brennan: That is a tribal remark in itself.

Anna Soubry: Hang on. When Opposition Members, such as the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), have said to me, "I need to talk to you about the steelworks," I have absolutely no problem. If the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop), who made a good speech, and the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) want to speak to me, that is no problem. If the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) wanted to speak to me immediately, it would not be a problem. My door is open to everyone, whatever their political party.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Will the Minister give way?

Anna Soubry: No, because I want to make some progress and to address all the points that have been made.

I do get agitated because I know the five asks regarding the steel industry. We have delivered on four and as for the fifth, which is business rates, the review continues. I hope that the Chancellor will agree with my view, for what it is worth, that rates should not rise after investments in plant and machinery which, as I have said many times, is bonkers. I hope that the representations that the Secretary of State, BIS and I make on behalf of all businesses affected by that peculiarity will advance that argument and that the Chancellor will agree with us.

Let us be honest, however, and recognise the problem: the price of steel has been tumbling. The price of slab has almost halved in 12 months. Production across the world—this is not just China—has increased, but consumption has fallen and is yet to return to pre-2008 crisis levels, so what is the Government's priority? I will not put a figure on it, but the priority is to secure the production of steel at Scunthorpe and Port Talbot. I want to pay tribute to everybody who works in the steel sector, especially to all those workers who have so far found themselves being made redundant. We will not forget the more than 2,000 workers at SSI in Redcar and the many more in the supply chain. I and all my Conservative colleagues do not need to be patronised by being told about the huge impact that redundancies have on communities and right across the workforce, because we understand that. I pay tribute to all those who work at Scunthorpe and Port Talbot, and to those who have lost their jobs, while also remembering what is happening at Forgemasters.

Forgemasters makes steel particularly well. It effectively has a contract with the Ministry of Defence, but it is not with the MOD, in that it supplies the steel for Trident. If Opposition Members want to secure Forgemasters' future, they need to ensure that they support Trident—that is an absolute fact.

Tom Blenkinsop: Will the Minister give way?

Anna Soubry: In a moment.

Turning to Scunthorpe, as we have heard, Tata's long products division has been on the market for some two years. We know that Greybull Capital is the preferred bidder and that it is in talks with Tata as to the sale of the long division and, notably, the future of Scunthorpe. I pay full tribute to Baroness Redfern, who is present today, who has done an outstanding job as the leader of North Lincolnshire Council in ensuring that it plays its full part in securing the steelworks at Scunthorpe, in particular ensuring that the blast furnaces remain open, so that they continue to make their fabulous steel. The Government have been actively involved in that. One of my first trips as Minister was up to Scunthorpe. Unfortunately, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe could not attend, but he was of course invited. That is how we do business: we invite everybody. We do not have meetings that exclude people who are not part of our political party. We invite all interested parties, because securing the blast furnaces and the production of steel at Scunthorpe, about which we are absolutely determined, matters more than cheap party politics.

Turning to Port Talbot, we have already been in long discussions, and I have visited the plant and have spoken to workers and management. There are huge challenges in securing the production of steel at Port Talbot, but discussions have been continuing for several months. Consultants have been brought in and have apparently gone through everything with a fine-toothed comb. We await their report. Tata will then come to us and tell us, frankly, what its asks are, but we already have a good idea. There is a good argument to be made for improving or creating a new power plant.

As it happens, just before this debate I was at the working group, which I chair, on the international aspect of steel, and we specifically spoke about the sort of help and assistance that Government can give when it comes to, for example, the improvement or the introduction of a new power plant. There is a good argument that we could find a way and a means of effectively lending money to a business such as Tata, but we would still have to ensure that the repayments on that loan were at commercial rates. If they are not at commercial rates, they breach state aid rules. No debate, no messing around—that is a fact.

When the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw talks about what the Scottish Government have been doing in relation to Clydebridge and Dalzell, she says, "We have had a look at this, and we have had a look at that." She has not told us what she has done. I wanted to intervene to say to her, "Well, have you looked at whether you can change your business rates and not be in breach of the state aid rules?"

Marion Fellows *indicated assent.*

Anna Soubry: So you have done that. Are you going to change your business rates?

Marion Fellows: As far as I am aware.

Anna Soubry: I put it on the record: "As far as I am aware," the Scottish Government are going to change their business rates for the benefit of the steel industry—I will give way to the hon. Lady at any time. Have the Scottish Government changed their procurement rules?

Interestingly, have the Scottish Government—as they must have done—looked at the state aid rules and found that they are exceptionally onerous?

Marion Fellows: I am not a member of the Scottish Government, and I do not represent the Scottish Government, but as a member of the Scottish steel taskforce I understand that, under the revaluation rules that are going to take place next year, rates are being looked at. The state of the steel sector is being taken into account and the rates will be reduced accordingly.

As far as EU state aid rules are concerned—the Minister asked me about that—she will know more about them than I do as an ordinary Member of Parliament, but I know that some amounts of money are allowed; I believe it is something in the region of €200,000 over three years. If that falls within the Scottish Government's remit, they will, and certainly have, checked it.

Anna Soubry: With great respect to the hon. Lady, one of the things that she will find here is that when a member of a political party stands up and makes assertions about the Government when their political party is in government elsewhere, they hold responsibility and have to provide answers. Someone cannot just stand up and make bland statements saying, "We have had a look at this, and we have had a look at this. Oh, and by the way, the UK Government are absolutely hopeless and useless, but we are absolutely brilliant," and then not have an answer when they are asked, specifically, "So, have you delivered on this? Have you delivered on that?"

Tom Blenkinsop: Forgemasters creates the vessels for the reactors within the four replacement submarines, and plate for their hulls is made by Dalzell and Clydebridge. The future of those steelworks is uncertain, so any commitment to four submarines is dependent on those sites unless the Government find alternative solutions, because it is sonar-specific plate.

Anna Soubry: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman; I specifically asked my officials for an answer to that very important point. At the moment I have not got that information, but I will of course write to him if I am able to obtain it.

Let me move on to the five asks of the steel industry made at the steel summit. On energy-intensive industries and electricity prices—absolutely delivered. Opposition Members say, "Well, they go back, and they say you didn't do this and that," but a lot of the delay was not the fault of any tardiness on behalf of the British Government; it was unfortunately due to the slow cogs and wheels of the European Union.

I am not going to engage in all this silly, patronising nonsense about the Secretary of State not knowing where Brussels is. Hon. Members do not do themselves much credit by taking such cheap shots. The Secretary of State went to Brussels and called an emergency meeting. He has been advancing the cause of ensuring we get the compensation signed off under the state aid rules, and I am hugely and deeply proud of that. It is because of his efforts and instructions to officials to expedite it without any further messing about that it is absolutely being delivered. Ask one—delivered.

Nic Dakin: The Minister must realise that the industry was promised this by the coalition Government three years ago. It still has not got it, and the expectation is that it will not have it until April.

Anna Soubry: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the forms have gone out and people are already bringing back their submissions. There was not a Conservative Business Secretary in the coalition Government, but there is one now—and, goodness me, what a difference it has made to getting on and getting the job sorted.

Stephen Doughty: Will the Minister give way?

Anna Soubry: In a moment.

Ask two on emission directives—delivered. Ask three is about dumping. I get particularly agitated here. There is no debate; there is no dispute. The first vote after the Secretary of State and I were in our positions was in early July. For the first time, the UK Government voted in favour of taking measures to stop Chinese dumping, and it is unfortunate that the great British media did not report that.

The next time we had the opportunity to vote against dumping was in November. Fact: we took that vote. Hon. Members know—they have heard me say it before, but I have to say it again—that when we did it the first time in July, such was the surprise of the officials that they went back to the UK to check the vote. It had never been done before, and we did it.

Stephen Doughty: Will the Minister give way?

Anna Soubry: In a moment.

On both those opportunities, we voted in favour of taking the measures that will go a long way towards stopping the Chinese dumping.

Stephen Doughty: Will the Minister give way?

Anna Soubry: I will give way, but then I have to make some progress; otherwise, we will run out of time.

Stephen Doughty: I will be very brief. The Minister blamed the Liberal Democrats—I blame the Lib Dems for a lot of things in this country. However, the Conservative steel Minister was informed about the dumping—they were shown very detailed graphs and given examples about what was going on—and about the detailed financials of the energy-intensive industry's packages and what was expected. What did the former Conservative steel Minister do to address both those issues?

Anna Soubry: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an answer to that, but I can say that every Department needs great leadership, and I am delighted that the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has exactly the sort of great Conservative leadership it needs.

I get slightly cheesed off at nonsense about the Government not being joined up and not working together. That could not be further from the truth. The current level and degree of co-operation within Government has never been seen before. I can give many examples of exactly where the Government are joined up. I am particularly proud of my working relationship with

Ministers in the Department of Energy and Climate Change, for example. We get on well and work well together. At the moment we are looking at why too few of our steel fabricators buy British steel. We are doing a piece of work on the supply chains to see how we can ensure that British steel is bought all the way through the supply chains.

The fourth ask made of the steel industry was on procurement. We are the first EU country—

Stephen Kinnoch: Will the Minister give way?

Anna Soubry: The hon. Gentleman cannot have a go until I have finished my sentence. He will have to bear with me one moment.

We are the first European Union country to use the new powers available to us to change the Government's procurement of steel and, indeed, other materials. There are now no excuses when it comes to Government contracts for not buying British. A number of claims were made about Hinkley B and Areva. In the case of Areva, that steel is not made in Britain. I am told that at least 60% of the steel at Hinkley Point can be bought in Britain. The other 40% is not made in Britain.

Stephen Kinnoch: We have very little time left. It is clear that the burning issue, which was raised by all hon. Members present, is market economy status. It seems that the Minister has moved off the dumping ask on to another ask.

Anna Soubry *indicated dissent.*

Stephen Kinnoch: I assumed the Minister had finished on dumping and ignored the most important point.

Anna Soubry: I am so sorry; the hon. Gentleman should read his brief better. There were—*[Interruption.]* No, no. There were five asks. I have dealt with four; the fifth is business rates, and I think I have dealt with that. The status of China is a new ask, not one of the original five. Let us deal with the market economy status for China. The Prime Minister has made it clear, and I think he makes a good case, that there is a good case for China to be given market economy status. This is where I get agitated with Opposition Members. I do not have a problem with people when we disagree on politics or argue about policies; I have a problem when they tell their constituents that if China gets market economy status, we will not be able to vote in favour of tariffs to stop it from dumping steel or anything else. That is not true. Russia has market economy status, but the EU is able to, and does, vote in favour of tariffs to stop Russia dumping.

For example, in the meeting I was talking about earlier, even though the task groups had come to the end of their time, we specifically looked at Russia and Iran. We are gravely concerned about the amount of steel that they are producing and about the threat of it flooding into the UK economy. So, again, we are looking at the issue of tariffs, but let me make it very clear. The Government do not make the complaint to the European Union; the complaint comes from the steel industry itself—it must raise the complaint. It is wrong for hon. Members to say to their constituents that if China gets

market economy status, we are precluded from introducing tariffs. We are not, so Members should please not mislead their constituents.

Tom Blenkinsop *rose*—

Huw Irranca-Davies *rose*—

Anna Soubry: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman first and then to the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland; no problem.

Huw Irranca-Davies: May I ask the Minister whether those same concerns are why France and Germany have not yet come to a conclusion? Should they come to the conclusion that they share the concerns expressed today, will she swing the weight of the UK Government behind them to oppose full status?

Anna Soubry: I have made it absolutely clear: the decision will be taken by the European Union. As I have said, if China wants to be in the game, it has got to prove that it can play by the rules. To be clear, let me repeat: MES will not preclude future tariffs.

Andrew Percy: Will the Minister confirm whether the Government or anyone else interested in the future of our industry has made any request about market economy status for China?

Anna Soubry: To my knowledge, absolutely no.

I must say that all questions will be answered by letter, but I want to make it absolutely clear now: the Government, under our Prime Minister, have described the steel industry as vital to the economy of this country—and it is. That is why the Government will continue to do everything they can to protect the steel industry and ensure that steel continues to be produced at both Port Talbot and Scunthorpe.

Andrew Rosindell (in the Chair): In normal circumstances, Mr Kinnock would be asked to wind up, but we have completely run out of time. It is a pity that we cannot continue the debate, but sadly we have to end at this point.

4.30 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statements

Thursday 21 January 2016

TREASURY

ECOFIN: 15 January 2016

The First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr George Osborne): A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council was held in Brussels on 15 January 2016. Ministers discussed the following items:

Current legislative proposals

The presidency updated the Council on the state of play of financial services dossiers.

Presentation of the presidency Work programme

The new ECOFIN chair, Jeroen Dijsselbloem, provided an outline of the Dutch presidency's Work programme.

European semester

The Council adopted conclusions on two European semester reports: the annual growth survey and the alert mechanism report. A Council recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area was also approved and will be sent to February European Council for endorsement.

Implementation of the banking union

The Commission gave an update on implementation of several dossiers linked to the banking union: the single resolution fund, the bank recovery and resolution directive and the deposit guarantee scheme directive.

Combating VAT fraud in the EU: Use of the reverse charge mechanism

An exchange of views was held in relation to widening the use of the reverse charge mechanism to combat VAT fraud in the EU.

Counter-terrorist financing

The Commission updated Ministers on progress to bring forward new proposals to reinforce the European framework in the fight against the financing of terrorism. The Council welcomed the update and will revisit the issue in February.

[HCWS484]

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Greg Clark): On 26 February 2015, my predecessor the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Eric Pickles) and the Secretary of State for Education (Nicky Morgan) confirmed that, having considered the report of the inspection by Louise Casey CB and advice note from Sir Michael Wilshaw (HM Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services

and Skills), Rotherham Metropolitan Borough was failing to comply with its best value duty. They therefore concluded that it was both necessary and expedient for them to exercise their intervention powers. Moreover, given the complete failure of political and officer leadership in the council at this time, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government decided that the intervention should be broad and wide ranging with commissioners exercising many of the authority's functions until these could be confidently rolled back for the authority to exercise in compliance with its best value duty. A team of commissioners were appointed to exercise all executive functions of the authority, as well as some non-executive ones (e.g. licensing). They also had to oversee a rigorous programme of improvement to bring about essential changes in culture and ensure there is in future effective and accountable political and officer leadership.

Nearly a year on, a number of challenges remain but there have been significant areas of progress. Following consideration of submissions from the lead commissioner in support of his proposal, including the views of lay and expert panels and the results of a public consultation. Today I am therefore proposing, on the recommendation of the commissioner team, my intention to return certain functions to Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.

After careful consideration of the proposal and this further information provided by the lead commissioner, I am satisfied that the council is now able to exercise the functions identified by the lead commissioner in compliance with the best value duty, and that the people of Rotherham can have confidence that this will be the case. I am therefore considering exercising my powers under section 15 of the Local Government Act 1999 to return certain service areas, including all associated executive and non-executive functions, to the council to exercise. Returning these functions is of the start of building the effective and accountable political leadership and represents a clear milestone on the road to recovery.

The functions to be returned are:

Education and schools; education for 14-19 years in all settings; school admissions and appeal system; youth services.

public health.

Leisure services; events in parks and green spaces.

Customer and cultural services, libraries, arts, customer services and welfare programmes.

Housing.

Planning and transportation policy; highways maintenance.

The council's area assembly system and neighbourhood working; responsibilities under the Equalities Act.

Building regulation, drainage, car parking; environmental health; business regulation and enforcement (not including taxi licensing); emergency planning.

ICT; legal and democratic services; corporate communications; corporate policy; procurement; financial services, including benefits and revenues, but not including audit.

Budget control in these areas and budget planning.

Policy arising from Sheffield city region.

The returned functions do not include licensing; children's services; adult social care; audit; and other functions which still remain high risk.

I am confident that this is the right time and these are the right functions to return to the council. The commissioners will provide oversight of the returned functions to ensure that they are exercised in accordance

with the best value duty. In addition they will continue to implement the rigorous programme of improvement they have started to bring about the essential changes in culture and ensure there is in future effective and accountable political and office leadership across the council.

I am placing a copy of the documents associated with these announcements in the Library of the House and on my Department's website.

[HCWS482]

EDUCATION

Childcare Bill: Joint Online Childcare Application

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Mr Sam Gyimah): During Second Reading of the Childcare Bill, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education announced that our extended childcare entitlement will be delivered via a joint online application being developed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

As I outlined during Committee Stage of the Childcare Bill, the Department for Education will be providing HMRC with funding for the development of the joint online application and eligibility checking system.

I can confirm today that for 2015-16, urgent expenditure estimated at £1 million will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

The development of the joint online application will mean that parents and children who will be eligible to benefit from both the extended entitlement and tax-free childcare will be able to apply for both schemes through one simple and straightforward system, saving them valuable time.

[HCWS481]

Reformed History of Arts Subject Content

The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb): The Government are reforming GCSEs and A-levels to be more knowledge-based and to make sure that they give students the best possible preparation for further and higher education, and for employment.

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 as well as for some of the GCSE and A-levels to be taught from September 2017. Content for reformed GCSE subjects can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/search?q=gcse+subject+content>

and content for AS and A-level subjects at:

<https://www.gov.uk/search?q=gcse+as+and+a+level+subject+content>.

Today I am publishing revised subject content for history of art AS and A-levels that will be taught in schools from September 2017.

Students will study a wide range of art and artists from different movements and periods including pre and post 1850, ensuring good breadth and depth of study. The content also includes the development of art over time, and the connections and interrelationship between different artists, periods and movements.

[HCWS480]

JUSTICE

Family Justice

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Shailesh Vara): Just prior to the Christmas recess, an error was identified in an online version of form E. This is the form provided by Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service in order to enable people to disclose financial information during divorce and similar proceedings.

This fault meant that the automatic calculator in the form calculated the wrong total for an individual's net assets by failing to deduct certain liabilities.

The Ministry of Justice was alerted to the fault on 10 December 2015 and a corrected version of the form was put online on 14 December. However the wider implications of the faulty form were not immediately recognised.

As soon as I was made aware of this issue on 16 December, I ordered an urgent investigation.

The investigation found the faulty formula was present in versions of form E which were online between April 2014 and mid December 2015 and between April 2011 and January 2012.

A total of 36,527 cases contain a version of form E filed from these periods. HMCTS staff have now reviewed all these cases and found that 3,638 files—10%—contained the faulty calculator version of form E with an incorrect figure for net assets figure in the summary table.

A total of 1,403 of these cases are still live, allowing HMCTS to intervene immediately to clearly flag these cases to the courts in order to avoid the error affecting the final orders in these cases.

The remaining 2,235 files—6.1%—were closed cases. Although the faulty form was used in these cases, it will not necessarily have had any effect on the ultimate outcome. Form E is only a part of the material used by the parties and the court and is used at an early stage, so the information is often disputed or superseded by further information introduced during proceedings.

Following the error coming to light, HMCTS established a dedicated email address which people could use if they were concerned about their own case: formE@hmcts.gsi.gov.uk. This email address was advertised on our website and also in all responses to media enquiries. As of 21 January, 51 members of the public have emailed us about their case.

I have instructed HMCTS to write to all parties in the 2,235 closed cases. The letter expresses our sincere regret for the error, sets out what happened and explains that, although form E is just one part of the evidence used in their case, there remains a possibility that the error affected the final outcome.

The letter sets out options available to people involved in these cases. Some may wish to do nothing, if, for example, they know that the error was corrected during the proceedings or they do not wish to reopen their cases. If people think they have been affected by this error then they can apply to the court to vary or set aside their order. My officials consulted the president of the family division about the court rules and procedures that would apply to such applications or for any other

proceedings that might be open to the parties. My officials also consulted the president on the development of a specific form for such applications. We have provided a link to the new form in our letter to the parties, as well as guidance on how to complete the form.

I have instructed that no court fee will be charged for making this application, and this is also made clear in the letter from HMCTS.

We are also uploading a new version of form E which makes clearer how the calculation of net assets should be made. We will also consider the future of form E as part of our broader court reforms and the automatic calculator function will be disabled during this process.

This failure should not have happened. Divorce proceedings can be very difficult and I sincerely apologise for this situation and any distress it may have caused.

[HCWS485]

NORTHERN IRELAND

Independent Commission on Information Retrieval

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mrs Theresa Villiers): The cross-party talks that ran from 8 September to 17 November last year, which culminated in the “Fresh Start” agreement, brought us closer than ever before to consensus on the best way to deal with Northern Ireland’s past. While we established much common ground, it was not possible to reach agreement on all issues. I am committed to working with the Northern Ireland parties, with the Irish Government as appropriate, and with representatives of victims and survivors, to build on the progress made during the talks. The UK Government are determined to resolve the outstanding issues that are preventing the establishment of the legacy institutions set out in the Stormont House agreement.

One of these institutions is the Independent Commission on Information Retrieval (ICIR). This will be an independent body designed to enable victims and survivors privately to receive information about the troubles-related deaths of their next of kin. As set out in the Stormont House agreement, and building on the precedent of the Independent Commission on the Location of Victims’ Remains, the ICIR will be an international body. To that end, the UK and Irish Governments have signed an international agreement to enable the establishment of the ICIR and to set out its functions. Today I have placed a copy of this treaty in the Libraries of both Houses.

The ICIR will be an important institution which will help victims and survivors to seek information which it has not been possible to obtain by other means. Engagement by families with the ICIR will be entirely voluntary. Information provided to the ICIR about deaths within its remit will not be admissible in court, something which families will always be told in advance. The ICIR will not, however, provide any form of amnesty or immunity from prosecution. This Government believe in the rule of law and would not countenance such a step. As the Stormont House agreement set out, information provided to the ICIR will be protected but no individual will be protected from prosecution if evidence is obtained by other means. It is the Government’s intention that the legislation needed to implement the ICIR will contain provisions clearly setting this out.

It had been our aim to lay the treaty before Parliament at the same time as introducing the legislation required to establish the legacy bodies. However, as agreement has not yet been reached on this legislation, this is not possible. Once any treaty is formally laid, Parliament has a period of 21 sitting days, in which it can resolve that the treaty should not be ratified, in accordance with the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010. I believe that it would be best if this consideration took place alongside the legislation, which will contain more detail about how the ICIR will function. I propose therefore formally to lay the treaty once we are able also to introduce legislation. These particular circumstances mean that placing a copy of the treaty in the Libraries of both Houses is an appropriate way to ensure that Parliament is aware of the text of the treaty, without instigating the formal process of consideration.

In addition to the ICIR, the Stormont House agreement envisaged the establishment of the Historical Investigations Unit, the oral history archive and the Implementation and Reconciliation Group. Together, this set of institutions provides the best opportunity to help Northern Ireland deal with its past and provide better outcomes for victims and survivors, the people who we must never forget suffered more than anyone else as a result of the troubles. The Government are committed to implementing the Stormont House agreement and to establishing the legacy bodies it contains. I will continue to meet victims’ representatives and others over the coming days and weeks to discuss these matters and to build support for the new institutions.

[HCWS479]

CABINET OFFICE

Contingencies Fund Advance

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock): The Cabinet Office has received a repayable cash advance from the Contingencies Fund of £37,199,000.

The requirement for this has arisen because the Cabinet Office cash receives a relatively high proportion of its voted resource programme funding at supplementary estimate, and so can only draw the related cash from the Consolidated Fund after the Supply and Appropriation Act has received Royal Assent in March 2016.

HM Treasury’s supply estimates guidance provides for a repayable cash advance from the Contingencies Fund in order to meet an urgent cash requirement for existing services when cash provision from the main estimate has been exhausted.

The cash advance will pay for programmes which will generate Government-wide benefits or savings and are urgent in the public interest.

The following programmes are funded from the reserve: various technology and property programmes announced in the 2015 summer budget which will generate savings across Government (£46,000,000); individual electoral registration (£9,750,000); and various Office for Civil Society programmes (£690,000).

The following programmes are funded from budgetary cover transfers from other Government Departments:

- various national security programmes (£17,465,000);
- a cross-government secure IT programme (£15,931,000);
- an identity assurance programme (£19,657,000);
- cross-government shared services (£3,836,000);
- common technology services (£3,500,000);
- cross-government Gulf strategy commitments (£1,491,000);
- various Office for Civil Society programmes (£1,300,000);
- financial management review target operating model (£300,000);
- and diversity and inclusion (£279,000).

The requirement for an advance is reduced by cash proceeds from the sale of Admiralty arch (£65,000,000), and budgetary cover transfers to other Departments for the GREAT campaign (£18,000,000).

Parliamentary approval for additional resources of £37,199,000 will be sought in a supplementary estimate for the Cabinet Office. Pending that approval, expenditure estimated at £37,199,000 will be met by repayable cash advances from the Contingencies Fund.

[HCWS483]

Ministerial Correction

Thursday 21 January 2016

TRANSPORT

Concessionary Fares: Blackpool North and Cleveleys

The following is an extract from the Westminster Hall debate on concessionary fares in Blackpool North and Cleveleys on 20 January 2016:

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): My hon. Friend raised several issues, and I will begin my response by talking about concessionary travel. The Government know how important affordable, accessible transport is. It is the bread and butter of the way communities function and move around. That is especially true for older and disabled passengers—a point that he made clearly and powerfully. That is, of course, why the Government have committed to protecting

the national bus travel concession in England, and why they spend some £950 million a year on doing so.

[Official Report, 20 January 2016, Vol. 604, c. 598WH.]

Letter of correction from Mr Jones:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard) in the debate on concessionary fares in Blackpool North and Cleveleys.

The correct response should have been:

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): My hon. Friend raised several issues, and I will begin my response by talking about concessionary travel. The Government know how important affordable, accessible transport is. It is the bread and butter of the way communities function and move around. That is especially true for older and disabled passengers—a point that he made clearly and powerfully. That is, of course, why the Government have committed to protecting the national bus travel concession in England, and why they spend some **£900 million** a year on doing so.

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 21 January 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT	1527	CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT—continued	
Amateur Sports Clubs: Flooding	1531	Small Production Companies: Cornwall	1527
BBC Charter Renewal.....	1536	Subsidised Satellite Broadband Programme	1528
Channel 4.....	1532	Topical Questions	1538
Children and Young People: Access to Sport	1534	Tourism: Yorkshire	1535
First World War Commemorations.....	1533		
Gender Equality.....	1544	LEADER OF THE HOUSE	1545
Grassroots Sport: Deprived Areas	1529	EVEL.....	1545
Restoration and Renewal	1543	Voting System	1546

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 21 January 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
CABINET OFFICE	44WS	JUSTICE	42WS
Contingencies Fund Advance	44WS	Family Justice	42WS
COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ..	39WS	NORTHERN IRELAND	43WS
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council.....	39WS	Independent Commission on Information	
EDUCATION	41WS	Retrieval	43WS
Childcare Bill: Joint Online Childcare			
Application	41WS	TREASURY	39WS
Reformed History of Arts Subject Content.....	41WS	ECOFIN: 15 January 2016.....	39WS

MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Thursday 21 January 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>
TRANSPORT	5MC
Concessionary Fares: Blackpool North and	
Cleveleys	5MC

No proofs of the Daily Reports can be supplied. Corrections which Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked in the Daily Report, but not telephoned, and *the copy containing the Corrections must be received at the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Thursday 28 January 2016**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF THE VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their Speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), on application to the Stationery Office, c/o the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons, from whom the terms and conditions of reprinting may be ascertained. Application forms are available at the Vote Office.

PRICES AND SUBSCRIPTION RATES

DAILY PARTS

Single copies:

Commons, £5; Lords, £4.

Annual subscriptions:

Commons, £865; Lords, £600.

LORDS VOLUME INDEX obtainable on standing order only. Details available on request.

BOUND VOLUMES OF DEBATES are issued periodically during the session.

Single copies:

Commons, £65 (£105 for a two-volume edition); Lords, £60 (£100 for a two-volume edition).

Standing orders will be accepted.

THE INDEX to each Bound Volume of House of Commons Debates is published separately at £9.00 and can be supplied to standing order.

All prices are inclusive of postage

CONTENTS

Thursday 21 January 2016

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1527] [see index inside back page]

Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
House of Commons Commission
Leader of the House

Business of the House [Col. 1549]

Statement—(Chris Grayling)

Litvinenko Inquiry [Col. 1569]

Statement—(Mrs May)

Infected Blood [Col. 1583]

Statement—(Jane Ellison)

Backbench Business

Childhood Obesity Strategy [Col. 1595]

Motion—(Dr Wollaston)—agreed to

Holocaust Memorial Day [Col. 1635]

Motion—(Wes Streeting)—agreed to

Vulnerable Adults: Transport [Col. 1661]

Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall

UK Steel Industry [Col. 649WH]

General Debate

Written Statements [Col. 39WS]

Ministerial Correction [Col. 5MC]

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
