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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Thursday 4 February 2016**



# House of Commons

*Thursday 4 February 2016*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Chemical Spills (River Tamar)

1. **Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to monitor and prevent future chemical spills from quarrying in the headwaters of the River Tamar. [903444]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart):** We take the issue of chemical spills very seriously, particularly in the context of the Tamar. Such spills have caused significant damage to biodiversity and, specifically, to fish. We are analysing the pH levels and the dissolved solids to prevent future occurrences.

**Scott Mann:** I am grateful for the Minister's response. Will he ask his Department to review the decision of the Environment Agency not to pursue legal action against Glendinning for the major pollution incident relating to Pigsdon quarry in 2014?

**Rory Stewart:** Legal proceedings were brought and the decision was made by Truro Crown court, under the hon. Judge Carr, to instead impose an enforcement order. Some £70,000 has been contributed by the company, but, much more importantly, five new lagoons have been put in place to deal with the incident and chemical processes are being used to prevent a recurrence.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab) *rose—*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Before the hon. Gentleman comes in, I emphasise that we are discussing the Tamar, not the Dee.

**Christian Matheson:** Indeed, sir. Cornwall is well-known for its history of mineral extraction, whether it be china clay or Cornish tin. Cheshire is about to enter into mineral extraction as well through fracking. The Government have gone back on their pledges on monitoring and preventing chemical spills from fracking rigs. While the Minister is considering the potential pollution of the Tamar, will he also consider whether there is sufficient monitoring to prevent chemical leaks from fracking in the headwaters of the River Dee, like that in the headwaters of the Tamar?

**Rory Stewart:** I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for an ingenious connection, although the nature of the extraction in the two cases is quite different. The Environment Agency takes its responsibilities very seriously, whether in respect of quarrying or fracking. If there are particular concerns, I would be happy to sit down with him to discuss them in more detail.

#### Emissions Standards: Fines

2. **Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Transport on the proposals by the European Commission for it to levy fines on vehicle manufacturers that do not meet emissions standards. [903445]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart):** In the wake of the Volkswagen engines scandal, it is extremely important both that we have monitoring in place to check the real levels of emissions of nitrogen dioxide and other pollutants from engines, and that we have proper fines in place. This Department and the Department for Transport will look very carefully at the proposals that were put forward by the Commission last week.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald:** I am grateful for that very positive response from the Minister. Does he agree that it is time to break the relationship between industry, testers and regulators, so that the process is truly independent and so that Government agencies, whether they be in his Department or the DFT, act wholly in the public interest?

**Rory Stewart:** As a matter of principle, it is incredibly important that regulators are entirely independent of the industry they regulate. This is essentially an issue for the DFT. The reason the Commission's proposals are interesting to ourselves and the DFT is that they include both the commitment on spot checks, with a clear indication of the fines, and a separation, as the hon. Gentleman says, the regulator and the industry.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Car emissions are a main contributor to poor air quality in this country. Many of the former local authorities that covered my constituency were among the first to sign up to the Clean Air Act 1956, but much of that progress has gone backwards as a result of poor air quality in urban areas. Is it not time for a new clean air Act that is fit for the 21st century?

**Rory Stewart:** Clean air is certainly an issue of significant concern, but air quality has improved significantly over the past 30 years. The levels of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, PM2.5 and PM10 have improved.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Not around here.

**Rory Stewart:** Air quality has also improved here. However, we will work very closely with individual local authorities on clean air zones to meet the level in the ambient air quality directive of 40 micrograms per cubic metre.

**Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): On the foot of the ongoing discussions with the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in relation to our inquiry into air quality, will the Minister hold the car manufacturers to account to ensure that car owners throughout Britain and Ireland who have been affected by the defeat devices are compensated?

**Rory Stewart:** This is a DFT lead, but the issue raised by the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) about the Commission's proposals addresses the relationship between the manufacturer, the vehicle owner, and the kind of fines that could be imposed. That is why member states will be looking closely at that Commission proposal.

### Food Waste

3. **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): What steps the Government plan to take to meet the UN target of halving food waste by 2030. [903447]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart):** Our commitment to the UN target of halving food waste is immensely important, and work on that is being taken forward by the Love Food Hate Waste campaign, the Waste and Resources Action Programme—WRAP—and the Courtauld 2025 agreement. It will aim to build on work that we have achieved since 2009, which has reduced household food waste by 17%.

**Paul Blomfield:** The Minister is right to highlight the reduction in household food waste, but he will know that that is not being matched by the food industry. Will he explain why Government Whips objected to the Food Waste (Reduction) Bill, which was promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) last Friday? Would it not be better to get the Bill into Committee, where its provisions and the positive course of action that it proposes could be properly considered, and we can take the opportunity to end the scandal of food waste?

**Rory Stewart:** I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy), who has campaigned strongly on this issue for a long time. We have significant concerns about the targets set in that Bill, and we believe that its proposals include perverse incentives. Voluntary measures have increased by 70% the amount that retailers have managed to redistribute to charitable organisations, and the real key will be getting councils and retailers to work on a unified system.

**Mrs Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): While visiting the anaerobic digestion plant belonging to Severn Trent, which is near to my constituency, I was impressed by the energy recovery from food waste. However, does the Minister agree that too much edible food is still going into waste? How do the Government plan to intercept that food for redistribution while it is still edible?

**Rory Stewart:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, because at the moment the average household in the United Kingdom wastes more than £60 a month on food waste. We must ensure that food is not wasted in the first place on its way from the farm gate to the house, and if food

cannot be consumed by humans, we must ensure that it is consumed by animals, and that it goes to anaerobic digesters only as a last resort.

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The Soil Association estimates that between 20% to 40% of UK fruit and veg is rejected before it even reaches the shop—it is deemed as being a kind of “wonky veg” because it fails to meet the supermarket's strict cosmetic requirements. Will the Minister ensure that supermarkets and manufacturers transparently publish their supply chain waste—I think Tesco is doing that with food waste hotspots? That is vital if we are to achieve a meaningful reduction in waste.

**Rory Stewart:** I absolutely agree that that is vital, and we recently held a round table with retailers on that issue. One solution, although not a total solution, is being pioneered by Tesco and Co-operative supermarkets, which are looking at individual varieties—for example, of potatoes—that result in much less food waste on the way from the farm gate to the shelf.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): My constituents in Kettering, especially those from the wartime generation, are horrified about the amount of food that is wasted. How can we get back to the principle that we do not put more food on our plate than we can eat, and that we consume the food that is on our plate?

**Rory Stewart:** My hon. Friend has drawn attention to one of the central points of this issue, which is human behaviour and culture. Certain things can be done by the Government and others by retailers, but in the end a lot of responsibility rests on us all regarding how much food we buy, how we use it, and how much of it we throw away.

### Flood Defence Programme

4. **Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): How many schemes will begin construction under the Government's six-year flood defence programme in 2016. [903448]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** A total of 246 schemes will begin construction in 2016-17 as part of our first ever six-year programme of investment in flood defences. That £2.3 billion of investment represents a real-terms increase on the last Parliament, and will protect an additional 300,000 homes.

**Sir Henry Bellingham:** I congratulate the Minister on championing this cause. Does she agree that when it comes to investing in new flood defences and improving existing ones, getting the support of local authorities, drainage boards, and the private sector is incredibly important? Will she pay tribute to Mike McDonnell in my constituency, who has helped to set up a community interest company to invest in sea defences along the stretch of coast adjacent to Snettisham and Heacham in west Norfolk?

**Elizabeth Truss:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When internal drainage boards work with local businesses and local councils, we can get really good local solutions.

The community interest company is a particularly interesting model, which is being pioneered by him and his constituents in North West Norfolk. It could potentially be used elsewhere.

**Louise Haigh** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): Sheffield remains £20 million short of the investment it needs to protect our city. The Department is holding a teleconference with council leaders, but will the Secretary of State commit to visiting Sheffield to see the innovative flood defences we have planned that will protect the city from a potential £1 billion of economic damage?

**Elizabeth Truss:** As part of the national resilience review being led by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, Sheffield is one of the core cities that will be looked at in particular to make sure it is sufficiently resilient to flooding. I am sure that as part of that review there will be a visit to Sheffield to ensure that that very important city has the protection it needs.

**Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Flood Re insurance will help many householders in Thirsk and Malton affected by recent floods, but it does not cover small businesses or leasehold properties with more than three units. In one such development in my constituency at Topcliffe Mill, residents of a two-bedroom flat now face a premium of £4,000 a year and an excess of £40,000. Will Ministers agree to meet me and representatives from the insurance industry to consider how we can provide a solution to this problem?

**Elizabeth Truss:** We are providing £6 million to help small businesses as a result of this winter's floods. The issue my hon. Friend raises with regard to leaseholders is important. Ministers will be very willing to meet him to discuss it.

**David Simpson** (Upper Bann) (DUP): On the defence programmes and the victims of flooding, will the Secretary of State confirm whether her Department is making an application to the EU solidarity fund to draw down funds for victims and businesses?

**Elizabeth Truss:** We have not ruled out an application to the EU solidarity fund. We have until the end of February to apply. We need to find out the total cost of the floods before a potential application is made. Our priority has been to make sure we get funding to affected homes and businesses as soon as possible. In fact, for the floods that took place on 26 December, funding was with local authorities on 29 December. Our priority has been making sure we make £200 million available to fix the damage and help communities to get back on their feet.

**Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): The devastating floods across the country are extremely well documented, as are the knock-on effects of the Government's decision to postpone or cancel capital schemes—an estimated cost of £5 billion. Communities, families, individuals and businesses have suffered ruinous consequences. It is imperative that the Government do everything possible to maximise resources from all areas. The Secretary of State mentioned the EU solidarity fund. Time is running out, with only three or four weeks left for an application in relation to Cumbria. Will she just get on with the job and do it now, please?

**Elizabeth Truss:** This Government have invested more in flood defences than ever before: a real-terms increase on the previous Parliament, which was a real-terms increase on what was spent under Labour. The fact is that the Labour Government spent £1.5 billion and we are spending £2 billion in this Parliament. We have got money to affected communities as soon as possible—that is our priority.

### British Food

5. **Andrew Griffiths** (Burton) (Con): What the role is of the Great British Food Unit in promoting British food (a) in the UK and (b) overseas. [903449]

9. **Stephen Metcalfe** (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What the role is of the Great British Food Unit in promoting British food (a) in the UK and (b) overseas. [903453]

10. **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): What the role is of the Great British Food Unit in promoting British food (a) in the UK and (b) overseas. [903454]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** We launched the Great British Food Unit in January. It brings together expertise from UK Trade & Investment and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to create a team of 40 people in London and teams around the world, including five people in China, to promote great British food. I am pleased to say that food and drink manufacturers have already agreed to expand their exports by a third by 2020.

**Andrew Griffiths:** I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I am concerned that the Secretary of State is anti-European, because she is denying our European colleagues the opportunity to drink great British beer. Although we imported £418 million of beer last year, we exported only £494 million of beer. Given that we brew the best beer in the world, that figure should be much higher. What is she doing to promote the British beer industry and to encourage our European friends to sup up?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I know that beer is my hon. Friend's passion, and I congratulate him on his role as chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on beer. Also, his constituency is home to some of the finest water in our country that produces some of the finest beer. In fact, Lord Bilimoria, one of the founders of Cobra, is one of our food pioneers helping to promote great British beer not just in Europe, but in India and China—we recently promoted great British beer at the Baker Street brew pub in Chongqing.

**Mr Speaker:** We are all now better informed.

**Stephen Metcalfe:** The success of the food industry, not least in counties such as Essex, is largely down to the innovation and skill of the workforce. How will the Great British Food Unit encourage more people into the industry, particularly through apprenticeships?

**Elizabeth Truss:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There are fantastic jobs to be had in the food industry, from farming to engineering and food technology. Food and drink is our largest manufacturing sector, and we need more apprentices in this vital sector. We have an ambition to triple the number of apprentices by 2020, and I will be holding a round table shortly with some of the leading figures from the industry to make sure they commit to that goal.

**Richard Graham:** The Great British Food Unit and the enthusiastic Secretary of State will know that some of the greatest food on earth comes from the Gloucester Old Spot pig and from Gloucester cattle, including the single Gloucester cheese, which is famously used in the annual cheese rolling race. There is no better place to see these and 130 other great Gloucester producers than the Gloucester services on the M5, described by *The Telegraph* as probably the best service station in the UK. Were she to find herself near the M5 in the near future, my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) and I would give her a warm welcome and a Gloucester Old Spot sausage. [*Laughter.*]

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank my hon. Friend for his extremely kind invitation. It is one of the best offers I have had all year. [*Laughter.*] Next time I am driving along the M5, which I frequently am, I will be very happy to meet him at this amazing service station.

**Mr Speaker:** The Secretary of State has made the hon. Gentleman's day, possibly his month and conceivably his year.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): To hit a more serious note, after that interesting and humorous exchange, may I say to the Secretary of State that to produce great British food, we need great British technology? The news yesterday that Syngenta, our leading European food innovator, which produces wonderful technology and innovation and has a large plant in my constituency, is to be taken over by ChemChina means that overnight the European capacity for innovation in food technology and much else will be wiped out. Should the House not debate that very seriously before it goes through?

**Elizabeth Truss:** We are investing in science and technology. Last year, the Prime Minister announced a food tech innovation network, and, in terms of DEFRA's capital budget, we are doubling our spend on investment in science and animal health research precisely so that we can take advantage of these huge opportunities.

**Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): The Great British Food Unit depends on great British farmers producing the goods for the unit, but many farmers are still experiencing problems with the Rural Payments Agency. One of my constituency farmers was only told late on Sunday afternoon of the failure to issue his payment, and even then it was done by email. What will the Secretary of State do to make sure that farmers are properly supported by the RPA?

**Elizabeth Truss:** The hon. Lady is right: farmers are facing difficult cash flow at the moment. We are doing all we can to get those payments out as soon as possible. It is the most complicated common agricultural policy

that has ever been introduced. We were still getting the final details of it in February last year, but up to 77% of farmers are now being paid, and £1 billion has gone out the door to farmers. We are working to make sure that the farmers get their money as soon as possible.

**Calum Kerr** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (SNP): Scotch whisky is a great Scottish and UK success story, with exports totalling £4 billion annually. Does the Secretary of State agree that reducing the 76% tax burden on an average bottle of Scotch in the coming Budget would send an important message that the Government support the industry? Will she speak to her friend the Chancellor and ensure that such a reduction is included in his statement?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I am sure that the Chancellor and the Treasury team have heard what the hon. Gentleman had to say. I agree with him that Scotch whisky is our top international export. Other products such as Scotch gin, which I promoted recently with the Scottish gin trail, taking people from the golf clubs of St Andrews to the distilleries around the north of Scotland, can also play a massive part. We have fantastic products in Scotland and fantastic products right across the UK. The Great British Food Unit is all about promoting them around the world. I am happy to work with the hon. Gentleman on that.

17. [903462] **Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): In supporting Dorset food and exports internally and across the world, will my right hon. Friend pay particular tribute to some notable producers in my constituency: Fudges, the Blackmore Vale dairy, Sixpenny Handley brewery and the Langham estate? Without wishing to outdo my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham), I should also add to that list the manufacturer of Dorset knobs, which I am very happy to offer the Secretary of State. Will she also take into account in all that her Department does the burden of regulation and the impost of the living wage, because many of these producers are very small, so those burdens fall particularly heavily on them?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I would be delighted to visit some of the fantastic producers in Dorset that my hon. Friend mentions, such as the Blackmore Vale dairy, and to see what they have to offer as well as using the Great British Food Unit to promote them both here and overseas. We are working to reduce regulation on our food and farmers, and over the course of this Parliament we are looking to reduce the costs by £500 million, so that we can see more new businesses opening, more exporting and more selling their fantastic food here in Britain.

### Flooding: Agriculture Industry

6. **Tom Elliott** (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): What assessment she has made of the effect of recent flooding on the agriculture industry. [903450]

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** Farmers in many parts of the country have been affected by the winter flooding, notably in Cumbria, Lancashire, Yorkshire, Scotland and, of course, areas of Northern Ireland. We identified 600 farmers in Cumbria alone who suffered

flooding after Storm Desmond. Unlike the Somerset floods two years ago, the flooding events have been relatively short-lived. However, in their wake, considerable damage has been done to stone walls, hedges and tracks. In England, we have established a farm recovery fund to help farmers get back on their feet.

**Tom Elliott:** In Northern Ireland, there is a long-established relationship with the Republic of Ireland Government in relation to Lough Erne and its levels. The UK Government had a relationship, too, from 1950, when that deal was made. Have there been any discussions with the Northern Ireland Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development about reviewing the levels of Lough Erne to stop farmers from being flooded in the area?

**George Eustice:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, flooding is a devolved matter, but if there is a need for discussion with the Irish Republic and if the Northern Ireland Administration would like me to be involved in that, I would be happy to have that conversation with them.

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Farmers in areas in the south of my constituency, around Methley and Mickletown, have had large areas of their land flooded to hold water in order to prevent flooding of housing, which the farmers themselves agree with. However, what they do not agree with is the Environment Agency saying that it could take up to six years for this water to drain off the land. One particular farmer in my constituency had 80% of his land covered. Will my hon. Friend speak to the Environment Agency to speed up the draining of the water from this land?

**George Eustice:** That is a good point. Natural flood plains play an important role in alleviating the risk of flooding in urban areas. We intend to use the countryside stewardship scheme to help us to deal with flood problems. As for my hon. Friend's specific point about the length of time for which land has been flooded, I shall be happy to take it up with the Environment Agency and see what can be done.

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): I am still waiting to hear the date of the meeting with Members whose constituencies lie along the River Wharfe to discuss the flooded farmland in Pool-in-Wharfedale and Arthington, in my constituency. We particularly need to discuss what can be done upstream to prevent the water from coming down and threatening both farms and housing. When can we have that meeting?

**George Eustice:** I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Rory Stewart), the floods Minister, has heard what the hon. Gentleman has said, and will be willing to meet him to discuss his concerns. My hon. Friend has already had many meetings with the many Members who have been affected by winter floods.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): The Secretary of State says that DEFRA wants to be able to spend more on flood defences by reducing the millions paid in penalties to the EU every year. However, the National Audit Office says that the Rural Payments Agency fiasco could cost the country a whopping £180 million a year in penalties. Can the Minister confirm the most recent estimate of

the amounts that are being paid to Brussels in fines, rather than being spent on British agriculture and dealing with flooding?

**George Eustice:** The "horizontal" regulation that governs the disallowance system has been changed, and the penalties that the Commission can charge, and their frequency, have increased. That is the issue of concern in this instance, rather than any particular issues involving the rural payments system. I repeat that we are spending £2.3 billion a year on flood defences, and have provided £200 million to help people to get back on their feet after the most recent episode.

#### Nature Improvement Areas

7. **Oliver Colvile** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con): What assessment the Government have made of the contribution of nature improvement areas to habitat creation and wildlife conservation. [903451]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart):** The nature improvement area report has been overwhelmingly positive, which is quite a rare feature of monitoring reports of this kind. I pay particular tribute to the Wild Purbeck nature improvement area, where there has been an extraordinary combination of activities: saving the ladybird spider, which has included 3,000 volunteer hours, and involving schools through the forest school learning initiative. These are great, great projects.

**Oliver Colvile:** I thank my hon. Friend for our hedgehog summit on Monday. What measures does he propose, along with our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, to increase the number of hedgehogs, which, as he knows, has declined by between 30% and 50% over the last 15 years?

**Rory Stewart:** I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who has become a doughty champion of the hedgehog. The most important thing for hedgehogs, which are a much-loved species, is their habitat, and we are dealing with that by means of our hedgerow schemes, as well as the woodland planting schemes that the Secretary of State is promoting, which include the planting of 11 million more trees over the next five years. The real challenge for all of us, however, is to see hedgehogs in a suburban context, and, in particular, to consider the possibility of providing them with access and corridors through garden fences.

**Barry Gardiner** (Brent North) (Lab): The 12 nature improvement areas were the right response to the Lawton report, but they were supposed to create 1,000 hectares of new woodland, 1,000 hectares of new chalk grassland, and more than 1,500 hectares of new wetland. How many hectares of each of those have actually been created?

**Rory Stewart:** I cannot give every one of those figures, but, as the hon. Gentleman says, the target for chalk grassland was 1,000 hectares, and a single project achieved 1,773 hectares.

**Mr Speaker:** That was a wonderfully precise answer, worthy of a boffin, although the hon. Gentleman is not a boffin; he is a distinguished Minister of the Crown.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I am proud to say that Northern Ireland has eight areas of outstanding natural beauty, 47 national nature reserves, 43 special areas of conservation, and 10 special protection areas. The charities—especially the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds—are working very hard in campaigning for support for wildlife in urban areas. What discussions has the Minister had with his Northern Ireland counterpart about preserving the countryside and ensuring that housing does not expand further from urban areas into rural locations, often encroaching on the wealth of wildlife in those locations?

**Rory Stewart:** We work closely with our Northern Ireland counterparts. Some of these issues are of course devolved, but we would love to work more closely on issues such as these, and if there are opportunities to do that, I personally would be delighted to engage more closely.

#### Flood Defences: Farmland

8. **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): How many acres of farmland will be protected by Government investment in flood defences over the next six years. [903452]

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** As a result of the Government's £2.3 billion programme, more than 420,000 acres of farmland will be better protected by 2021. That means that over the course of the decade between 2010 and 2021, we will see 1 million acres of farmland being better protected from flooding.

**Matt Warman:** I recently visited the River Steeping in my constituency with representatives of the Environment Agency and saw the huge amount of damage that badgers are doing to flood defences in that area—[*Interruption.*] Don't worry. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that the Environment Agency's preferred method of creating artificial setts to relocate badgers will have a meaningful effect on the riverbanks and secure the area for the future?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I was pleased to meet my hon. Friend and representatives of the local internal drainage boards to discuss flooding in his constituency, and I am pleased to hear that the Environment Agency has found a solution to this issue. I note that 100,000 acres of agricultural land in his constituency will be protected as part of our six-year programme.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): While the Government are prevaricating, farms and businesses in the north of England and in Scotland are struggling to cope with the aftermath of the December floods. Can the Secretary of State explain why she needs to find out the total cost before applying to the EU solidarity fund, and will she be able to do this in time to meet the deadline?

**Elizabeth Truss:** The hon. Lady should be aware that we have made a farming recovery fund available, and that we have already paid out money to farmers worth up to £20,000 for each farmer. As soon as the floods took place, we looked on satellite mapping, identified the affected farmers and got on with paying them and sorting the issue out.

#### Broadband Services

11. **Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): What recent assessment she has made of the effect of slow broadband services on farmers and other rural businesses. [903455]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart):** Access to fast reliable broadband is of course important for rural areas, as the hon. Lady well knows. There are two indicative measures that we have taken. One was to ensure that by the end of last year anyone who wished to have a 2 megabit service could access such a service. Perhaps more important is the universal service obligation, which will be in place with 10 megabits by 2020.

**Chi Onwurah:** In 2012, when I criticised the Government for abandoning Labour's universal broadband commitment, the then Secretary of State said:

"We have a plan and we are going to deliver it."—[*Official Report*, 25 October 2012; Vol. 551, c. 1059.]

So was it part of the plan that, in 2016, farmers would still be unable to get the broadband access they need in order to fill out the forms that the Department makes it mandatory to complete online? What is the plan now?

**Rory Stewart:** As the hon. Lady is aware, farmers are able to make applications on paper. Also, she is even more aware than I am of the fact that this is an extremely difficult issue to deal with in rural areas. We have just carried out seven very interesting pilots with operations such as Cybermoor to look at different technological solutions, but the key indicator is the universal service obligation of 10 megabits by 2020.

**Mr Gary Streeter** (South West Devon) (Con): The roll-out of superfast broadband in Devon and Somerset is being hampered by the poor performance of BT Openreach, which still has a virtual monopoly in the area. Is it not time that the Government did something to tackle that monopoly?

**Rory Stewart:** The Department for Communities and Local Government leads on this issue. The reason that the seven pilots have been interesting is that they are community-led pilots that have looked at different technological solutions ranging from satellite through to point-to-point wireless connections. We are going to need all those solutions and to involve all the different parties in order to deliver the difficult challenge of rural broadband.

#### Topical Questions

T1. [903474] **Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Elizabeth Truss):** Following the severe flooding in the north of England over Christmas, the Government are working to help communities to get back on their feet and to restore critical infrastructure. We are taking forward two important areas of work: the national flood resilience review to assess how the country can be

better protected from future flooding and increasingly extreme weather events and, in those areas affected by flooding, we are taking a catchment-based approach looking at what improvements are needed to flood defences and at upstream options for slowing the river flow.

**Mr Cunningham:** What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the supermarkets and farmers about food waste by the supermarkets?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I held a round table meeting, with not just supermarkets, but food manufacturers, because we need to address the issue of food waste right through the food chain. We are working on the next step of the Courtauld agreement—Courtauld 2025—which will have voluntary targets to get both supermarkets and the food manufacturers to a better level.

T6. [903480] **Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that the Government will reallocate fishing quota from those who hold it only as an investment to active, small-scale fishermen such as those who fish out of Lowestoft, who bring real benefits to their local community?

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (George Eustice):** My hon. Friend will be aware that we had a manifesto commitment to rebalance quotas, and we have already commenced that this year, with the quota uplift that comes with the introduction of the landing obligation. We have made it clear that we will give the first 100 tonnes, and 10% thereafter, to the under-10 metres, and this year it will give them an extra 1,000 tonnes of fish.

T2. [903475] **Mr Mark Williams** (Ceredigion) (LD): The recent Tesco case has shown the importance of the Groceries Code Adjudicator. Does the Secretary of State share the view of the National Farmers Union, the Farmers Union of Wales and many in the dairy sector that now is the time to consider extending the adjudicator's remit right across the supply chain, from gate to plate, even if that requires legislative change?

**George Eustice:** I am aware of the representations made by the NFU and of the conclusions of the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in this regard. I know that colleagues in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills are about to commence a review of the role of the adjudicator so far, and it may well be that as part of that they look at how the code is implemented. There would be challenges involved in trying to regulate things that far up, with thousands and thousands of different relationships to police, but we hear what has been said and we will look at this matter.

T8. [903483] **Kevin Hollinrake** (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Cross-compliance rules prevent hedge cutting in August, yet the only bird that seems to be nesting at that time is the very prolific wood pigeon. The rules are preventing farmers from doing vital work, as they are unable to get on to that land during August. Will Ministers agree to look at this to see what can be done to change these rules?

**George Eustice:** My hon. Friend will be pleased to hear that I am always looking at the cross-compliance rules to see whether we can introduce proportionality. I do not agree with him that it is just the wood pigeon that is being protected; yellowhammers and other rare species that we are trying to encourage to recover also have second broods later in the year.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): One less well-publicised deal the UK has been negotiating with our European partners recently is the circular economy package, which could not only bring about significant environmental benefits, but create jobs and growth. The Government, however, do not seem to have a strategy for achieving the ambitious waste targets set out there or for unlocking the economic opportunities that would come from greater resource efficiency. When are we going to have a proper waste resources strategy from the Secretary of State?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Rory Stewart):** The circular economy package is absolutely central, and we are looking closely at it. We sat down with a number of different people last week specifically to address it. The key is in getting the right balance between preventing the resources from being wasted in the first place and the targets that the European Union is setting, but I absolutely agree that this is vital and I am very happy to include the shadow Secretary of State in these discussions going forward.

**Kerry McCarthy:** I thank the Minister for that response—I hope the Secretary of State can reply to the next question. The Ellen MacArthur Foundation says that the huge growth in plastics production means that by 2050 there could be more waste plastic in the sea than fish. Just 5% of plastics are recycled, 40% end up in landfill and a third end up polluting our ecosystems. What is the Secretary of State doing to combat plastics pollution? For starters, how about doing what President Obama has just done and ban microbeads in cosmetic products?

**Elizabeth Truss:** We are looking at the issue of microbeads, but I would point out that the plastic bag charge that we have introduced has brought about an 80% reduction in the use of plastic bags.

**Ben Howlett** (Bath) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in welcoming the multimillion pound joint investment by the Environment Agency and my local authority in the work on the River Avon, which runs through my constituency, as it will help to reduce flooding for hundreds of homes and businesses across the constituency? Will she also look at further funding should the flood risk increase?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question. I congratulate the Environment Agency and his local authority on that work. What we are doing as part of the national resilience review is making sure that we are properly protected right across the country. We are investing a record amount in flood defences, and doing it in a way that is fair. Therefore, our flooding formula reflects the number of houses and businesses protected wherever people live in the country.

T3. [903476] **Margaret Greenwood** (Wirral West) (Lab): I welcome the announcement of further marine conservation zones around our coast to protect our wildlife. However, back in November 2012, when the previous round of MCZs was announced, many in my constituency were very concerned that the zone to protect Hilbre Island was dropped at the eleventh hour, especially in the light of the licence for underground coal gasification that exists in the Dee. Why was Hilbre Island not included in this latest round?

**George Eustice:** We ruled out Hilbre Island, following assessments by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, because the simple truth was that the features that people said were there were not there sufficiently for us to designate those areas.

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): For farmers, farmgate prices are so low that the single farm payment is absolutely essential. Will the Secretary of State assure me that the Rural Payments Agency recognises that there are still too many farmers who have not received their payments, and that work is being done to ensure that, next year, we catch up so that we are not late in paying again?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. A number of farmers are facing cash-flow issues, which is why we are putting as much resource as possible into the RPA. We are now up to 77%, and we have paid out £1 billion. The cases that we are now dealing with are the more complicated ones, including those involving common land and cross-border land, which take extra time. As I have pointed out, we are dealing with a very complicated cap. One of my main efforts is to try to simplify that cap and enable farmers to make claims online this year so that the system will be faster next year.

T4. [903477] **Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): No ifs, no buts, will the Secretary of State commit to maintaining the ban on foxhunting with hounds?

**Elizabeth Truss:** We have been very clear in our manifesto. We retain our commitment to a free vote on this issue, with a Government Bill in Government time.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Will the Secretary of State undertake that the Great British Food Unit will promote the superfood, Bury black pudding?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I certainly will. I have had the opportunity to sample the great British Bury black pudding in my hon. Friend's constituency, and I hope that it will become known around the world.

T5. [903479] **Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): London breached annual pollution limits just days into 2016, repeating what happened in 2015. The Government were forced by the Supreme Court to publish plans on reducing air pollution. Does the Secretary of State think that her Department is doing enough to tackle air pollution? It is projected that there will be five years of this in London.

**Elizabeth Truss:** As the hon. Lady said, we published plans just before Christmas to ensure that we comply with those air pollution levels. The level of roadside nitrogen dioxide has fallen over the past five years. We have invested £2 billion in that already, but we do need to do more, which is why we issued the plans just before Christmas.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): Seafood is nutritional and healthy and many thousands of people in the Cleethorpes and Grimsby areas work in the industry. What initiatives is her Department planning to promote the seafood industry?

**Elizabeth Truss:** I thank my hon. Friend for his point. The Great British Food Unit has not just outposts around the world, but regional teams to help local businesses, whether they are in Cleethorpes or elsewhere in the country, to promote their food both in the UK and overseas. Certainly, seafood is a huge part of that.

T7. [903482] **Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State confirm that it was her signature on a letter last July promising to drive forward fracking in sites of special scientific interest and national parks, in complete contradiction to assurances previously given? May I respectfully suggest to her that, since she is the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, she should be standing up for the interests of the environment and rural areas, and not the interests of big globalised fracking companies that want to frack in rural Cheshire?

**Elizabeth Truss:** As the Royal Society and the Royal Academy of Engineering made clear in their report, shale gas extraction is safe and has minimal impact on the environment, provided that it is correctly regulated. I am absolutely confident that we have very strong protections in place through the Environment Agency to do that.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I fear that this will be the last question. I am sorry, but progress has been very slow—very long questions and very long answers.

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Has my hon. Friend thought through the impact of the introduction of marine conservation zones on the under-10-metre fleet? That could have an effect on smaller, non-nomadic boats, which might be banned from fishing in their own grounds.

**George Eustice:** I absolutely assure my hon. Friend that the interests of fishermen are taken into account when we make decisions on these designations. It is important to note that designation does not mean that we ban fishing; it may mean, for instance, limitations on the particular types of bottom-trawling gear that do most damage.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry to disappoint colleagues, but we really must move on.

## ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

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

### EU Referendum

1. **Ian Blackford** (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): What recent assessment the Electoral Commission has made of the potential effect of the date of the EU referendum on mayoral, local, and devolved institutions' elections. [903465]

**Mr Gary Streeter** (South West Devon): The Electoral Commission recently wrote to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, following that Committee's recent evidence session, on a number of issues, including the potential impact of the date of the referendum if it were to be held in June. A copy of the letter is available on the Committee's website.

**Ian Blackford:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that answer. As he will know, early-day motion 1042, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins), has cross-party support in the House. It calls for the EU referendum not to be held in June.

Does the hon. Gentleman not agree that holding the referendum in June would seriously undermine the democratic process? Furthermore, yesterday the First Ministers of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales published a joint letter calling for the EU referendum not to be held in June. Does he not agree that the Government should respect the calls from the devolved Administrations and defer the referendum?

**Mr Streeter:** It is for the Government to decide how they respond to the letters from the heads of those Governments. The Electoral Commission has strongly advised the Government and the House about the date of the referendum. The Government listened; they are not holding the referendum in May. I am sure that, as soon as a specific date is announced, the Electoral Commission will give further advice.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Given the lengthy procedure for determining the lead organisation, will my hon. Friend make it clear that the Electoral Commission will ensure that it appoints a lead organisation in sufficient time—and not halfway through the campaign?

**Mr Streeter:** The Electoral Commission is extremely exercised about the issue of appointing the lead campaigns, and it will do that as soon as possible.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): Will my hon. Friend confirm whether the Electoral Commission has given any views about potential dates for the EU referendum in June?

**Mr Streeter:** My hon. Friend has his finger on the pulse. Let me read one sentence from the appropriate letter:

"As may be expected, the impact is greater the closer together the dates of poll and is particularly significant for the first two Thursdays in June (2 and 9 June in the case of 2016.) I would encourage that these dates are avoided if it is possible to do so." That is the advice that the Electoral Commission has given the Government.

## Policy Development Grants

2. **Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): What assessment the Electoral Commission has made of the effect of the level of policy development grants on the operation of political parties. [903467]

**Mr Streeter** The Electoral Commission has recently written to the Government setting out its recommended approach to implementing the reduction of policy development grants, which the Government announced in the spending review and autumn statement of 2015. A copy of the Electoral Commission's letter will be placed in the House Library.

**Kirsty Blackman:** Policy development grants allow political parties to develop considered, costed policies to the benefit of the people living in the UK. As the hon. Gentleman said, the grants are to suffer a cut, which will save the Treasury a very small amount of money relatively but have a big impact on political parties. Does he agree that there could not be a less appropriate time for such a cut?

**Mr Streeter:** The important thing is how the money is allocated among the various parties. The hon. Lady will know that the Electoral Commission has consulted the smaller parties. It has written to the Government recommending that those parties should be disproportionately protected—that is, they should get a smaller cut than the larger ones. The Electoral Commission is waiting for the Government to respond to that advice.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Is this issue not a real worry? In a healthy democracy we need parties to be able to develop policy. What is going on in the House of Lords and in this Chamber is penalising the Opposition in terms of the Short money and the policy development grant they get. That cannot be good for democracy, can it?

**Mr Streeter:** The hon. Gentleman always speaks very clearly and powerfully on these issues. Unfortunately, the issue he raises is a matter for the Government, not the Electoral Commission. It is for the Government to decide the size of the grant; the Electoral Commission will advise the Government on how the grant should be allocated.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): This mean, despicable cut will hamper the power of Oppositions—the Conservative party will be in opposition in the future, as they were in the past—to reduce the democratic accountability of this place. Would it not be a great improvement, if the Government wish to improve the quality of our democracy, to cut the number of hereditary chieftains who sit in the House of Lords and the number of people in the House of Lords who buy their places by making donations to political parties?

**Mr Streeter:** Once again, a very powerful outburst from the hon. Gentleman, but I am afraid these issues have absolutely nothing to do with the Electoral Commission.

**Mr Speaker:** That has never stopped the hon. Gentleman before. *[Interruption.]* I have never accused the hon. Member of indulging in an outburst—more a spontaneous articulation of strongly held opinions.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

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

### Queen's 90th Birthday

3. **Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): What plans the Church of England has to mark the 90th birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. [903468]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mrs Caroline Spelman):** The Church of England will mark the 90th birthday of Her Majesty with a large number of events and activities at national and local levels. Alongside these events, the Bible Society and HOPE have released a companion book titled "The Servant Queen", with a foreword written by Her Majesty that discusses how her faith has influenced her service of this nation over the last 90 years.

**Dr Offord:** I am sure I speak on behalf of the whole country when I say that the opportunities for the Queen to be celebrated are most welcome. The Church is recommending that every parish church organises an exhibition or festival on the weekend of 10 to 12 June. Will my right hon. Friend use her office to encourage residents to challenge local authorities that seek to charge for road closures or to require events to have public liability insurance?

**Mrs Spelman:** My hon. Friend makes a good point, because there will be a large number of activities in London, not least a special service at St Paul's on 12 June, and his constituents will no doubt want to be there. While this issue is not directly my responsibility, I will use my good offices with the Local Government Association to try to make sure that our constituents are not impeded in celebrating Her Majesty's birthday in the best possible way.

### Street Pastor Teams

4. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): How many street pastor teams the Church of England works with. [903469]

**Mrs Spelman:** The Church of England has supported Street Pastors since its formation in London by the Ascension Trust in 2003. A large proportion of its clergy and members of the congregations are involved in Street Pastors. In Kettering, nine of the 27 street pastors are Anglicans.

**Mr Hollobone:** Kettering is indeed fortunate to have a superb team of street pastors, who go out in the town centre at weekends to speak to, often, vulnerable people and to many young people who are the worse for wear and who have had too much to drink. That really is an excellent example of faith-based action. May I urge my

right hon. Friend, through her good offices, to encourage the Church of England to get even more involved in supporting such a worthwhile cause?

**Mrs Spelman:** I could not support that recommendation more. There are now 12,000 trained street pastors in our country, serving 270 towns and cities. It is particularly interesting that the nightly reporting inventory for the last year for Kettering showed remarkable attention to detail. It refers to giving away 125 pairs of flip-flops, 294 bottles of water and an amazing 2,299 lollipops.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): In my constituency, Street Pastors started in September 2015. Its vision is to go out to help vulnerable people and to do the best for them, and the results have been excellent. What discussions has the Church of England had about working with other Churches? We are better together, as we all know, and if we can do these things together, we can reach more people.

**Mrs Spelman:** As I indicated, the concept of street pastors did not actually originate with the Church of England, and we acknowledge that. However, Anglicans support absolutely what the street pastors do. Churches should work together; indeed, we should look to work with other faiths. In the city of Birmingham, near my constituency, there are also street pastors of the Muslim faith, and I have seen for myself what an impact street pastors have on gang culture and on tackling knife and gun crime.

### Ethical Investment Policy

5. **John Pugh** (Southport) (LD): What recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Church Commissioners' ethical investment policy. [903470]

**Mrs Spelman:** During 2015, the Church Commissioners' ethical investment strategy won awards at the Portfolio institutional awards in the category of responsible investment. The commissioners have also had success in leading shareholder resolutions on climate change behaviour with BP and Shell, and they will continue to work with other institutional shareholders on filing similar resolutions at their annual general meetings.

**John Pugh:** I thank the right hon. Lady for that full response, but is not the correct principle that the commissioners actively seek to shun investment in companies guilty of what the Chancellor calls "aggressive tax avoidance"?

**Mrs Spelman:** Yes. Indeed, it is just a year to the day since the Archbishop of Canterbury said that a good economy is based on

"the principle that you pay the tax where you earn the money. If you earn the money in a country, the revenue service of that country needs to get a fair share of what you have earned."

I could not put it better myself.

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): One of the ways in which the Church deploys its investments, ethical or otherwise, is in supporting schools across the country. Will my right hon. Friend use her offices to persuade the Church, and particularly certain dioceses, to take a

more responsible and open-minded approach to joining academy groupings where some of their schools, particularly primary schools, are underperforming and need to change?

**Mrs Spelman:** The Church of England is the largest provider of education in this country, and it is co-operating with the Government in trying to address poor performance in schools. Eighty per cent. of Church of England schools are rated “good” or “outstanding”, but the Church recognises the need to work with schools where the performance is not as good as that. Multi-academy trusts present a great opportunity for successful Church of England schools to mentor and help with the raising of standards among those which find this more difficult.

#### **Church Leadership: Women and BME Groups**

6. **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): What further steps the Church of England is taking to increase the representation of women and BME groups among its leadership. [903471]

**Mrs Spelman:** The Church of England needs to increase its vocations for ministry by around 50% in the next 10 years in order to sustain the 8,000 clergy it currently has in parish ministry. The representation of women in the Church has grown significantly, with almost equal numbers being recommended for ordination training. Currently, those of black, Asian, and minority ethnicity make up 3% of the clergy population, and the Church is committed to increasing that percentage.

**Matt Warman:** I welcome that answer. May I ask that, when trying to increase the range of people available to take up positions that are currently vacant, we pay particular attention to churches that have been vacant for long periods, because that is damaging to communities such as that at St Matthew’s in Skegness?

**Mrs Spelman:** I hope I can reassure my hon. Friend on this, because as recently as Tuesday night in this House we passed the obscurely titled Diocesan Stipends Fund (Amendment) Measure. That Church Measure—it originated from the diocese of Lincoln, which covers his constituency—should enable his diocese to invest in the training of more clergy by releasing money from the funds for that purpose.

#### **Credit Unions**

7. **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): What support the Church of England provides to local credit unions. [903472]

**Mrs Spelman:** Churches and dioceses across the country have responded enthusiastically and creatively to the Archbishop of Canterbury’s call to support credit unions and community finance, often building on pre-existing initiatives and helping to build financial resilience in communities. The diocese of Gloucester has recently part-funded the appointment of a credit union development worker for Gloucestershire Credit Union and established collection points in local churches.

**Richard Graham:** The diocese of Gloucester has shown real commitment to breathing new life into Gloucester Credit Union; I should declare an interest as a long-standing member. However, we need to do much more to reach effectively those who are most vulnerable to loan sharks. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that, while the Church of England builds and promotes its own new credit union, that will not distract from the important work it does in supporting existing local credit unions?

**Mrs Spelman:** I absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. Every Member of this House would recognise the importance of credit unions at the local level, but that goes hand in hand with, and does not detract from, the Archbishop’s task group on responsible credit savings, which has sought to harness the Church’s national and grassroots resources in support of developing a stronger community of finance.

**Mr Robin Walker** (Worcester) (Con): As chairman of the all-party group on credit unions, may I welcome my right hon. Friend’s last answer? I also welcome the leadership that the Archbishop of Canterbury has shown on the issue of problem credit. Does she welcome the launch of Fair For You, and will she comment on how the Church can support that community finance initiative in the rent-to-own sector that is taking on some of the challenges in that sector and showing that responsible, local community finance can compete?

**Mrs Spelman:** I will certainly take that suggestion back to Church House. The Church has shown commitment to helping people manage their money and invest safely, and to teaching our children at the very earliest age—through its LifeSavers project, with assistance from the Treasury—how to ensure that they do not get into debt. All that is evidence, I think, that the Church will be supportive of my hon. Friend’s suggestion.

## Return of Kings

10.35 am

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for Home Affairs if she will make a statement on events planned by the group Return of Kings.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley)**: Roosh V is a US, self-styled pick-up artist. Media reporting has suggested that supporters of Roosh V and the Return of Kings website were scheduled to hold nine events across the UK this Saturday 6 February. An announcement on the group's website has been publicised in the press this morning, stating that no Return of Kings events will be held on Saturday.

The Government condemn in the strongest terms anyone who condones rape and sexual violence or suggests that responsibility for stopping these crimes rests with the victims. Responsibility always unequivocally rests with the perpetrator of these serious crimes.

Any form of violence against women or girls is absolutely unacceptable. The impact of domestic and sexual violence on the victims—physically, psychologically and emotionally—cannot be overstated, and the Government are working closely with victims and survivors, support services, the police and criminal justice agencies to end these terrible crimes. If criminal offences have been committed, including incitement of violence against women, the Government would expect local police forces to deal with any offenders appropriately.

The Government do not routinely comment on individual immigration or exclusion cases, but the Home Secretary has powers to exclude an individual who is not a British citizen, if she considers that their presence in the UK is not conducive to the public good. This Home Secretary has excluded more foreign nationals on the grounds of unacceptable behaviour than any before her. That can include, and has included, exclusions based on threats posed to women's safety because of encouragement of violence against women.

The Government are pleased that the Return of Kings events appear to have been cancelled, and I look forward to this afternoon's full debate in Westminster Hall on the subject of the role of men in preventing violence against women. I am sure we will discuss these issues at length.

**Kate Green**: I welcome the Minister's response. There has been widespread ridicule of, and revulsion at, the antics of the group Return of Kings, including from the respected police and crime commissioner for Northumbria, Vera Baird, and parliamentary colleagues. My hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) has written to the Minister about the matter, and there has been widespread coverage in the media. The public, in this country and worldwide, have also responded. Indeed, there are 63,000 signatures to the online petition calling for the events to be banned, so I am very glad that they will not go ahead this weekend. That is in no measure, as far as I can tell, due to the action of the Government, but we need assurances for the future, because Roosh V has said that he cannot stop men attending private meetings.

The Minister has said that the Home Secretary has the power to exclude individuals from the UK. What information do the Government hold about Roosh V's plans to travel to this country in future, and is it the Minister's expectation that he would attract a ban? Has she or the Home Secretary considered classifying Return of Kings as a proscribed group?

Events were advertised to Roosh V's followers, which led to plans for counter-demonstrations in a number of UK cities, creating a threat both to public order and to women's safety. The Minister has said that the police have powers to act if they believe that crimes have been committed. Does she believe that the threshold for incitement to rape or hate crimes has been met? What discussions have been had with the police, and what guidance has been issued to them, about handling such activities? In relation to the online advertising of the events—at which participants were apparently required to give the password "pet shop" before being admitted—what discussions have the Government had with internet providers and Facebook about taking down those offensive posts?

The events take place against the backdrop of a 41% increase in rape in the past year and the loss of much specialist provision. According to the Women's Budget Group, 29% of the cuts announced to local authorities in the 2015 spending review could fall on services to support women who are suffering from violence, and 32 specialist refuges closed between 2010 and 2014. Many rape crisis centres have told me that they have no guarantee about their funding after next month. Will the Minister assure the House that that funding will continue from April this year?

As the Minister has mentioned, there will be a debate in Westminster Hall this afternoon on the role of men in tackling violence against women, and that is welcome. I expect that it will cover perpetrator programmes and compulsory sex and relationships education in schools, for which Labour has been pressing for many years. Will the Minister commit to introducing compulsory sex and relationships education as part of the personal, social, health and economic education curriculum in every school?

Finally, when will the Government ratify and implement the Istanbul convention, which was signed in 2012? What is the explanation for the delay?

**Karen Bradley**: I start by agreeing with the hon. Lady that the comments of this individual and the proposals of this group are absolutely repulsive. I am sure that everybody in the House will join us in condemning what they have said. Such things have no place in British society. I assure her that the Government are taking all the steps we can to deal with the matter, and I will be happy to write to her on the specifics of what the Government can do. She will understand that I cannot comment on individual cases, and many of the things that she asked about are operational matters for local police. I will be happy to write to her about what local police can do to stop such activities, but it would not be appropriate for me to go into detail here.

The hon. Lady talked about ridicule, and I share her view that we should ridicule the group and show contempt for them, because they hold the most ridiculous views. She mentioned Vera Baird, with whom I agree that we

should make a point of ridiculing the comments. If we can show that they are ludicrous, people will not want to be part of this.

The hon. Lady asked about internet providers. As she knows, we talk with internet providers about many topics, including indecent images of children online, children having access to pornographic material, and inappropriate material. I will certainly take this point up with the internet providers when I see them at the UK Council for Child Internet Safety board next month.

The hon. Lady asked about the Istanbul convention. We have an issue on article 44 of the Istanbul convention, which concerns an extraterritoriality matter. We are discussing it with the devolved Administrations, because it needs primary legislation, and I am not going to ratify the convention until I am absolutely certain that we comply with all its measures. We comply with everything except that one point, and I want to make sure that we deal with it before ratification.

The hon. Lady mentioned the debate this afternoon in Westminster Hall. I pay tribute to the white ribbon campaign, which has been instrumental in making it clear that men do not want to see violence against women and girls.

Finally, I want to take up what the hon. Lady said about the 41% increase in rape. That is a 41% increase in reported rape, and we welcome that, because it shows that victims have the confidence to come forward and that they are reporting those crimes. If they do so, we can get convictions, which are at their highest ever level. The crime survey for England and Wales shows that the level of those crimes is not going up, and we welcome that. We want to see more reporting, and I hope she will join me in welcoming the increase in reporting.

**Dame Angela Watkinson** (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): I welcome the Government's commitment, through education, to raising awareness about sexual and relationship abuse with its "This is Abuse" campaign. Does the Minister agree that more emphasis must be placed on tackling controlling behaviour and emotional abuse, which often go unreported?

**Karen Bradley:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question. The "This is Abuse" campaign has been extremely successful, and I am very pleased that the Government announced, just before Christmas, that we are continuing with it. It is so important that young people understand what is appropriate, understand what is appropriate in relationships and understand what a normal loving relationship is, as opposed to an abusive one.

My hon. Friend will know that the new domestic abuse offence—the offence of coercive or controlling behaviour—was commenced on 29 December. The new offence had been called for for many years. It was a difficult thing to do, which is why the Government made sure that we got it right, but we now have the ability to prosecute and convict offenders who never commit physical violence against their victims, but have abused them for far too long.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I thank the Minister for her comments. I join her in condemning rape and violence in any form and, in particular, any attempt to blame the victims. I wholeheartedly agree with her that responsibility must always rest with the perpetrator.

We in the Scottish National party are pleased that the events have been cancelled. The anti-women agenda behind them is utterly and completely repugnant. In Scotland, our petition against the events, which were due to take place in Edinburgh and Glasgow, has attracted about 40,000 signatures. Members may be aware that SNP Members have signed an early-day motion condemning these sexist and hate-mongering meetings and the misogyny behind them.

In Scotland, Police Scotland has been working closely with anti-violence against women organisations. It put out a fairly strongly worded statement about the policing of the events that were to have taken place. It is obviously absolutely paramount, as I am sure the Minister would agree, that women should be able to go about their lawful business, day and night, in our cities and towns without being subjected to this sort of intimidation.

The Scottish Government and Police Scotland have worked hard on the investigation of sex crimes in Scotland. The Minister will be aware that a number of years ago—in 2008—the Scottish Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service set up a specialist national sexual crimes unit. I was very proud to be one of its founding prosecutors. Our conviction rates for rape and sexual violence have indeed increased, but we are still working very hard on that, as these are challenging crimes to prosecute.

I associate myself with the questions raised by the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), and I thank her for asking this important urgent question. SNP Members, too, want the Istanbul convention to be ratified as soon as possible, and I am sure the Minister will reassure me that she is continuing to liaise with the devolved Governments about that.

Will the Minister reassure me about one point raised by the Member for Stretford and Urmston? If the Home Secretary becomes aware of any plans this gentleman—I use the word loosely—may have to enter the United Kingdom, will she liaise with the Scottish Government, and indeed the other devolved Administrations, on any future events?

**Karen Bradley:** I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her comments. I assure her that I will copy her into my letter to the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green). We want to take all the steps we possibly can, and I want to set out in depth the steps that the Government can take and what we will do.

The hon. and learned Lady mentioned the Istanbul convention. I assure her that we are liaising with the devolved Administrations to make sure that we ratify it as soon as possible. She talked about police forces. I want to pay tribute to Police Scotland, and to all police forces across the United Kingdom. It is worth making the point that such criminals do not recognise borders, and police forces need to work together to make sure that we tackle these crimes. Such crimes are not acceptable in the United Kingdom—and I mean the whole United Kingdom.

**Simon Hoare** (North Dorset) (Con): I very much support what the Opposition Front Benchers have said. We defend our cherished liberty of free speech to the utmost, but with that freedom must come responsibility. May I say to my hon. Friend the Minister that I am pretty certain all Conservative Members would welcome the proactive engagement of the Home Secretary and

[Simon Hoare]

her Department not only in excluding this man—frankly, he is an embarrassment to all men—but in proscribing his organisation?

**Karen Bradley:** I want to reassure my hon. Friend that he would struggle to find a more proactive Home Secretary. This Home Secretary has excluded more people and done more to tackle violence against women and girls than any Home Secretary in history, and I am very proud to serve in her Department.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): These planned meetings may well have been simply a publicity stunt by an attention-seeker so insecure in his own masculinity that he goes to such lengths to augment the size of his—er—following. I have been contacted by many constituents—men and women—who are outraged and revolted and also frightened by the planned meeting in Newcastle, so can the Minister reassure them that anyone meeting in Newcastle or anywhere else, or coming to this country to plan or condone rape, would be treated in the same way as anyone planning or condoning murder, terrorism or any violent act?

**Karen Bradley:** I can assure the hon. Lady that that is a criminal offence and such people would be treated in the same way. I join her in her comments about the possible reasons why this individual is doing what he is doing—to ensure that he gets publicity, which he may need for other reasons. I will say no more.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Can we be really robust in deciding who is allowed into this country and who is not? Rather than relying on individual police forces to intercept such individuals after their arrival, if the Government have clear intelligence that an individual or a group are seeking to incite criminal activity in this country, the Government should have no qualms at all about making it clear that these people are excluded from our country, so that we do not have to put extra pressure on our police forces, who have many other things to do.

**Karen Bradley:** My hon. Friend will understand that I cannot comment on individual cases, but I agree that it is much better to exclude than to deal with such people when they are here. This Home Secretary has excluded more foreign national offenders and foreign nationals than any other.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): I can see no possible benefit from this individual being allowed into the UK now or in the future, so may I add my voice to those of hon. Members who say that, although we understand that the Minister cannot comment on individual cases, we hope that very soon she will be able to do so by saying that this person is excluded permanently from the UK? She cannot talk about operational police matters; is there a general steer that she would hope to give to the police as to their response to this matter?

**Karen Bradley:** I am sure the hon. Gentleman's comments will have been heard. I have the Police Minister sitting next to me and he has also heard the hon. Gentleman's comments.

**Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): Although I share the revulsion at this group's views and the need to exclude such people from the UK, there is a substantial weight of evidence now to suggest that this group has no plans to meet and is concocting these plans across the globe to generate maximum publicity for its vile views, and that it is taking politicians and the media across the globe for a ride. I welcome the news that these alleged events have been cancelled, but has the Minister seen or heard any evidence to suggest that there was actually a plan to hold any of these events in the UK?

**Karen Bradley:** I have as much information as my hon. Friend as to how valid the plans may or may not have been, but he makes an important point. We should all remember, as the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) said, to treat such people with ridicule rather than seriously.

**Liz Saville Roberts** (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): I, too, welcome the public revulsion which has resulted in the cancellation of the Return of Kings meetings, including one in Cardiff, which Plaid Cymru was set to oppose. How will the Minister address the wider question of the balance between free speech online and the incitement of violence against women as though it was socially acceptable?

**Karen Bradley:** The hon. Lady asks about online specifically. I assure her that what is illegal offline is illegal online. If it is a criminal offence, it is a criminal offence, no matter where it happens.

**Mike Freer** (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): As part of the review of public order, will my hon. Friend review the weighting of the community impact element when the police decide when to intervene? One of the problems with such public order decisions is that the police take quite a black and white decision about whether the law has been broken, rather than taking a wider view of the impact that that has on the community involved.

**Karen Bradley:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. I know that he has personal experience in his own constituency. I can assure him that we will look at those points.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): This is not the first time that a campaign of violence and aggression has been orchestrated via the internet, and it will not be the last. Although we hear warm words from the Government every time there is an incident, nothing ever seems to happen. I press the Minister to say what action the Government will take over the ease with which vile messages can be distributed via the internet.

**Karen Bradley:** I assure the hon. Lady that it is a criminal offence to make these kinds of comments. The Government do not take these matters lightly. We work hard and at length with the internet service providers, which have a responsibility to ensure that such messages are not distributed.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): This individual's offensiveness and arrogance are exceeded only by his ignorance. There are real worries about whether the

meetings were anything other than a publicity stunt to get a reaction. Does the Minister agree that the key thing is to ensure that there are positive role models for young men, which the majority of people are, and that the key mistake this individual made was to think that many men would want to attend meetings so vile in their intent?

**Karen Bradley:** I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): On the very day when we will discuss for the first time at Westminster the positive role that men can play in preventing and ending violence against women, does the Minister share my concern that this small, small man's abhorrent views and publicity seeking risk distracting us from the positive role that the vast majority of men—real men—would like to play in ending misogyny in all its forms?

**Karen Bradley:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point and I look forward to debating the matter this afternoon. He is absolutely right that men have a positive role to play, and the vast majority of men do so.

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister agree that this situation is symptomatic of a much bigger, awful trend towards misogyny, hatred against women and violence that we are seeing on all sorts of media, including Twitter, which is international? What efforts is she making to promote an attitude of zero tolerance towards that trend, not just in Britain, but by taking leadership internationally to address it at its roots?

**Karen Bradley:** The hon. Gentleman leads me into an answer that could potentially last many days on the different things that need to be done internationally to promote women and women's rights, such as the action that the Government are taking to tackle female genital mutilation and forced marriage. All people have a right to exist and live equally. These views and comments are not acceptable.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): It is a ridiculous irony that the events have been cancelled for the safety of this man's supporters, given the nature of the events. I join everybody in their condemnation of this sick individual and his misogynist followers. Will the Minister pay tribute to the groups of campaigners across the country, particularly in Glasgow, who have helped to force the cancellation of the events? Will she also pay tribute to Police Scotland, which has worked closely with the campaigners in Glasgow and Edinburgh to ensure their safety at the events? There was unequivocal condemnation in the Police Scotland statement, which said that

“sex without consent is rape.”

**Karen Bradley:** I agree with the hon. Lady. I pay tribute to Police Scotland and to all police forces across the country, which work equally hard to deal with these crimes and to make that message heard.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I agree with the Minister that most men will not support these vile, anti-women, misogynistic, pro-rape views. I am

sure that Members on both sides of the House will support the Home Secretary unequivocally in making sure that Roosh V never sets foot on British soil. What more are the Government doing to make sure that the small number of individuals who do support these abhorrent views learn the error of their ways and see that such views are not acceptable in a decent society?

**Karen Bradley:** The hon. Gentleman makes the important point that prevention and education are incredibly important to make sure that the young men—and older men—who hold these views understand that they are wrong. The “This is Abuse” campaign, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch and Upminster (Dame Angela Watkinson) mentioned, is part of that, as is our work to end gang and youth violence and exploitation, because young men who are in a circle where it is seen as acceptable to exploit young women and treat them as no more than sex objects have to be educated that that simply is not right.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): The fact that this event in Glasgow has been cancelled shows that people do make Glasgow. Does the Minister agree that any event planned to coach men how to coerce women into having sex, is not a free speech issue but an issue of public safety and order? Will she join me in condemning the sick-minded halfwits who support these events and were planning to attend them, and does she welcome the fact that this weekend they will now be sitting in their underpants, eating cold ravioli from a tin?

**Karen Bradley:** The hon. Gentleman conjures up quite an image—I think I will leave it at that!

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): Such grotesque misogynist and homophobic views are not masculine—they are a perversion of masculinity and are cowardly. Does the Minister welcome initiatives by the National Union of Students and student unions—including in Leeds—to train bar staff to spot signs of sexual harassment? We must stamp out sexual harassment in all our society.

**Karen Bradley:** I would be very interested in learning more about what the hon. Gentleman says, as that is exactly the kind of initiative that we need to ensure that it is clear that no woman can ever be guilty of inciting her own rape. Rape is committed by the perpetrators, and they are the only people who are responsible.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): As the Minister will know, I wrote to the Home Secretary on this issue in response to the outrage and anger of my constituents who contacted me about it. The Government of Australia have publicly stated that they will continue to monitor any application from Roosh V, or anyone else associated with the Return of Kings. Will the Minister assure the House that the UK Government will do likewise for any individual associated with this group who is promoting a diet of hate?

**Karen Bradley:** I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Home Secretary keeps a very close eye on all these matters, and that the Government take every step they possibly can.

## Business of the House

11.2 am

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House give us the forthcoming business, and all that jazz?

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling):** There is not much jazz in this, unless there is an MP4 concert coming up, but that is not something I know about. The business for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 8 FEBRUARY—Motions relating to the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2016 and the State Pension (Amendment) Regulations 2016—that certainly doesn't have any jazz in it—followed by debate on a motion on the future of the routes of the Great Western Railway. The subject for that debate was determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

TUESDAY 9 FEBRUARY—Opposition day (un-allotted day). There will be a half-day debate on the European referendum on a motion in the name of the Democratic Unionist party, followed by a half-day debate on housing on a motion in the name of the Liberal Democrats. That will be followed by a motion to approve a money resolution on the House of Commons (Administration) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 10 FEBRUARY—Motions relating to the police grant and local government finance reports, followed by a motion relating to the Procedure Committee report on the notification of arrest of Members.

THURSDAY 11 FEBRUARY—Debate on a motion relating to Equitable Life, followed by debate on a motion on the conservation of sea bass and the effect of related EU measures on the UK fishing industry. The subjects for both debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 12 FEBRUARY—The House will not be sitting.

We have yet to finalise the full business for the week commencing 22 February, but provisional business will include:

MONDAY 22 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of a Bill—*[Interruption.]*

Hon. Members will just have to wait—anticipation for next week.

I also inform the House that the business for Westminster Hall for 11 February will be:

THURSDAY 11 FEBRUARY—General debate on the persecution of Ahmadiyya Muslims and other religious minorities in Pakistan.

**Chris Bryant:** It has been quite a week, hasn't it! I thought I was hearing things yesterday morning when listening to the "Today" programme, when they said that a "Belgian loon" had given the Prime Minister his backing, I thought, "Is that gross BBC bias? Inappropriate stigmatising language?" Perhaps they were talking about a Walloon? No, it was Mr Sander Loones, the vice-chair of the New Flemish Alliance. So now we know—the Loones back the Prime Minister.

As far as I can see, the only people Leave.EU hates more than the EU are Vote Leave. And Grassroots Out, of course. Oh, and then there is Better Off Out, which I thought was a gay organisation but apparently is not, and is a completely different organisation from Get Britain Out, which also is not a gay organisation. "Splitters!" we might all shout. Leave.EU believes that Vote Leave

does not really want to leave the EU. Vote Leave believes, however, that Leave.EU is a bunch of right-wing homophobes—it is not far wrong. Leave.EU thinks that Vote Leave are a bunch of hippy-dippy, let-it-all-hang-out libertarian lunatics. And everyone hates Iain, apparently. Will the Leader of the House tell us which group he is going to join? Will it be Grassroots Out, Vote Leave or Leave.EU, or will he just sign up to the People's Front of Judea, the Judean Popular People's Front and the Popular Front of Judea all at the same time?

I note that the Leader of the House just announced the Second Reading of "a Bill" for 22 February. That is not an announcement—it is a non-announcement. What Bill will this be, or does the Leader of the House even know? Has the Chief Whip not told him yet? He could whisper in his little ear and tell us all later. For all we know, following what the Minister for Europe said earlier this week, it could be the putting children up chimneys Bill. Frankly, I would not put it past this lot. Now that the new Justice Secretary has consigned yet another preposterous policy that came from the pen of the former Justice Secretary, will the mystery Bill be the Chris Grayling abolition Bill?

Incidentally, Mr Speaker, I can let you in on a secret, as long as you do not tell anybody else. Apparently, members of the Cabinet refer to the Leader of the House as the Dark Lord, although at this rate I think he is going to be the Invisible Lord. Will the hon. Member for Mordor ensure that the Work and Pensions Secretary comes to the House next week to make a statement on the despicable appointment of Doug Gurr, the head of Amazon China, as a non-executive director of the Department for Work and Pensions? Is this some kind of cruel joke or deliberate insult to benefit claimants and people in receipt of pensions?

For years, Amazon has used anti-competitive practices to crush competitors. It has used deliberate and calculated means of avoiding paying its fair share of tax in this country and it has systematically refused to co-operate in tackling VAT fraud. If it was a benefit claimant, people would be accusing it of fraud. The figures are shocking. It took £5.3 billion of sales from British internet shoppers but, according to Companies House, paid just £11.9 million in UK tax. That is a tax rate of 0.002%—not 0.2% or 2%, but 0.002%. Those are best mates rates. Is it not always the same with the Tory Government? There is one rule for the rich and powerful, and quite another for the rest.

When the Work and Pensions Secretary comes to the House, will he explain this to us all? Under his rules, if we take two twins born in 1953—let us call them, for the sake of argument, Jack and Jill—Jack gets £155 in state pension, while Jill gets £131 just because she is a woman. And that is not all. Less than one in four women born in the 1950s will qualify for the full flat-rate state pension. That is a disgrace! It is unfair, unjust and immoral.

On Tuesday, we had the Second Reading of the Enterprise Bill. The Bill has already been through all its stages in the House of Lords. As it started in the Lords, the Public Bill Committee in the Commons cannot take any public evidence. Yet in a case of startling hubris, the Business Secretary announced that the Government intend to add a whole new section to the Bill to liberalise Sunday trading. This was not in the Conservative manifesto. It was not even mentioned in the Lords. Who are the Government frightened of—the bishops or the voters?

Lent starts on Wednesday, so may I suggest a new Lenten discipline for the Leader of the House and the Government? Tell the House first. Today is Time to Talk day, when we talk about mental health. Will the Leader ensure that the NHS England mental health taskforce report, which has been constantly delayed and was originally promised for before Christmas, is not published during the recess, but when the House is sitting next week? Leaks from the report suggest a £1.2 billion gap in mental health provision. Warm words about mental health and parliamentary sovereignty are all very well, but we will judge the Government by their actions, not their words.

I want to end with a few words about personnel in the office of the Leader of the House. I understand that he has decided to do without the services of his head of office, Mike Winter. I cannot say how retrograde a step I believe this is. Mike is a man of complete and utter civil service professionalism. He served Labour and Conservative Leaders of the House with complete impartiality and dedication, working closely with Members of all political parties, putting in extremely long hours and leading his team admirably. He frequently put me right. His total focus has been on serving the House, which I gently suggest to the Leader of the House should be his focus too. I wish Mike well.

**Chris Grayling:** Mr Speaker, your request about the length of the shadow Leader of the House's contribution lasted just one week.

The shadow Leader of the House made several requests for statements. I simply remind him, as I do each week, that I provide him with extensive opportunities to debate matters in the House, but we have established in recent weeks that each week he stands and asks for debates, and almost never do they get tabled when the Opposition are given time for them. He and his party table debates on fewer than one in six of the subjects he asks for debates on. Either he is not seriously interested in them, or his own party is not listening to him.

The shadow Leader of the House asked about tax paid. I simply remind him that our steps to recover tax from companies such as Google are necessary because, during its 13 years in power, Labour did nothing about it. I sit and listen to the hypocrisy of the Opposition—they ask why we are doing this now and they talk about mates rates—but they did nothing about it in government. He also talked about pensions, which they did nothing about in government either. We are introducing a new single-tier pension that will deliver fairness for people in our society and ensure that everybody has a decent retirement. In the 13 years Labour was in power, when did it ever do anything about that?

The shadow Leader of the House talked about the changes in the Enterprise Bill. I simply remind him that we are the elected House, and we will debate a matter related to devolution, which is something that Labour is supposed to support but which it clearly does not any more.

Once again, we heard nothing of this week's events in the Labour party and its latest madcap idea. As if using nuclear submarines as troop carriers was not enough, the shadow Chancellor now wants to get rid of borders. Yes, no borders at all! We would have terrorists crossing borders, organised crime spreading its nets and more and more migration against the wishes of the people of

this country. The Labour party has been seized by a madcap ideology, and the shadow Leader of the House is still sitting there and supporting it. I do not understand why.

**Dame Angela Watkinson** (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): Will the Treasury take a closer look at the proposed changes to the disbursement of landfill tax revenues through the landfill communities fund before they become effective in April? Currently, 10% of the funds for every project are raised by a third party—usually the applicant—but the proposal is to transfer that 10% to the landfill operator. The concern is that many small operators might withdraw from the scheme, meaning that fewer projects can be considered. I am sure that this is an unintended consequence.

**Chris Grayling:** I am aware of my hon. Friend's concerns, and I can assure her that the Department for Communities and Local Government is in discussions with industry representatives and is trying to do what it needs to do in the right way. It has to take some decisions, but it is fully aware of her concerns as it looks to reach a decision.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing next week's business. Mr Speaker, I am sure that you and the rest of the House would like to know that today is World Cancer Day. Almost every household in the country is touched by cancer, so this is a great opportunity to pay tribute to all the wonderful staff who work in the hospitals across the whole of the United Kingdom and treat people with this still appalling condition.

This morning, the *Daily Mail* intriguingly asked, "Who will speak for England?" I have no ambition in that department, but I was thinking that the Leader of the House is perhaps the ideal candidate. He is "Dr EVEL of Lore", the man who liberated English legislation from the oppression of we pernicious hordes of Scots MPs and he is also one of the leading Eurosceptics in the Cabinet. Cometh the hour, cometh the man.

We have an opportunity to debate this matter because we have a European debate next week, courtesy of the Democratic Unionist party—I am grateful to DUP Members for bringing it to our attention again. Perhaps we will have another opportunity to discuss the joint letters from the First Ministers of the devolved Assemblies and Parliaments from across the UK. Perhaps it will not be so contentiously dismissed as it was yesterday by the Prime Minister when it was raised here. A little bit more respect for the First Ministers of the various Assemblies and Parliaments would be in order this time round.

We have only one week in which to secure a deal on the fiscal framework—the critical financial arrangement that underpins the Scotland Bill—yet the two Governments could not be further apart. We had only an hour or so to debate it yesterday, unfortunately, as a result of the extended statement, and there will be no further opportunity to look at this before agreement is to be reached next Friday. The Chief Secretary to the Treasury said something intriguing yesterday in front of the Scottish Affairs Committee. He said that if agreement on the fiscal framework is reached, it would have to come back to this House for a possible debate, and he hinted at a possible vote. I do not know what the Leader of the

[Pete Wishart]

House knows about what the Chief Secretary was saying yesterday, but it raises some intriguing questions. If it does come back to this House and the House then rejects the fiscal framework, what on earth happens to Scotland? I want to hear the Leader of the House respond on this matter.

I know that urgent questions are a matter for you, Mr Speaker, and that you decide whether or not they happen. Could we have a little debate or even just a conversation about urgent questions on sitting Fridays? There were two last Friday, and that presents immense difficulty for Scottish Members—in fact, for Members of any constituencies other than those in London—because we cannot get to the House on a Friday morning. We have to make some critical decisions on whether to stay for the urgent questions or go back to serve our constituents on a Friday—the one working day when we have such an opportunity—given that we have to spend a day travelling back and forwards to this place. May we have a conversation about that, Mr Speaker?

May we have a debate on tax arrangements across the United Kingdom? Apparently, Labour wants to tax workers on below-average earnings in Scotland, but also to reduce taxes for the rest of the United Kingdom. I do not know whether this is Labour's Better Together tax or the Tory austerity tax, but I would like to have some clarity about Labour's plans for the whole UK.

Lastly, I come to an issue on which we might all be able to agree—MP4 for Eurovision! The time has come. I know that you are a fan, Mr Speaker, as is the Leader of the House. This is a political contest, as we know, and we have had all these young starlet acts trying to achieve a win, but now is the time for grizzled old politicians to get in there and do their bit for the United Kingdom. I am sure I will secure the support of the whole House for MP4 for Eurovision.

**Chris Grayling:** I think that is a great idea. The hon. Gentleman and I do not always share exactly the same views on European matters, but I can tell him that I will happily champion the cause of MP4 in Eurovision. I just hope that there is a change when it comes to those difficult votes, because countries in eastern Europe unfortunately tend to award the UK entrants “nul points”. Let us hope that MP4 will turn things round. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have the support of the whole House in doing so—

**Chris Bryant** *indicated dissent.*

**Chris Grayling:** Oh no. I am sorry to say that the shadow Leader of the House will not be supporting MP4 for Eurovision. I think that is a shame and a betrayal of the principles of the House, but never mind.

The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) asks whether I am going to speak for England. I have to say that I speak for the United Kingdom, and I think all of us here should speak for the United Kingdom. He called me Dr Evel—I have been called Dr Evil and the Dark Lord today, so we are mixing our books somewhat—but on the EU vote, we were very clear, as was the hon. Gentleman's former First Minister, that there should be a sensible gap between the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish elections and a referendum. The Prime Minister made it clear

yesterday that there will be a gap of at least six weeks, which is the gap requested by the hon. Gentleman's former party leader. He will therefore forgive me if I treat his comments today with a degree of scepticism. We are simply doing what the Scottish nationalists asked for.

The hon. Gentleman is more pessimistic than I am about the fiscal framework. I am sure that the constructive dialogue between the Government at Westminster and the Government in Edinburgh will ensure that there is no problem with it, and that we will reach agreement. We all want to see a Scotland Act, rather than a Scotland Bill, in time for the Scottish elections, and we will continue to work to that end.

Urgent questions on Fridays are, of course, a matter for you, Mr Speaker, but I am sure that the Scottish National party will want to participate in Friday debates just as actively as any other party in the House.

There is one more thing on which we can agree today. The hon. Gentleman talked about Labour's tax rise proposals. I do not think that they are good for Scotland either, and I think that that is why the Labour party is struggling in Scotland. Saying to people, “Vote for us and we will increase your taxes” has never, in my experience, been a good platform for an election.

**Mr Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley) (Con): Let me give the Leader of the House an opportunity to be a white knight for the people of Lancashire. The county council has embarked on a consultation about the withdrawal of subsidies from bus services. The consultation will close at the end of March, but in the meantime the council has already told bus operators that it will withdraw the subsidies, and some services will cease on 21 February. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a Minister to make a statement about this sham consultation, and about what can be done to help some of the most elderly and vulnerable people, living in villages, who will be isolated if the bus cuts go ahead?

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend has made his point in his customary forthright manner, and he is right. It is not acceptable for a county council—a Labour-controlled county council—to announce a proposal, to consult on that proposal, and then to start to take action before it has even seen the responses to the consultation; but that, of course, is what Labour is really like when it holds power.

**Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): When can we debate the Government's planned cut in funding for the National Wildlife Crime Unit, which is welcomed only by those sadists who think it fun and amusing to torment defenceless wild animals? Will the Government cancel the threatened cut, or will they proceed with it and reinforce their reputation as the nasty party which does not care about animals' suffering?

**Chris Grayling:** I know that a number of Members have expressed concern about the issue. The Home Secretary will be in the House on Monday week, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be able to raise it with her then.

**Mrs Sheryll Murray** (South East Cornwall) (Con): Last Saturday I sent the Fisheries Minister an image of a chart showing a French-registered fishing vessel inside the United Kingdom's six-mile limit. Looe Harbour

Commissioners would like to know what investigations the Minister has carried out. As today is my birthday, will the Leader of the House give me a present by asking the Fisheries Minister to come here and make a statement? Perhaps he could also tell us how he will deal with the imbalance in the haddock quota, whereby UK fishermen receive about 10% of the total allowable catch while French fishermen receive about 80%.

**Chris Grayling:** Let me begin by wishing my hon. Friend a very happy birthday, probably on behalf of all of us. She is still a very powerful advocate for the fishing industry and the communities that she represents. The Fisheries Minister is, of course, a neighbour of hers, but I will ensure that he is made aware of the point that she has raised. It is a matter of great concern to our fishing communities that such matters are dealt with properly and the rules are followed. We should certainly take action when they are not.

**Nic Dakin** (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I welcome the announcement that DONG Energy is to proceed with Hornsea Project One. May we have a statement on how the project can be used to assist the development of the South Humber bank, and how the Government will use their new procurement guidelines to ensure that UK steel is used in that development?

**Chris Grayling:** We are anxious to ensure that UK steel is used in UK projects. As the hon. Gentleman will know, many of the big infrastructure projects are using it, and we will continue to work to ensure that that happens. We want the sector to be developed on Humberside; it is already a very important part of the local economy. There will be questions on this very subject next Thursday, and I suggest that the hon. Gentleman raise it with the relevant Minister then.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): It is one thing for the Leader of the House to poke fun at the Leader of the Opposition over his strange ideas about the Trident successor, as he did today. It is quite another thing for No. 10 to adopt this policy on the question of delaying a vote which everyone, including the Ministry of Defence, industry and both sides of the nuclear debate in Parliament, expected to take place in the next few weeks. Can the Leader of the House look the House in the eye and tell us that those at No. 10 are not playing party politics with the nuclear deterrent? If they are, it is beneath contempt.

**Chris Grayling:** My right hon. Friend has been a powerful advocate for our nuclear deterrent—a view that I support wholeheartedly—and he has been effective in highlighting the flaws in the Opposition's policies. He will know that it is the Government's intention to debate this matter in the House in due course. I cannot give him an announcement today on when that will happen, but I will ensure that my colleagues are aware of the concerns that he has raised.

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): Last year, Dublin's Special Criminal Court convicted Thomas "Slab" Murphy of tax evasion. On Tuesday evening on the BBC, he was exposed as a former chief of staff of the Provisional IRA and a godfather of serious and organised crime. Putting the Accutrace S10 marker in British fuels was

supposed to stop the laundering of British fuels across the whole of the United Kingdom, but this man's crime syndicate continues to launder these fuels. When is the Treasury going to get a grip on HMRC and get a new marker into British fuels that actually works? This week, 59,000 litres of fuel were wrongly seized by HMRC because the roadside test for Accutrace is a dud. Will the Leader of the House urge the Treasury to get this criminal activity stopped?

**Chris Grayling:** We all want to see this kind of criminal activity stopped, because it damages legitimate businesses and it damages the economy of Northern Ireland. I will ensure that the point he has raised is brought to the Treasury's attention, because it is clearly something that it would not want to see continuing either.

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on pharmacy services? Having visited a local pharmacist in Prittlewell this week, I was horrified to find that as a result of overall reductions in the budget of £174 million, there is every likelihood that the wonderful range of services that our pharmacists offer will be diluted.

**Chris Grayling:** This concern was raised last week, and the Minister responsible, the Minister for Community and Social Care, my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), happened to be on the Front Bench at the time. I was able to provide an assurance to the House that he would treat this matter with great care. He is aware of the concerns that hon. Members have raised and he will be back in the House next week. This is something we have to get right, because pharmacies play an important role in local communities, and the Minister is well aware of that.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House might not be aware that, before I entered the Parliament, I had a proper job outside this place—

**Chris Bryant:** In the 19th century.

**Mr Sheerman:** No, in the 18th century, with you! One of my employers was ICI—Imperial Chemical Industries—which has now become Syngenta. Is the Leader of the House aware that Syngenta is one of the three largest chemical companies in the world, and that it now looks as though it could be taken over by ChemChina, a Chinese Government-based organisation? This will put thousands of UK jobs in danger and could eradicate them from the market. May we have an urgent debate to discuss this? Just like steel, the chemical industry is a big employer at the heart of our economy.

**Chris Grayling:** I am not aware of the details of the proposals, but as ever the hon. Gentleman certainly makes a powerful case. I am sure that his comments will be listened to by the Business Secretary, but may I suggest that he seek to secure an Adjournment debate in order to bring Ministers to the House to discuss the matter?

**Mark Pritchard** (The Wrekin) (Con): In this country, 320,000 people are both deaf and blind, yet local councils are only required to provide a register of those who are

[Mark Pritchard]

blind only. Would it not make more sense for local authorities to have a register to collect information on those who are both blind and deaf in order to better co-ordinate care for all those who suffer in this way? May we have a debate on this matter?

**Chris Grayling:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on the important work he does in this area and on the support he provides for those who suffer from both those disabilities. The relevant Minister will be in the Chamber next week and my hon. Friend will have the opportunity to make that point then, but I will also ensure that his concern is raised with the Department before then.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Leader of the House may be aware that the House of Representatives in Australia has deemed this week that bairns in arms are no longer visitors in the Chamber and can be brought in to be breastfed or bottle-fed by their parliamentary parents. Would he support such a change in this Parliament?

**Chris Grayling:** There are a few people who believe that such a change is necessary, but of course it would be a matter for the relevant Committees and for the whole House to discuss. We have to make sure we have a family-friendly Palace of Westminster and House, but we must also be careful to maintain some of the traditions of the House as well.

**Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): May we have a debate to celebrate the work done in this country by organisations such as the Arts Council and the Royal Ballet, which bring in so much tourism, and by the wonderful organisations in my constituency that add to the different tourism offer we have in the area? That has been recognised by the Chancellor in his autumn statement.

**Chris Grayling:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I am glad that the Chancellor did recognise that in the autumn statement. It is very important that we maintain the strong arts bodies in this country. They make a valuable contribution to our culture, as well as attracting business from overseas. She makes an important point, and may I take advantage of this opportunity to wish her a happy birthday, too?

**Paula Sherriff** (Dewsbury) (Lab): Last Saturday, the extremist group Britain First came to Dewsbury town centre, carrying crucifixes and proclaiming the Prophet Mohammed a paedophile. There was understandable concern among our community, with many businesses closing for fear of violence. A huge police operation took place, which clearly cost a lot of money. I pay tribute to the wonderful people of my constituency and the police, who carried themselves in an exemplary manner. Does the Leader of the House agree that we should now have an urgent debate on where the balance lies between freedom of expression and incitement of racial hatred?

**Chris Grayling:** I very much agree with the hon. Lady on that; we benefit from being a multicultural, multi-ethnic society. The different communities in the United Kingdom bring great strength to it. Those who would seek to

divide us should be unreservedly condemned. I pay tribute to her constituents and to those police officers, who often put themselves at risk in dealing with incidents of this kind. There can never be an excuse for the incitement of racial hatred. We have strong laws in this country, and it is of course for the police and the prosecuting authorities to decide when and how to use them, but I am sure she would find universal support in this House for what she says. Racial hatred is something to be abhorred and to be prevented at all cost.

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): The Government are rightly taking steps to counter the threat of violent extremism and to promote community cohesion, and I am sure everyone in this House supports that. The Leader of the House will, however, be aware of the recent Westminster Hall debate on the registration of out-of-school settings, which highlighted considerable concern about that issue. Does he agree that it is essential that there is widespread consultation on any other proposals in the Government's counter-extremism agenda before a counter-extremism Bill is brought before this House?

**Chris Grayling:** I absolutely accept the point my hon. Friend is making. It is very much the intention of those in the Department for Education who are working on this to listen carefully to representations from hon. Members to try to get this right. We all share a common objective in these matters. What we do not want is inappropriate, unnecessary regulation placed on small groups that do small amounts of work each week to the benefit of local communities.

**Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): Further to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), I learned from my constituents this week that the snaring of wild animals is still not illegal. It is, of course, cruel and sadistic, so do the Government have any plans to introduce legislation to ban snaring and to protect our wild animals?

**Chris Grayling:** I am aware that this matter is subject to campaigning at the moment, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will give careful consideration to it. I am not aware of any current plans, but given the concerns raised in this House, it is certainly something we need to give some consideration to.

**Chris White** (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): May we have a debate on unitary authorities and the potential efficiencies that they can create?

**Chris Grayling:** Many in this country believe that unitary authorities are a better way of running local government. Equally, there are parts of the country where the two-tier approach works extremely well. What we are seeking to do through the changes we are pushing through to the relationship between central and local government is give greater freedom to local authorities to decide what is right for their area and to give them the opportunity to put forward reforms that will involve both change and greater devolution. If my hon. Friend feels that is right for his area, I encourage him to get into discussions with the relevant Department about it.

**Roger Mullin** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (SNP): Can we have a statement from the Government on when they will review the 1955 treaty on tax treatment

that operates between the UK and Malawi, as the treaty operates to the considerable disadvantage of one of the poorest countries in the world?

**Chris Grayling:** I am not aware of the specific detail of that treaty, but I will ask the Foreign Office to ensure that the hon. Gentleman gets a proper response to the concerns that he has raised.

**Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con):** I am pleased to say that employment levels in Crawley are at a record high, with the jobless claimant count now at 1.5%. Of course there is always more that can be done and, one month today, I am holding an apprenticeship fair in Crawley civic hall. May we have a debate on the importance of further encouraging apprenticeships to help promote economic growth?

**Chris Grayling:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work that he is doing locally on this matter. One of the most important parts of achieving our collective goal of 3 million apprenticeships in this Parliament is the work done by individual Members to encourage local employers to provide apprenticeship places. I commend him and other Members around the country for the work that they are doing in this regard. Apprenticeships are a central part of our future economic success.

**Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab):** Yesterday, we heard from the Prime Minister that in-work benefits for EU migrants are a pull factor, but we cannot judge that to be the case as the information has repeatedly been withheld after freedom of information requests. Given that the Leader of the House is such a fan of FOI, will he request Ministers to put that information before this House alongside a statement?

**Chris Grayling:** We will be debating the renegotiation and the package that we have been offered, and statements will be made by the Prime Minister in this House once the renegotiation is complete. I have no doubt that all the information required by Members will be there when those debates take place.

**John Stevenson (Carlisle) (Con):** Carlisle and Cumbria are starting to experience recruitment issues, and, in time, there could well be a skills shortage. In many respects, that is partly an indication of success, but that success will be further exacerbated by the potential large investment into Cumbria, which will raise issues about attracting the right people with the right skills into the county. Will the Leader of the House agree to a debate on those issues, and on what central Government can do to assist in creating the opportunities from which Cumbria can benefit?

**Chris Grayling:** The challenges to which my hon. Friend refers are a symbol of the success of this Government in generating real economic improvement in parts of the country that have, all too often, been left behind. In many respects, I am pleased to hear of the pressures that he describes, but clearly we have to react to them and help businesses in Cumbria to secure the skills it needs. That is why this Government's programme to build apprenticeship numbers and other measures that we will take to improve our skills base are so important. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the issue.

**Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab):** November 2015 is the latest month for which we have A&E figures. The Royal Free recorded 1,592 patients not seen within four hours, and the North Middlesex a shocking 3,306 patients. Both hospitals are now supposed to serve the people of Enfield North, as the Government have closed the A&E at Chase Farm hospital. May we have an early debate on the Government's mismanagement of the NHS, as the people in Enfield and across the country are being badly let down when they arrive at A&E in need of treatment?

**Chris Grayling:** The right hon. Lady will have an opportunity to raise her concerns on Tuesday when the Secretary of State for Health is in the Chamber. I simply say that, under this Government, the NHS is receiving more money than ever before and is treating more patients than ever before.

**Oliver Colvile (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Con):** As my right hon. Friend knows, I have been campaigning to save the hedgehog for several weeks now. On Monday, we have the hedgehog summit with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State. Next week, I plan to launch a petition to make the hedgehog a protected species—I very much hope that everyone in this House will participate in it. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that, if we get more than 100,000 signatures, we will be considered for having a further debate on this very important issue?

**Chris Grayling:** I have to congratulate my hon. Friend on his diligence on this matter; the hedgehog has a much better chance of survival with him around than might otherwise have been the case. If he secures 100,000 signatures on his petition, I am almost certain that the Petitions Committee will feel obliged to have a debate on it. Given how strongly he has pushed the issue in the House, I am sure that his request will also have universal support across the House.

**Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab):** My constituent David Chamber has raised with me his not uncommon problem: he is a graduate unable to find graduate work. The Prime Minister has said that he does not want foreign graduates doing what he describes as "menial" labour. May we have an urgent debate on what help we can give our UK graduates to get graduate jobs, on which the student loan repayment system depends?

**Chris Grayling:** When I was employment Minister in 2010, and we had inherited unemployment levels almost twice as high as they are now, conversations with young people entering the job market were challenging. Today, the situation is very different—unemployment has come down by almost half and job opportunities for young people in this country are better than they have been for a very long time. Under Labour, things went badly wrong; this Government have sorted them out.

**Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con):** My constituent Cordelia Law was left with a legal bill of nearly £3,000 after being threatened with a libel action by a developer whose planning application she commented on to her local council. May we have a debate on our libel laws? I

[Kevin Foster]

would not endorse every comment that Cordelia Law made, but that type of reaction from developers could deter many other people from commenting on planning applications in which they have an interest.

**Chris Grayling:** Obviously, I cannot comment on the specific detail of that case, because I do not know enough about it, but it is always right and proper for those putting in planning applications to treat local communities with respect. If people feel that they have been let down by local authority processes, they can and do go to the ombudsman to seek a determination of maladministration. It sounds as if my hon. Friend is doing a fine job of representing his constituent anyway.

**Jeff Smith** (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): Civil society organisations have legitimate concerns about restrictions on their ability to challenge school admission arrangements. May we have a statement about the proposed ban on objections from these organisations so that we can better understand who will and will not be affected?

**Chris Grayling:** These things are, of course, predominantly for governing bodies and local authorities to decide, but the hon. Gentleman is free to raise this issue as an Adjournment debate and bring a Minister to the House to respond to his concern.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): People in the villages of Lincolnshire are desperate to get to Cleethorpes, where they will find excellent shopping and the finest fish and chips in the land. Unfortunately, however, the Cleethorpes economy could be set back owing to cuts in rural bus services. May we have a debate about the funding of rural bus services, which clearly needs a rethink?

**Chris Grayling:** I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes. That is a matter for the Department for Communities and Local Government, which will come before the House on Monday. I encourage him to bring his point to the attention of the Ministers with the most direct responsibility for addressing these issues.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): Yesterday, the Bank of Scotland announced that it will close its Mount Florida branch in my constituency, which serves thousands of people in that community, King's Park, Battlefield and slightly further afield. The bank has announced the closure without having done any community consultation at all; a lot of older people in particular will have to travel quite far to get to their local branch. May we have a debate on how the big banks are able to do such things without proper consultation with the community and to the detriment of local people?

**Chris Grayling:** As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, that issue has been raised by a number of hon. Members in the past few weeks. If the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee were here, I would be saying that there is clearly a demand across the House for a debate on this subject, and I encourage the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) to make

such a request. I should also say that the Post Office now offers many alternative banking services. I hope local communities will take advantage of the Post Office, to make sure that it can offer those services in their local communities.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): The Chair of the Backbench Business Committee has been called away on urgent business, so he has asked me to say that the Committee has scheduled every debate that has been requested. We are very much open for business as far as debates after the recess are concerned. As you will be aware, Mr Speaker, debating time in this Chamber and Westminster Hall is extremely precious, so I encourage Members to put applications in.

The Community Security Trust reported this week that the number of anti-Semitic incidents has fallen by a welcome 21%. However, before we all get complacent, that is the third highest level on record, and it follows the highest level ever recorded. May we have a statement from the Home Secretary responding to that report to make clear what action the Government will take to make sure that anti-Semitic incidents are not only treated seriously, but combated across this country?

**Chris Grayling:** I absolutely echo that point. I commend the work of the Community Security Trust. This is every bit as much of an issue as the events in Dewsbury last week, which were mentioned earlier. Anti-Semitic racist incitement in our society is utterly unacceptable, and so is incitement of race hatred against any group in our society. All of us in this House should stand against it when we discover it and see it. It is unacceptable and should never be tolerated.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): Does the Leader of the House detect any difference between his view of the European convention on human rights—when he was Lord Chancellor, he said:

“We have a treaty right to withdraw...We would exercise that right. There is always a first time for everything”—

and that of the current Lord Chancellor, who said this week that the Government were

“not planning to derogate absolutely from any”

of the ECHR rights? Should we now expect any repeal of the Human Rights Act in this Parliament, or has that vanished with the rest of Leader of the House's programme when he was at the Ministry of Justice?

**Chris Grayling:** I hate to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but Government Members believe that the Human Rights Act should be replaced. Labour do not. The public support us. Labour are wrong, we are right.

**Robert Jenrick** (Newark) (Con): Hundreds—probably more than 1,000—British nationals have taken the very brave decision to go and fight against Daesh in Syria and Iraq, joining the YPG and the foreign fighter forces of the Kurdish peshmerga. Those people include my constituent, Aiden Aslin, a former care worker from Newark. It is now Home Office and police policy to arrest these individuals under counter-terrorism legislation on their return to the UK. Even if, as is most likely, they are not charged, that will remain on their record, and constituents such as mine, who have taken an extremely brave decision—one could argue that it is foolhardy, but

it is extremely brave—to fight with our allies, will not be able to, for example, enter the United States for the rest of their lives. What can my right hon. Friend do to raise this issue with the Home Secretary and the relevant authorities so that we adopt an appropriate policy towards these brave citizens of this country?

**Chris Grayling:** Of course, this issue has to be treated with great care. I will make sure my hon. Friend's concerns are raised with the Home Secretary, who will be in the Chamber on Monday week taking questions. I encourage him to raise that point with her, but I will make sure she is aware of the concern he has raised.

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): May I ask the right hon. Gentleman to nag his colleagues in the Department for Transport? The very expensive public inquiry into the New Generation Transport trolleybus scheme in Leeds concluded in October 2014, but the report has been gathering dust in the DFT for about six months. Can we finally have a statement on the issue so that we can get an answer? I hope it will be a no, so that we can then progress with a genuinely modern scheme involving light rail and/or tram-train.

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. I will make sure that it is raised with the Department today and ask it to write to him.

**Andrew Stephenson** (Pendle) (Con): I recently met Noor Mukhtar, Pendle's Member of the Youth Parliament, at Nelson and Colne College to discuss the UK Youth Parliament's anti-racism and anti-discrimination campaign. Given recent Government initiatives on the issue, and the fact that the Prime Minister used his new year's speech to talk about discrimination in Britain today, may we have a debate on this important issue?

**Chris Grayling:** Again, my hon. Friend makes an important point about the need to avoid discrimination and racist behaviour in our society, and I think the whole House would agree with that. On behalf of the House, could I—particularly a few days after you, Mr Speaker, hosted Members of the Youth Parliament in your state rooms to celebrate the achievements of some of those young people—pay tribute to all those involved in the Youth Parliament, who make a really important contribution to discussions between young people and parliamentarians around this country?

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): On Monday, I attended the Women Against State Pension Inequality debate in Westminster Hall. It is such a big issue, and the debate was so busy, that I had to sit in seats normally occupied by Tory MPs. The novelty quickly wore off as I had to watch colleagues point their fingers at Members on the Benches opposite. On a

serious point, however, the Minister in that debate yet again hid behind the excuse of the deficit, so can we have a real debate about alternative measures we can put in place to end the injustice to women of the inequality of the state pension increase? We should bear in mind that this Government recently allocated an extra £6 billion to Trident, with a £10 billion contingency—that is £16 billion right away that could be better spent.

**Chris Grayling:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, I always value the moments when we find ourselves sitting alongside the SNP, as it were, because they are all too rare. We talk about the deficit because it is true: over the past few years this country has had a major crisis in its public finances. We have made good progress in turning that around, but we have a way still to go. It has led to some difficult decisions. The pension issue is about equality. It is about ensuring that men and women have the same state retirement age, and it is also about our retirement age reflecting the good news that we are all living longer.

**Andrew Gwynne** (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): May we have a debate on the impact of relaxing planning rules? Such a debate would give me the opportunity to raise the plight of Haughton Green in my constituency, where, in recent times, residents have seen a loss of their heritage with the bulldozing of the old rectory and have been deprived of a say over the future use of the Methodist church, and where there is likely to be extensive in-fill development, even though that will require the use of already congested medieval road infrastructure.

**Chris Grayling:** The hon. Gentleman will have the opportunity to raise these issues with Ministers on Monday. There is a balance to be found in making sure that we protect local environments and the character of local areas but also provide adequate housing for the next generation, because that is also important.

**Geraint Davies** (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): You probably know, Mr Speaker, that children living in low emission zones have a 10% lower lung capacity than children living outside, partly because diesel emissions from cars cause pollution worse than that of many lorries, and Volkswagen has obviously been involved in emissions testing scandals. Will the Leader of the House consider having a debate on improving the cleanliness of the air in our city centres for the sake of our children's health, including the possible restriction of diesel vehicles, given that 52,000 people die each year from diesel pollutants?

**Chris Grayling:** This matter is now attracting widespread concern. It is obviously important to ensure that we have proper air quality and that we look after public health. Ministers are taking the matter very seriously and investigating it carefully.

## Point of Order

11.52 am

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I want to go back to the issue of the Second Reading on 22 February of a Bill as yet unannounced. There is no Bill sitting waiting to be finished off in the House of Lords, as a Lords starter, and no Bill that has had a First Reading in this House, as yet, so the only possibility is that the Government fully intend next week, by the time we are back here next Thursday, to have the First Reading of a Commons starter Bill that will then have its Second Reading on 22 February. Would it not be grossly discourteous to this House for the Leader of the House, who knows perfectly well what that Bill is going to be, not to stand up and tell us exactly what it is going to be, because otherwise he will have published it by the time he is back here next week?

**Mr Speaker:** Does the Leader of the House wish to respond?

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Chris Grayling):** Can I just say that the shadow Leader of the House is talking absolute nonsense?

**Mr Speaker:** Right. Pursuant to the hon. Gentleman's point of order, I can say only, at this stage, that I have no knowledge of the matter. I heard what the Leader of the House has said. I think it is a fair point to make to the House as a whole that it is not obligatory, but it is desirable, for words uttered to be genuinely meant. On one or two occasions in the past, I have come across language used such as "Second Reading of a Bill" which turns out really just to be a kind of holding statement, if you will, and what eventually transpires is something somewhat different—perhaps quite specifically not a Bill, and not a Second Reading of a Bill, but something else. On a serious note, in terms of the intelligibility of the proceedings of the House and the transparency with which we operate, I know that the Leader of the House will want to hold himself to a rather higher standard than that, and I am sure we can be assured of that.

## Personal Statement

11.54 am

**Mr Geoffrey Cox** (Torrige and West Devon) (Con): In 2009, the House resolved that hon. Members should register all outside earnings within 28 days of their receipt, whether connected with their parliamentary duties or not.

For a prolonged period last year, I very much regret that I failed to comply with that rule in respect of my professional earnings as a barrister.

The House has a right to expect of its Members, particularly those on the Standards Committee, as I was, that they will uphold its rules to the fullest extent. For that reason, I have stepped down from the Standards Committee, and I hope that the House will accept my sincere and full-hearted apology for my failure to observe this important rule.

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the hon. and learned Gentleman for what he has said.

## **Collapse of Kids Company**

### **PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

#### *Select Committee statement*

**Mr Speaker:** We now come to the Select Committee statement. The Chair of the relevant Select Committee, Mr Bernard Jenkin, will speak for up to 10 minutes, during which, as those familiar with the procedure will realise and those who are not will now learn, no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of his statement, I or whoever is in the Chair will call Members to put questions on the subject of the statement, and call Mr Bernard Jenkin to respond to these in turn. Members can expect to be called only once. Interventions should be questions and should be brief. Front Benchers may take part in questioning.

11.56 am

**Mr Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for the opportunity to make this statement on our report entitled, “The collapse of Kids Company: lessons for charity trustees, professional firms, the Charity Commission, and Whitehall”.

We found that an extraordinary catalogue of failures of governance and control had taken place in the charity. It is obvious that many will feel blamed by our report. However, we very deliberately set about investigating the matter with a view to find lessons to be learned, not to find blame. Unless we can learn lessons, there will be an increased likelihood that such events will be repeated.

First, on the question of professional firms, the charity’s auditors repeated in every audit letter their concern that reserves in the charity were very low. The charity never acted on that advice. Instead, it was all too keen to trumpet the fact that it had received what it called a “clean audit” in every year of its existence. Under questioning, the auditor said that the charity had been living permanently “on a knife edge”. That sense of urgency was not communicated in formal advice to the charity. He also candidly admitted that the auditors should have notified the Charity Commission of their concerns about the charity, in accordance with the duty placed on auditors of charities under section 156 of the Charities Act 2011. That is a lesson that I hope all auditors will learn.

We also cross-examined Pannell Kerr Forster, which did an investigation into the governance and controls of the charity, on behalf of the Cabinet Office. We were concerned about how it evolved the remit of its report into being an investigation into governance controls rather than governance and controls. The report ended up being of rather limited value in the Cabinet Office, although it was read as what it was originally intended to be. That gives rise to the question of how the Government manage professional firms, as well as of how professional firms conduct themselves in respect of their responsibilities.

The charity also commissioned advice from PricewaterhouseCoopers, but it had so little time to produce anything in the run-up to the collapse of the charity that what it produced was of extremely little value. The Government took too much comfort from that

report as well, and PwC should have been more candid and direct with the Government about how valuable its work could be to them.

The Charity Commission has a statutory duty to prevent, detect and tackle abuse and mismanagement in charities. It did not do so with Kids Company. Prior to 2015 the Charity Commission did not engage with Kids Company, because it received very few complaints. Why did so few people complain to the Charity Commission, given that this was, for a long period, a charity with a mixed reputation that excited a lot of public comment? In order to attract complaints, the Charity Commission should have a much higher profile as an avenue for complaints. It needs to be much more proactive in responding to concerns that are raised in public about a charity. In the case of high-risk charities with many employees and dependent beneficiaries, it should be equipped and funded to do more to provide scrutiny and, more importantly, advice and support to struggling trustees.

The Government need to reverse cuts to the Charity Commission to enable it to carry out its statutory function. We also recommend that the Charity Commission take new powers to hold hearings and to produce reports and recommendations about charities. It really should not fall to a Select Committee of the House to produce reports on the activities of individual charities. Kids Company received more than £42 million in grants from central Government across several Administrations, and it has not had to compete for a grant since 2013. Other charities have voiced bitter discontent at the unfairness of that. Government will need to work hard to restore faith in the grant-giving system of Whitehall.

Kids Company enjoyed unique, privileged and significant access to senior Ministers, and even to Prime Ministers and Leaders of the Opposition, throughout successive Administrations. Some witnesses stated that they were intimidated by that high-profile support, and questions have been raised about whether it affected funding decisions; it certainly discouraged people from raising concerns. Government lacked any objective assessment of Kids Company’s activities and outcomes, and the effectiveness of its governance. Government must improve their capability so that they are less reliant on external reviews when making assessments about charities.

The civil service should be commended for resisting the hold that Kids Company seemed to have over so many others, but the advice of the civil service was, in the end, overridden. Ministers should not allow charity representatives to exploit their access to Government in a way that might be construed to be unethical. Ministers should not override, or risk creating the perception that they are overriding, official advice to hand over funding to charities on the basis of personal prejudice or political considerations. That raises questions about how conflicts of interest for Ministers are addressed in Government with respect to charity funding. The awarding of commercial contracts could never have been conducted on the same basis.

The real message of the report is about charity trustees. It is the same as the message in our report about charity funding last week, in which we found that trustees of some of the most famous charities in the country had failed to understand what was being done in their name. Both reports highlight the role of trustees of charities. The primary responsibility of trustees is the good governance

[Mr Bernard Jenkin]

and the maintenance of the reputation of their charities. The primary responsibility for Kids Company's collapse rests with the charity trustees, who failed in their duty concerning the governance of the charity. I do not for a moment doubt the good faith of every trustee who served the charity, and I have evidence that some tried very hard to do the right thing. The only conclusion that anyone can reach is that either they did not know or understand the implications of what was going on in the charity, or they knew and failed to act.

The Charity Commission's guidance requires trustees to "make decisions solely in the charity's interests. They should not allow themselves to be swayed by personal prejudices or dominant personalities."

That seems to be exactly what happened in Kids Company, however, and it must be in danger of happening in every large charity that has been built up by a powerful and influential founder. The lesson is a universal one for all trustees. The trustee body of Kids Company did not have the necessary knowledge or experience of, for example, psychotherapy or youth services to be able to interrogate the operating model and safeguarding procedures.

In conclusion, it would be wrong to scapegoat any single individual for what occurred in the charity, but there are lessons that the House, the Government, the Charity Commission and professionals should draw from the situation. Most importantly, the Government need to understand what went wrong and how it can be rectified in future.

**Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op):** I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) and the members of the Select Committee for this important report. It has shone a light on what is a very sorry saga for all concerned, not least the vulnerable children who turned to Kids Company in their hour of need. I also pay tribute to the thousands of volunteers and workers in the sector who do so much to support vulnerable young people, usually without the same levels of funding and freedom that Kids Company clearly enjoyed. It is a deep shame that so much good work is at risk of being tarnished by this unique, high-profile failure. Having read the report, particularly the evidence given to the Committee by the senior civil service, I want to ask the hon. Gentleman about the way in which grants were administered, and whether he feels anything has changed since his report.

The Government have just passed the Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Bill, which was supported by Labour, to beef up the Charity Commission's regulation of the sector, particularly when it comes to trustees. Does the hon. Gentleman feel that the Government have learned their own lessons? For example, it is clear that rules applying to other charities did not apply to Kids Company. As he said, it had not had to compete for a grant from central Government since 2013. The Committee was told by a former Conservative Minister that Kids Company

"appeared to have a lower threshold of proof in order to get money from public funds"

and that its chief executive

"was almost the poster girl at the Big Society summit".

I ask the Minister whether the Government—both Ministers and civil servants—have actually acknowledged their role in this sorry saga, and whether they have taken any concrete steps to ensure that they are never complicit in such a tragedy again.

**Mr Jenkin:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her comments. Let me emphasise, as she did, that it is plain to see that there was much good work going on in the charity, and that has been lost; that many vulnerable young people were dependent on the charity, and they have been left forlorn and bereft; that many of the employees and volunteers were deeply committed to the charity's work, and they feel deeply betrayed and let down by what has happened; and that this has caused a great deal of distress. I am pleased to be able to inform the House that there is already evidence of things being salvaged from Kids Company and of things being rebuilt in the sector. We wish every success to those who are going to fund and support those things, because there is a gap, which the charity was seeking to fill, in meeting the needs of our society.

Yes, we are recommending even more powers for the Charity Commission than those in the Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Bill. We very much want the Charity Commission to recommend courses for charity trustees, so that they have somewhere to go to learn. The Institute of Directors runs courses for non-executive directors. Where is the equivalent for charity trustees, who have just as onerous a set of responsibilities? It is not the executives and the chief executive who are responsible for the conduct of a charity, but the trustees, who are jointly and severally liable, and it is not just the chairman who is responsible, but all the trustees.

We want the Charity Commission to have the power to hold legally privileged hearings, like those of a statutory inquiry, so that it can hear and receive evidence that cannot be impugned in the courts. That would mean that people with concerns about charities could go to the Charity Commission without the fear of losing their job, of reprisals or of being traduced in the press. The Charity Commission would be able to hold proper hearings and people could speak to it without fear or favour, as they do before Select Committees.

The hon. Lady raised the question about conflicts of interests that Ministers did not quite understand and that the system has not quite grasped. If the senior executive of a charity appears on a public platform with someone who then becomes the Prime Minister or is photographed in the Cabinet room with the Prime Minister at the launch of a Government initiative, they have a mutual interest, and that was not reflected in the way decisions were made in this case. If the political interests or the financial interests of the charity become aligned with the political interests of certain Ministers, those Ministers should recuse themselves from those decisions, as they would in any commercial arrangement. There is going to be a new arrangement. We are going to require the Government to think about this very seriously and possibly even amend the ministerial code accordingly.

**Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con):** As my hon. Friend has said, the ultimate responsibility for the failure of Kids Company lay with the board of trustees. Does my hon. Friend agree that, among the many lessons to be

learned from this sorry episode, is that the board of trustees should include members with appropriate qualifications for the sort of charity they are operating, and in addition that the board of trustees should be regularly refreshed? In the case of Kids Company, the chairman had been in that role for many years. That, I would suggest, led him to become far too close to the chief executive, and ultimately to be dominated by her.

**Mr Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his question, and I am grateful to him and all members of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, who were all so fully engaged with this inquiry, which made our report so much more valuable. My right hon. Friend is right about the appropriate skills that trustee bodies need. Very often people think they need business skills, whatever those are, or accounting skills or some kind of technical skills. Actually, they need other skills. They need skills in the sector in which the charity operates. As I pointed out in my opening remarks, there was nobody with psychotherapy experience, and the charity was a psychotherapeutic charity. There was nobody with youth sector experience, and this was a charity in the youth sector.

Boards of trustees also need people who are able to hold the right kind of conversations, who are fearless about hearing what needs to be heard, and who are capable of confronting people if necessary, but with kindness and understanding, in order that the truth reaches the charity trustees and the messages are heard. This charity prided itself on being open and consensual. I am afraid the evidence is that it was precisely the opposite. There were many people in the charity who were fearful of those who wanted to suppress the truth because the truth was so difficult to deal with. The truth was very difficult for individuals to deal with, and if there is no truth, there will be no enlightenment and no judgment. There is no substitute for charity trustees exercising broad and enlightened common sense and judgment. It is not just about sets of skills.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle)**: Order. The answers have been very thorough, but they need to be a little shorter.

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): I pay tribute to the Chairman of the Committee. The inquiry was quite a harrowing experience for all of us and he handled a difficult situation extremely well. Will he comment a little further on the role of journalists and the media in the inquiry? Incredibly detailed work was done by Miles Goslett, for example, and *The Spectator* was willing to publish when no one else was prepared to do so. That journalist had to go round all the media, which did not want to know because of some of the issues that have been referred to. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the role of media in such investigative journalism and the role of freedom of information are even more important now?

**Mr Jenkin**: I agree with everything the hon. Lady says. There were journalists who tried to get things published, but the editors and the publications that might have carried those messages were also scared of confronting

what appeared to be a very powerful charity with very great influence leading to the heart of Government. There is a message there.

There is a message, too, for the Charity Commission. Even when things were published, why were those journalists not invited to the Charity Commission, and why did it not say, “Tell us what you think is going on here, because we probably ought to know”? I hope journalists will feel a sense of obligation, not necessarily to reveal their sources or anything like that, but where they think a big charity is in serious trouble, to offer their advice to the Charity Commission. It would be a public-spirited thing to do. They would do that in respect of a serious risk to national security; they should do so for the security of the charitable sector as well.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I join my colleague, the hon. Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), in paying tribute to our Chairman, who led the inquiry, and to the staff of our Select Committee, who did some very valuable work in the course of the inquiry. The last tranche of Government money, £3 million, was given to facilitate restructuring, but I was surprised to see in the television programme aired on BBC 1 last night the impression given that the management and the chief executive had other ideas about how that money was going to be spent. Do we know whether the £2 million balance of the unspent £3 million that was given has been recovered by the Government? Will there be any further investigations into that money passing to Kids Company virtually 24 hours before it shut down, or is this report the end of the matter?

**Mr Jenkin**: That last question is very interesting. There is an ongoing investigation by the official receiver, which should be able to tell us what happened to that money and if any money is due to be returned to the Government. I am not a legal expert, but I think that once the Government handed over the money, it belonged to the charity. It no longer belonged to the Government and, although the Government might be a creditor, they will probably have to queue up behind other creditors. I very much hope that the Government might accept that the employees who lost their employment very abruptly are entitled to some measure of recompense, perhaps out of those funds. The answer is that I do not know. What was evident from that programme last night was how the restructuring was resisted to the very end. I am not sure whether that was known to the Minister who signed the letter of direction.

I, too, would like to pay tribute to the staff of the Committee. They do not usually like their name up in lights—it is not the tradition of the House service—but we are very fortunate in our Committee. We have very good staff.

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): Having watched the BBC documentary last night and seen the founder of Kids Company laugh about breaking the law and be dismissive of a vast amount of UK taxpayers’ money which was handed out so freely by both Labour and Conservative Governments, it is clear that lessons have to be learned. One of the lessons that we failed to learn in the past was that brash, bright, colourful, flamboyant characters who are favoured by senior politicians should be open to the same scrutiny as the many conscientious

[Ronnie Cowan]

hard-working individuals who work tirelessly for a charity with only the best of intentions. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the report should be only an opening salvo and must be followed up?

**Mr Jenkin:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. Yes, this is an opening salvo—both reports are opening salvos—about governance. The question of governance extends beyond charities to how the whole of Whitehall is governed—all the public bodies and the civil service, and how we govern the contractual exchanges between the public and the private sectors from Whitehall. Governance is not just about compliance and box-ticking. Governance is about the exercise of judgment by the people who are accountable for what occurs, and I hope that fellow Select Committee Chairs and I will pursue the matter of governance across the whole of the public sector and the parts of the private sector that are funded by the public sector.

**Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** I commend my hon. Friend and his Committee for his report and for his statement to the House today. On pages 47 to 49 of his excellent report he is excoriating in his criticism of the two Ministers who signed off the direction in June 2015 to give Kids Company £3 million, against the advice of the permanent secretary to the Cabinet Office. One of those Ministers, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, was good enough to give evidence to the Committee and has shown courtesy to the House by being here today. The other, the Paymaster General, does not appear to have given evidence to my hon. Friend's Committee and is not in the House today. In his report, the Chairman writes:

"In neither his letter of direction nor his oral evidence has Mr Letwin provided convincing justification for his and Mr Hancock's decision to ignore the comprehensive advice of senior officials . . . This grant should not have been authorised contrary to advice."

In the Government's response to his Committee's report, can we expect a ministerial apology from both Ministers involved and a clear explanation of how the £2 million which is still missing will be found?

**Mr Jenkin:** I have heard everything that my hon. Friend has said. The report speaks for itself. I hope very much that the Government will give a full and clear explanation in response to the report. I am sure that they will. I have never doubted the integrity of the two Ministers who signed the letter of direction at all. We must wait for the Government's response. In the end, I am not responsible for the Government's response.

**Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab):** May I add the name of Harriet Sergeant to that of Miles Goslett as she, too, exposed this fraud? This was British journalism at its very best and the report shows our Select Committees at their very best in the way that it exposes the waste, extravagance and delusions of this sad episode, which robbed far better charities of vital funds to help children in distress.

Is it not vital that the conduct of the Ministers who ignored the advice and wrote the letter of direction is considered by the adviser on Ministers' interests? Is it not crucial that we get to the nub of this terrible waste? The buck stops with the Prime Minister. We should

have broken the taboo that exists—I would like the Chairman to make this suggestion. As this charity was linked in every way with the big society stunt that was being run by the Prime Minister at the time, the person who should have given evidence to us was the Prime Minister.

This matter will not be put to rest until the Prime Minister explains why he set up what was virtually a slush fund, by getting funds moved from the Department for Education, where Ministers might have stopped this, to the Cabinet Office, from where the money was going out. That was wrong, it was damaging to many of the children who were allegedly being helped by Kids Company and it was very damaging to those charities that could prove the worth of what they were doing through statements and evidence, which Kids Company never did. Should we not look forward to this never happening again and to moneys being moved out of the Cabinet Office's control?

**Mr Jenkin:** It is in the nature of politics that some people will always be readier to pin the blame and extract some action as a result. I hope that I am conducting the Committee in a way that all its members support. I think that we get so much more from witnesses and that our reports have more authority if we do not try to pin blame on individuals, but the House will have heard what the hon. Gentleman said.

The hon. Gentleman touched on the important issue of why youth funding was moved from the Department for Education to the Cabinet Office. We really did not get an explanation of that, except for a denial that it had anything to do with wanting to be able to continue funding Kids Company, which the Department for Education had clearly become reluctant to do. One of our conclusions is that Departments should be responsible for allocating funding to outside bodies, rather than the Cabinet Office, because it is, by its nature, too close to the political centre of power in Government and a suspicion can be created, at the least, that decisions are being influenced.

We made a recommendation about the LIBOR fund, which was set up by the Chancellor of the Exchequer to support military charities. It is clearly a very worthwhile initiative, but any possibility that it could be construed as a fund under the personal control of the Chancellor of the Exchequer should be very clearly checked.

**Mr Speaker:** Somewhat tighter answers would be appreciated. They are way too long.

**Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con):** I thank my hon. Friend for his statement and his Committee for the work it has done in preparing the report. Does the Committee plan to review the extent to which the valuable and important recommendations in its report are complied with and carried out?

**Mr Jenkin:** We always make sure that our recommendations are followed up and the Government have to give a very clear response to them.

**Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op):** I commend the hon. Gentleman and his Committee for this very good report. He is absolutely right that a focus on governance is vital. The Public Accounts

Committee is very clear that we will follow governance and accountability in respect of taxpayers' money wherever they lead. In the evidence that we heard from senior civil servants about the use of ministerial directions, there was clearly a reluctance on the part of permanent secretaries to call for a ministerial direction because of the relationship that they had with their Secretaries of State. Has he had any thoughts about undertaking further work with his Committee on the use of ministerial directions and whether that system is working well in Whitehall?

**Mr Jenkin:** There has been controversy about the role of ministerial directions. The former Minister for the Cabinet Office, who was responsible for civil service policy, urged permanent secretaries to ask for ministerial directions to facilitate the making of decisions. That was understandable because he felt frustrated that, as he saw it, decisions were being blocked. On the other hand, senior civil servants pride themselves on having a good relationship of trust and understanding with their Ministers and are therefore reluctant to reach for the requirement for formal direction. They would far rather have a relationship with their Ministers that is based on a shared understanding of the concerns about a particular issue. I am bound to say that I rather side with civil servants on that one. If we had a system that was run just on instructions, it would be impossible for civil servants to give their best advice to Ministers. That is the system that Northcote-Trevelyan set up and that we should attempt to sustain.

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): I apologise to hon. Members and to you, Mr Speaker, that I have only just arrived in the Chamber. I was speaking to a group of schoolchildren from my constituency in the education centre and I could not miss that.

I want to say a few words in support of the Chair. This was a difficult report to achieve consensus on and he did a very good job of getting us as close to consensus as was possible. I caught the tail-end of what my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) was saying and I sympathise with a lot of what he said. I also heard my hon. Friend, the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee. The National Audit Office ought to have a stronger look at all of this, particularly at where Ministers are instructing civil servants on matters of funding in this way. I hope that this sort of thing will never happen again and that this report will go some way towards mending fences for the future. That being said, I think that this is the tip of the iceberg and that the story will continue. There is probably a lot more that we have not reported on.

**Mr Speaker:** I feel sure that the House will agree that the Chamber's loss was the school students' gain.

**Mr Jenkin:** I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support and for his work on the Committee. The one point that I will pick up on is his comment that this must never happen again. I can tell you for certain, Mr Speaker, that it will happen again. The question is whether we have a system in place that allows us, each time it happens, to learn, rectify and prepare for the future to make sure that it happens less and less often. That is what our recommendations are really about.

**Neil Coyle** (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman and his Committee on bringing forward this report. Many points have been made about the governance of the Charity Commission and I welcome the specific recommendation that he mentioned, but what role should the Care Quality Commission have played in inspecting some of the services that Kids Company claimed to be providing? There seems to have been a gap there. It might have helped to identify the fact that the numbers did not stack up. Will he join me in congratulating the director of social services at Southwark Council, David Quirke-Thornton, who stepped in to make sure that vulnerable young people received support quickly when Kids Company collapsed?

**Mr Jenkin:** I am certainly very grateful to David Quirke-Thornton. There are still discussions to be had between statutory social services and the charitable youth sector about what gaps in provision exist. Those would be productive discussions.

The question of inspection that the hon. Gentleman raises is a very important one. Ofsted did go into parts of Kids Company, but the senior executives of the charity did not find that very welcome. If social services are inspected, perhaps there is a case for inspecting charities of this nature, particularly if they are in receipt of public funds and if they have caring and safeguarding responsibilities. The private sector is investigated in that way—boarding schools and so on—and charities should be treated in the same way.

**Mr Speaker:** Notwithstanding what I said earlier about the prolixity of some of the answers and the relatively slow progress, the hon. Gentleman has received, and warmly deserves, the appreciation of the House for bringing before us this very important report on behalf of his Committee. It is a practical expression of his decades-long commitment to this House, its integrity, and its centrality in the affairs of the country, and he deserves our thanks.

## Backbench Business

### Parliamentary Sovereignty and EU Renegotiations

*[Relevant Documents: Fourteenth Report from the European Scrutiny Committee, on UK Government's renegotiation of EU membership: Parliamentary sovereignty and scrutiny, HC 458.]*

**Mr Speaker:** To move the motion I call not a baron, but the Baron in the House.

12.30 pm

**Mr John Baron** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): As ever, you have been very generous, Mr Speaker.

I beg to move,

That this House believes in the importance of Parliamentary sovereignty; and calls for the Government's EU renegotiations to encompass Parliament's ability, by itself, to stop any unwanted legislation, taxes or regulation.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting this debate, and Members on both sides of the House who supported the application for it.

There can be no greater issue for this Parliament to debate and defend than the country's sovereignty, as that goes to the heart of everything we do. Without it, we cannot truly have the final say on a host of issues, including the primacy of our laws, the integrity of our borders and the extent of burdensome regulation. As our EU renegotiations proceed, however, it appears that little effort is being made to truly restore parliamentary sovereignty. It is not a priority, which I suggest is a great opportunity missed.

We have a golden opportunity to pitch for fundamental change in our relationship with the EU for the benefit of both parties, as the Prime Minister promised in his Bloomberg speech, but we are missing it while No. 10 tinkers at the edges. Without consulting his parliamentary party, in my view the Prime Minister is sidestepping the issue completely by arguing for temporary measures, and measures that require us to club together with other Parliaments, in the vain hope of stopping the EU. That is not restoring parliamentary sovereignty. If we as a Parliament and a country cannot on our own stop any unwanted EU taxes, directives or laws, then it is clear that if we vote to stay in, we vote to stay on the conveyor belt towards ever closer union, as laid out in the EU's founding treaty. Parliament will become nothing more than just a council chamber of Europe.

To those who say that the UK already accepts a certain pooling or loss of sovereignty when joining other international organisations, I say that only the EU can force us to take in economic migrants despite the strain on our infrastructure, override our laws, and foist burdensome regulation on our companies, despite the vast majority not even trading with the EU.

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on raising this important issue, and I agree with everything he has been saying. The great 19th-century constitutionalist, Walter Bagehot, divided politics into the "effective" and "decorative" parts of

the constitution. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this place must be the effective part of our constitution, not just a decoration?

**Mr Baron:** I completely agree, and that is why I suggest that the issue of sovereignty goes to the core of our relationship with the EU. If we do not take the opportunity to address it now, it could be lost for a generation.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): I wonder whether all those years ago Enoch Powell was right, and that we have been dodging this issue ever since 1972. The question he posed was that if we join the EU, this Chamber and democratically elected House loses its sovereignty. Now an historic moment is approaching, and the British people have to make that choice. Will they reclaim that sovereignty or not?

**Mr Baron:** I can only repeat what I said to the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins)—I completely agree, and that is why this debate is important. It is not easy to say some of these words, but I regret that there has been a lack of consultation on the proposals in this renegotiation. Better engagement, certainly with the parliamentary party, and perhaps with Parliament generally, given that we are representatives, would have been useful.

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): Would the hon. Gentleman include in that statement of regret the complete failure to consult the national Parliaments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland during the process?

**Mr Baron:** What I regret is the lack of wide consultation generally with regard to renegotiation. When many of us were campaigning in the last Parliament for a referendum in this one, it was in the hope that we would have a meaningful debate prior to the renegotiation, and then a meaningful debate afterwards as we headed towards a referendum.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Baron:** Let me make a little progress, and then I will take further interventions. I am also conscious of the time.

Let us be clear about the so-called "red card". We appear to have a system that has more holes in it than a Swiss cheese—so much so that it is more like a lottery ticket that has been through the wash. The question is: is it valid? The idea is that we club together and form a majority with other national Parliaments to stop unwanted EU taxes and laws, but that would not enable our Parliament, by itself, to reject anything that it did not want. This would be an extension of the ineffectual "yellow card" system currently in operation, but with an even higher threshold.

Lord Hague once referred in this Chamber to the system then in operation, which was similar to what is now being proposed:

"Given the difficulty of Oppositions winning a vote in their Parliaments, the odds against doing so in 14 countries around Europe with different parliamentary recesses—lasting up to 10 weeks in our own case—are such that even if the European Commission proposed the slaughter of the first-born it would be difficult to achieve such a remarkable conjunction of parliamentary votes."—*[Official Report, 21 January 2008; Vol. 470, c. 1262.]*

The “lottery ticket” system will not work. It would be like a football referee getting out his fraction of a red card, only then to consult with 14 other officials before deciding what to do, by which time the game is over. If we are serious about regaining control of our borders and fisheries, and about having the ability to set our own trade deals and the power to set our own business regulation, sovereignty must be restored to Parliament. It is quite simple. Everything else is a cop-out, a sell-out, a lottery ticket fraud. Let us be honest about the washed-out lottery ticket.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): I am glad that I did not interrupt my hon. Friend in the midst of that wonderful metaphor. One of the real problems with the mentality of those who subscribe to the EU project is that instead of being honest enough to say “no” to those of us who want our sovereignty back, they put forward devious and deceptive and pretences to say yes, when in reality they know it means no.

**Mr Baron:** I can only agree with my right hon. Friend. Having said that, the Minister for Europe is nothing but a courteous and able Minister, and I am delighted that he is in his place. I would not want him to be under the illusion that we are suggesting that of him, but there has been a tendency to act out a charade, when actually we have been on the conveyor belt of ever closer union. We need greater honesty in this debate.

**Mr Bernard Jenkin** (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): My hon. Friend has raised the issue of sovereignty, and the draft decision document published this week by the European Union contains a section called “Sovereignty”. If ever there was a misnamed section of a document, it is this—perhaps my hon. Friend will come on to that. The one thing that this document does not return to the United Kingdom Parliament is sovereignty over the laws that are made for this country. Indeed, it promises a “red card”, which is no more than an extremely cumbersome method of qualified majority voting in the European Union.

**Mr Baron:** I cannot but agree with my hon. Friend.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** Does anybody want to disagree?

**Mr Baron:** There will be people who want to disagree—don’t worry.

I will just turn, if I may, to the immigration emergency brake, which again is questionable. I speak here with a tinge of sadness, because I think the Government have framed this part of the debate in the wrong manner. Let us first of all be clear that the emergency brake access to in-work benefits will last only four years, with the EU, not Britain, judging whether the emergency brake is declared. Not even here do we have control. It is also unclear what happens after the period expires. In addition, access to benefits would gradually be increased, meaning it is moot how much of a deterrent to immigration a brake would actually be.

My sadness—I have said this many times in this place—is that I believe the Government are wrong to couch the debate in these terms. It feeds into a negative narrative about immigrants. It ignores the fact that almost all—the vast majority—immigrants from the EU come to Britain to work hard. They are not looking for benefits. It ignores the fact that large-scale EU immigration cannot be stopped, in all truthfulness, while we adhere to the

EU’s founding principle of freedom of movement, particularly as the rise in the national living wage picks up speed. Let us have real honesty about this debate. I am fed up with listening to politicians focus on benefits and play to the gallery. It is absolutely wrong to do so. It feeds a negative narrative. The vast majority of immigrants—let us make this absolutely clear—come here to work hard and we should acknowledge that fact, so let us have clarity about the emergency brake. After all, it can only be used by the EU backseat driver, and we all know how dangerous that can be.

There are massive holes in the two key planks of the Government’s renegotiations. Is that important? For some, it will not be. I say it is important, because while the general view may be that we are standing still while inside the EU, we are in fact standing still on a conveyor belt towards ever closer union. Let us be absolutely clear about that. Indeed, the lesson of the eurozone crisis is that the EU usually finds a way of achieving what it wants, ever closer union, even at the expense of violating its commitments. As Mr Juncker once said, “when it becomes serious, you have to lie”.

Those are the words of the President of the European Commission.

The EU is developing all the trappings of a nation state: a currency, a body of law and a diplomatic service. It makes no secret of its ambitions or its determination to succeed, even if this results in a democratic deficit with its own peoples. We only have to hear what has been said by some of the key people in the EU. Mr Juncker has made his position very clear:

“if it’s a ‘yes’, we say ‘on we go’; and if it’s a ‘no’, we say ‘we will continue.’”

Angela Merkel has made her wishes clear:

“we want more Europe, and stronger powers to intervene”.

Martin Schultz, President of the European Parliament, has been particularly blunt:

“the UK belongs to the EU”.

Mr Barroso, the former President of the Commission, has cast light on the EU’s integration process:

“they must go on voting, until they get it right”.

If things do not change, the UK is captive on a journey to who knows where. Looking into voting at the EU’s Council of Ministers, academics based at the London School of Economics—there has been very little research on this—have shown that, in recent years, Britain has voted against the majority far more often and been on the losing side more than any other member state. It is not as though it is even getting better within the internal structures of the EU. The British people never signed up to this and it is therefore right that they are finally having their say in a referendum. Do the British Government truly believe that they can muster sufficient votes to stop this inexorable vote towards ever closer union? That is one of the key questions Ministers should try to answer today.

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman mentions various eminent and well-known persons in the EU. Is not one thing that binds them all together in relation to this debate the fact that they are not elected? We in this Parliament had no say in who they are and we cannot get rid of them. The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) mentioned Enoch Powell. Tony Benn said that if we cannot get rid of the people in an institution, it is not democratic.

**Mr Baron:** I very much agree with the hon. Lady. There is a democratic deficit in the EU. It is no coincidence that the European Parliament, after the most recent elections, is probably the most Eurosceptic European Parliament in the EU's history. There is a connection there and the EU needs to recognise that it needs to put that democratic deficit right.

**Mr Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that even elected people do not get thrown out? We cannot get rid of Dan Hannan, for example, because he is No. 1 of 10 or 11 Members of the European Parliament.

**Mr Baron:** There are many flaws in the system. The peoples of Europe—although one can generalise too much in this respect—are asking more and more questions as the system fails to deliver, in particular on the economic front. Mass unemployment is causing great hardship in many countries and the EU is failing to deliver.

**Sammy Wilson** (East Antrim) (DUP) *rose*—

**Mr Baron:** I think I have allowed the hon. Gentleman to intervene once already. No? In that case, please do.

**Sammy Wilson:** The hon. Gentleman is being very generous in giving way. He is hitting the most important point here. Does he accept that this is not just an academic debate about sovereignty? This is an issue that goes to the very core of social cohesion. If people feel they cannot change those who make decisions, we will have all kinds of trouble and tensions on our streets. That is the core of the issue. Democratic institutions are important for the wellbeing of society.

**Mr Baron:** I completely agree and that is very well put. It is terribly important that there is an element of democratic accountability. If there is not, we will alienate sections of society and issues such as unemployment will not be properly addressed. How are people going to voice their opinion without moving to the extremes of the political divide, and feeding that extremism because they do not feel they can be democratically represented within the existing structures?

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree there is a practical side to the issue of sovereignty, too? As a member of the EU, we have lost our sovereign ability to negotiate friendly or free trade agreements with major economies around the world. It would be in this country's interests to have a friendly trading agreement with the big economies, such as America, China and Japan. We cannot do that, however, because we have lost our seat at the World Trade Organisation and our membership of the EU forbids us from making such negotiations.

**Mr Baron:** That is absolutely right. It is a question of sovereignty, at the end of the day. If we cannot take our seat at the WTO and negotiate our own trade deals, indirectly that is a loss of sovereignty. There is no doubt about that. I am conscious that time is ticking on, so I will make some progress if colleagues will forgive me.

The Prime Minister misses the importance of parliamentary sovereignty in the EU debate. That is a mistake No. 10 is in danger of making when it focuses too heavily on Project Fear issues, such as immigration and jobs. We all know it is the loss of parliamentary

sovereignty that really lies at the heart of our uneasy relationship with the EU, and which has rankled since we first joined in the 1970s. Over the course of the referendum campaign, I do not believe Project Fear will bite. Ever-increasing numbers of big businesses, including the likes of JCB, Toyota, and Unilever, make it clear that they will not pull out in the event of a Brexit. Indeed, a recent Barclays report suggested a Brexit would be beneficial to the UK. Jobs are linked to our trade with Europe, not to our membership of the EU. Given that our vast trade deficit is in the EU's favour, it would want to sign a trade agreement in the event of a Brexit.

Furthermore, even if the EU wanted to get awkward, it could not. Falling global tariffs since the 1970s mean that both the UK and EU are bound by the WTO's "most favoured nation" tariffs—the USA's average being under 3%. One can easily lose 3% in a currency swing in a week. Many smaller countries outside the EU easily trade with it. Does the "in" camp think the public believe we could not do likewise?

What excites voters' imagination is the ability to restore sovereignty to our ancient Parliament. I rather suspect the Prime Minister knows this, and that consequently he is holding something in reserve—we are hearing something about a sovereignty Bill, for example—but details are scant. If it is true, however, does it not acknowledge that the "washed-out lottery ticket" and the EU "backseat driver brake" are not fit for purpose? Will the Minister supply the House with more details?

In conclusion, there has never been a better time to renegotiate our relationship with the EU, and nor are we ever likely to be in a stronger position to win meaningful concessions. I therefore urge the Prime Minister, at this critical stage, to return to the renegotiations and seek nothing less than a true restoration of parliamentary sovereignty. Let us step back for one brief moment. If the EU did not exist today, would we really invent it? I cannot understand why this and other Governments have acquiesced in this charade. I can only surmise it is because it is easier not to correct it and to do nothing, than to put it right and take action. But inaction is costing this country dear, not just by way of our £10 billion a year net contribution, but in terms of our sovereignty and responsibility to the people of this country.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. On account of the number of hon. Members who wish to contribute, I am afraid we must start with a six-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

12.51 pm

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) on his excellent speech.

I want to address those of my Labour colleagues who mistakenly remain in favour of staying in the EU. The hon. Gentleman talked about being told, "No", but we have some opt-outs, which is good, because they have saved us some of the pain of being a member of the EU. I think, in particular, of the opt-out from the euro. Had we been a member, we would have been destroyed by the crisis in 2008. The fact that we could depreciate by

30% protected our economy, to an extent, from that terrible experience. Other countries in southern Europe had much greater difficulties and are still suffering. Currency flexibility, which means that countries and economies can adjust to appropriate parities with other economies, is fundamental to a successful world economy, let alone national or European economies.

**Mr Jenkin:** Is not one of the more ridiculous parts of the document published yesterday the idea that we need the EU to recognise more than one currency in the EU? Given that Sweden voted in a referendum to stay out of the euro, when it did not have an opt-out, as was negotiated in the Maastricht treaty for the UK, is it not clear that if a country has its own currency, the EU cannot take it away, and that we do not need a treaty change or anything to tell us we can have the pound?

**Kelvin Hopkins:** I agree absolutely with the hon. Gentleman. I have had the pleasure of being a member of the European Scrutiny Committee for some years now, and in that capacity I meet representatives from other Parliaments. Swedish Parliament representatives tell me that support for joining the euro is at 11% in Sweden, so I do not think it will be joining any time soon. We heard from the Czechs recently. As soon as anyone suggests they might join the euro, they basically say, “Never”. One or two countries that joined the euro now think it was not such a good idea and might like to withdraw if they could. It is true that there are several currencies in the EU: several countries retain their own currency. Some years ago, I met Polish representatives, and I said, “Whatever you do, don’t join the euro, if you want to run your economy successfully, because you would be pinioned, and it would not be good for Poland.” I do not think my advice mattered; nevertheless that country has not joined the euro, and I see no prospect of its doing so in the near future.

I want to talk about other opt-outs. I have long campaigned in the House on the bizarre and nonsensical common fisheries policy. Thousands, if not millions, of tonnes of fish are being destroyed by being dumped back into the sea dead, and fish stocks have been savagely cut. The only way forward is for countries to be responsible for their own fish stocks, along traditional lines, to husband their own resources and to fish in their own seas, as the Norwegians do.

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): Is it not a pity that the Government have missed the opportunity of treaty change around the CFP, which has been an absolute disaster for the Scottish fishing community?

**Kelvin Hopkins:** Indeed. I raised the matter when a former representative from UKRep spoke to the Committee a few years ago. I said, as I had suggested to the coalition Government, “What would happen if we gave notice that in five years we would withdraw from the CFP, restore the 200-mile and 50% limits and start to manage fish stocks properly, in the interests of our own fishing industry, monitoring every boat and catch sensibly, as happens in Norway?” He said, “You’d be expelled from the EU,” so there is no possibility of that happening.

If the Government put that in their negotiations, however, they might be a bit more persuasive. I have a list of things I would have in the negotiations—sadly,

the Government have not followed it—and getting rid of the CFP is one of them. We have the largest fishing grounds and used to have the most successful fishing industry in the EU, but it has been devastated by overfishing and the appalling discarding of bycatches. The point is that, if we made a real change, we would apparently be thrown out, so the substantial changes I want would not be acceptable.

Even yesterday, people were talking about the common agricultural policy—another nonsensical policy that has cost us dear—under which we make massive net contributions to the EU. Every country ought to manage its own agriculture. Some, like the Norwegians, would choose to subsidise it for strategic reasons, as would be perfectly acceptable. We could do the same and choose either the current subsidy regime or a different pattern of subsidies. Each country should do its own thing. One of the nonsenses is that some countries are paid not to grow food. I was in Lithuania a couple of years ago with the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), the Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee. It used to be self-sufficient in food, but now thousands of acres are lying fallow because it is paid not to grow food. That is nonsense, and it is all to do with the CAP.

**Sammy Wilson:** The hon. Gentleman is making an important point. In Northern Ireland, a big issue is what would happen to farming subsidies were we to leave the EU, but is not the point that farming subsidies are better tailored to the needs of individual countries than is a common policy that often fails to meet the needs of farmers in our countries?

**Kelvin Hopkins:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. If we withdrew, we could eliminate the net loss of our contribution to the budget—some say £19 billion, others £14 billion, but either way it is in the billions—and still subsidise regional and other policies, and tailor them to our national and regional needs.

I turn now to the sham of so-called “social Europe”. It is used as a lever to persuade social democratic and socialist parties to say yes to the European Union, but when it comes to the crunch—this would not necessarily impress Conservative Members and certainly not Labour Members, I hope—the EU always finds in favour of employers. Free movement is not about being benign; it is about bidding down wages, ensuring that wages are kept down and profits kept high. It is part of the neo-liberal package of measures that is being driven by the European Union.

In the case of Greece and other southern European countries that have had bail-outs, one of the conditions for bail-out is to put a brake on collective bargaining: “You’ve got to calm down your employees, especially in the public sector. We’re not going to give you the bail-out unless you cut back on collective bargaining.” That is hardly “social Europe”. What about the rights supposedly involved in the charter of fundamental rights? Then, of course, another condition of bail-out is forced privatisations, and we have seen fire sales of public assets in these countries. All these things have damaged social welfare in those countries.

The biggest problem of all has been mass unemployment, falling national output and falling living standards. Greece provides the most extreme example, but other countries have suffered, too. Greece has seen its living

[*Kelvin Hopkins*]

standards cut by 25%, and its unemployment is at 25%—50% among young people. Across southern Europe as a whole, youth unemployment stands at 40%. It is nonsense—it does not work economically. The idea that is all about “social Europe” and that it is beneficial to workers is, I think, complete nonsense and simply not true.

**Kate Hoey:** Does my hon. Friend agree that what he has said is predominantly why—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman’s time is up—a point that I had not spotted. I am being more courteous than I need to be, but it seems discourteous to deprive the hon. Lady. Would she like to finish blurting out what she wanted to say?

**Kate Hoey:** I am saying that my hon. Friend provides a reason why the trade union movement and trade unionists across the country are catching on to this more and more. Is this not why trade unionists are speaking out and beginning to join and get involved in the campaign to leave?

**Kelvin Hopkins:** Yes.

**Mr Speaker:** Excellent. I was about to say that a single -sentence answer would suffice, but the hon. Gentleman has provided a one-word sentence—magnificent!

1.2 pm

**Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) on introducing this debate so well.

I have to say that this has been a very long journey—30 years, I suppose, in all. I do not want to speak about the technicalities of negotiation; we will deal with that when the Foreign Secretary appears in front of the European Scrutiny Committee on 10 February. I had the opportunity to say a few words yesterday in reply to the Prime Minister’s statement, but today I simply want to indicate what I really feel about this question and explain why I am so utterly and completely determined to maintain the sovereignty of this United Kingdom Parliament.

It is really very simple. We are elected by the voters in our constituencies. We come here, and have done for many centuries, to represent their grievances and their interests, to fight for their prosperity and to support them in adversity. The reason why this House has to remain sovereign is that it simply cannot be subordinated to decisions taken by other people. This is about this country and it is about our electors. This is what people fought and died for.

As I mentioned yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister referred in his Bloomberg speech to our “national Parliament” as the “root of our democracy”, but I would also mention that in our history, this Parliament has been steeped in the blood of, and nourished by, civil war. When your great predecessor, Mr Speaker—

**Peter Grant:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir William Cash:** Certainly not at this moment.

I was about to say that Speaker Lenthall, in defiance of prospective tyranny, refused to accept armed aggression by the monarchy. Pym, Hampden, ship money—this

was all about sovereignty and defending the rights of the people from unnecessary and oppressive taxation, which was being imposed on them without parliamentary authority. Through subsequent centuries, we saw the repeal of the Corn laws, and parliamentary reform through the 1867 Act to ensure that the working man was entitled to take part in this democracy; and after that, through to the 1930s when we had to take account of the mood of appeasement.

With respect to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Europe, I take the view that in completely different circumstances what has happened in these negotiations in terms of parliamentary sovereignty can be seen when the die is clearly cast and we now have an opportunity for the first time since 1975 to make a decision on behalf of the British people. That is why we need to have regard to the massive failures of the European Union and to its dysfunctionality—whether it be in respect of economics, immigration, defence or a range of matters that are absolutely essential to our sovereignty.

All those issues have, within the framework of the European Union, been made subject to criticism. We are told that we would be more secure if we stayed in the European Union and that we would preserve the sovereignty of our electors who put us in place to make the decisions and make the laws that should govern them. Would we really be more secure in a completely dysfunctional, insecure, unstable Europe? No, of course not.

The issues now before us in Europe are actually to do with sovereignty. If we lose this sovereignty, we betray the people. That is the point I am making. Yes, there are certain advantages to co-operation and trade, for example, and I agree 100% with that. I have always argued for that, but what I will not argue for is for the people who vote us to this Chamber of this Parliament to be subordinated so that we are put in the second tier of a two-tier Europe, which will be largely governed, as I have said previously, by the dominant country in the eurozone—Germany.

**Mr Jenkin:** Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most worrying sentences in the document published this week relates to what will occur if the eurozone seeks to deepen its integration? This sentence reads:

“member states whose currency is not the euro shall not impede the implementation of legal acts directly linked to the functioning of the euro area and shall refrain from measures which could jeopardise the attainment of the objectives of the economic and monetary union.”

Given that there is going to be a new treaty and we do not know how it is going to affect us, is this not in effect giving up our veto?

**Sir William Cash:** It is. We were promised that in 1972. Our membership of the European Union is entirely dependent on the same Act that was passed in 1972. It was a voluntary decision based on certain assumptions. The 1971 White Paper, which preceded that debate, said that we would never give up the veto, and went on to say that to do so would be against our vital national interests and would endanger the very fabric of the European Community itself. They knew which way it could go. They knew they had to keep the veto, but it has been taken away from us progressively by successive Governments. If we cut through all the appearances, this is a sham. That is the problem and this is the real issue.

**Sir Edward Leigh:** My hon. Friend is so right to raise the debate above mere technicalities. He will remember that at his school he was told that the blood of the martyrs is the seed corn of his church. Is not the blood of all those parliamentarians who died in defence in this House the seed corn of our liberties?

**Sir William Cash:** I agree 100% with my hon. Friend. This is not about technicalities. It is about freedom of choice—freedom of choice at the ballot box for people to have their own laws that can be challenged accountably—not by proportional representation, not by the European Parliament, not by COREPER getting together in unsmoke-filled rooms to hatch deals on behalf of the people who are actually being affected in their daily lives. That is the problem. We have wordsmiths, and we have people running around in big chauffeur-driven cars making decisions—unelected bureaucrats—just as Monnet and Schuman intended in the first place.

We have reached the point of no return. We have to say no: we have to leave. That is the position. I do not need to say any more. As far as I am concerned, this is about the liberties of this country. It is about the liberties of our people. That is why I say that we must leave the European Union.

Let me end by quoting from G. K. Chesterton and John Gower:

“Smile at us, pay us, pass us; but do not quite forget,  
For we are the people of England, that never have spoken yet.”

1.10 pm

**Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab):** I shall be very brief, because I know that many Conservative Members wish to speak. I am disappointed that so few of my own colleagues are here, wishing to defend the European Union and to speak against the sovereignty of this Parliament, but they are not here, so I shall say a few words.

Actually, what I really want to do—because we are talking about Parliament, and about great parliamentarians—is quote some of the things that were said in the House by one of the greatest parliamentarians, sadly now dead, the right hon. Tony Benn. They follow on from what was said by the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash)—and I agreed with every word of it. This is not about technicalities and “wordsmiths”, as the hon. Gentleman put it, and it is not about bureaucrats. It is about, fundamentally, our belief in our country, and our belief in our country’s ability to run itself.

Let me first quote from a letter that Tony Benn wrote to his Bristol constituents on 29 December 1974. I am not sure whether you had been born yet, Mr Speaker, but I think you probably had been. Tony Benn wrote:

“Britain’s continuing membership of the Community would mean the end of Britain as a completely self-governing nation and the end of our democratically elected Parliament as the supreme law making body in the United Kingdom.”

So he was showing some foresight back in 1974. The following year, he made a speech during a meeting at which the Cabinet was discussing the Labour view on how Members should vote in the 1975 “leaving” referendum. As we know, the party was very split at the time. He said:

“We have confused the real issue of parliamentary democracy, for already there has been a fundamental change. The power of electors over their law-makers has gone, the power of MPs over

Ministers has gone, the role of Ministers has changed. The real case for entry has never been spelled out, which is that there should be a fully federal Europe in which we become a province. It hasn’t been spelled out because people would never accept it. We are at the moment on a federal escalator, moving as we talk, going towards a federal objective we do not wish to reach. In practice, Britain will be governed by a European coalition government that we cannot change, dedicated to a capitalist or market economy theology. This policy is to be sold to us by projecting an unjustified optimism about the Community, and an unjustified pessimism about the United Kingdom, designed to frighten us in. Jim”

—I think that he meant Jim Callaghan—

“quoted Benjamin Franklin, so let me do the same: ‘He who would give up essential liberty for a little temporary security deserves neither safety nor liberty.’ The Common Market will break up the UK because there will be no valid argument against an independent Scotland, with its own Ministers and Commissioner, enjoying Common Market membership. We shall be choosing between the unity of the UK and the unity of the EEC. It will impose appalling strains on the Labour movement...I believe that we want independence and democratic self-government, and I hope the Cabinet in due course will think again.”

On 13 March 1989, he told the House of Commons:

“It would be inconceivable for the House to adjourn for Easter without recording the fact that last Friday the High Court disallowed an Act which was passed by this House and the House of Lords and received Royal Assent—the Merchant Shipping Act 1988. The High Court referred the case to the European Court...I want to make it clear to the House that we are absolutely impotent unless we repeal section 2 of the European Communities Act. It is no good talking about being a good European. We are all good Europeans; that is a matter of geography and not a matter of sentiment.

Are the arrangements under which we are governed such that we have broken the link between the electorate and the laws under which they are governed?

I am an old parliamentary hand—perhaps I have been here too long—“

He was here for a lot longer after that!—

“but I was brought up to believe, and I still believe, that when people vote in an election they must be entitled to know that the party for which they vote, if it has a majority, will be able to enact laws under which they will be governed. That is no longer true. Any party elected, whether it is the Conservative party or the Labour party, can no longer say to the electorate, ‘Vote for me and if I have a majority I shall pass that law’, because if that law is contrary to Common Market law, British judges will apply Community law.”—[*Official Report*, 13 March 1989; Vol. 149, c. 56-8.]

That was very, very apt all those years ago, and it is even more apt today, which is why I absolutely believe that this House must be sovereign. The Prime Minister’s negotiations have failed to take account of any of that. When we are given the referendum, the people will finally have a chance to say no to this undemocratic, anti-democratic system—a system that is opposed to the democracy that we want in this country.

1.15 pm

**Mr Geoffrey Cox (Torrige and West Devon) (Con):** On this day of all days, let me commence by striking—I hope—a note of humility. The truth is that I do not know whether the conclusion I have reached is right or wrong. I think that the problem we face in questioning our consciences in relation to whether or not our country should take this historic step to depart from the European Union is almost too big for a single individual to compute. All the potential economic consequences, and all the other consequences for our social and other fabric, are of a complexity by which individuals, and even Members of Parliament, would rightly feel daunted.

**Mr David Nuttall** (Bury North) (Con): Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

**Mr Cox:** Not just now.

I think that the Prime Minister was right—completely right—when he said to the House this week, “Do what is in your heart.” We can never be sure, if we leave the European Union, that the economic consequences of doing so will play in one way or another, but we can have faith that they will, and, speaking for myself, I have that faith. Ultimately, we must ask ourselves, “What do we believe is right? What is important to us, as Members of Parliament and as representatives of our country and our constituents?”

That is why I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) struck the right note. For a long time I have remained silent on this issue, trying to wrestle with the rights and wrongs of it, and waiting until we have seen the final version of the proposals to be made by the Prime Minister. The draft decision was published by the Commission the day before yesterday; I have read it, and I have to say that I do not believe that it is a sham. I believe that it represents the best that the Prime Minister could do within the parameters that he had set himself. I think that there is much useful stuff there. If it is worked on, and if detail is provided and is sufficiently substantial and well drafted, no doubt it will provide some modest measure of satisfaction, and some ring-fencing for us in a thoroughly, fundamentally unsatisfactory position. However, I do not believe that it amounts to the rewriting of the DNA of this organisation which I believe the country is crying out for.

For that reason, I have concluded—and this is the first time that I have said so—that I shall be obliged to vote to leave the European Union. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Stone, I believe that it is a question of freedom: the freedom of this country to be true to itself, and to follow the policies that the House and its Executive believe are the best policies, fitted and suited for the interests of this nation: not diluted, not representing an accommodation of, and a constant adjustment to, the competing interests of 29 member states, but following the path that this nation sets and that is right for this nation’s interests. For 40 years we have shifted, adjusted and felt uneasy in our skins at the compromises we have had to make as a consequence of our adherence to the Union.

I say to our partners in the European Union that this is not an act of hostility. It is a rebirth of our country in its full independence and its full freedom, to enable us to set our commercial policies, to be decisive and clear and give a lead to the international community in foreign policy, to set our own defence policy in the way we judge to be in the best interests of those we represent, to enable us to have clear lines of democratic accountability and to fulfil the spirit and genius of our own nation.

I say to this House and to those who listen outside: let us trust in the genius of our own people. Before 1974, did this country do so badly? Were we not leaders in the development of human rights? Did we not have 400 years of peaceful political evolution? This country does not have to be afraid of resuming its own independent self-governance. We can offer more to the world by that means than by being a muted voice in a big organisation with whose objectives and outcomes we do not feel at ease.

I shall not attempt to address now the technicalities of this issue or the economic rights and wrongs. I shall conclude on a note of freedom with the words of John Milton himself:

“Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks. Methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam.”

When he spoke those words, he spoke in defence of freedom and truth. Let us believe in the genius of our country.

1.22 pm

**Peter Grant** (Glenrothes) (SNP): I have had to remind myself what motion we are debating today because it strikes me that if it had been phrased to say what most of its sponsors want it to say—namely, that this House could not care less what the Prime Minister achieves because we are voting to get out anyway—I am not convinced that anyone, with the possible exception of the last speaker, the hon. and learned Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr Cox), would have said anything different.

I would never have thought that, almost exactly nine months after becoming a new Member of Parliament, I would be giving a lesson in English parliamentary history to one of the most esteemed and experienced parliamentarians to grace this Chamber, the hon. Member for Stone (Sir William Cash). However, this Parliament did not witness the English civil war, because it did not exist at that time. One of its predecessors, the Parliament of England, most certainly did, but at best this Parliament has existed since 1707. Some would argue that the Parliament of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland is less than 100 years old. I say that not to knock the pride of those who justifiably believe that the previous Parliament of England delivered a lot and was a trend setter for democracy in many parts of the world, but if you have a strong hand to play, you damage it by overplaying it. I fear that some of those on the Conservative Benches are overplaying the significance of the history of previous Parliaments that have met not in this exact building but close by.

**Sir William Cash:** I would simply say that when Scotland joined us in the Union, it was in order to combine our fight for freedom. Indeed, the Scots fought with us in all the great battles including Waterloo and the Somme and right the way through the second world war. It is that freedom that we fought for together.

**Peter Grant:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely correct. The Poles, the French, the Hungarians and many others also fought alongside us.

What actually happened in 1706-07 was that the two Parliaments were combined; it was not a takeover of one Parliament by another. I entirely respect the clear pride and positive English nationalism that we have heard from some Conservative Members today. That is a positive thing; as long as nationalism is based on pride in and love for one’s country it is always to be welcomed. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stone on his pride in declaring that “we are the people of England”, but we are not the people of England; we are the people of Scotland. We are the sovereign people of Scotland, in whom sovereignty over our nation is and always will be vested. For Scotland, sovereignty does not reside in this

place, and it does not reside in those of us who have been sent to serve in this place. It resides for ever in those who have sent us to serve here.

I am genuinely interested in the concept that the institution of Parliament is ultimately sovereign, even over the people. Perhaps someone who speaks later can tell me who decided that that should be the case, and who gave them the right to decide that. I suspect the answer will be that it was the people who agreed that Parliament should be sovereign, in which case it is the people who retain the right to change that decision.

**Sammy Wilson:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that this debate is not about the sovereignty of this place but about the sovereignty of the people who elect us to this place? Therefore, if we become pawns, the sovereignty of the people he is talking about—the people of Scotland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales—is diminished.

**Peter Grant:** I have a lot of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's comment, but I have to draw his attention to the wording of the motion. It does not mention the sovereignty of the people; it talks about the "importance of parliamentary sovereignty"—[HON. MEMBERS: "They are the same thing."] The two are most definitely not the same thing. If Parliament is sovereign, does it have the legal and constitutional right to pass any legislation, however morally repugnant it might be, with the people's only recourse being to wait five years and then vote for different Members of Parliament? That is not a version of parliamentary sovereignty that I recognise, and it is not a version of parliamentary sovereignty that the people of Scotland recognise or will ever be prepared to accept.

**Mr Jenkin:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Peter Grant:** No, I need to make some progress and the hon. Gentleman made a lot of interventions earlier this afternoon.

I want to look at the second part of the motion, which goes to the nub of the EU membership debate. We have heard the term "ever closer union" being repeated as though it was some kind of threat and we were going to be swallowed up by a big two-headed monster, probably in Germany but possibly in Brussels. I urge Members to look at the wording of the preamble to the European treaties to see what the term was originally intended to mean. The exact wording varies from time to time, but we are talking about ever closer union between the peoples of Europe so that decisions can be taken as close as possible to the people.

I want to ask those Conservative Members, and some on the Opposition Benches, who are determined to argue against the concept of ever closer union: are we really saying that we want to drive the peoples of Europe further apart at a time when we are facing the greatest humanitarian crisis in our history, which nobody believes can be addressed by individual nations acting on their own? Are we really saying that we are against the concept of ever closer union between the peoples of Europe? I also draw Members' attention to the fact that my use of the word "peoples"—plural—is not some kind of mistake written by Alexander the Meerkat. I am using it deliberately to recognise the diversity of cultures, faiths and beliefs among the peoples of Europe.

Are Members against the idea that decisions should be taken as close to the people as possible? I believe that the term "ever closer union" can still be turned into one of the greatest assertions of the rights of the peoples of Europe that we have ever seen. However, I willingly accept that it is a vision that has not been followed by the institutions of the European Union. Those institutions have failed, and continue to fail, to fulfil the vision that was set out in the original treaties. I would much rather we continued to be part of the European Union so that that vision can be delivered, because I find it not only welcoming but exciting. Just imagine living in a Europe in which monolithic power-mad Eurocrats, whether in Brussels or closer to home, were no longer able to ride roughshod over the will of the people. I remind the House that there was a Prime Minister not long ago who chose to ride roughshod over the will of the people, when the immovable object that was the late Margaret Thatcher met the irresistible force that was the will of the people of Scotland over the imposition of the poll tax. Within two years, that immovable object had been moved. The irresistible force that is the sovereign will of the people of Scotland is still there and will be there forever.

**Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con):** I assure the hon. Gentleman that the one thing the irresistible force would not be able to compete against would be an irresistible force from Brussels—he would never get his way, ever again.

**Peter Grant:** Nobody knows; during the independence referendum, when people asked why I was still happy for Scotland to be in Europe, I said it was because we have never had a chance to be a part of the European Union with a voice. Questions were asked about fishing earlier, and I can tell hon. Members that Luxembourg gets a vote on fishing policy whereas Scotland does not. Scotland's fisheries Minister was not allowed to be part of the UK delegation; an unelected Lord who knew nothing about fishing was sent, instead of possibly the most respected fisheries Minister—one who is actually respected by fishermen. My constituency has a bigger coastline than Luxembourg, yet Luxembourg gets a vote on fishing policy and nobody in Scotland does. These are the kinds of areas where we need to see reforms.

I long to see the day when the dream of Europe, as originally set out, is realised, when the peoples of Europe are genuinely brought closer together—not the institutions, the civil servants or the Governments, but the peoples of Europe—and when decisions are taken closer to the people than they are now. I long to see a Europe where "Man to Man, the world o'er, Shall brothers be for a' that."

1.30 pm

**Mr Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) (Con):** I thank the Backbench Business Committee for recommending this important debate. In 2013, the Prime Minister set out the future of Europe in his Bloomberg speech. He acknowledged that the status quo was no longer working for us, so he promised us change, reform and even a new treaty. Having received the draft negotiation earlier this week, I ask myself, "Where are these grand promises of fundamental reform?" There are none; there is not a single clear-cut promise of any treaty change. The Prime Minister said that the European Union cannot progress

[Mr Andrew Turner]

with “more of the same”, but so far that is all I have heard. It has been more of the same complex rules, restricting and burdening us; more of the same inability to change; more of the same foreign domination that we have not asked for and that we do not want. The European Union is its own biggest threat. How many times will we be promised a more competitive environment? How many times have we been told that red tape will be cut and the single market strengthened? We have yet to see real proposals and we have yet to see proper results—enough, is enough.

I am interested in Mr Tusk’s definition of sovereignty, because the proposals can hardly be called “sovereign”; nor do they let power flow back to this Parliament. Instead, we could receive a “red card”—a red card that can be used only when a group of national Parliaments decide to stop a legislative proposal. A majority of 55% of member states is to constitute a red card, whereas my majority would be 100% of the United Kingdom.

What about this “emergency brake”? It is an emergency that needs to be objectively justified. Whereas it is jolly good that the Commission tells us that the UK would qualify to pull this brake, it is outrageous that the final word lies not with us, but with other member states. We may not, says the EU, have to pursue an “ever closer union”. When the UK is neither allowed to pull its own brake, nor to decide its own emergency, that is when I feel that the ever closer union is still very much upon us.

The Prime Minister described an updated European Union as flexible, adaptable and more open. I can only see a supposedly updated European Union that is inflexible, unadaptable, and blocked. The Prime Minister did warn us, saying:

“You will not always get what you want”,

but it is becoming clearer by the day that with the European Union you never get what you want. If the European Union really wants us to stay, would it not have offered us more? The European Union has sucked up our sovereignty, and trampled all over our ancient rights and freedoms. Are we simply going to carry on with this relationship we have with the EU, when the EU so obviously does not want to change? Is not the only solution just to say “Leave” to this whole spectacle? This renegotiation is a spectacle; it is too much noise, too much of a farce and much too little substance.

**Stephen Gethins** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry, but the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr Turner) has completed his speech. I call Sir Gerald Howarth.

1.35 pm

**Sir Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot) (Con): May I say what a great pleasure it is to take part in this vital debate? I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) on securing it, and may I pay tribute to you, Mr Speaker, for being in the Chair for this important debate, because I know that you take these matters extremely seriously? As for my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr Cox), his speech was a tour de force and I feel every ounce of the passion that he feels about this subject.

This is not a new issue; this has been going on for well over half a century. When the then Lord Privy Seal, Edward Heath, sought advice from the then Lord Chancellor, Lord Kilmuir, he was given advice in December 1960 in respect of our potential membership of the Common Market, as it was then called. Lord Kilmuir stated:

“I have no doubt that if we do sign the Treaty, we shall suffer some loss of sovereignty, but before attempting to define or evaluate that loss I wish to make one general observation. At the end of the day, the issue whether or not to join the European Economic Community must be decided on broad political grounds”.

He continued:

“Adherence to the Treaty of Rome would, in my opinion, affect our sovereignty in three ways: Parliament would be required to surrender some of its functions to the organs of the Community; The Crown would be called on to transfer part of its treaty-making power to those organs; Our courts of law would sacrifice some degree of independence by becoming subordinate in certain respects to the European Court of Justice.”

Lord Kilmuir could not have been clearer, but in 1975, when people were asked to vote on these matters, this issue of the loss of sovereignty was played down by Ted Heath and his Government at the time. Some of us foresaw the dangers. We saw that the EEC had a president, a flag, an anthem and a court. In 1986, 45 of us voted against the Single European Act. I am the only Conservative who voted against it left in the House, but there are two who did so on the Opposition Benches: the Leader of the Opposition; and the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner). I quite accept that I am in rather questionable company, but we did have one thing in common: we believed in our country—in those times, at any rate.

**Mr Jenkin:** We still do.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** I still do, as my hon. Friend says.

The EEC has now become the European Union, and it has a currency, a Parliament, a high representative and a defence identity, designed of course to undermine NATO. What are those things? They are all the attributes of a sovereign nation state, and we deceive ourselves if we imagine that this process has now somehow come to a halt, been frozen in aspic and will remain ever thus—it will not. The direction of travel is clear. We do not have to prove this to the people, because they can see the direction of travel since 1975 and how this organisation, which we were told was going to be a common market in goods and services, has grown to become so much more—and it intends to continue. As several hon. Members have said, we must look at what is happening in the eurozone, with this absurd deceit that there can be a single currency without a single monetary institution operating a single monetary policy. This process will continue, and the British people must be warned that if they vote to stay in this organisation, they will not be voting for the status quo; they will be voting for further integration and further change.

In his excellent speech at Bloomberg, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it absolutely clear that he believed in maximising parliamentary sovereignty, and he said it again yesterday. The proposals contained in the Tusk arrangements, as my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay pointed out, are absolutely absurd. We have to get another 15 or so other Parliaments to agree. That is not the restoration of sovereignty to this Parliament, but basically a cop out.

I salute the European Scrutiny Committee, the illustrious Chairman and members of which are here in this Chamber today, for the work it has done in pointing out the exact situation. Its December report, “Reforming the European Scrutiny System in the House of Commons”, said that

“the existing Article 4(2) of the Treaty on European Union, which requires that the EU ‘shall respect the essential state functions’ of its member states, and that this means respecting the democracy of the member states.”

Accordingly, the Committee’s report recommended that “there should be a mechanism whereby the House of Commons can decide that a particular legislative proposal should not apply to the UK.”

That seems to be the sensible way in which to go, and I am sorry that the Prime Minister did not accept the recommendations of that Committee. There is a way forward. There is plenty of evidence to show that these arrangements that the Prime Minister has put in place are not legally binding. We need to restore sovereignty to this Parliament. The British people have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to do that.

I close with the words of Sir Walter Scott, the great poet from the Scottish borders from where I draw so much of my own blood.

“Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,  
Who never to himself hath said,  
This is my own, my native land!”

And I want it back!

1.41 pm

**Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con):** What is parliamentary sovereignty? It is the power and the ability of this elected House to carry out the wishes of the British people. Sovereignty of Parliament is actually the sovereignty—or the power—of the British people. Bit by bit, over the past 40 years, successive Governments have handed over the power of this House, and therefore the power of the British people, to the European Union.

Of course it was not always the European Union. Back in 1973, and when people voted in 1975, it was the common market, the European Economic Community. It then dropped the middle E, so that it became the European Community. It gradually attracted all the attributes of a state as it moved towards its goal of becoming a united states of Europe, with its own Parliament, its own flag, its own anthem, its own court, and its own foreign service.

We do not have to be Einstein to work out where the EU is going. It is heading in that direction, and in doing so it means that, in so many areas, the European Union, and not this Parliament, is sovereign. This loss of sovereignty from this Parliament is at the heart of my opposition to our membership of the European Union.

Handing over powers to the European Union means handing over the powers of my constituents in Bury North and of the British people. Why is that important? Well, it is important for this reason: when my constituents come to me and ask for help, they expect this Parliament to have the power and the ability to be able to sort out their problem. In so many areas, that is no longer the case. Whether we like it or not, the reality is that the power has been handed over to Brussels.

**Sir William Cash:** As my hon. Friend knows, a very good example is the ports regulation. The industry, the employers, the unions, the Government and the Opposition did want not it to happen, yet we were powerless to do anything about it. The regulation will become a European regulation and imposed on this Parliament, unless we can obstruct it, as we have done so far.

**Mr Nuttall:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is an excellent example of where this House no longer has the ability to control its own affairs. In passing, I pay tribute to the great work that my hon. Friend and his Committee have done in drawing to the attention of this House and therefore the British people the enormous number of rules and regulations that come out of Brussels and that have to be enforced by this Parliament.

As I was saying, our constituents come to us expecting that we will be able to help them. When they find out that we cannot do so, what does that result in? It results in their having a lack of confidence and faith in MPs and the political process. That is evidenced by a reduced turnout in elections. People think, “Well, why bother? These people have no power anymore.” That is why we have seen a fall in the turnout. It also means that there is a lack of engagement in the political process, because people lose faith and confidence in the whole democratic process, and that is dangerous. Societies break down once democracy breaks down, which is why it is so important that the people of this country seize this golden opportunity—this is their one opportunity—in the forthcoming referendum to take back the powers. They should do so for the sake not of us in this House, but of themselves, because if they do not like what we are doing, they can get rid of us and appoint someone else in whom they have faith. This is where we have common cause with those on the left of British politics. We might disagree with them—they want a socialist system, which is an honourable position, but I prefer a capitalist system and I will stand up and defend that—but we both can agree on democracy and on the fact that the power lies with our constituents. If my constituents do not want me, they can replace me with someone else, and we all stand on that basis.

This is a golden opportunity. I hope that this debate will show the British people that this is the one chance probably in their lifetime to get back their powers. I do not believe that this renegotiation has changed in any meaningful way the sovereignty of this House. It will not give us back any powers. We do not have time to examine these documents in detail, but I have looked at them and I am sure that they do not give us back any more powers, which is why I hope, in my heart of hearts, that the British people will ask themselves from where they want to be governed—from here in Westminster or by the foreign powers in Brussels.

1.48 pm

**Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con):** If the British people miss this unique opportunity to reject the undemocratic EU superstate project, it will be the fault of people such as me—not me as I am today, but me as I was in 1975 when I had the chance to vote to withdraw from the then EEC and I wasted it. Why did I waste that chance? Well, it was very simple: I was intimidated by the establishment. My instincts were to vote to leave, but all around me, in Oxford—in that home of lost causes—the great and the good were saying that it was

[*Dr Julian Lewis*]

beyond question that the prosperity of the United Kingdom depended on remaining in the EEC. I thought, “What do I know about it?” After all, in those days, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (Mr Nuttall) pointed out, it was only about an economic community. It was not about my pet subject of the defence and security of the United Kingdom. How that has changed, now that it is—and now that we know where we are heading.

When the time comes for me to advise my constituents about what I think they should do, I will give them six good reasons to leave the EU. First, I will tell them that every year the United Kingdom pays £20 billion to this organisation and gets less than half of it back. Secondly, I will tell them, as we have heard today, that the EU wants ever closer political union and that we cannot opt out of that while remaining within the European Union. So-called “associate membership”—the trick they are waiting to give us at the final stage of the great concessionary charade in which we are currently engaged—would make no difference at all. It might even diminish our own powers still further.

Thirdly, I will tell my constituents that the European Union wants a single European population with no borders between EU countries, so that we cannot restrict immigration into the United Kingdom. Fourthly, I will tell them that the EU wants to develop its single European currency into a single European economy controlled from Brussels. Fifthly, I will tell them that the EU wants a single European army, a single European foreign policy—that did a lot of good for the Ukraine, didn’t it?—and a single European justice system, all outside UK Government control. Finally, I shall tell my constituents that all of that is designed to create a single country called Europe under a single European Government, thus finally taking away the power of the British people to govern ourselves.

In his excellent opening speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) gave a long list of statements made by European bigwigs. As he pointed out, some of them did actually stumble across the truth; when they do, however, they usually pick themselves up, brush themselves down and carry on as if nothing had happened, as Churchill once said of a lesser British politician.

One occasion when a European Union bigwig told the truth was on 31 December 1998, the new year’s eve before the introduction of the single European currency. I happened to be up, waiting to see the new year celebrations on television, and on to my screen came the visage of Romano Prodi, who, as we all know, was then the President of the Commission—or, as these people always like to call themselves, the “President of Europe”. He was asked a simple question about the European single currency: “It’s a political project, isn’t it?” Now, remember: this was the single currency that had been sold to people over and over again as being vital for their economic prosperity. So that was what they asked him. And because it was too late for anyone to do anything about it, he told the truth, and he told the truth in an entirely cynical way when he replied, “It is an entirely political project.”

So we know what they are trying to do, and what we have to achieve is to make sure that people, when they come to make their decision, are not intimidated by the

great and the good on economic grounds, when the real aim is political, and they should reject the EU by voting to leave.

1.54 pm

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) on securing this very important debate. The principle of parliamentary sovereignty is the central pillar of the British constitution. In modern history, it flows from the Glorious Revolution of 1688. It is the very fountainhead of our freedoms and democracy in this country, and I believe that every Member of this House should seek to defend it.

I have been concerned about parliamentary sovereignty since 1972; I was a very unfortunate, sad youth. I remember the debate about accession to what was then the European Economic Community, and being told by Edward Heath that we would not be losing our sovereignty, merely sharing it. I felt at the time that that was a nonsensical proposition. Sovereignty cannot realistically be shared; it can either be preserved or surrendered. So in 1975, unlike my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), I voted against remaining in the European Union. My view has not changed since.

My view is that we have ceded—temporarily, I hope—our sovereignty to the supranational entity now known as the European Union. I believe that that sovereignty can be recovered, and that it is not completely lost. But the concern is that the unremitting accretion of power to the European Union, which the EU is clearly intent on pursuing if the Five Presidents report is anything to go by, carries with it the danger that at some stage our parliamentary sovereignty will indeed be extinguished. No one in the House, from the Prime Minister down, should be prepared to accept that.

The Prime Minister said in his Bloomberg speech:

“There is not, in my view, a single European demos. It is national parliaments, which are, and will remain, the true source of real democratic legitimacy and accountability in the EU.”

That is certainly the case in the United Kingdom. But we must look at the draft decision that the Prime Minister unveiled to the House yesterday. The question is whether that would, if agreed, be sufficient to restore the sovereignty of the United Kingdom that has been ceded to the EU. I have huge concerns that it would not.

In the first place, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash) pointed out in his Committee’s report, the legal force of a decision, which is a political agreement of Heads of Government and Heads of State, is open to debate. The draft decision details the various areas of provisional agreement struck between the British Government and the President of the Council. Other hon. Members have referred to freedom of movement and to benefits, and I do not propose to repeat their arguments. However, I would like to refer to what the draft decision says about sovereignty.

The significance of the repeated references in the European treaties to the creation of an “ever closer union” is played down considerably. The decision declares that the words should not be used to support an expansive interpretation of the competences of the EU or of the power of its institutions; instead it suggests that the words are intended simply to signal that the European Union’s aim is to promote trust and understanding among the peoples of Europe.

**Sir William Cash:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that even if the expression “ever closer union” is taken out in respect of the United Kingdom, that will not change one word of any of the existing treaties or laws? We will continue to remain subject to those laws and treaties.

**Mr Jones:** My hon. Friend is entirely right. In fact, the decision acknowledges that the competence conferred by member states on the Union can be modified only by a revision of the treaties following the agreement of all member states. Although the commitment to ever closer union is stated to be symbolic, the reality is that competences have been transferred from the sovereign nations of Europe—Britain included—to the EU and its institutions. The extent of that transfer is very great indeed, as other hon. Members have pointed out.

The institutions of the EU have become ever more powerful. So powerful are they that even the proposal to limit benefits to EU migrants and the new rules on child benefit, set out in the draft decision itself, would, it seems, be vulnerable even if agreed by all Heads of Government and Heads of State. Today’s newspapers report that Members of the European Parliament will have the right to veto all the proposed reforms, including the so-called emergency brake.

**Mr Douglas Carswell (Clacton) (UKIP):** Does the right hon. Gentleman not agree that if we are unable to secure substantive reform now, when the Union’s second largest member, and its fifth largest economy, is threatening to walk away, the chances of our ever getting substantive change that we can be comfortable with are nil?

**Mr Jones:** I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. That is the direction of travel that the European Union is hellbent on pursuing.

A document circulated in the European Parliament asserts:

“The European Parliament will defend the fundamental principles and objectives of the EU and will be cautious of setting dangerous precedents which could undermine such principles and objectives.” The issue of parliamentary sovereignty could not be thrown into any sharper relief.

Nor do the “red card” proposals protect British parliamentary sovereignty. They require reasoned opinions to be submitted within 12 weeks of transmission of a draft EU law, and they require more than 55% of the votes allocated to national Parliaments. That is another attempted exercise in so-called pooled sovereignty.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** I wonder whether my right hon. Friend can help the House. On this business of voting, are we talking about the number of Parliaments or the weighted votes? Germany has about 16% of the weighted votes and France has about 12.5%, so between them they have 30% towards the 45% blocking threshold.

**Mr Jones:** My understanding is that it is the latter.

The proposals do not amount to a reassertion of the sovereignty of the Queen in Parliament. Yesterday, in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), the Prime Minister said:

“asserting the sovereignty of this House is something that we did by introducing the European Union Act 2011. I am keen to do

even more to put it beyond doubt that this House of Commons is sovereign. We will look to do that at the same time as concluding the negotiations.”—[*Official Report*, 3 February 2016; Vol. 605, c. 934.]

All hon. Members will be looking forward to the announcement on that, and it would be helpful if my right hon. Friend the Minister could give us an inkling of what is proposed, so that we can achieve at least some comfort.

If what is done is insufficient, the British people will be right to conclude that a vote to withdraw from the European Union is the only way to preserve the valued constitutional integrity of our country.

2.2 pm

**Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con):** More than 70 years ago, our great island nation stood alone against the tyranny of the jackboot and the lash. Our freedom, our democracy and our sovereignty were in mortal peril. Led by Winston Churchill, we did not flinch in protecting them. Hundreds of thousands of our brave men and women—whether in uniform or not—gave their lives to defend our island and everything we stand for. Because of their sacrifice, we have a daunting responsibility to respect what they fought and died for. I must therefore ask: why are we so prepared to hand the destiny of our proud island nation to an unaccountable bureaucracy with barely a murmur? How dare we? How dare we? How would anyone dare to go down that road? I simply cannot understand it.

We have a duty to those who fought and died to stand up for our country and to ensure her sovereignty is kept intact. This sham of a renegotiation does not do that, and we all know it. Sadly, one treaty after another has undermined our will to resist. We have already handed over the UK’s head, torso, arms and legs. Now we propose to surrender our very soul. And to whom? The answer is a group of unelected Commissioners who sit in their multimillion-pound glass towers, surrounded by all the trappings of cars, secretaries and expenses, pontificating over lobster and Chablis about plans to create a wonderful new centralised state—a federal Europe—where uniformity is pressed on an unwilling electorate by guile, persuasion or threat. Democracy my foot!

**Sammy Wilson:** Is that not the central point about the EU’s unwillingness to devolve sovereignty to individuals—to voters—and Parliaments? The EU cannot afford it. If it is going to centralise functions right across Europe, forcing states and individuals into arrangements they do not want, sovereignty is the last thing it is going to tolerate.

**Richard Drax:** I could not have said it better, and I will expand on that very point a little later in my speech.

Who will lose out? It is the voters—the man and woman in the street—whom Opposition Members claim to represent, and who will increasingly rail against an authority over which they have no control and no say. Meanwhile, our political elite march on, deaf to the cries of those who elected them.

This madness will continue, at least in the short term—Germany has too much to lose. To control the experiment further, closer integration is not only necessary but inevitable, with more and more power going to the centre, whatever our Prime Minister says to the contrary.

[Richard Drax]

We are told we are safe from all this. We are not. I am sure that the Prime Minister, who is an intelligent man, knows that in his heart. I have watched, appalled and dismayed, as we have ceded powers to the EU in an insidious and gradual erosion of our sovereignty. There was a time when all the laws affecting the people of this country were made in this House by directly elected Members like us. As we know, that is no longer the case. As we have been dragged kicking and screaming down this truly undemocratic path, we have been assured by one Prime Minister after another, “Don’t worry. We have a veto over this, and a veto over that. We have a red card we can wave.” Now, apparently, to block laws we do not like, we have to persuade at least 15 EU members to agree with us. Will they hell!

To me, sovereignty means the ability to govern ourselves free from outside interference. We are not free to do that today. For heaven’s sake, we have to ask 27 countries for permission to change our welfare rules. Meanwhile, our borders remain dangerously porous, permanently open to EU citizens and horribly vulnerable to infiltration by those who would do us harm. What staggers me is how we wandered into this trap.

I have always been suspicious when political parties agree, and with the notable exception of a few Members, our future relationship with the EU is a very good case in point. As a member of the European Scrutiny Committee, I see first-hand the raft of legislation that comes in boatloads from across the channel. It interferes in every single facet of our lives.

**Peter Grant:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Richard Drax:** I will not give way.

The arrogance is mind-blowing, the intrusion truly terrifying, the accountability non-existent. We have nothing to fear from leaving the EU except fear itself. That is what the Europhiles are peddling in their genuinely misconceived belief that we are better in than out. I often hear the retort that we are more secure inside the EU than out. Why? As the problems of the euro, unemployment, the refugee crisis and uncontrolled immigration tear the EU apart, I can see no logic in that argument. It is NATO that has held the peace over the past decades, not the EU.

As ever closer union forces more conformity on member nations, the wider the chasm between the electorate and the elected will grow. That is where the wound will fester, and there are clear indications of that already across Europe.

Who would have thought that the biggest threat to our freedom, democracy and sovereignty since the second world war would come from within? I shudder at the implications of staying in the EU and the consequences that that will have for everything that I, and millions of others, hold dear.

What we need is the enterprise, flair, intelligence and determination of one nation to get out there and do business with the world, safe in the knowledge that the country is sovereign, free and truly democratic. Let the lion roar!

2.9 pm

**Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con):** I pay tribute to the Backbench Business Committee for allowing this debate, which is the right debate at the right time. I fear that during the referendum period we will often hear

people say, “The EU is just something about free trade and you needn’t worry yourselves that it’s any different from the institution we joined back in 1973”—or thought we were joining. I very much fear that we will not hear much said about sovereignty, so I am very pleased that we are having this debate today.

Much of the debate, as we heard from Opposition Members yesterday, will be about the idea that we would lose trade through Brexit. Rarely cited, though, are the 5.5 million jobs in the EU that are reliant on trade with us, and the £60 billion trade deficit that we have with the other 27 EU countries. We are a premier market for EU nations’ products. We abide by the rule of law; we are a decent country to do business with. Are we really to believe that on the stroke of our leaving the EU, BMW would not want to sell us its cars? Are we really to believe that a Frenchman would look at a Range Rover and say, “Ah, they’re not in the club any more, so I’m not going to buy their product”?

**Peter Grant:** The hon. Gentleman is making some valid points. This is why it is important that the “stay in” campaign is positive rather than negative. Does he realise that the arguments he is rubbishing about what would not happen if Britain left the EU were advanced by his party in almost exactly the same terms in relation to what would happen to Scotland if we left the United Kingdom—that nobody would buy our whisky any more? Does he now accept that the arguments advanced by “project fear” at that time were complete and utter nonsense?

**Craig Mackinlay:** I think the hon. Gentleman would find that 300 years of history makes things rather different. I find the SNP’s arguments really curious, and I really struggle with this one. As for the arguments you make about trade, you are somehow twisting them round to your enthusiasm for the European Union. I tended to agree with you: I did not think that trade would have been at risk if Scotland had left, but you now think that in respect of the European Union.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman keeps using the word “you”. He is a partisan and enthusiastic advocate of the British Parliament, and a key tenet of our debates is that debate goes through the Chair. There is no “you” involved, because I have not expressed any views.

**Craig Mackinlay:** I apologise, Mr Speaker; it is always exciting when there is an intervention from an SNP Member.

We have to recognise that trade has changed—that the world is now a global place and trade barriers have come down. A lot of these trade areas are good, friendly nations—Commonwealth nations. I always find it very strange that our friends—our kith and kin; our family—extract their wallets and purses and find, lo and behold, a note with a very familiar and loved face on it, but we deny them access to our country, and we are not allowed to speak to them on trade terms, because of course that is done by a Swedish Commissioner—Cecilia Malmström, a former university lecturer. You could scarcely make this up. We have enthused about having the Premiers of China and India over to our country—you entertained them, Mr Speaker, in your House and in this place—and yet it was nothing much more than a charade.

Those on the contra side of this debate will say that the EU is moving in our direction and we have to stay in it to be of influence. Well, I am sorry, but we have tried that argument for 40 long years. We have tried to change things; we have tried to reduce its powers. Try arguing that with the small fishermen in Ramsgate or the small businesses across our country, given all the regulations and red tape! What is the recent history of being at that high table and working from within? In the Council of Ministers, Britain is always on the opposing side. Our PM has been outvoted under qualified majority voting rules 42 times since 2010. It is time, I think, that he was honest with himself and with us that the EU is moving in a different direction.

We will also hear much in the referendum debate about what might be—what could be—with regard to security and justice. I am afraid that that will all just be part of “operation fear” to encourage the electorate merely to acquiesce quietly and gently as we continue the destruction of the sovereignty of our Parliament and this place.

I think we need to go back in time a little. We will go back to 1971—to Edward Heath’s White Paper, in which he said:

“There is no question of Britain losing essential...sovereignty.”

In 1973, he said:

“There are some in this country who fear that in going into Europe we shall in some way sacrifice independence and sovereignty. These fears, I need hardly say, are completely unjustified.”

Papers have been written since by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that, I am afraid, reveal what was really happening.

What has developed since then? Obviously those papers were produced in the very infant days of what the European Union was trying to become. It has since amassed a number of treaties, directives and decisions, and of course the bulk of ECJ law. For brevity, I shall concentrate on a couple of fiscal matters. With regard to VAT, in particular, we are entirely and completely subservient to EU law. Some months ago, we had a rather entertaining debate about the tampon tax. That really did highlight the fact, perhaps accidentally, that we in this place are completely unable to enact any changes to a very key stream of national legislation. We merely walk through the Lobbies, supplicant to what Brussels has told us we must do.

When the Chancellor prepares his annual Budget, he has to start with the £20 billion of gross contributions to the EU—some 30% of our current deficit. Across corporate taxes, in dividends and losses, the primary authority is increasingly ECJ cases. When he seeks new rules to enhance Britain’s investment and entrepreneurial spirit—I cite the enterprise investment scheme and, more recently, the seed enterprise investment scheme—he has to seek permission from Brussels in case they flout state aid rules.

The direction of travel of the European Union is very obvious. I merely quote Angela Merkel:

“we need a political union—which means we need to gradually cede powers to Europe and give Europe control.”

We are simply on the wrong bus. If we do not take this opportunity to leave, it is probably just as well that there is a proposal for a major renovation of this palace to be conducted, because dear old museums need care. This referendum gives us the opportunity to restore this place—to restore to the public of the UK that which should never have been taken away from them.

2.17 pm

**Marcus Fysh** (Yeovil) (Con): I believe in the primacy and sovereignty of this House which flow from the people who send us here. It is a great honour to follow such rousing and passionate speeches in that regard.

The position that I put to my constituents before I was elected was that I would try to give them my dispassionate assessment of what the referendum choice means in real terms for people and their families, that I would try to explain the logic of that so that others can see it and make their own choice, and that I would make a constructive attempt to approach whatever happens next to make sure that we get the best deal for those people. So if the House will bear with me for a moment, I want to run through a ledger on each side of the argument as to what some of the advantages of leaving or otherwise might be.

First, on an issue that is so important to people—can they get a house? I believe that, on balance, they will be a lot less likely to be able to get houses if we do not leave, partly because there is such an influx of migration from the EU that will not let up because of what is being proposed in the renegotiation. I would score that as a five on a one-to-five scale of effects.

The second aspect is people’s access to services such as school places and hospitals. Again, on balance, unless we leave it will be a lot less likely that they will have that access. Next is whether the cost of living will be manageable. I think that that is less likely, although not a lot less. There will be benefits of less regulation and tax if we leave. I am worried about the proposed VAT impositions on food and clothes, in particular, and potentially fuel duty. I would give a score of four on that aspect.

Will people be able to move in search of work to a big city in this country? I think that unlikely, unless we leave, so I score it five. Demand for housing and jobs in London is massive because foreign demand is crowding out domestic supply. I think that the answer to the question of whether people will be able to get a job where they are is the same either way. There may be one or two surprises on trade, but I think that, at the very least, they would be offset if we negotiated our own trade arrangements.

Will jobs pay better? Overall, I think that would be the case if we left, but not a lot more, so I score that four. Will people be able to go on holiday and work in Europe? That would be marginally less likely if we left, although I do not think it is a particular issue. Visa arrangements with non-EU countries, such as Australia, are perfectly normal and work quite well, so I score that two—a marginal negative—out of five.

Will people be safe under domestic security arrangements? I think that the answer is the same either way. We already share our data with our friends and allies in Europe, and that would not cease to be the case. It is only very recently that we have started sharing passenger manifests for aeroplanes, which is amazing. I think that will continue.

Will we be safe with regard to international security? I think that the answer to that question is also the same either way. As we have heard, we rely on NATO and that would not change. Our bilateral alliances will be constructive, I am sure. Will our environment be secure? I think it might be marginally less secure, so I score that two on my little scale.

[*Marcus Fysh*]

Turning to the local level, one of my constituents' concerns is that big, international exporters such as Westland might run into trouble if we were to leave the EU. Personally I am not too worried about that. We would need to preserve the same sort of regulation with regard to Government procurement of large defence orders. We would also need to consider replacing some of the science and technology research investment money that the EU currently provides, but that is certainly not beyond the wit of man. Those things are doable. We would also need to look at farming subsidies, which have been mentioned.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** My hon. Friend is making a very good case. Does he agree that if we no longer had to pay about £10 billion net to the European Commission, we would have an awful lot of money to be able to institute a proper arrangement for support for, and investment in, the research he has mentioned?

**Marcus Fysh:** I agree with my hon. Friend that there is scope for that. Clearly, we would need to spend a lot, so I do not buy the argument that we would have lots of extra money.

In summary, in respect of the 10 things I have listed, my score is 36 out of 50. By my logic—it is not an emotional logic to do with sovereignty, which I will come on to in a moment—I am leaning towards thinking that it is in our interests to leave. I would need to feel a fairly strong emotional attachment to the EU project and its institutions in order for it to outweigh that inclination. Although I do not have that emotional attachment, I realise that others do and that they might also make slightly different assessments of their interests. They will happily be able to choose for themselves. On the question of whether a sovereignty clause would make a major difference to the renegotiation, that is not clear, particularly with regard to restriction of immigration.

I do not think we can reform the EU dramatically by staying in. Clearly, the devil will be in the detail, which I will certainly look at. I have not made up my mind fully, but I believe in Britain and its people. The emotion I feel at the moment is for them. Personally, at this stage, I would be inclined to leave.

2.24 pm

**Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg** (North East Somerset) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow my near neighbour in Somerset, my hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (*Marcus Fysh*), who gave a fantastic calculation as to why, on balance, it would be right to leave. I know that the people of Somerset will respond warmly to the lead he has given them.

I want to pick up on a couple of threads mentioned by the hon. Member for Glenrothes (*Peter Grant*) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (*Mr Nuttall*) relating to parliamentary sovereignty. We sometimes get into the idea that parliamentary sovereignty comes out of a vacuum, but in fact it is a means to an end; it is not an end in itself. It is the way we represent the sovereignty of the British people. They delegate to us, for five years, the right to make laws in their name, but at the end of those five years they expect to have the sovereignty returned to them intact, so that they can decide how it should be used in future.

In that sense, I am very close to the Scottish understanding of the sovereignty of the people, because it comes from them and belongs to them. It is not ours to give away; it is ours to protect, return and operate within. It is not about us as individual Members of Parliament or these grand rooms; it is about the rights of the British people and their ability to achieve through us the things that they have expected to achieve for centuries. I am thinking primarily of redress of grievance and the right to hold the Government to account.

That is why the issue is so difficult. Although it is possible to hold a Minister to account and to seek redress of grievance through this House in those areas that remain a domestic competence, as soon as an issue goes beyond these shores and becomes a European competence, it is impossible to obtain redress of grievance through this House. Indeed, in my correspondence with a Minister on behalf of a constituent, I was told that, although the Minister was sympathetic to my constituent's plight, if he were given the redress he needed the British Government would themselves be fined. He could not, therefore, get that redress. That is a fundamental attack on parliamentary sovereignty which is there for the right reason.

On the renegotiation, the hon. Member for Glenrothes made an interesting point. He said that he thought many of us would vote against anyway, because we are so desperate and gasping at the bit to leave, and that, whatever happened, we would not have been willing to accept what the Prime Minister came up with. I do not accept that. I think that this was an opportunity for fundamental reform, but that has not happened. I do believe that the Government have acted in good faith—I do not believe they have got it right, but I do accept their good faith.

The Government have, however, negotiated around the edges. They are, perhaps, so steeped in the ways of the machinations of the European Union that they have failed to see the big picture and think that, when negotiating with 27 other countries and the Commission, it is an amazing achievement to get the right to hold a discussion on the difference in view between the Euro-outs and Euro-ins. It is like dealing with a brick wall—for want of a better cliché coming immediately to mind—so even being allowed a discussion results in them thinking, “Whoopie! We’ve achieved something very important that we can present to the British electorate.”

If we look from a further distance at what the Prime Minister has said over a number of years, what he promised in his Bloomberg speech and what we put in our manifesto, we see that they were not about pettifogging changes around the edges; they were about fundamental reform and the reassertion of sovereignty. Because the renegotiations were in that sense so narrow, so weak and so uninspired, the status quo is not an option in the referendum. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (*Sir Gerald Howarth*) said, the choice is not between leaving and staying exactly as we are; it is between leaving and remaining in a Union moving towards ever closer union.

If we look at our past opt-outs, we will see that that is true. The Prime Minister said yesterday that the social chapter no longer exists. It is incorporated in the treaty, so our opt-out came and went, as frost on a winter morning might disappear as the sun comes out. Our opt-out on Schengen is there and it is important, but recently we agreed that we would be part of an EU border force:

there is a migration problem, and the solution to it is of course more Europe and more European integration. We are going along with that, although we are not formally part of it. The Dublin treaties on returning people to the place where they first sought sanctuary are coming under threat, which would make our position outside Schengen very difficult to manage.

On justice and home affairs, we got an opt-out under the treaty of Lisbon, but again and again we have given more away. We have given away the arrest warrant and we have given away Prüm, so investigation and arrest are now in the hands of the European Union.

**Mr Andrew Turner:** Why was there no referendum on the things that were first taken out and then sent back?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** The European Union Act 2011 was a protection, but it was also part of a coalition deal, so it ensured that things that the Lib Dems were quite keen on would not automatically trigger a referendum. I agree with my hon. Friend that we ought to have had a referendum on giving back the things that we had claimed when we opted out of justice and home affairs matters a little over a year ago. Now that arrest and investigation are determined at a European level, the argument for some European centralised oversight will only become stronger. If a Bulgarian issues an arrest warrant that is effective in the United Kingdom, surely there needs to be some European common standard to ensure that that is done properly.

The direction of travel is towards more Europe. Even in the context of monetary union, we should bear it in mind that we only have an opt-out from stage 3. We are committed to stages 1 and 2. The European Union has not enforced those in recent years, for obvious reasons, but that will not always be the case. We are committed—article 142 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union is relevant to this—to our currency being of interest to the European Union.

**Dr Julian Lewis:** Does my hon. Friend agree that part of the problem is that there is a huge degree of unification among the elites at the heart of the European Union, but there is no such sense of common identity among the peoples of the countries that make it up?

**Mr Rees-Mogg:** My right hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. He is absolutely right: there is no common people, but there is an elite who have this vision that more Europe is the answer to a maiden's prayer. Let us look at the treatment of Greece, and how it suffered through its membership of the euro, which was forced upon it. Greece was encouraged and egged on by the European Union and the Commission to adopt the euro, partly because it was the birthplace of democracy, and how outrageous it would be if it did not join in this grand political scheme. When it got into difficulties, which economists knew it would get into, what was the answer from the European Union? More Europe, more control over its affairs, more direction over what it does and less domestic democracy. In what happened in Greece, we see the clash that is in the motion before us. We have a choice between moving to a single European state or maintaining the sovereignty that is still ours. To do that, we have to vote to leave. Texas maintained that it had the right to leave the United States; it did not.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I would like the debate to finish at 3 o'clock, if possible, and certainly no later. I do not know whether there will be a Division of the House; we shall have to wait to see, but I would like the debate to finish by 3 o'clock if we can manage that.

2.33 pm

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): I thank the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) for bringing the debate to the House, and for his earlier comments. I will tackle the issue of sovereignty first. I refer those who have come late to the debate, and those who read my comments at another time, to the excellent speech given by my hon. Friend the Member for Glenrothes (Peter Grant), who said that popular sovereignty lies with the people. The hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) also touched on that in his excellent contribution.

Fundamentally, we think that the negotiations have been a missed opportunity. When we hear people blaming the European Union, we wonder whether we should instead be thinking about how the UK uses its role as a member state. That may be where the fault has lain over the years.

**Peter Grant:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his thoroughly unwarranted praise. At this moment, there are no fewer than 16 documents from Europe that the European Scrutiny Committee has asked to have debated in Parliament. Some are scheduled and some are not. Some have been waiting for more than two years. Does my hon. Friend agree that, all too often, people point the finger of blame at the European Union for being unaccountable and not subject to scrutiny, but perhaps we should look more closely at the Government's unwillingness to be scrutinised over how it interacts with Europe?

**Stephen Gethins:** My hon. Friend raises an important point, and I know that it is a frustration of his—as a member of the European Scrutiny Committee—and of others that the UK Government appear reluctant for their actions in the EU to be properly scrutinised. Perhaps the Minister can deal with that in his summing up.

We saw this missed opportunity from the very start. There was a lack of consultation with the devolved Administrations, on which the matter will have a significant impact. When it comes to Europe, the Government need all the friends that they can possibly get. The failure to take on board the devolved Administrations, who have done a much better job of making friends and influencing people in recent times in the European Union, was a missed opportunity.

Another missed opportunity was the chance to think about what really constitutes a member state. I was interested earlier to hear Conservative Members trying to compare the debate on Scottish independence with this debate. Let me tell the House this: the European Union could not impose the poll tax on the United Kingdom against its will, the European Union could not send nuclear convoys through the United Kingdom against its will and the European Union could not impose Trident on the United Kingdom against its will. Those are all things that could be imposed on Scotland. The role of a member state and Scottish independence are two totally separate issues.

**Mr Baron:** I am delighted that my friend and colleague on the Foreign Affairs Committee is giving way. I suggest to him gently that when the Scottish people voted for the Union, they voted for its ability to make decisions on behalf of all the peoples of our Union. That needs to be recognised by the SNP.

**Stephen Gethins:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution, which was thoughtful, as usual. On that point, of course the Scottish people did. It is a matter of respect. We may not have liked that decision, but it is the decision that they made, and it is why we are here in record numbers to make our contribution. Let me draw out the point about respect, because I believe that the hon. Gentleman may agree with it. If we are going to have a referendum, we should not have it too soon. That means respecting the electoral process in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, London and the English local authorities. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond) and Members from every single party in the House have signed my early-day motion stating that a June referendum would be “disrespectful”, and I think that goes to the heart of the matter. That is why the European Union referendum will be a huge test of the Union that the voters of Scotland voted to remain in.

As well as considering the respect agenda and allowing a long time, the Government—Opposition Members may agree with me on this—should have the courage of their convictions and have a proper debate about membership of the European Union. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon announced the date of the independence referendum 545 days before it was held. I am not quite suggesting that we should wait 545 days before we sort this out, but I am suggesting that June is too early and that if, as the Government suggest, this is a once-in-40-years decision, we should make it properly and have the courage of our convictions. I fully believe that the case for remaining in the European Union stands up to that scrutiny, and I look forward to making that case. I know that Conservative Members have different views, and I respect them, but let us have a proper debate on the matter.

As my right hon. Friend quite rightly said, and the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay mentioned this point as well, we do not want another “Project Fear”. I have been concerned by some of the arguments that have been made. Do not get me wrong, Mr Speaker, because I believe—I will say this to put it on the record—that the United Kingdom could be a successful independent country outside the European Union and that it could stand on its own two feet. The question is whether or not we are better off by doing so. Let us not have another “Project Fear”.

There is the issue of Scotland being taken out of the European Union against its will. While we have been in the Chamber this afternoon, an opinion poll has been produced by TNS. It shows that 44% of Scots want to remain within the European Union, and 21% want to leave, with the remainder undecided. We look forward to that debate, but the poll shows that the overwhelming majority of the people of Scotland want to remain within the European Union.

**Sir Gerald Howarth:** Is the hon. Gentleman aware that serious vested interests in the European Union will in no way allow Scotland to accede to the European Union? If he does not see that, he need look no further than Spain.

**Stephen Gethins:** If the hon. Gentleman seriously thinks that the European Union would somehow vote not to have its most energy-rich country and the one with its longest external border as part of its union, I think he seriously misunderstands the European project. I have never heard anything so ludicrous. In the same sense, I have heard Conservative Members say that Scotland would somehow be in a queue behind Albania. I think that that is disrespectful, and I hope he will not continue the debate in that tone of disrespect.

Mutual respect, which is the reason why Scotland should not be taken out of the Europe, also extends to respect for immigrants, which has also been raised in this debate. Immigration is and has been good for this country, and I want it to continue. It is good for my constituency and the businesses within it. We need to be careful how we conduct the debate on immigration.

I am wondering whether the Minister will comment on the principle of subsidiarity. I do not know what difference this deal will make to strengthening Scotland’s national Parliament, or indeed the Parliaments and Assemblies elsewhere in the country. Does the principle of subsidiarity end in this place? It most certainly should not do so.

Let us make the positive case for membership of the European Union. I want to see a long and proper debate, as I am sure do Members from both sides of the House. I hope that they will vote with us when it comes to setting the date of the referendum. Let us talk about where we should have more Europe. I do not think that we should be afraid of that on issues such as climate change—yes, it does exist—as well as security policies and so on. Let us also talk about having less Europe. We have raised the issue of fisheries. Let us bear in mind that Scotland’s fishermen were described as expendable not by the European Union, but by the United Kingdom Government who sought to represent them. On that point, I will sit down. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Very good, indeed. I call Pat Glass.

2.42 pm

**Pat Glass** (North West Durham) (Lab): This has been a very long debate, and I have sat through the whole of it. I counted 14 speeches in total, not including the winding-up speeches, and it started with that of the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron). The speeches were all passionate and eloquent, and we have heard some very strongly held views. The last Back Bencher to speak was the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who is always eloquent and entertaining—so much so that, on occasions, I find myself nodding along, even though I do not agree with a single word he says.

It is depressing that we have heard a rehash of many of the same, often ill-informed, myths and stories about how Britain no longer has control over its own sovereignty, having yielded everything to Europe. What I found most disappointing is that, for people outside Parliament watching the debate in the Chamber, the speakers have largely been older, grey-haired men in grey suits—

**Kate Hoey** *rose*—

**Pat Glass:** I said “largely”.

I do not believe that that represents the country we are here to serve or the views of the people outside Parliament. It has been yet another debate—I am sure there will be many more up to the referendum—in which members of the Eurosceptic right wing of the Tory party have been able to grandstand, while positioning an ice pick firmly in the back of their own Front Benchers and lining up to rubbish their own Prime Minister's negotiations. Two of my Labour colleagues have joined in enthusiastically, but given that over 96% of the members of the parliamentary Labour party, including every member of the shadow Cabinet, are members of the PLP pro-EU group, it is absolutely clear that Labour is a pro-Europe party and that it is campaigning actively for a remain vote in the referendum.

I am conscious that the debate has been very long and that we have heard an awful lot from one side of the argument, but I want to be respectful of the House and to give the Minister time to sum up, so I intend to be brief.

Right at the beginning, the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay said that the electorate got very exercised about our sovereignty. Not in my experience: people in my constituency are concerned about jobs, youth unemployment, housing, the bedroom tax, tax avoidance by large companies and, yes, immigration, but the people I speak to never talk about the sovereignty of the EU, EU bureaucracy or Britain's rebate. That just does not happen on the doorstep.

**Mr Baron:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Sir William Cash:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Pat Glass:** No. I am sorry, but we have heard an awful lot from one side of the argument.

People in the Westminster bubble, particularly Conservative Members, are exercised about all those things, but given that I have no reason to believe that the people of North West Durham are any different from people across the country, they are simply not the top priorities of people working hard outside Parliament.

**Mr Baron:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Pat Glass:** No.

This is largely a Tory party drama—a blue-on-blue issue—with very little relevance to the lives of ordinary people who are struggling to pay their rents and mortgages, and to get their kids to school. The Prime Minister has repeatedly given in to his own right wing, seeming not to understand that they will never be satisfied on these issues. In doing so, he has risked this country's future prosperity, safety and place in the world.

I will not go over them in great detail, but there are many reasons for remaining part of the EU. There is the economic case and the environmental case, as well as issues involving this country's future safety and security and our place in the world. The Labour party is committed to keeping Britain in the European Union, because we believe it is in the best interests of the British people. For us, it is simple: Britain is a stronger, safer and more prosperous country as part of the European Union.

The world is becoming more and more globalised. The problems that we face are complex and they need complex international responses. We cannot solve the

problems of climate change, international terrorism, international crime, people trafficking or mass migration across the world on our own; we can tackle those issues only by working with our partners in Europe. We are part of NATO and the UN, as well as of other organisations across the world, which means that we have given up some of the things we used to do ourselves for the greater good, the safety and sometimes the prosperity of our country. I do not see a problem with any of that.

I will move quickly on to what should happen in the future. I want our sovereignty to be enhanced through seeking democratic reform that will make EU decision makers more accountable to its people and not so metaphorically and physically distant from our communities. I want economic reform that will put jobs and sustainable growth at the centre of European policy, and that will bring in labour market reforms to strengthen workers' rights in a real social Europe. I believe that we enhance our sovereignty by negotiating with our EU partners for policies and agreements that benefit us as a country and improve the lives of our citizens.

Ultimately, the referendum will come down to a decision to remain or leave, and I believe that the people of this country will vote for the future and not for a past that only ever existed in the minds of the Eurosceptics on the Conservative Benches.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I should say to the Minister that I would like to call the hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) to wind up no later than 2.58 pm.

2.48 pm

**The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington):** The hon. Member for North West Durham (Pat Glass) said that this had been a long debate. I confess that for me it passed in a twinkling of an eye. As the hon. Lady gains in experience of these occasions, I think she will find that this was quite a brief encounter with some of the arguments about this country's place in Europe.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) on obtaining the debate. I shall move straight to addressing the central arguments that he described in his speech. He is right that parliamentary sovereignty lies at the heart of how the United Kingdom thinks about its constitutional arrangements, and it is true that Parliament remains sovereign today. As I think he himself said in his speech, there is only one reason why European law has effect in the United Kingdom at all, and that is because Parliament has determined that that should be so and has enacted laws which give European law legal effect here.

To avoid any misunderstanding about the fact that any authority that EU law has in Britain derives from Parliament itself, we wrote into the European Union Act 2011, in section 18, that the principle was clear—that European law has direct effect in the United Kingdom only because of Acts of Parliament. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday, if there is more we can do to make that principle clear, we would be keen to do that. It is open to Parliament, too, to pass laws to rescind the European Communities Act 1972 to end Britain's membership of the European Union. If that were not the case, if ultimate sovereignty did not continue to lie here, there would be little purpose in our having this national debate about a referendum on British membership.

[*Mr David Lidington*]

My hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) is right that standing alone in 1940 should continue to be a source of pride and inspiration to everybody in this country from whichever political family they happen to come, but let us not forget that that was never a situation that this country or Winston Churchill sought. It was one forced upon us by defeat, and only a few days or weeks before Churchill's speech about fighting on alone, he had gone to France and offered France a political union with the United Kingdom in order to try to maintain the struggle against Nazism. If we look back at our great history, we can see how leaders such as Marlborough, Pitt, Wellington, Castlereagh and Disraeli sought to advance the interests of the United Kingdom and the British people through building coalitions of allies and of support among other nations on the European continent.

**Sir William Cash:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr Lidington:** My hon. Friend will forgive me—I have very limited time. Many colleagues have spoken and I want to respond on behalf of the Government.

As a number of hon. Members said, there is concern about the question of ever closer union—about Britain being drawn against its will into a closer political European Union. There are a number of clear safeguards against that. As the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) pointed out, we remain opted out of such things as the single currency. We can decide for ourselves whether to participate in individual justice and human rights measures. There are issues such as taxation and foreign and security policy where the national right of veto continues.

We wrote into the European Union Act 2011 a requirement that a referendum of the British people would be needed before this or any future Government could sign up to treaty changes that transferred new competencies and powers from this country to Brussels—to the European institutions. That referendum lock also applies to any measure that moves the power to take decisions at European level from unanimity, with the national veto, to majority voting.

What the draft documents from President Tusk this week explicitly recognise is that there should be different levels of integration for different member states, and that the language and the preamble to the treaty about ever closer union does not compel all member states to aim for a common destination. The fact that this is a draft declaration by the European Council is significant, because the treaty itself says that it is for the European Council to set the strategic political direction of the EU as a whole.

We need to recognise in this House that there are other European countries for whom the objective of ever closer union may be welcome and in line with their national interests. Ministers from the Baltic states have said to me, “When you’ve been through our experience of being fought over by Soviet communism and Nazism, when you’ve lost a quarter of your population to those tyrannies and to warfare, when you’ve lived under Soviet rule for half a century, and then you get back your independence and your democracy, you grab any bit of European integration that’s going because you want

that appalling and tragic history not to repeat itself.” We should respect their wish for closer political union, in return for their respecting our clear wish to remain outside such a process.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon and Billericay asked whether we would reinvent the EU today. I say to him and to the House very plainly that if we were starting from scratch, I would not start with the treaty of Lisbon, but we are where we are. The debate both in this place and in the country, when assessing the results of the Prime Minister's renegotiation and the wider issues at stake, should be about whether the interests of the British people whom we represent—their security, their prosperity, their hopes and ambitions for their children—are better served by remaining in the European Union, which I hope will be successfully reformed, but which will still not be perfect, or by leaving and attempting from the outside, *de novo*, to secure some kind of new arrangement with that bloc of countries. That is the context within which we should consider the specific issues that have been raised in this debate.

I will take trade as an example, because a number of hon. Members have mentioned it. Outside the European Union, we would have the theoretical freedom to negotiate free trade agreements on our own behalf. However, it is not just a matter of speculation, but what leading trading nations say to us, that they are much more ready to negotiate trade deals with a European market of 500 million people, with all the leverage that gives us as a player in that single market, than to negotiate with even a large European country on its own.

**Mr Jenkin:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr Lidington:** No; I apologise to my hon. Friend, but time is very limited.

The reality is that the World Trade Organisation and other international organisations are largely directed by blocs of countries and very large nations such as China and the United States. I believe that the interests of the British people are better served not simply by having a separate flag and name plate on the table, but by playing a leading role in shaping the position of the world's biggest and wealthiest trading bloc, using its leverage to advance our national interests and winning new opportunities for businesses and consumers in this country.

I am disappointed by the pessimism of some hon. Members. Look at what we have achieved through positive British action at the European level. It was Margaret Thatcher who built the single European market that has made possible, for example, affordable aviation for ordinary British families in every part of this country. It was Margaret Thatcher, John Major and Labour Prime Ministers who made possible the entrenchment of democracy, the rule of law and human rights in central European countries where those things were crushed for most of the 20th century. We did that through support for the enlargement project. The work that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is leading to strengthen co-operative European work against terrorism and organised crime is doing more to aid our security and defend the safety of the British people than we would be able to achieve through unilateral action.

I want us to be in a reformed European Union and in the single market, playing a leading role in creating a safer and more prosperous Britain and a safer and more

prosperous Europe. We should be in the things that matter to us and that benefit us, but out of ever closer political union—out of the euro, the European army and Schengen. There is a real prize available to us. That is why I am supporting so enthusiastically the work that my Prime Minister and this country's Prime Minister is doing to secure that future for the United Kingdom in a successful and reformed European Union.

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Member for Basildon and Billericay (Mr Baron) must certainly have a couple of minutes in which to wind up the debate.

2.59 pm

**Mr Baron:** Many thanks for remaining with us during the course of this debate, Mr Speaker.

I suggest that we are approaching a seminal point in our history, when we will either choose to remain inside the EU and continue down the road of ever closer union, at the expense of our sovereignty, or vote to leave the EU and, thereby, regain our ability to have the final say on issues such as the primacy of our laws, the integrity of our borders and the extent of business regulation. The fact that No. 10 seems now to be talking about a sovereignty Bill clearly illustrates that the Government's so-called red card system, or watered-down, washed-up lottery ticket, and the emergency brake controlled by an EU backseat driver, is unravelling as we speak.

Such measures will not stop us being drawn into ever closer union with the EU should we remain, and they certainly will not restore our parliamentary sovereignty. The British people want to be represented by their MPs, not governed by the EU. Sovereignty is ours to cherish, not to sacrifice. I am afraid that the Minister and the Government have been unable to answer our questions, so I therefore intend to press to a vote the motion which clearly says that the Government's EU renegotiations must encompass Parliament's ability to stop any unwanted legislation, taxes or regulation.

*Question put.*

*A Division was called, but no Members being appointed Tellers for the Ayes, the Speaker declared that the Noes had it.*

*Question accordingly negatived.*

**Mr Speaker:** The Division is off. Perhaps the hon. Members were locked in a room by somebody. Good heavens. Well, there we are. I was all ready to sit in for the Division—I have been here for the last two and a half hours for the debate, so I was perfectly prepared to be here for the Division, but a Division must take place in an orderly way, or not at all.

## Yemen

*[Relevant documents: Oral evidence taken before the International Development Committee on 27 January 2016, on the crisis in Yemen, HC 532; Correspondence between the International Development Committee and Rt Hon Justine Greening MP, relating to the crisis in Yemen, reported to the House on 2 February 2016, HC 532.]*

3.5 pm

**Kirsten Oswald** (East Renfrewshire) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the conflict in Yemen.

I am very pleased to have secured this important debate. I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allowing it to take place here today.

We meet against a background of continuing conflict and death, with further reports of Saudi-backed strikes on populated areas, most recently a cement factory in the city of Amran. That resulted in reports of further deaths, including of people inside cars parked nearby, of shopkeepers and of residents going about their daily business. This is a very pressing issue. The humanitarian situation in Yemen is dreadful and it is getting worse. Recent estimates by the United Nations suggest that over 8,000 people have been killed in Yemen since March last year. At least 1,500 children are reported to have died. Much of the civilian infrastructure has been destroyed by air strikes and armed fighting on the ground, effectively cutting families off from essential services, including clean water, sanitation and medical treatment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) has already raised in this House the incident in which a Médecins sans Frontières hospital in Saada was hit by missiles. That was the third MSF facility to come under attack in recent months. People are dying there from what should be preventable diseases because there are not the hospitals, medical supplies or infrastructure to prevent it. With hospitals reduced to rubble, thousands of children are at risk of malnutrition. In fact, Save the Children has reported a 150% increase in cases of severe acute malnutrition among children. Some of its facilities, which should be safe havens, have been destroyed.

It is no surprise, therefore, to see Médecins sans Frontières and others declare that the conflict in Yemen is being played out with total disregard for the rules of war. The UK Government have been aware of mounting evidence of civilian deaths and of the destruction of civilian infrastructure. Among other growing voices, Amnesty International has raised concerns about air strikes targeting heavily populated civilian areas with no military targets nearby. That would clearly constitute a violation of international humanitarian law.

The numbers of civilians dying as a direct consequence of the conflict are stark. According to the UN, 73% of child deaths and injuries during the second quarter of 2015 were attributable to air strikes by the Saudi-led coalition. Some 60% of all civilian deaths and injuries have been attributed to air-launched explosive devices. Increasing numbers of children are being pressed into military service, used as pawns by both sides in the conflict, and placed in increasingly dangerous and vulnerable situations. More than 3 million children are now out of school. Education has fallen by the wayside,

[Kirsten Oswald]

setting the children of Yemen up perfectly to be another lost generation, with significant long-term consequences for the country and the region.

More than 21.2 million people in Yemen, including 10 million children, are now in need of humanitarian aid. This staggering figure gives Yemen the dubious distinction of being the country with the highest number of people in humanitarian need in the world. Yemen relies almost entirely on imports for its food, so the de facto blockade imposed by the Saudi-led coalition at the start of its military intervention in March 2015 has had an extremely damaging impact. There is a very high level of food insecurity. According to the UN, 14.4 million Yemeni people are in this situation. In basic terms, that means one in every two people is not getting enough to eat.

One of the most distressing features of the conflicts that have plagued the middle east for too long is the re-emergence of the barbaric practice of siege as a weapon of war. When I raised the issue in the context of Syria, I was pleased to receive confirmation of the UK Government's position that the imposition of starvation and deliberate destruction of the means of daily life for civilians may be a matter for the International Criminal Court. The practice must be stopped. It is vital that support be given to ensure that supplies and humanitarian aid can enter the country and be safely distributed to the population, including in the southern city of Taiz, where humanitarian access has been extremely constrained. Parties to the conflict must be pressed to allow this access. Unless we address those issues, we should not be surprised to see continued outflows of refugees from countries that are being bombed back into the dark ages. Such an outcome is exactly what Daesh is working towards. Those who claim the status of legitimate Government cannot continue to act like medieval warlords and expect to receive the backing of the international community.

It is important to acknowledge the brave and tireless work of many non-governmental organisations working in the area, despite the huge dangers they face in this volatile situation. The conduct of the war means that NGOs are having to put their workers in peril. This raises significant questions about how much longer they will be prepared to do so, and about the consequences for Yemeni civilians if they decide they cannot continue. The Government must now listen to these organisations and consider the evidence. They must acknowledge what is happening and the scale of the issue. It is vital that they put pressure on all parties to allow humanitarian agencies a safe space in which to operate.

I acknowledge the important and welcome role of the Department for International Development in supporting the Yemeni population. Its response has been flexible and responsive and would appear to provide a constructive way forward, were it not for the astonishing mismatch between its welcome work and the Government's military dealings with Saudi Arabia, which severely impact on life in Yemen and the country's future prospects.

World attention on difficulties in the middle east is focused on the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, and sadly the catastrophic situation in Yemen is often overlooked. Yemen's status as only a minor oil producer—it is not even a member of OPEC—perhaps makes the country less

likely to feature on the western news radar. The International Red Cross described Yemen as one of the world's forgotten conflict zones. While the world looks elsewhere, economic and political power-plays in the middle east cause ever more chaos and destruction to the country. The UK cannot continue to look the other way or sit on the fence. If it does, it must accept that its foreign policy is morally bankrupt and that its lack of action is both knowing and deliberate.

Yemen is facing one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world. Meanwhile, the daily intensive use of explosive weapons, often in populated areas, continues to rain down death on the civilian population. Many of these civilians have been killed by air strikes conducted by the Saudi Arabian air force, using British-built planes flown by pilots trained by British instructors, including at RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland, dropping British-made bombs—they are probably made in Scotland—and with operations co-ordinated by Saudi Arabia in the presence of British military advisers.

Figures from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills show that in the third quarter of last year, the UK granted more than £1 billion of arms export licences for Saudi Arabia, despite overwhelming evidence of human rights violations committed by the Saudi-led coalition in its aerial bombing campaign.

**Stephen Gethins** (North East Fife) (SNP): Does my hon. Friend agree that if the Government consider that there have been breaches of international humanitarian law, the Government should investigate and report to the House?

**Kirsten Oswald**: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend.

Through their substantial support for Saudi Arabia, the Government are exacerbating the desperate plight of the people of Yemen. Since the conflict reignited in March, there have reports of serious violations of the laws of war by all sides. Human Rights Watch has documented several apparently unlawful coalition airstrikes between April and August. In all these cases, it either found no evident military target or considered that the attack failed to distinguish between civilians and military objectives. There are legal questions to be answered about the UK supplying weapons to Saudi Arabia in support of its military intervention and indiscriminate bombing campaign in Yemen.

It is important that we take stock of other UK interventions in this part of the world. Not only in Yemen but across the region, we have a very chequered past. The UK has a history of subjugating the interests of the population in the region, who are bit players in UK conflicts with other powers. Although we still have significant relationships with the rulers and leaders of the region, the UK is, perhaps unsurprisingly, mistrusted for its failure to deliver on promises. As Tarek Osman says,

“the wave of Arab uprisings that commenced in 2011 is this generation's attempt at changing the consequences of the state order that began in the aftermath of World War One.”

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): The hon. Lady is making an interesting speech. The World Food Programme made the point that both sides in the conflict—not just one—are impeding the distribution of food aid to those millions of people who desperately need it. Does she agree?

**Kirsten Oswald:** The hon. Gentleman makes a valid and important point, but what we need to do is to ensure that everyone engaged in that region co-operates, wherever possible, to ensure that people get the food and other support that they need.

This new generation in Yemen, who are searching for a better future, have been abandoned to a conflict influenced by others, none of whom have the needs of the Yemeni people in mind.

The Minister said in a speech last week that Saudi Arabia should do a “better job” of trumpeting its human rights successes. What an astonishing statement to make. I think we can safely assume that the civilians in Yemen suffering as a result of this terrible onslaught will feel that they have no human rights whatsoever. Human rights, and particularly those of the people of Yemen, evidently did not loom large in that statement—but they must. The UK Government must admit that they have been front and centre of the Saudi bombing campaign in Yemen, and that yet again we are putting profit before basic human rights and international law.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** I agree that the hon. Lady is making a powerful and pertinent speech. However, I ask her to be cautious in quoting from *The Independent*, which used a Google translator to translate a press release of a statement that did not accurately represent the meeting I had in Saudi Arabia. I did make that point last week in response to the urgent question and I repeat it today—I would never use such language. I made it very clear to the Saudi Arabians that they have a long way to go, and that we wanted to work with them on improving their human rights.

**Kirsten Oswald:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I echo his sentiment that there is a significant way to go in respect of human rights, which is a matter of great concern. I was in the Chamber last week, so I am pleased that I can recall the sentiment, if not the words, that the hon. Gentleman said. I will be interested to look back at the discussion, because I thought the sentiment was quite clear.

The UK Government must fully consider the situation in Yemen. There is no doubt that it is challenging in many ways, but this does not mean that we should disregard either the credible evidence coming from the area or the realities and scale of the problem. A UN panel of experts has documented 119 coalition sorties relating to violations of international law in Yemen—including the targeting of civilians. It is worthy of note that the International Development Committee, while observing that this UN report was leaked, did not consider that this affected the credibility of what it was asserting.

**Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con):** Does not the hon. Lady agree with the representative of UNICEF who appeared before the International Development Committee—chaired by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg)—who said that he did not believe that there was “deliberate targeting” of civilians?

**Kirsten Oswald:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and it is important to hear from as many organisations as possible. I must tell him that in the

research I conducted, I encountered many organisations that have indeed suggested that there was targeting of civilians, which gives us all the more reason to have a proper investigation into the situation.

I must ask the Minister today whether he doubts the credibility of the UN panel of experts, and if so, why he feels that way. As in other parts of the region, we must do all we can to facilitate and support a peace process. We should be encouraged that the parties have previously come to the table, but it is disappointing that these talks have so far been delayed. One issue that needs to be addressed—this can come only with good first-hand information, as was suggested—is just how much control those who claim leadership really exercise over the myriad groups in conflict across the country. The leaders of al-Qaeda and Daesh-linked groups have no interest in peace, and we must not let them scupper every peace effort by destroying attempts to bring about a ceasefire. We know that, across Yemen today, chaos reigns. Disparate forces and agendas clash and bombs rain down from the air, destroying infrastructure, homes and lives.

**Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con):** Does the hon. Lady accept, however, that the Yemen conflict is spilling over the borders from Yemen and outwith?

**Kirsten Oswald:** I think that conflict in any area is cause for concern, but today we must focus on this particular conflict, and on the question of where the United Kingdom Government’s responsibility lies. I believe that it is inconsistent for them to give aid to Yemen with one hand while, with the other, selling weapons that will be used to bomb the country to smithereens.

The Minister and the UK Government need to come clean about the specific involvement of the UK military in arms sales, training and logistics in relation to Saudi Arabia’s military operations in Yemen. I do not think that conflict by proxy is the policy of the Conservatives, but given what is happening in Yemen, it is difficult to see how that is not the case. The Belgian Government have felt able to suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia, yet we continue to ignore human rights issues both in Saudi Arabia and in respect of Yemen, and continue to sell arms.

The delay in the establishment of the Committees on Arms Export Controls may have had an influence on the position. The Committees should have been established months ago, as has been highlighted by the continued pressure exerted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson). Let me ask the Minister this: what has been the cost to human life of that delay?

I agree wholeheartedly with the Chair of the International Development Committee, who said in his letter yesterday:

“It is a longstanding principle of the rule of law that inquiries should be independent of those being investigated.”

It is very disappointing that the UK Government did not take the opportunity in September 2015 to endorse the proposal of the Government of the Netherlands for the establishment of an international fact-finding mission to investigate the conduct of the war. That would have provided the information sought by the Minister, who recently said that if weapons systems had been abused and genuine intelligence was available to verify that, action would be taken in relation to export licensing.

[Kirsten Oswald]

It is time for the UK Government to stop running away from scrutiny, and to take urgent action to suspend all sales of arms to Saudi Arabia until it can demonstrate that they are not being used against civilians, and not being used in violation of international law. The UK must do more to alleviate this humanitarian crisis and ensure that there is access to areas where people are besieged and starving, and every effort must be made to ensure that the delayed peace talks begin. We cannot stand by any longer as Yemen descends further and further into terror and chaos. It is time for the UK Government to step up and do the right thing.

3.21 pm

**Edward Argar** (Charnwood) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) on securing this important debate, although I did not agree with every word that she said. I must say that I believe the British Government are more than open to scrutiny: the presence of this Minister in the House on numerous occasions, responding to questions and debates about Yemen, is testimony to that.

It is with some sadness that I speak in a debate about a country that is very close to my heart, but is suffering the horrors of conflict so eloquently described by the hon. Lady. The current war in Yemen has been described as the “forgotten war” by, among others, the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) during a recent debate. The hon. Gentleman will be reassured to know that, while I agree with him about very few things, I do agree with him about that.

Sadly, the war in Yemen is still the forgotten war today, despite the work of many non-governmental organisations and many Members of Parliament. I think particularly of the work of the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), and of all that he has done to ensure that the House remains cognisant of what is happening in Yemen. I should add that he and others have always sought to highlight the joys of the country, and to explain why it is such a wonderful country. I know that Yemen is also very close to the heart of my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat), who knows it very well.

As well as being vice-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on Yemen, I have had the pleasure and privilege of visiting and travelling around the country on a number of occasions, and seeing such wonderful places as Sana’a and Aden, but also Taiz, Ibb and Hadhramaut. I fear that, sadly, my visits to Yemen will not be repeated for some years, but they gave me an insight into this complex, ancient land and its generous, hospitable and fiercely loyal people. Along with, I am sure, many other Members, I am proud to declare myself a friend of Yemen and its people; and, of course, the United Kingdom has a long-standing friendship and an historical and trusted relationship with the country.

All that makes it even sadder to see what has become of Yemen. Its former President, Ali Abdullah Saleh, described ruling the country as akin to “dancing on the heads of snakes”, so complex are its history and its religious, tribal and political make-up.

Yemen faces many challenges, as we have heard. It is the most populous country in the Arabian peninsula, with a population of almost 30 million, but it is also one of the poorest, with an annual income per head of less than \$1,500. Yemen does not have the advantage—although these days perhaps it is a diminishing advantage—of oil revenues to swell its coffers and budget, and it has historically relied heavily on imports of food, goods and, crucially, diesel fuel in order to function. All this is compounded by the challenges of a burgeoning young male population with limited economic prospects. Those conditions, overlaid with a fractured polity and a security situation that is fragile at the best of times, mean that Yemen has always been in a precarious situation, even before the current conflict.

Yemen has always been more of a loose confederation of tribes than a nation state with strong central control on the Westphalian model, and for centuries its location has placed it at the centre of proxy wars waged by other powers. Today, in some ways, it finds itself in that situation again, with an Iranian-backed Houthi militia fighting a Saudi-led coalition supporting the legitimate Government of President Hadi, with regional and dynastic geopolitics also playing their part in the conflict.

The conflict and its consequences are clear and stark, and I shall reiterate just a few of the comments made by the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire. More than 20 million people are at risk of starvation and humanitarian disaster, with 82% in need of some assistance, according to Save the Children. Of course it is often the children, the most innocent, who are the most likely victims of any conflict.

Our effort to play our part in helping to end this ruinous conflict has a number of major component parts. The most immediate is of course the provision of humanitarian relief. The witness from Oxfam at a recent hearing of the International Development Committee, chaired by the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), said that the support by DFID had been “really profound and fundamental”. UK aid already totals more than £85 million, and its scale is constrained only by the situation on the ground and the ability to distribute it safely. The UK’s aid contribution is not in doubt, and I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), will convey to his counterparts in the Department for International Development the expressions of support from me and the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire for the work that it has done. I sincerely hope that that work will be built upon so that we can build an international coalition of aid givers. As we look across Parliament Square today, we see that there is rightly a focus on the situation in Syria, but we must make every effort to ensure that the situation in Yemen receives the same priority.

After food and medicines, getting fuel and water into Yemen remains one of the biggest challenges. Ports such as Hodeidah are barely functioning, and when they do, ships sometimes have to wait offshore for weeks before being able to offload. For a country that was already reliant on imports for its food and fuel needs, this is a disaster. Getting supplies into and around the country is vital, and I hope that the Minister will be able to update the House on that work later.

The humanitarian response and the UK's continued role in it are vital, but we are to a large degree tackling the consequences rather than the causes of the problem, and we must strive to tackle both. The Minister has made it clear—in statements to the Select Committee, I believe—that the UK is not a party to this conflict, and he is right. The UK is not an active participant in the coalition, although we rightly support it as a reflection of our support for the legitimate Government of Yemen headed by President Hadi. We must make it clear, as was mentioned earlier, that it is unhelpful to focus on only one party to the conflict as being responsible for the civilian casualties. Both sides bear responsibility for the consequences of the conflict.

**Kevin Foster:** Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that there is a UN resolution that the coalition of states is seeking to enforce?

**Edward Argar:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and displays his usual erudition and eloquence on this topic, as on so many others.

It is vital that renewed impetus is given to peace talks to find a lasting settlement to bring stability to the country. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) and to this Minister for their work on this issue. I alluded earlier to the fact that Yemen could have no greater friend in the British Government than this Minister. I know he cares passionately and personally for the plight of the people of Yemen, and is working day and night to do what he can to alleviate it and bring peace to that country.

We must always remember that a peace settlement that is imposed from outside or that does not recognise and heed all voices in Yemen is doomed to fail. We in the UK have the potential to continue to play a significant role in bringing all sides together, but any settlement to bring lasting peace must emerge from within Yemen itself. I am reminded of what I believe is an old Arab proverb, “Me and my brother against my cousin, but me and my cousin against a stranger.” We must always remember that peace must come from within the country. The final element, in the longer term, must be support and a clear commitment over a prolonged period to rebuild this shattered country and its infrastructure, primarily its fuel and water infrastructure.

Before concluding, let me briefly deal with the comments made by the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire about the need for any suspected or reported abuses of human rights or civilian casualties to be investigated. The Minister has always been clear that where allegations of civilian casualties or about the consequences of actions are made, he and others have raised them with the Saudi Arabian Government, as appropriate. What was agreed in September at the Human Rights Council by all those there represents the right way forward: the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, working with the legitimate Government of Yemen—that is important in terms of access—will investigate, as appropriate, any such allegations. I believe it is due to report in March. That agreement, built on a consensus at the HRC, represents the right way forward. These things are always confusing through “the fog of war”—I believe that is the title of a well-read piece of research by my hon. Friend the Member for Tonbridge and Malling in respect of broader legal challenges sometimes faced by our armed forces, in which he highlighted the complexity of

conflict situations. There are competing versions of events and competing understandings of what actually happens, so I strongly urge all Members of this House to support the proposals agreed in September and see what the High Commissioner for Human Rights concludes in March.

As the hon. Lady has said, it is time that the international community gave the crisis and conflict in Yemen the focus and priority they deserve, as we quite rightly do with Syria. I know that the British Government are doing their bit, and I hope that today's debate helps to raise the profile of this forgotten war and that peace will soon be a reality for all the people of that suffering country.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. It will be obvious to the House that we have very little time for this debate and a lot of people want to speak. I would like to try to do this without a formal time limit. If people could keep to five or six minutes, everyone will be able to get in. If not, we will have a time limit, be it three minutes, two minutes or whatever is necessary, later in the debate.

3.33 pm

**Keith Vaz** (Leicester East) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar). We share a border in Leicestershire and now we share a cause, and it is good to see someone who was elected only last year become passionate about an overseas country and become such an expert on it. I know that his interest in Yemen preceded his election, and I am glad to see him as a strong and effective vice-chair of the all-party group on Yemen. I speak not just as a Yemeni by birth, but as the chair of the all-party group for the past 27 years. I must rival President Saleh with the years that I have spent in office—that is not a good comparison, I know. It has been a huge honour to serve in that capacity and to be joined recently by my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) and the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond), both of whom are Yemenis by birth.

We now have three Yemenis sitting in the House of Commons. That should help everyone to understand that for us this is not just business; it is very personal. The situation matters greatly. My fondest memories of my childhood were watching the boats coming in. They went past Steamer Point as they were about to enter the Suez canal. Indeed, only Leicester beating Liverpool last Tuesday could match that kind of warm feeling that I had as a child. Sadly, those wonderful memories of our childhood have gone, and we face in Yemen a roll call of catastrophe, which was set out so eloquently by the hon. Members for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) and for Charnwood.

I know that the Chairman of the International Development Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), will have more horrifying statistics that we will struggle to understand—some 21 million in need of aid, millions of children without food and people starving to death. We hear such figures as if this is a piece of fiction, but it is fact.

[Keith Vaz]

I thank the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) who came on one of the all-party group's last visits to Yemen. He caused us a lot of worry. He had been told to stay in the Sheba hotel, but, as everybody knows—especially the Prime Ministers and Secretaries of State who worked with him in Government—he cannot be told what to do. When we got up one morning and found that he was missing, we thought that he had been kidnapped. In fact, he was out in Sana'a, a world heritage centre, taking photographs. Like all visitors to Yemen, he had fallen in love with the country.

What is this country now? It is a country in poverty; a country facing the possibility of civil war; and a country that is being fought over by other foreign powers. It is not the people of Yemen who want this conflict. The conflict arises because those from outside want to topple the democratically elected Government of President Hadi, and because of that there is outside intervention.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I was touched by the care that the right hon. Gentleman showed for my welfare. It was indeed an extraordinary trip. Talking about children, at the time, the British Council was matching 1,000 schools in the middle east with schools over here. On our journey, I was able to twin a school in Worthing with a school in Aden. Does he agree that, as well as the killings and the injuries, one of the biggest tragedies is the fact that about half of all children in Yemen are not in education? So much is being done to ensure that Syrian children have some continuity in their education, but the situation in Yemen is so much worse. If we do not have the future in mind for those children, the future of the whole country will be in peril.

**Keith Vaz:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. He is the House's expert on education. When he talks about the need for education, he is absolutely right, because it offers a life chance. Some 1,500 people have died, and 9.9 million people are in poverty. The fact that the children cannot go to school will affect the rest of their lives, and childhood passes so quickly. They will not have the advantages of education, and we need to concentrate on that.

I join the hon. Member for Charnwood in praising the Minister—Members on the Opposition Benches do not tend to do that very often—because he deeply cares about the situation in Yemen. Whenever the all-party group has asked him to address us, whenever we have made suggestions, and whenever the right hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Sir Alan Duncan) has made suggestions, which I am sure that he does on a daily basis, the Minister responds. If he had half a chance, he would be on a plane via Dubai to Sana'a international airport to try to stitch together the patchwork of international diplomacy that now exists.

Much mention was rightly made by the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire of the involvement of Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia's involvement has been important; had that not happened, I believe that the country would have been overrun and that President Hadi would not have returned to Aden. We now need to pause. The all-party group, individual Members and the Minister

have been clear that there has to be a ceasefire. The airstrikes have to stop, and we have to find other methods of trying to secure the country without the scenes that have taken place. Civilians may not have been targeted, but they have died. We need to make sure that we work with the Saudis, who are the regional power—we cannot do this without them—to make sure that we get peace in Yemen. They have a big responsibility to ensure that that happens. If Yemen falls, that will affect every other country in the middle east.

As the Prime Minister has said on numerous occasions, the frontline in Sana'a is the frontline in London. Many of the terrorist plots that I have come across as Chair of the Home Affairs Committee have come from people plotting in places such as Yemen. Indeed, many of the Paris bombers were involved in some way with what was happening in Yemen; I think one of them was trained there. We are not talking about a country far away that we do not need to care about; it really matters to our future, not just because of the humanitarian crisis but, more importantly, because of how it will affect Britain and the rest of Europe.

I thank this Minister and the Minister of State, Department for International Development, the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne), who has also listened carefully to what we have said. One of the great things about how the Government have approached Yemen is that they have continued what was started by the previous Government. There is no party politics in this; the whole House is united, as were the previous Prime Ministers, Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, in ensuring a focus on Yemen. The current Prime Minister is also very focused on it. I have written to him on numerous occasions and his responses are detailed and relevant. He wants to make sure that peace is restored. We are all on the same side.

As I conclude, I have a few asks. First, as he also supports the ceasefire, will the Minister give a commitment to intensify the support of the UN to try to bring peace to Yemen and to ensure that we continue the dialogue with all sides, especially with Saudi Arabia? There has been a lot of criticism about the use of British weapons by the Saudis in this conflict. That will go on, of course; we live in a parliamentary democracy and we have to raise these issues. The Government have to respond, and they have.

However, we need to work with the Saudis and the Omanis. Oman has not been mentioned enough in these debates, but the Sultan in particular has a big role to play. Here is a border in the Arab world: to the north, Oman is as peaceful as a country can be but to the south is the turmoil in Yemen. The Gulf Co-operation Council also needs to be involved. It cannot be absent from the table.

It is not the Minister's job to chase up debts, but I remind him of the great donor conference in London before the last but one general election. Billions were pledged but very few countries have paid up. We should go back to the countries that pledged and make sure that something is done.

Let me end by saying this. We still have a lot of friends in Yemen. My two children were very friendly with the son of one of the Yemeni ambassadors who came here. His name was Salman, and we have lost touch with him. The last time we saw him, he had come up to Leicester to see a football match with my young son. I think of

that bright young boy and his sisters, who came to this country for a short time as the children of diplomats, and the bond of friendship that we formed with them. To think of them in a house in Sana'a without electricity, schooling or food is terrible. I hope that, if Salman is listening to this debate or hears about it in some way, he will contact us so that we know that he and his family are safe.

My real worry is that Yemen is bleeding to death. Unless we are prepared to stop the bleeding, the consequences will be horrendous.

From the bottom of my heart I beg the Minister to continue doing what he is doing, to make sure that this issue is centre stage. I thank parliamentary colleagues from all over the country, who have so much on their agendas, for coming here in such numbers to think and talk about Yemen. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds North East (Fabian Hamilton), who has just joined the Front-Bench team, for coming. He will be a wonderful shadow Minister. I hope he makes this issue a priority. I know we talk about the big countries, but Yemen matters to us. Please let us not allow Yemen to bleed to death.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing):** Order. I make no criticism of the right hon. Gentleman, who has spoken with passion and taken lots of interventions, but we will now have a formal time limit of five minutes. I call Kevin Foster.

3.45 pm

**Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con):** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will bear in mind the time limit. It is a great pleasure to follow the thoughtful speech by the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), given the passion he brings to this issue as a result of his background.

The first point for me is this: why does this conflict matter to us in the UK? Why has the MP for Torbay taken time on Thursday afternoon to come along to this debate? For me, there are three clear reasons. The first is Yemen's geographical location. Back in Victorian times—I made this point recently during an urgent question on this issue—Suez was one of the key trade links for the then British empire, and it is still one of the seven key maritime pinch points. Therefore, stability in Yemen matters to global trade. Given that Aden was, for many years, a British protectorate, there is also a moral duty on us to retain an interest in the area and how it has developed. In many ways, as the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) touched on, we have played quite a significant role as a country over the last 100 years in shaping what governance on the modern Arabian peninsula looks like.

The second point is that problems do not stay within one nation's borders. We have seen that dramatically illustrated in Syria, with the refugee crisis. The UN warned back in December that 14 million people are what it terms "food insecure"—an interesting way of describing people who may starve if they do not get assistance.

The third point is humanitarian concern. My predecessor in Torbay brought to my attention on social media today some of the heart-breaking images coming out of Yemen as a result of the conflict. Those very much reminded me of a statement by Robert E. Lee:

"It is well that war is so terrible, otherwise we should grow too fond of it."

The right hon. Gentleman very personally illustrated the impact on people on the ground.

It is also worth remembering the security threat that exists in the midst of this conflict, and that is what I will focus my brief remarks on. In the middle of the battle between the Houthis and the forces loyal to President Hadi is al-Qaeda. Both President Hadi and the Houthis oppose al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, which has staged numerous deadly attacks from its strongholds in the south and south-east. Western intelligence agencies now consider al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula the most dangerous branch of al-Qaeda because of its technical expertise and global reach.

**Wendy Morton:** Does my hon. Friend agree that regional instability makes this issue even more urgent? We need to find a peaceful solution to the problem so that we do not create a bigger vacuum, into which organisations such as al-Qaeda can move.

**Kevin Foster:** I completely agree with my hon. Friend. Where we have spaces in conflicts—especially spaces where no Government and no system of law and order exists—these groups are able to fester, grow and develop their abilities. We saw that in Afghanistan during the time of the Taliban, and we are seeing it in Syria, where a civil war has allowed Daesh to grow, fester and build its capabilities. As we have seen in Yemen and other parts of the middle east, having these spaces where no Government exist creates a danger to our security and global security, and we cannot just ignore that.

With President Hadi's co-operation, the US has been carrying out operations, including drone strikes, but the advance of the Houthi rebels has seen that US campaign scaled back. Therefore, a quarrel between two enemies of al-Qaeda is making it easier for al-Qaeda to develop and become more of a threat. As we have heard, there is the prospect of the fighting spilling over into neighbouring countries, not least into Saudi territory. While we all have our views about some of Saudi Arabia's bluntly appalling domestic policies, such as the lack of religious freedom and the use of the death penalty in a way that we in this country find unacceptable and certainly would not contemplate, we must sometimes be careful what we wish for, because some of the potential alternatives in that country are not those of a modern, liberal, western democracy.

Looking back to the Arab spring of 2011, many of us, perhaps naively, hoped that it would be very much like the 1989 "velvet revolution" that swept through eastern Europe, sweeping away dictators and despots and replacing them with the relatively modern democracies that we have today. Yet experience shows that some of the forces that have been unleashed since 2011 have not been those of freedom and tolerance—in fact, quite the opposite.

It is therefore right that we work with the Saudi Government and the wider coalition to try to bring peace to Yemen based on a United Nations resolution. With regard to our supporting the Saudi armed forces, I have to say—this may be a point of difference with some Opposition Members—that I would rather that is done by our forces, who have human rights and international law ingrained in their operations, than potentially by some other countries' forces who have within the past 30 years engaged in things that we would find unacceptable.

[Kevin Foster]

We cannot just ignore this situation. We cannot turn a blind eye while we see children being dragooned into fighting for rebel groups and terrorist organisations, and a three-way war threatening to spill over and threaten the security of some key maritime routes and the stability of the wider region. It is not for the UK to do this on its own, and we are not doing it on our own. We need to make sure that international law is applied and that all parties to the conflict respect their obligations. I think that ultimately, working with our partners through the United Nations, we can bring peace. I welcome the interest in this subject expressed in this debate.

3.51 pm

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster). I congratulate the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) on bringing this very important and timely debate to the Chamber today. The International Development Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry into the situation in Yemen. Last week, we heard such powerful and convincing evidence that DFID's excellent humanitarian response is being undermined by the wider Government approach to Yemen that this week we felt compelled to write to the Government setting out our serious concerns, to which I will refer in turn.

Let me start by addressing the scale of the humanitarian crisis. Every speaker has described the horror: more than 21 million people—over 80% of the population—are in need of assistance, more than 14 million people are struggling to find enough food, and 2.5 million people are displaced. The effects of this conflict are devastating. Atrocities have been committed by both sides. We heard evidence that 62% of the killings and maimings have been caused by the Saudi-led coalition, and that Houthis have recruited over 700 children to armed groups that have laid siege to cities such as Taiz, denying their populations access to humanitarian aid and medicines.

**Valerie Vaz** (Walsall South) (Lab): As a Member who was born in Aden, I was concerned to hear that a church in Ma'alla where I used to worship was hit, along with a hospital. What steps are being taken to ensure that aid will be allowed to get through? Access to aid is very important.

**Stephen Twigg**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In evidence from DFID itself we were told that the very welcome UK aid of £85 million could have been more, but that it is simply proportionate to what can currently be spent by our partners given the difficulties of access. She is absolutely right that that is one of the major considerations.

Let me turn to the need for an independent international inquiry into alleged abuses of international humanitarian law. We received overwhelming evidence that is contrary to the position that the Government have taken on this matter. The UN expert panel report documented 119 alleged abuses. There is evidence from Amnesty International, from Human Rights Watch, and from Médecins sans Frontières. Saferworld told us in its evidence last week:

“In other contexts, the Government will cite”

the Human Rights Watch and Amnesty reports on Syria, Libya and Sudan to support a British Government position, but

“they are referred to as not good enough to be considered evidence compared with a reassurance from the Saudis, one of the belligerents to the conflict, that there are no violations of international humanitarian law.”

It is true that a resolution was agreed at the UN Human Rights Council last September, but the original wording of the motion tabled by the Government of the Netherlands was much stronger. In my view, the British Government should have stood with our Dutch partners, rather than with Saudi Arabia in watering down the need for an independent inquiry. We do not have that independent inquiry. Once again, I urge the Minister to reconsider the UK's position, so that we support a genuinely independent, UN-led inquiry into the serious allegations of the violation of international humanitarian law.

Let me finish by talking about the central issue of UK arms sales to Saudi Arabia. DFID is consulted when arms are sold to a country in receipt of DFID assistance. Saudi Arabia does not receive such assistance, so DFID is not consulted on the question of arms sales to that country, even though those arms are being used in Yemen, which does receive DFID aid. The scale of our arms sales to Saudi Arabia is eye-watering. The £3 billion received in just six months last year represents 40% of total UK arms sales for that period, with £1 billion of it received in just three months for bombs. The Royal Saudi air force has more UK planes than our Royal Air Force.

United Kingdom, European and international arms trade law is clear that licences cannot be granted if there is a “clear risk” that they may be used in the commission of violations of international humanitarian law. That is all that is required—a clear risk—and we have a very powerful legal opinion from Matrix Chambers that the UK has breached its obligations under international arms law.

I urge the Government to think again on this central issue. As has been said, the Committees on Arms Export Controls will be established when we meet next week. The issue must be on their agenda. It is absolutely vital that we take seriously our responsibilities under our own law as well as international and European law. The International Development Committee met members of this country's Yemeni diaspora two weeks ago and their voices were very powerful on that question. The evidence that we heard from the UN panel of experts and international humanitarian organisations last week, and from the diaspora, is very strong that the UK should support a truly independent inquiry into what is going on, and in the meantime we should suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia.

3.57 pm

**Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): I welcome this debate and the inquiry by the International Development Committee, of which I am privileged to be a member. The suffering of the people of Yemen is acute, and the world needs to know about it. I urge people who have knowledge and can provide an account of the situation in Yemen to contribute to our inquiry. As the Chairman of the Committee has just said, we heard some powerful accounts during a meeting with members of the diaspora just a couple of weeks ago. I hope to refer to some of them in a moment.

I applaud my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) for his excellent speech, because of which I shall have to remove substantial parts of mine. I will, however, reflect on some of the points that have been raised during the debate. As several Members have said, 21.2 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance in Yemen, making it the country with the highest number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in the world. Forty per cent. of the country's population are under 15 years old, so the children really are suffering substantially. Since March 2015, 1,012 grave violations against children have been documented; the figure is now likely to be much higher. Forty-one schools and 61 hospitals have been damaged and, as has been said, more than 700 children have been recruited or used by armed groups. As we heard from those in the diaspora, those youths join extremist groups simply to feed their families.

Not only are 47% of schoolchildren in Yemen out of school but, as a university professor from the diaspora group told us, higher education has been affected. He taught in a university that once had 4,000 students; there are now only 400 left. Those statistics will have a significant bearing on the long-term development of the country. We were told that there had been outbreaks of dengue fever and measles, and that they fear polio. They told us that health facilities have been gutted, and that there are 2 million people in an area that is at grave risk of a malaria outbreak.

Those who are in business told us that the banking system, which is vital if people are to survive, is crippled. One businessman said that before the conflict, there were 15 banks that he could work through, but now there is only one left and he worries that it will close soon. Will Ministers do what they can to try to ensure that what remains of the banking system stays open, so that those involved in business can continue to trade? That is vital.

Much of the food in Yemen—80% to 90%—is imported. We were told, however, that the economy is crippled and cannot function. Manufacturing and what food production there is in Yemen have stopped. Products, including medicines, which are in short supply, now cost on the black market 300 to 400 times more than they used to. Major cities have had no electricity for six months. The UN report of last August stated that 26% of private businesses had closed in a five-month period, but the diaspora representatives told us that the true number was much higher. On their estimates, 77% of private sector businesses have closed and 71% of private sector workers have lost their jobs. That is critical because, as they told us, although aid can help, it will never be enough to feed and support the more than 20 million people we are talking about. A healthy economy is what is needed.

Finally, I pay tribute to all who are working in Yemen, including Save the Children and the UN workers, for the sterling work that they are doing in such difficult circumstances. Let us hope that the world continues to hear and take note of the suffering of Yemen. For too long, too little information has been put out, and I congratulate all Members of the House who are determined to ensure that that changes.

4.2 pm

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I am glad to be able to participate in this debate on the situation in Yemen, which is clearly not getting the international

attention that it should. I commend to Members the coverage that Scotland's newest newspaper, *The National*, has given the conflict over the past few months. The newspaper has consistently endeavoured for some time to get the matter into the consciousness of the Scottish public.

My interest in Yemen was sparked by my constituent Fahim, who came to see me last year on the day the exam results came out in Scotland. He passed the courses that he had been studying, but his pride in doing so was overwhelmed by the devastating news that his application to stay in the UK had been rejected and the Home Office had decided that he had to return to his native Yemen. This adoptive Glaswegian has been in the UK since 2009. He was a pharmacist back home, and since coming to Glasgow he has participated in voluntary groups and tried to make a life in the city. He would love to be able to go back home but, as he explained to me, it would be incredibly dangerous. He has no certainty about what has happened to his family in Yemen, so he could not even return to the people he knew, never mind the place he knew.

Since I spoke to Fahim he has been made destitute by the Home Office, and he has been sleeping in shelters and on sofas. Today the Home Office tried to contact him at an address that it evicted him from in August. I have been fighting for him to be able to stay here, because the more he told me about the situation, the more worried I became. I discovered that UK citizens are advised by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that if they find themselves in Yemen, they need to get out. Its website says that the FCO

“advise against all travel to Yemen. This includes the mainland and all islands. If you're in Yemen, you should leave immediately.”

There has been no British embassy in Yemen for over a year, and the FCO has advised people against travelling there since 2011.

But what of the citizens of Yemen? If Yemen is not safe for you, Mr Deputy Speaker, or for me, it is not safe for Fahim and it is certainly not a safe place for the citizens of Yemen. The last figures I obtained from the Home Office show that, for the first half of last year, only 14—I repeat, 14—asylum claims by Yemeni nationals were successful, while 31 were refused and 221 souls are still awaiting a decision. I hope, when the new figures come out, that they will have improved, but I urge the Government to give some certainty to those in the same situation as Fahim who are ill with worry about their future. If we can keep more Yemenis safe in this country, we have an absolute humanitarian duty to do so.

I attended the excellent meeting of the all-party group on Yemen last week, but I was absolutely shocked by the stories told by the representatives of Oxfam, Save the Children and Saferworld. They reported on a broken country, with severe shortages of fuel, water, food and other resources. Save the Children says that 21.2 million people, including 9.9 million children, are in desperate need of humanitarian aid. They are among the most desperate in the world.

The aid agencies tell us that they do not have all the funds they require. They are very much asking for their partner agencies in other parts of Europe to get more money from those countries. It has been mentioned that the UK has been generous, and we have been generous, but we need to get more aid to those agencies. The agencies

[Alison Thewliss]

cannot get access to all the people who need their help. People have been displaced in the country multiple times, and much of the infrastructure is struggling to cope.

The situation in Yemen is deteriorating daily. Twitter brings me news today of more bombs dropped on civilian areas. The *Yemen Post* reports today that, in the past 24 hours, 25 civilians have been killed by air strikes, 45 have been injured and 17 homes have been destroyed. Yesterday, 16 were killed and 31 injured when a factory was attacked in Amran. If such a level of carnage was happening in this country, we would be outraged and we would act. If a hospital here got hit by bombs or missiles, as no fewer than three Médecins sans Frontières medical facilities have been in the past three months, we would find that unacceptable.

As well as those struggling with the humanitarian crisis, medics in Yemen are struggling to do their job of patching up the people hit by bombs and injured in conflict, because they are coming under attack themselves. It is clear that the conflict in Yemen is being carried out with no respect for international humanitarian law. Hospitals are supposed to be off limits. Dr Joanne Liu, the international president of MSF, has stated that,

“the UK Foreign Secretary claimed that there have been no deliberate breaches of international humanitarian law in Yemen... This implies that mistakenly bombing a protected hospital would be tolerable.”

It is not.

**Mr Ellwood:** The hon. Lady makes a very important point. She is illustrating the horrors of war, which largely occur in populated areas when one adversary chooses to hide within such populated areas. Unfortunately, that leads to casualties. We are not in any way saying that when a civilian area or facility is attacked or destroyed that is somehow acceptable; it absolutely is not. When there is collateral damage of that form, it is important for whichever side has done it to put its hand up and say that it will conduct an investigation. We are not saying it is right, but we are making it clear—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. In fairness to the Minister, he cannot take advantage of the situation. We are struggling to get everybody in, and interventions are meant to be very short. He cannot make a speech now, given that he will be making a speech later. That is unfair to everybody.

**Alison Thewliss:** The point is that such bombings have now happened three times, and those involved in the conflict are not taking responsibility for their actions. Médecins sans Frontières is struggling to get the support it needs when it says that such a situation is unacceptable. People being taken to hospital in ambulances have been hit in this conflict, so it is clear that huge errors have been made in the conduct of the conflict. We could say that such hospitals are not being targeted, but what is worse is that bombs are being dropped in crowded areas, which is where the danger arises for many of the people living there. Cluster bombs, which are illegal, are being used in the conflict, as we can see from the pictures that appear on Twitter and other media sources. Who would bomb a hospital? It is completely wrong, and it is completely against all the rules of warfare. We should challenge that on every possible occasion.

If we have troops embedded with the Saudis, they should be making that clear and not allowing such attacks to happen. The Saudis are getting their bombs from us, so we could stop this happening. We could suspend arms sales to Saudi Arabia today, and we could be an honest broker in bringing peace to the people of Yemen. I ask the Government to act, and to act now.

4.9 pm

**Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con):** I thank colleagues in the Chamber for securing this important debate. As has been said, the conflict in Yemen has been described as the forgotten war. In recent weeks and months the conflict has escalated significantly and has begun to attract international attention.

In the time available, I shall focus on the humanitarian situation. It is a privilege to be a member of the International Development Committee. It is estimated that some 21 million people in Yemen—more than 80% of the population—are in need of life-saving assistance and protection. Recently at the IDC we heard evidence from a number of NGOs—Oxfam, Save the Children, UNICEF and the Yemeni diaspora. We heard about the difficulties in getting humanitarian aid into the country and into the areas where it is most needed. We heard that in Taiz people need food, water and medical supplies. They even need oxygen. Many civilians have been displaced and are forced to live on the edge of the city.

In these circumstances it is the children who are among the most vulnerable. It is estimated that more than 9 million children are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. There are reports of grave violations against children and of schools being attacked or destroyed. The indirect consequences of conflict such as children falling ill who would not otherwise have fallen ill, are often worse than the conflict itself. It is vital that the UK continues to play its part in the humanitarian aid effort. I am always grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues from DFID for taking the time to come to the Chamber, answer questions and update us on the dreadful situation in Yemen.

DFID has doubled its aid and recently the Secretary of State announced a further £10 million of aid. We must recognise the very difficult conditions in which DFID and FCO staff are working. One of the biggest challenges is getting that humanitarian aid to where it is most needed. It is therefore vital that the international community does all it can to secure safe humanitarian corridors so that aid relief can pass through unimpeded. Those who work tirelessly on the ground in those difficult circumstances have to manage and mitigate the risks on a day-to-day basis.

I shall touch briefly on defence and defence co-operation. Politically, the UK supports the Saudi-led coalition's intervention. It is important that we remember that that came at the request of the legitimate President, President Hadi, to deter aggression by the Houthis and the forces loyal to the former President, and to allow the return of the legitimate Yemeni Government. Nevertheless, it is worrying to hear of airstrikes on civilian targets. With all that is going on in Yemen, I urge the Government to continue to monitor the situation closely and to take seriously the allegations of violations of international humanitarian law.

With conflict in the wider middle east region—Syria, Iraq—and Daesh continuing to make the headlines, it is easy to see why Yemen's has been described as the forgotten war. Let us hope that after today we can play a part in changing that. The situation in Yemen is different from that in Syria, but that does not make it less important. I urge the Government to continue to do all they can to secure a comprehensive and peaceful solution for Yemen, as that is the only way to bring about the long-term stability that the country, the wider region and the world want.

4.14 pm

**Dr Lisa Cameron** (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) on bringing about this important debate, particularly at this time. Given the time pressures, I shall focus on the humanitarian situation in Yemen.

Recent figures reported by the United Nations indicate that the conflict claimed 2,795 civilian lives in 2015, and that there have been thousands more casualties. Nearly 1.5 million people have been displaced by the conflict, and many thousands may die from malnutrition and the impact of the humanitarian crisis.

Even before the conflict, Yemen was the poorest country in the Arab world. Poor governance, poor human development indicators and rapid population growth meant that millions of people were suffering greatly and already experiencing poverty and hunger. The country is now experiencing a significant humanitarian crisis. It is reported that more than 80% of the population is in need of humanitarian aid. That equates to approximately 21.1 million people, including nearly 10 million children.

In Yemen, it is the civilians who are bearing the brunt of the conflict. Many public facilities have been damaged or destroyed and people have lost access to essential services, including clean water, sanitation, energy and medical services. It is reported that nearly 600 health facilities have closed, and, as we have heard, hospitals have been hit. Food prices have soared, creating a desperate situation for millions of people, including particularly vulnerable groups of children. Of the 10 million affected children, nearly 8 million do not have enough to eat on a daily basis. UNICEF estimates that 537,000 children, or one in eight under-fives, are at risk of severe acute malnutrition.

Many children have been forced out of school by the conflict. Although differing figures are quoted, it appears that the number of children who need access to education may be between 2.9 million and 3.4 million. Furthermore, with medical centres being shut down and supplies diminishing, children are at risk of dying from treatable diseases. That is in addition to the risk of death or injury in the conflict itself. Save the Children has reported that since the start of the conflict, at least seven children have been killed or injured every day.

On human rights issues, it has been highlighted that there has been a significant recent increase in the recruitment and use of children in conflict in Yemen. I have spoken in previous debates about the impact of using children in combat. The effects are often felt long after the physical scars have healed. It psychologically damages them for life. In addition, it has been highlighted that children, particularly refugee children, are falling victim to human traffickers and are at risk of trauma, such as physical and sexual violence.

As we have heard, Yemen relies on imports for the majority of its food and fuel supplies. The blockade has had a significant impact on the quantity of vital supplies that are able to enter the country. The unpredictable and dangerous situations that agency staff on the ground have to work in have severely impeded their ability to distribute crucial humanitarian supplies around the country to affected populations. I pay tribute to the work of aid agencies in the area. Substantial obstacles continue to impede the passage of essential goods into and around Yemen. Much more needs to be done to create a humanitarian corridor.

I want to focus on the need to place increased diplomatic pressure on all parties in the conflict to support UN efforts to find a political solution. We must pressure those who are involved to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law, to take all possible measures to protect civilians and to ensure that humanitarian agencies are given a safe space in which to operate. The UN declared Yemen a level 3 crisis on 1 July—a category reserved for the most severe and large-scale humanitarian crises. We need to put pressure on all those involved to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches vulnerable people, such as women, children, the disabled and those in need of medical aid and oxygen, as well as the general population. I beseech the Minister to do everything possible to increase the pressure for a ceasefire, an independent inquiry and a political solution, and to ensure that the ordinary civilians in Yemen who are affected, many of them helpless children, are protected and supported.

4.19 pm

**Mrs Flick Drummond** (Portsmouth South) (Con): I thank the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) and the Backbench Business Committee for initiating this debate.

It is a pleasure to take part in this debate following our earlier discussions in Westminster Hall. As the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) said, I was born in Aden, and I have always taken a close interest in the affairs of the middle east. It is regrettable that the crisis in Yemen has been carrying on in different ways and far from the attention of the rest of the world, and even since our last debate, the situation has deteriorated and the civil war in the country has carried on into yet another year. I am hopeful that through diplomatic means the conflict can be resolved, but that depends on the willingness of external powers to make that happen, just as much as it does on the willingness of the two sides in Yemen.

This current civil war is the latest in a series of conflicts that reach back centuries and are one strand of the wider conflict between Sunni and Shi'a in the Muslim world. Whatever our aims to restore peace, we must understand that there is a problem at the heart of that issue, which very few settlements in the middle east have managed to resolve. Any settlement in Yemen is likely to require the engagement and attention of the outside world for a long time.

Whatever we say about our involvement as an arms exporter to the region, it is clear that we have an historical and moral role in the affairs of that part of the world. Almost since 1945, the situation in Yemen has been one of civil war of some sort. The coalition includes Saudi

[Mrs Flick Drummond]

Arabia and the Gulf countries—those countries are our friends; we have influence with them, and we must work with them closely to stop this humanitarian catastrophe.

Throughout this period, Yemen has been one of the poorest areas of the world. Save the Children has been working in Yemen since 1963, and it is a damning comment on the lack of political progress and commitment to solve the conflicts there that it is probably helping the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of families that it worked with more than 50 years ago. The humanitarian position is one of deep crisis, and I am reassured that it fully engages the attention of the Government through DFID, and that that engagement is respected by non-governmental organisations working in Yemen. We are a leading donor, along with the US and the UAE, and I welcome the Secretary of State's recent announcement of an additional support package.

**Kevin Foster:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the humanitarian disaster presents the biggest risk of the situation spilling over into neighbouring states as people try to escape?

**Mrs Drummond:** Absolutely, and there is also the fear of al-Qaeda and Daesh getting into a country that is failing.

However desperate the crisis is in Syria, that country benefited from a degree of infrastructure, education, and general health of population that was miles ahead of the Yemeni equivalents. The poor of Yemen have no resources of any kind to fall back on except for external aid, yet there has been a blockade of Yemen across all routes by the coalition engaged in the war. The impact of that on a country that depended on imports for 90% of its food has been significant, despite the best efforts of relief organisations.

**Edward Argar:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the impact of the blockade on the fuel supplies on which Yemen depends for its water and energy needs is a huge problem for that country?

**Mrs Drummond:** I thank my hon. Friend because he has just saved me from reading out quite a lot of my speech. I totally agree with him, and I can now move on quickly to the next bit.

The role of the Saudi-led coalition has come under scrutiny because of the alleged human rights violations during their involvement. Those allegations are balanced by equal concerns about the attempts of the Houthis to overthrow a legitimate Government by force. The coalition is in a position of moral authority to call a ceasefire. The Government are securing Aden against al-Qaeda, and are moving towards Sana'a and the Houthis. I am concerned at reports of large casualties already as the push to Sana'a gets under way, with news outlets talking of "dozens" of deaths last night alone. Saudi forces have entered north Yemen for the first time, and I hope that we can get an assurance from the Saudis that their presence on the ground is temporary, and operates under clear rules of engagement.

The role of Iran in this conflict also needs to be addressed. The west has engaged with Iran in the hope that the Iranians will contribute towards pacifying the middle eastern situation, but we have yet to see evidence

that they are willing to do so. There are already widespread concerns about human rights breaches, which the Government so far seem to believe are confined to the rebel side. Evidence on the ground suggests that the air campaign has been carried out with little regard for target verification by some coalition pilots. Our allies may well assure us that they do not mean to harm civilian targets, but it is fair to question whether they have operational control over sorties, and the discipline that we expect from our own forces. We are in danger of being found in breach of international law unless the coalitions control its forces.

I hope we will also learn about how breaches of international law by all sides will be independently investigated. We have heard assurances from several Ministers that the Government support investigations, but we have not yet heard any details of how we will support them in practice. In the discussion following the urgent question on 28 January, the Minister indicated that discussions with the Saudis about human rights concerns would take place this week at the Syria donor conference. I hope that those discussions will take place, and given that the Iranian Foreign Minister is also in London, I hope that discussions with him can take place as well. I hope the Minister will update the House on those discussions once they have taken place.

I want to add to hon. Members' comments on the help of NGOs and others with the humanitarian crisis. I did have a longer speech and have had to take the part relating to this out, but that is not to say it is not incredibly important. I am very pleased that DFID has long had an operational plan for channelling aid to Yemen. I am confident that further stepping up our commitment will be efficient and effective. I am sure other hon. Members will support calls from NGOs and charities for our continued and increased involvement. I agree with them.

Finally, I hope the Syria conference this week will provide the opportunity for meaningful talks. The only way we will ever get a settlement in Yemen is by talking, not fighting. I hope that, with our long history with Yemen, we can be a major contributor to the peace process.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order. I have to bring the time limit down to four minutes. I call Mike Wood.

4.25 pm

**Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): With the humanitarian situation deteriorating, we must ensure that all sides in the conflict are clear about the urgent need for a political solution. Yemen has descended into widespread armed conflict since March and is classified by the UN as a level 3 emergency. Despite that, this in some ways remains a neglected crisis. Government institutions are no longer able to deliver basic services to people in need, including basic healthcare and nutrition services, water and electricity. According to Amnesty International, four out of five Yemenis today rely on humanitarian assistance to survive. There is no access to essential services and food prices have soared, creating a desperate situation for millions of people.

According to the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, women and girls in Yemen face entrenched gender inequalities that limit their access to

basic services and livelihoods. The conflict has exacerbated the impact of those inequalities. By October 2015, an estimated 52% of internally displaced persons were female and 22% were girls. Displaced women often bear the burden of supporting their families despite challenges in accessing assistance, especially outside their communities. These challenges are even more acute for female-headed households, which assessments have found comprise over 30% of the displaced households in some areas: conflict and displacement; increased gender-based violence, especially sexual violence; domestic violence; early marriage; and trading sex to meet basic survival needs. Despite uneven reporting, recorded instances of gender-based violence show a clear upward trend since March. Overall, women are also more acutely affected by a decline in living conditions and service availability. Even before the recent conflict escalation, Yemen had the second-worst malnutrition and stunting levels globally, with half of all children malnourished and one in 10 dying before the age of five.

The United Kingdom cannot stand idly by. This is why it is not only morally right but essential that the UK has more than doubled its humanitarian funding to Yemen in the past year, with new funding announced last week bringing the annual total to £85 million. The new £10 million emergency support package announced by the International Development Secretary will provide much needed help for people affected by a conflict that has disrupted the delivery of essential food, fuel and medical supplies to those most in need, putting millions of lives at risk. This new aid, which will go to UN and NGO delivery partners on the ground, will include critical medical supplies and rehabilitation of health centres to improve the health of children in particular, with 320,000 children suffering severe malnutrition. It will include emergency food assistance and the protection of livestock to help people who are facing critical food shortages. Thermal blankets will keep displaced families warm during winter as 2.5 million people have been displaced by fighting. The aid also includes treatment for potentially fatal diseases, such as diarrhoea, cholera and malaria.

The UK can be proud of its humanitarian effort, but there is more to be done. I welcome the unity displayed today and the clear commitment from the Minister to ensure that further assistance is provided.

4.29 pm

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate, which I thank the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) for organising, because Yemen is an important country to many of us.

Yemen is important to me personally because I studied my Arabic there some 20 years ago. Though I was not born in Khormaksar, as some of my hon. Friends were, and though I did not grow up overlooking Crater lake, as so many did, the country has marked itself on me. It has done so because it is a country of such wonderful contrasts. It is a very rich, green and beautiful land. It grows some of the world's finest coffee, as well as khat, which, although banned in this country, is very popular in certain parts of the world. It is extraordinary in its richness. It is the place where the Arabic language was formalised and the domestication of the camel happened and therefore the place from which the colonisation of the deserts of Arabia and the rest of al-Jazeera al-Arabiya began.

Yemen is, then, at the heart of Arabia, and that is one reason why the conflict matters so much. For the Saudis, it is not some minor adjunct to their territory or some neighbouring state that they can ignore. It is a country with which they have such close relationships of blood and history that they cannot cut it off. Many tribes that now live happily in Saudi Arabia have cousins and links across the border. I remember as a soldier watching as convoys of donkeys crossed the Saudi border—forgive me, Mr Deputy Speaker, for taking a slight diversion. They would load up donkeys with hay and take them on the route five or six times, and when the donkeys knew where they were going, they would remove the hay, take away the donkey driver and load them up with heroin, and the donkeys would follow the same route. And so these self-propelled donkey caravans of drugs would come straight out of Yemen.

The Saudis have a real and personal interest in Yemen, and we should recognise, therefore, that they are defending their own interests. I will not argue, however, that they are doing so in the most humane way; they are not. They are behaving in ways that frankly call into question the training they have received from some of the finest pilots and servicemen in the world. I would urge them, therefore, to remember the lessons and doctrines they learned at Shrivenham and Cranwell and to remember that civilians are not a target.

This is an extremely important moment for Saudi Arabia. It is just beginning again to assert its presence in the region, as it has the right to do, being an important country. It is also right to do so given the expansion of the Iranian empire into traditionally Arab areas, such as Iraq, the eastern seaboard of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, where the Iranian influence is growing. The Iranian encirclement of Saudi Arabia is certainly a threat. I welcome the fact, therefore, that the Saudis are reacting and that Britain is playing her role, as a good ally, in supporting her, but I urge them to think hard about how it conducts this campaign.

The campaign, in the heart of Arabia, is being played out perhaps not in our broadsheets, but in the broadsheets of the cafés of Cairo, Algiers and Baghdad. People are watching the leadership of Riyadh and its conduct, and they are thinking, “Are these the allies we want? Is this the example for Arabia and the post-Arab spring generation?” I ask the Saudi Government to think hard about the human rights and lives of the people they are affecting, not just in Yemen, but around the Arab world.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** I suggest that the Front Benchers take eight minutes each.

4.33 pm

**Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) and others on securing this debate and the Backbench Business Committee on allowing us the time. It has been an important and timely debate, and we have heard some powerful and personal speeches, not least from the hon. Members for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) and for Charnwood (Edward Argar), the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) and the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond). We have also heard useful contributions from the members of the International Development Committee, whose recent report and letter I strongly endorse. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response to it.

[Patrick Grady]

This is not the first time that Yemen has been discussed on the Floor of the House recently. On 20 January, my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) asked the Prime Minister to explain why the use of UK built planes, with pilots who are trained by instructors from the UK, dropping bombs made in the UK and co-ordinated by the Saudis in the presence of UK military advisers does not add up to UK complicity in this conflict and potentially, therefore, in the war crimes allegedly being perpetrated. That is perhaps the single most important question arising from today's debate. Others have expressed it in different ways, but I look forward to hearing the Minister's answer. This also speaks to bigger issues that I shall explore briefly such as the humanitarian situation, the need for a peace process and the broader question of the use of weapons and the UK's human rights record.

We have heard in moving detail about the humanitarian situation. Yemen has the highest number of people in humanitarian need of any country in the world right now, and the impact on children is particularly worrying. The right hon. Member for Leicester East spoke about the lifelong and generational consequences of denying children their education. Much of the humanitarian situation could be preventable, or at least be capable of being mitigated, even in the face of the conflict, because the threats of food insecurity and the challenges to infrastructure are a result of coalition restrictions on shipping and the damage that has been done to infrastructure, severely limiting the ability of commercial deliveries such as food and medicines, stopping them getting through.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss) made the point that the Foreign Office advises against travel to the country, which starkly illustrates the humanitarian situation, yet the Home Office is trying to deport people back to it. It would be good to hear a response from the Minister on that. It is important to have a sustained return to pre-conflict levels of commercial supplies and humanitarian aid, and the establishment of a UN mechanism to simplify and streamline that. It would be helpful to hear how the Government are supporting that at the UN. Allowing a humanitarian response is, of course, the first step to a peace process.

We heard from the hon. Member for Charnwood that peace must come from within the country. That is correct, but it needs to be supported by an international process. The right hon. Member for Leicester East was right to say that the bombing has to stop. Now is the time for a ceasefire—first to allow humanitarian access and then to provide time and space for negotiations. The hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) was right to point to the geographical and geopolitical significance of Yemen and the real risk of violence spreading elsewhere.

Peace across the middle east is a complex and inter-related process. If we are going to build peace in Syria or anywhere else, we must have peace in Yemen, and the UK Government should not undermine their position and their credibility as peacemakers across the region by their links to this conflict. As I have said, that is one of the crucial issues. A major characteristic of the conflict has been the use of explosive weapons, especially

in populated areas, intensive aerial bombardments and ground attacks, destroying not only military but civilian targets—and there is real concern that that is deliberate.

Yesterday, my hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow Central and for East Renfrewshire met Yemeni human rights campaigners who told us of destruction and showed us horrific images of civilian death and destruction in the country. They rightly say that this is no way to restore the legitimacy of any Government, let alone by a foreign power such as Saudi Arabia. That reflects the findings of the UN report.

There is a bigger and more serious concern about the influence of the United Kingdom. Serious allegations have been made in a comprehensive legal opinion commissioned by Amnesty International, Saferworld, Professor Philippe Sands, QC and others in Matrix chambers, which concluded on the basis of the information available that the UK Government are acting in breach of their obligations arising under the UK consolidated criteria on arms exports, the EU common position on arms exports and the arms trade treaty by continuing to authorise the transfer of weapons and related items to Saudi Arabia within the scope of those instruments.

Several times the Minister has asked to see the evidence and asks us to give him the evidence and information on which to launch an inquiry. If this legal opinion by some of the most respected human rights lawyers in the United Kingdom is not the basis on which the Government can act, what is? As we have heard, the Government of Belgium have suspended its arms trade, and why the UK Government cannot follow suit has yet to be made clear. As has been expressed, we hope that this will be high up on the agenda of the Committees on Arms Export Controls when it meets next week.

I want to leave time for Front Benchers, especially the Minister, to respond to the debate. This has been described as a forgotten conflict. I hope that today's debate has helped to change that and that the Yemen conflict will not be forgotten. Serious questions are being asked of the Government about their humanitarian response, their role in the peace process and, above all, their possible complicity in military action by Saudi Arabia and thereby their connection to alleged war crimes. The Government now have a chance to respond to all those issues. They should heed the questions asked by Members and by many of our constituents. Let us hear some answers and see some action.

4.39 pm

**Fabian Hamilton** (Leeds North East) (Lab): Some of what the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) said slightly cut across some of the things that I was going to say, but I shall say them none the less.

Let me begin by thanking the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) for securing the debate. We have heard some passionate arguments and some important facts and statistics, but, above all, we have heard that this conflict will continue to have profound effects, not just on the region but on the rest of the world, unless peace can be secured. That is not to ignore the terrible desperation and the terrible death and destruction of the people of that country, including so many children.

As for the Labour party's position on the conflict, we recognise the legitimacy of President Hadi and the coalition. In particular, we note that the coalition's action is backed by a United Nations resolution, and that Saudi Arabia has been attacked by Houthi rebels from northern Yemen. However, it is clear to us that both sides should be doing considerably more to reduce the humanitarian cost. Ultimately, as many Members have said this afternoon, peace talks are the only way to bring about an end to the conflict, and a negotiated settlement must be the priority for everyone.

In her opening remarks, the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire said that Yemen was being bombed back into the dark ages. She also quoted the Red Cross as saying that this was a forgotten conflict, a phrase that many other Members repeated. My right hon. Friend—my good friend—the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) observed that the conflict was having an effect in the United Kingdom. He should know, because, as Chair of the Home Affairs Committee, he will have seen much evidence that that is the case.

**Keith Vaz:** I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend on his promotion to the Front Bench. I was very moved by the case that was raised by the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss). Bearing in mind what she said, does my hon. Friend agree that we should think very carefully about sending people back to Yemen when they have committed no criminal offences, but are here legitimately, and would be returning to a country in great conflict? Does he agree that the Home Office should look at that policy again?

**Fabian Hamilton:** If I had had a little more time, I would have responded to the main point that was made by the hon. Member for Glasgow Central (Alison Thewliss), who wondered how we could even consider sending vulnerable people who have been here—in the case of her constituent for more than six years—back to a conflict zone that we will not allow our own citizens to go anywhere near. That seems to me to be totally inhumane. I know that it is not strictly the Minister's responsibility, but I hope that he will at least shed some light on whether the Government will reconsider the position of those vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers from Yemen, as well as that of the Syrians whom we are already taking in. I thank my right hon. Friend for making that important point.

Many Members have referred to the humanitarian crisis, and that is the issue that really upsets and depresses so many of us when we hear statistic after statistic about the effect of conflict and war on our fellow human beings. As would be expected, the Opposition are deeply concerned about it. A number of Members cited statistics showing that 14 million people currently rely on food aid, and that more than 2.3 million—four times the number of people who were displaced at the beginning of 2015—have fled their homes in Yemen in search of safety. Peter Maurer, the president of the International Committee of the Red Cross—whom I was privileged to meet, along with Members who are present today, when I was a member of the International Development Committee, as I was until last month—has said that the situation in Yemen is

“nothing short of catastrophic.”

That sentiment was echoed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East when he spoke about the humanitarian effects of the conflict.

The hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) praised DFID's efforts in Yemen but said that we needed a coalition of aid givers to ensure that sufficient aid was received. However, as the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) pointed out, aid cannot resolve the problem. The economy has to be rebuilt and that can happen only if there is peace. That peace agreement has to be negotiated.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East said in his passionate contribution that Yemen was a catastrophe, with 21 million people in need of aid. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), who is no longer in his place, emphasised the effect that the conflict is having on children, as did many other hon. Members. The children in Yemen are in a worse position than the children in Syria at the moment. To echo something that my right hon. Friend said, Yemen is bleeding to death.

The Chair of the International Development Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), pointed out that terrible atrocities were being committed by both sides. He said that evidence had been given to the Committee that DFID's humanitarian effort was being undermined. He also told the House that hugely respected non-governmental organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International had provided overwhelming evidence of human rights abuses.

Let me turn now to the role of Saudi Arabia. I want to mention cluster munitions, because widespread reports from NGOs state that such munitions have been used in this terrible conflict. The response to a written parliamentary question from the shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn), suggests that the Government might be conceding that that is true. The reply from the Foreign Secretary stated:

“We are aware of reports of the alleged abuse of cluster munitions by the coalition in Yemen and we have raised this with the Saudi Arabian authorities. The UK does not supply cluster munitions to any members of the coalition in Yemen. In line with our obligations under the Convention on Cluster Munitions we will continue to encourage Saudi Arabia, as a non-party to the Convention, to accede to it.”

I hope that the Minister will give us further information on that terrible situation.

The SNP spokesperson, the hon. Member for Glasgow North quoted Philippe Sands, and I should like to quote something equally relevant from his important opinion given on 11 December 2015. Philippe Sands is not only a professor of law but a Queen's Counsel. In his concluding paragraph he said this of the UK's trade in weapons with Saudi Arabia:

“In the current circumstances we can be clear in concluding what the UK is required to do to bring itself into full compliance with its legal obligations: it should halt with immediate effect all authorisations and transfers of relevant weapons and items to Saudi Arabia”—

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I have been struck by the recent words of the international president of Médecins sans Frontières, Joanne Liu, who said:

“Is this the new normal: an MSF hospital bombed every month?”

We do not know that these are British munitions, but we do not know that they are not. Until we know the answer, should we not be stopping these arms sales completely?

**Fabian Hamilton:** Clearly there is a strong case to stop the arms sales immediately. I am pleased that the Chair of the International Development Committee and the Chairs of the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, the Defence Committee and the Foreign Affairs Committee have now re-formed the Committees on Arms Export Controls, which we used to call CAEC. I served on it during three Parliaments, so I know how it works, and I believe that it could examine carefully how British munitions and arms are being used by Saudi Arabia. In the meantime, I believe that the sales should be stopped.

I shall give the House the complete quotation from Philippe Sands:

“In the current circumstances we can be clear in concluding what the UK is required to do to bring itself into full compliance with its legal obligations: it should halt with immediate effect all authorisations and transfers of relevant weapons and items to Saudi Arabia, pending proper and credible enquiries into the allegations of serious violations...that have arisen and that could arise in the future, as addressed in this opinion and the sources here referred to.”

In other words, those sales should stop immediately.

I wish to conclude by making two more points. First, I have three key questions that I would like to put to the Minister. As we have heard, there have long been serious and credible allegations of war crimes against both sides. Now that these reports have been corroborated by a UN report, the Opposition have called for the suspension of arms sales to Saudi Arabia while that is being investigated. As we have heard, that has been backed by the Select Committee on International Development. Last week, the Minister said he was yet to read and study the UN report. He has now had the time to do that, so what does he make of it? Last week he promised to raise the report with the Saudis at the “highest level” this week, either at the counter-Daesh meeting or at the Syrian donors’ conference, which is taking place today. Has he had the chance to do so? Thirdly, the Government have consistently said that the reports must be investigated. What would he consider to be an adequate investigation?

Finally, we have heard some remarkable speeches today, not just from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby and the hon. Members for Congleton, for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron), and for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), all of whom I had the privilege of serving with on the International Development Committee until last month, but the hon. Members for Charnwood, for Torbay (Kevin Foster), for Glasgow Central for Tonbridge and Malling (Tom Tugendhat) and, of course the Yemenis in this House—those who were born in Yemen—the hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East. I hope that the Government can take the hints, listen to what has been said this afternoon and play a vital role in securing peace for the people of Yemen and the rest of the world.

4.51 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** I have just under six minutes to answer this too short debate, and I cannot do justice to the quality and the detail of the questions and concerns that have been raised. As I have done in previous debates, I assure hon. Members

that I will write to them to give them my best answer. This debate, short though it is—I join others in saying that we should have longer debates—has shown that there is interest, concern and expertise in this House.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) for securing this important debate. As many hon. Members did, she started by talking about the humanitarian devastation in Yemen and said this was the forgotten war. I had the opportunity at the current conference on Syria to speak to the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon. I said, “Look at the support that Martin Kobler is given in Libya and that Staffan de Mistura is given in dealing with the Geneva talks, and compare that with the support given to Ismail Ahmed, the UN special envoy for Yemen. They are not on the same scale.” There is an acknowledgement that more needs to be done by the international community because of the scale of the humanitarian catastrophe taking place there.

The hon. Lady also mentioned concerns about oil and other assets needed to keep people alive getting into the country, as did others. She said that the UK is looking the other way, but, as we have heard in passionate speeches from Members on both sides of the House, Britain certainly is not looking the other way. We are one of the largest donors and supporters of the country. We are working to support the UN envoy and we are working towards a political solution. She touched on the 119 incidents mentioned by the UN report, and I intervened on her to qualify my own comments. The Opposition spokesman, whom I welcome to his place, asked me about that. I did raise the issue with the Saudi representatives at the Syria conference, and I also spoke to President Hadi on the phone today, raising the concerns about what is happening in Yemen. I also had the opportunity to speak to the UN envoy to raise the concerns about the scale and profile of what is happening. I am sorry that there has been a delay in the talks following the ceasefire that took place in December, and we are working hard to establish what needs to come first, before the ceasefire. I am referring to the confidence-building measures, which are the prelude to then making sure that the ceasefire can last.

My hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) gave a passionate speech, again calling this the forgotten war and talking about Yemen being a complex and ancient land. He also commended the role DFID is playing and our contributions there, and I concur with him on that.

The right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) articulated his own experience of Yemen. Indeed, there are others in the House who have lived in or who were born in that country as well. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his kind words of support. He touched on the wider concerns of extremism in the Arab peninsula, not least with al-Qaeda, which was responsible for a number of attacks on the mainland, and he made an important link between what is happening in the region and the security that we have in our own country as well, and that should not be forgotten.

The day before yesterday, I met the culture Minister of Oman and raised some of those concerns with him. It was a private meeting, but it was very helpful to have such a frank conversation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) stepped back and looked at the wider regional picture. He reminded the House that, from a maritime perspective,

Yemen is one of the seven global pinch points in the world. He also talked about the threat from other extremist organisations, such as Daesh, which recently killed the governor of Aden. Indeed, al-Qaeda runs the town of Mukalla, which is a port on the southern coast. He also mentioned the effect of change by asking what would happen if the Administration in Saudi Arabia were changed. It is a liberal wing that is running that very conservative country. Of course we want change and modernisation, but it must be done at a workable pace.

Let me turn now to my friend, the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), whom I have known for a couple of decades—we used to represent different student unions at university. It was a pleasure to stand in front of the International Development Committee, of which he is Chairman. I offer on record to meet him in private to talk about some of the detail, as I appreciate that he and his Committee members were a little frustrated in my not being able to answer all their questions. He talked about the city of Taiz. Sadly, President Hadi has confirmed that the city has again been cut off and that humanitarian aid cannot get in. The hon. Gentleman again raised the matter of the report of the UN expert panel. I can confirm that we are looking into its findings, but there is a UN process as well, which was pre-empted when the report was leaked. None the less, there is a process, and we will be following it and looking at the findings.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the formation of the Committees on Arms Export Control. It is absolutely fantastic. Why has it taken so long? It is an important aspect from a legislative perspective of holding the Executive to account. I am pleased to see that it is to be reformed. He also touched on the Human Rights Council resolution in October. There is a consensus there, and he will be aware of that. As much as any individual would want to push forward a particular line, we have to leave the room with what will actually work, and it was decided that the resolution would work. I should make it clear that the council then determined that it would provide assistance to Yemen's national independent

commission of inquiry, which will look into the details. It will then report back to the Human Rights Council. If it is felt that the inquiry is not independent enough, then that is the vehicle that can be used for that to be recognised, rather than having a general call for an independent inquiry.

Time is against me. I have so many other comments to make and answers to provide. As I have said, I will write to Members with my response to this debate. I can say that this Government take what is happening in Yemen very seriously. I personally have devoted an awful lot of time trying to remain at the forefront so that I have some influence. I recognise the concern that this House has over the human rights issues, and I will take them away with me. I am grateful that we have had this opportunity to debate these matters. I certainly hope that, the next time we do so, we are not limited to a 90-minute debate.

4.59 pm

**Kirsten Oswald:** I thank everyone who has taken the time to come here and speak today. It is very heartening to see such a high turnout on a Thursday afternoon, which reflects, I think, the importance of the subject. There have been some very impassioned speeches, some of which reflected a great knowledge of Yemen. However, we are talking about a forgotten war, and I hope that our debate has had a positive impact in that regard.

I reiterate my calls for the UK Government to consider very carefully our position in relation to the arms that we sell and the training that we offer to Saudi Arabia. Humanitarian aid, access, and the need for a consistent and coherent peace process are key to providing the stability that Yemen and that whole area of the world need in order for it to move forward for the benefit of the people of Yemen and for the wider benefit of the global community.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the conflict in Yemen.

## Delay Repay Scheme: Rail Commuters

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—(*Kris Hopkins.*)

5 pm

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I thank the Rail Minister for being here to respond to this debate. I am going to speak about many painful personal experiences of delays on the trains; the Minister can share some of those with us as well, as I am sure that she has also had experiences of train delays. Like her, no doubt, I have received a huge quantity of emails, letters, Facebook messages and tweets from various constituents unsatisfied or very unhappy with the services currently provided by Southern and Thameslink, the two major train operating companies that run in my area.

The companies are providing a completely unacceptable standard of service. As the Rail Minister knows, they are consistently among the three lowest-scoring train operating companies in the national rail passenger survey carried out by the watchdog Transport Focus; it covers issues such as overall satisfaction, value for money, punctuality and reliability.

Delays and cancellations are often announced at the last minute, and overcrowded trains and bad customer service are a daily occurrence for suburban London commuters. We now have to add to the list of excuses the wrong kind of sunlight—a novel one for me. In the past, I have heard the excuse of a pheasant having been stuck in the shoe of a train brake; that was another novel explanation for a train delay. Combine those problems that passengers face with yearly rail fare hikes, and we see that there is a lot of pressure on commuters, who have not only to pay for the shambolic service but suffer lost time and increased stress.

The passenger compensation schemes are not fair and are largely unknown to passengers, which means that the train companies are getting away with a shocking service. How bad are things? The public performance measure gives the percentage of trains that arrived at their final destination within five minutes of their scheduled arrival time. Five years ago, over a period of one month in 2010-11, more than 1,000 Thameslink trains were delayed. Move on five years and the figure is 5,000 trains. In 2010-11, more than 2,000 Southern trains were delayed in one month; five years later, the figure is more than 8,000. I accept that part of that will simply be down to the fact that train companies are running more services, but to see train performance going down rather than improving over five years is a cause for concern.

The Minister knows about the current compensation schemes. The old-fashioned passenger charter is being phased out. Most train operating companies now operate the newer Delay Repay scheme, which is included in all the new franchise contracts. The scheme works in different ways for different train operating companies, but broadly speaking the one operated by Govia is representative. Passengers delayed by 30 minutes or more are entitled to 50% compensation of the single-fare price, which goes up to 100% for delays of 60 minutes or more. Compensation usually takes the form of rail vouchers to be collected from the relevant operator's ticket office, but it can be paid out in cash if requested by the passenger—that is also not widely publicised.

What are the problems with the scheme? First, the compensation threshold is too high. For many suburban commuters the typical journey will be 30 to 45 minutes, so receiving compensation after a delay of 30 minutes, with full compensation for a delay of over 60 minutes, is an insult because that often means that the delay has to be the same length as, or longer than, the actual journey.

There is also a complete lack of standardisation. The only common element of Delay Repay schemes across the train operating companies is the 30-minute threshold for compensation—everything else differs. The circumstances in which compensation can be paid vary; some compensation schemes include the weather and planned engineering works, whereas others exclude them, so there is no clarity about what passengers will get.

The ways to claim compensation also differ from one train operating company to another, with compensation sometimes paid as vouchers and sometimes as cash. The preferred method—at least some train operating companies are moving towards this, and the sooner the better—would be for companies automatically to compensate passengers through their Oyster cards, smartcards and contactless cards or through the other electronic means that passengers use to pay for tickets.

The variety of ways in which compensation is paid, and the different schemes in operation, are clearly a source of confusion for staff as well. Which? is doing a lot of good work on this issue, and when its researchers looked into it at stations, 37% of them were given no information, or only part of the information they needed, about how long a delay needed to be before a refund was due. If even the staff in the station do not understand how or when compensation is payable, what chance do commuters have?

Compensation schemes are badly publicised, and it is hard to claim. A 2013 survey by Transport Focus, the independent watchdog, found that 88% of those eligible for compensation did not claim. A 2014 survey by the rail regulator showed that 67% of respondents knew not very much, or nothing, about their rights to compensation. A Which? survey revealed that only 36% of passengers remembered being informed of their rights after their last delay.

That points to a significant problem with train operating companies' passenger information policies. It implies an unwillingness on the part of companies to make claiming compensation as easy as possible for their customers. On many occasions I have called on companies to make sure that, for every train that is delayed, where passengers would be entitled to compensation, that should be announced on the train. Preferably, as passengers get off the train, there should be members of staff handing out leaflets so that everyone knows they are eligible and everyone is certain how they can claim. Indeed, now that there are electronic displays on trains, they could also be triggered to ensure that passengers know.

The procedures for claiming compensation vary, and passengers can use different forms. Some companies offer email claims with a photo of the ticket. Others require an original ticket to be sent in—an option that I have used.

As to the forms of compensation, rail vouchers are the standard form, but train operating companies fail to advertise the fact that cash compensation is available on request, as per condition 42(d) of the national rail conditions

of carriage. The Which? survey I referred to carried out an anonymous investigation at 102 stations, revealing that 63% of the time during the investigation people were not told they could receive compensation in an alternative form to vouchers, even after staff were prompted—perhaps to encourage them to remember that that was the case.

The fact that vouchers need to be picked up from ticket offices is another hurdle, and it means that passengers cannot necessarily get the best fares, given that online tickets booked in advance are often the cheapest.

There is currently a lack of enforcement. There is no ombudsman for rail companies, and that makes it very difficult to hold the train operating companies to account. Transport Focus, the independent watchdog, has no powers to make TOCs pay a refund. I am not alone in expressing concern about these issues. A super-complaint has been presented to the Office of Rail and Road outlining evidence of the consumer detriment in this market and inaction by train companies in making customers aware of their rights, with unnecessary complexities and barriers within the system. We expect the ORR to respond to that complaint by mid-March. I hope the Minister will say what she expects to come out of that and what action she might expect to take.

What is my proposal? Perhaps surprisingly, it will not necessarily encounter the degree of resistance, certainly from some of the train operating companies, that one might expect, as I understand that some are willing to entertain it. I propose that the delay threshold should be reduced such that commuters are entitled to compensation after 15 minutes of delay, when they would get 50% compensation, and after 30 minutes, when they would get 100% compensation. Rather than 30 and 60 minutes, the thresholds would be 15 and 30 minutes. Season ticket holders' rights to compensation would have to be adapted accordingly.

What other things need to happen? As I have said, much better publicity is needed about the existing Delay Repay scheme, even if the scheme is not improved in the way that I suggest. I recently signed up to the email notifications that Southern and Thameslink give when there is disruption on their services. I do not know whether there has been a case of a train falling foul of the current 30-minute delay threshold since I have been receiving those emails—presumably many other passengers will now be receiving them—but I hope that if that happens in future they will make it very clear that people are entitled to claim compensation and include a link and an explanation about how they can do so. As I said, we need electronic announcements on trains. We need staff at stations handing out information. We need a degree of standardisation so that commuters, many of whom use different train operating companies, understand that there is a simple, standard process that they can follow, with the same claims procedure in every case. That would also help staff, who will often move from working for one train company to another. If they do not understand how the system works at the moment, then at least if there was only one system in place, there would be a better chance of their doing so.

Given the volume of rail complaints, we need to establish an ombudsman with real teeth to impose sanctions on the train operating companies. It was suggested to me in an email—I have no clear view on this at the moment, so I would be interested to hear the Minister's view—that

we should allow nominee companies, which are now active in the field of claiming compensation for airlines, to operate in the rail market as well, to get economies of scale and help passengers with associated charges. Perhaps if that happened, more passengers would claim, but we would not want to get lots of phone calls from them saying, "Have you had a train delay? Would you please call this number?" which would be very frustrating.

What are the advantages of my proposals? First, there is no doubt that a scheme where compensation kicked in at 15 minutes and 30 minutes on any train service anywhere would put more pressure on the train companies. If they knew they were going to get financial pain from running trains late or not having enough drivers, which is the usual excuse in the Southern area, they would make sure that they had more drivers, and so on. It would put more pressure on them to improve their performance. As I said, better advertising of the scheme would ensure that far more passengers were able to take advantage of the compensation. Although that would not necessarily reduce their stress levels on delayed trains, at least it would give them a bit more money in their pockets through part-compensation for the very poor services.

I will finish where I started by asking the Minister whether she will support my call for Delay Repay to kick in at 15 and 30 minutes.

5.14 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Claire Perry):** I thank the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) for securing this debate. Some people say that I seem to have drawn the short straw by having to participate in Adjournment debates on successive Thursdays, but I am always happy and keen to talk about the railways and what this Government are doing to try to improve them.

I agree with many points made by the right hon. Gentleman, including the fact that the compensation system is not working as well as it should and his comments about performance issues. Indeed, I chair a taskforce comprising the operators, Network Rail, Transport Focus and anyone who might be able to help us drive up performance in this crucial region.

May I crave your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker, and put on the record my personal thanks to the Network Rail team that has managed to fix the Corbridge landslip, which had completely disconnected the vital east-west line between Newcastle and Carlisle? The team has moved 35,000 tonnes of soil, the line is open and trains will run from next week. That is proof that the orange army really can deliver, and I want to make sure that that happens in the right hon. Gentleman's region as well.

It might be helpful if I set out some of the improvements that are already happening. Delay Repay is a universal, standardised offer of compensation that has been adopted by 80% of rail companies. That addresses the right hon. Gentleman's point about variability in what people are entitled to. As he has said, under Delay Repay passengers can claim 50% of a single fare for delays of 30 to 59 minutes; 100% of a single fare for delays of more than 60 minutes; and 100% of a return fare for delays of more than two hours. Ten operators use the scheme and it is being introduced nationally, along with franchising.

[*Claire Perry*]

Interestingly, the scheme is among the most generous compensation schemes for rail passengers in Europe. I know that sometimes it does not feel like that, particularly if there are persistent delays, but there are countries that do almost nothing for customers who are delayed.

**Tom Brake:** Will the Minister reflect on the fact that the compensation scheme can afford to be generous because so few passengers actually claim compensation?

**Claire Perry:** The right hon. Gentleman anticipates a very important point—on which I also agree with him—that I will come on to address.

It is not enough to rest on saying that a general scheme is in place and being rolled out. The right hon. Gentleman raised two main, vital issues. First, he asked what passengers can do if there are shorter delays. I have had a look at journey times from his constituency. The average journey time for constituents of his travelling from Wallington to London Victoria is about 38 minutes, and for those travelling from Carshalton and Mitcham Junction it is 25 to 29 minutes. Clearly, it would be a bad day if the delay lasted as long as the journey time. That is why the Chancellor made it absolutely clear in the autumn statement that we will introduce a compensation level starting at 15 minutes. I want to do that quickly. We are, of course, working through the numbers. I cannot yet say what percentages will be paid and when, but the right hon. Gentleman can have an absolute assurance that in the near future a compensation scheme will be introduced right across the Delay Repay franchises, including the Govia Thameslink Railway: the clock will start ticking, quite rightly, at 15 minutes. That is absolutely appropriate.

Improvements were made to the scheme last year. The right hon. Gentleman is right to ask what other industry pays us in travel vouchers. We need to pay people in their own currency, to demonstrate respect for the time they have lost. Three main changes were made to the GTR compensation scheme last year, to the benefit of his constituents. First, when calculating compensation, it used to be assumed that a season ticket holder travelled every single day of the year. Now, holiday entitlement has been included in that. The net result of all those calculations is that if annual season ticket holders claim compensation, they will get £3.70 per journey instead of £3.30, which is a 12% increase in the compensation level. If they experience a 60-minute delay, which would be unlikely, and, indeed, catastrophic, the compensation will be substantially more—an additional 10%.

The second change that the right hon. Gentleman rightly focused on is that the industry now pays compensation in cash, not in vouchers. He will share my disappointment that there is not widespread knowledge about that, certainly among staff. I will talk a little about my expectations of the ORR super-complaint in a moment.

The third change is, I think, the most important. People do not have time to faff about trying to claim compensation. These are busy people, trying to get to work and home to their lives and families. I am sure the right hon. Gentleman will welcome the introduction of automatic compensation. It is already happening. Certain operators offer automatic compensation if passengers

buy a ticket online, so it can be linked to a specific journey. Others, including GTR, are linking automatic compensation payments to the use of a smart card, which has been rolled out for season tickets.

C2C, which, like GTR, has benefited from the south-east flexible ticketing programme—the Government's great investment in smart ticketing in the south-east—will, from this month, provide automatic compensation of 3p per minute for every minute's delay after two minutes. If someone is sitting on that train, even if they are only delayed for five minutes, their time is worth something. That is exactly the sort of scheme that works well for constituents such as those represented by the right hon. Gentleman, who take shorter journeys and for whom those persistent minutes of delay are very annoying. That is something that we are monitoring and we would like to see it rolled out, particularly across the metro franchises.

The right hon. Gentleman raised an important point: it is completely unacceptable that all these measures are being put in place but, as Passenger Focus found, only 12% of passengers claim the compensation to which they are entitled. That is made doubly annoying by the fact that train companies receive compensation from Network Rail and from each other if delays are created—the so-called section 8 compensation payments. Money is flowing into those train companies, and it should be flowing out to all passengers who are entitled to compensation.

Southern and GTR have a “reasonable endeavours” clause in their franchise about making announcements. We are determined that they should meet that, and one of the measures I am looking at is whether to get all the train companies to publish their numbers for compensation claims so that we can see, relative to the number of passengers they are carrying, which ones are doing well. As the right hon. Gentleman says, making announcements is not rocket science. Indeed, some companies do so, particularly on their Twitter feeds, where they say: “This is a delayed train, and you are entitled to claim compensation. Here's how you do it.” By the way, rather than having people muck about with bits of paper, the claim forms now can generally be downloaded or completed online. In fact, GTR has an app that enables passengers to submit their delay claims straight from their mobiles.

The right hon. Gentleman made an interesting point about nominee companies and airlines. Such companies exist in the rail sector. I do not know whether I am supposed to say this, but companies such as Delay Repay Sniper will do all the work and take all the hassle out of the process. I want people to get the compensation that they are entitled to. I mentioned the smart card, on which GTR will offer an automatic refund by 2017. We will not stop here; we will keep pushing for better compensation.

The right hon. Gentleman made a suggestion about announcements on trains. The new fleet of class 700 trains that will start running on the franchise this year have lots of onboard information, and it is perfectly reasonable to have an electronic message that states, “You are entitled to compensation if you are on this train.” Those are all good suggestions.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned performance. In an ideal world, compensation would be zero, because the trains would all get there on time. I am sure that we all want that. There might be an element of apples and pears in the statistics that he cited about historical cancellations, because the franchise was re-let in a very

different from two years ago. It is now the biggest in the country, with about 20% of Britain's passenger journeys, and that may have something to do with the big increase in the cancellation numbers.

I would be the first to say that the performance level is not good enough. I have pulled out the performance statistics. They show that about four out of five trains on the Southern metro service, which serves the right hon. Gentleman's lines, arrive on time according to the public performance measure, which is about 77%. I am interested in trains arriving at the right time, for which the figure is 51%, and that is substantially better than what it was last year.

The point that so many people have collectively missed is that the impact of a crowded train of 1,000 people arriving late on the British economy is very substantial in terms of the productivity of that train load of passengers. My view is that performance on that very crowded part of the rail system should be driven up and made substantially better, because the aggregate level of human misery created by delays is higher and the hit to the productivity of the British economy caused by delaying millions of people is also higher.

I have therefore challenged the entire group of people operating that part of the railway, from the head of Network Rail downwards, to drive it back on to a high-performance route by the end of 2018. By then, the London Bridge works will be substantially complete; we will have the new class 700 fleet, which will offer so much relief in terms of better trains and increased capacity; and we will largely be through the Thameslink programme, which has created disruption for so many people. We must stay focused on how we can deliver a high-performance railway at that time. However, it is not enough to wait until then. I have made it absolutely clear to the operators and Network Rail that performance needs to improve now, so that although people can claim compensation, they will not necessarily need to do so because their trains will be on time.

**Tom Brake:** Will the Minister clarify one point? She said that at some point in the future—perhaps she will speculate on when—compensation might kick in after 15 minutes. Given that only 80% of TOCs have currently signed up to Delay Repay, does she expect 100% of them to sign up to that new, enhanced system for 15-minute delays?

**Claire Perry:** The current intention is to put Delay Repay in the franchising commitments. Delay Repay may cover 80% of the TOCs, but the vast majority of passengers are covered by it.

I want to say a few words about the ORR super-complaint. It is absolutely right that something that is clearly not working for consumers is picked up by Which?—a great organisation—and I have met Which? to discuss the super-complaint. My expectation of what will come out of it is that there will be a clearer understanding of who is ultimately responsible for sanctioning companies that do not pay compensation. Companies do pay compensation: there is very little evidence that they do not pay customers who are entitled to it, but the process is tortuous and much more difficult than it should be. We absolutely expect that, through a combination of the ORR, the Department for Transport and normal consumer measures, the situation will improve. Compensation will continue to improve, and pressure will be applied to ensure it is paid to those who need it. We are absolutely committed to driving up performance on this vital part of Britain's railways.

However, I want to say a final word about the cost of rail fares, which the right hon. Gentleman rightly mentioned. In fact, a season ticket from Carshalton costs £1,676 a year, not including a travelcard. That is only £6.45 a journey, which is not necessarily a huge amount, but people need to feel that that is money well spent and that they will have a reliable journey for that amount.

By the way, that is why we have frozen rail fares at RPI plus zero for the duration of this Parliament, which is the first time that has happened in many years. While the disruption is going on, we do not want rail fares to outstrip wage inflation, as has happened for the past few years. For the first time in a decade, wages are rising quite a lot faster than rail fares.

Fundamentally, we are making a record level of investment in the railways, but unless passengers see and feel the benefits, both in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency and right across the country, that investment is not delivering. We are determined to make sure it delivers.

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.29 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

Thursday 4 February 2016

[MRS CHERYL GILLAN *in the Chair*]

## BACKBENCH BUSINESS

### Preventing Violence Against Women: Role of Men

1.30 pm

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the role of men in preventing violence against women.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan.

I am proud to be an ambassador for the white ribbon campaign, which was started by men to help to end the scourge of violence against women by encouraging men to take responsibility for the issue. I am proud that this is the first debate held in Westminster looking specifically at what men can do to end violence against women. I am not proud that in the 21st century, in this highly developed country of ours, a woman suffers an incident of domestic abuse every 22 seconds.

Some 1.4 million women were abused by a partner in 2013-14, and the vast majority of those cases were not reported to the police. In addition, 28% of women report that they have suffered abuse in the home since turning 16. The horrific scale of those figures highlights the size of the problem, so I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for granting us the opportunity to bring this important issue to Westminster Hall. I also thank the hon. Members for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) and for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) for supporting the application.

My contribution to the debate will focus largely on male violence against women. I do not wish to imply that men are not victims of domestic violence; they are. However, the vast majority—about 80%—of domestic violence cases are perpetrated by men on women. All of us in the House should be concerned that the incidence of male victims of domestic violence in Scotland is on the rise, increasing from 11% of all victims in 2005-06 to 18% in 2014-15. Parliament may want to debate that important subject in the future, but today we are debating violence against women.

There have been significant positive legislative steps both north and south of the border, and the Scottish Government currently have an open consultation on establishing a new domestic abuse offence. It is hoped that the offence will be similar to, but wider in scope than, the new law recently enacted in England and Wales. Alongside physical abuse, the offence may include acts that are not currently viewed as criminal in the eyes of the law, including abusive behaviour that is likely to cause a victim to suffer psychological harm. That behaviour includes the deprivation of liberty and autonomy; isolating an individual from friends, family and wider society; withholding or controlling access to resources, including

money; psychological control and manipulation; threats and the creation of a climate of fear, including threats towards children; and controlling or withholding access to healthcare, education or employment opportunities. The move would be welcome, and it follows on from the introduction of the Abusive Behaviour and Sexual Harm (Scotland) Bill and of Clare's law, which allows people to contact the police and request information on a partner's background if they suspect him of a history of domestic abuse.

I have been asked by some why I am so interested in the issue. The truth is that until a few months ago, I was not. I had not realised that the statistics were so shocking, and I had not even heard of the white ribbon campaign. In September last year, I was playing rugby for Parliament's Commons and Lords team. I actually only played for three minutes before I was carted off to A&E for what was eventually diagnosed as a bruise, which is quite embarrassing in rugby. When I eventually went back to the ground, we were posing for pictures and someone put a lapel badge on me. I did not know what it was, but it was put on my shirt by a team mate. If I were allowed to say that that team mate is now sitting in the Public Gallery, I would, but I am not allowed to say that so I will not. He put the badge on me and we all smiled for the pictures, but I thought, "I'd better look this up." I was a new MP, and the *Daily Mail* does not need any excuses to write stories about Scottish National party MPs so, just to make sure I researched the badge straight away and was pleased to discover the white ribbon campaign.

In further research, I discovered the shocking statistics. Like many others, I had just assumed that domestic abuse was on the decrease, but I was shocked to discover that it was not. The fact was, I had been involved in politics at an activist level for such a long time and I had played rugby—where the white ribbon campaign is fully active—for 17 or 18 years, yet I had not heard of the campaign, so I thought I would use my voice as a new MP.

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate, and I am delighted to be working with him on this important campaign. I am sorry to hear of his experience with the Commons and Lords rugby team, and I apologise for having to leave the debate early because I am going to the start of the super league season in the other code—rugby league. Does he agree that sports stars such as Ikram Butt—the Leeds, Featherstone and England rugby league star—and strong sporting heroes from all sports are ideal role models for showing that strong men are absolutely against violence against women in all its forms?

**Gavin Newlands:** I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. Later in my speech, I will call on sportsmen, celebrities and MPs—men of all persuasions—to support the white ribbon campaign.

I am a father of two young girls, and I always worry about their futures—about how they will grow up and who they will settle down with when they are much, much older. As a father and as a citizen, I want to do all I can to stamp out the abhorrent use of violence and bullying that puts down and disempowers women, and I will work with anybody from any party in trying to achieve that.

[Gavin Newlands]

In Scotland, the stark economic cost of failing to address domestic violence is said to amount to £1.6 billion. A 2009 study completed by Sylvia Walby of Lancaster University suggested that in England and Wales, domestic abuse alone costs society more than £15 billion a year in costs to services and economic output. However, regardless of the sums involved, failure to tackle domestic violence is simply not an option. The figures that I have just read out do not quantify the human and emotional cost that arises from violence against women.

At the very heart of it, this debate revolves around the premise and reality of equality. Some argue that we live in an equal society, that men and women are treated equally and that young girls are provided with the same opportunities as their male counterparts. Those people are sadly wrong. We are not living in an equal society, and still today, in the 21st century, too many men think they are in a position to overpower women and treat them as they see fit.

In England and Wales, abusive partners cost the lives of two women every week. Back home, Police Scotland spends 20% of its operational time dealing with instances of domestic violence. Domestic rape almost doubled in 2013-14, with an increase of 81%. Politicians are known to bandy about figures and statistics, and I do not intend to use too many more, but these are not just numbers; they are horrific and often life-changing experiences suffered by women across the country. The statistics show that we do not live in an equal society. They indicate that for too many women, this is still a broken society. With one voice, this Parliament should say, "Enough is enough."

If there were any doubt that this debate is needed, by chance it falls in the week in which we have witnessed an angry outcry across the UK about the ridiculous and attention-seeking pro-rape blogger Roosh V. This small, pathetic excuse of a man has some of the most abhorrent views that I have come across, and is endangering the lives of women to further his own career. The views he expresses highlight the long journey that we still have to travel to ensure real, not perceived, equality for women.

A lot of good work is being done to tackle the effects of domestic violence and to enable authorities to charge and convict offenders. Efforts to prevent it from occurring in the first place have also increased. Both the UK and Scottish Governments are committed to eradicating domestic violence from our society and have adopted preventive strategies in combating it.

In 2010, the coalition Government launched their strategy entitled "A Call to End Violence against Women and Girls", which committed to challenging the attitudes and behaviours that cause many women and girls to live in fear. The strategy is aimed at providing the authorities with the tools that they need to bring perpetrators to justice. The desire behind it is to adopt a partnership approach to preventing violence from happening in the first place. That is the correct approach to take—working across organisational boundaries to achieve a common goal. We need to intervene early, preventing violent acts against women from becoming the norm and working with all bodies to help eradicate domestic violence from our society. I will come back to the subject of prevention work.

The UK Government are providing funding to local groups that perform services that help to tackle violence against women. However, earlier this week Women's Aid informed me that the current crisis funding for women's refuges in England will come to an end on 31 March. The Minister sidestepped this question in the Chamber this morning, but when she responds, will she commit to a long-term, sustainable funding solution for women's refuges?

**Dr Rupa Huq** (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech. He talks about cuts to services. Does he agree that the Government are often clever in defraying those cuts on to local government? In my borough, Southall Black Sisters does very good work for black and minority ethnic communities on issues such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation and the impact of religion and culture. The organisation is being stifled at the moment because the grant to Ealing Council has been cut drastically, which is affecting its ability to deliver those services.

**Gavin Newlands:** Absolutely. It is often the people who need such services the most who suffer as a result of cuts. I will return to funding, but the hon. Lady's remarks are welcome.

I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government share the approach of seeking to intervene early and to work with others to help create a society in which women and girls are free from abuse. The "Equally Safe" strategy, launched in partnership with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, is aimed at preventing and eradicating violence against women and girls, and creating a strong and flourishing Scotland where all individuals are equally safe and respected. One positive aspect of the strategy is that it not only sets out to prevent violence against women from ever occurring, but seeks to address the daily inequalities and injustice that women face.

The Scottish Government have supported the strategy with sizeable financial support. In March 2015 the First Minister announced that £20 million would be invested in a range of measures to address all forms of violence against women and girls, in addition to the £11.8 million provided as part of the Scottish Government's equality budget for 2015-16. More than £2 million of that funding has been allocated to prosecutors and the courts service to ensure that cases involving abuse are heard more quickly. Some £1.8 million has been awarded to Rape Crisis Scotland over the next three years to allow it to expand its advocacy services across the country, including by having rape crisis services in Orkney and Shetland for the first time. Less than a week ago, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Communities and Pensioners' Rights, Alex Neil, announced a further £0.5 million to help build stronger and more resilient women's support groups across Scotland by helping to improve their infrastructure.

That investment by the Scottish Government amounts to a 62% increase on the previous Administration. Last week, during a hearing organised by the all-party parliamentary group on domestic violence, many groups raised concerns about funding for the services that they provide. Can the Minister assure those groups that not only will their funding not be cut but that they might see similar uplifts to the ones their Scottish counterparts have received?

I have spoken about prevention and about adopting a joined-up approach to addressing the issue, and I have said that eight out of 10 cases of domestic violence are committed by men on women. That basic premise is what led me to secure this debate. For the past few months I have been proud to be an ambassador for the white ribbon campaign, a worldwide organisation with active groups both north and south of the border. The campaign concentrates on working with men to speak out and challenge male violence against women. It urges men and boys to wear a white ribbon and sign a personal pledge never to commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women. Some 25,000 men have signed up to that pledge, and last year I tabled an early-day motion calling on all Members to support the work of the white ribbon campaign. I make that call again today and urge all MPs to sign the pledge, but this is not just about increasing the number of pledges; it is about creating positive male role models.

Other MPs have been long-standing supporters of the white ribbon campaign, including the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland), who tabled an early-day motion in November welcoming its 10th anniversary. As MPs, we need to show leadership on this issue. As public figures and representatives, we have a duty to lead by example. Not only should we sign the pledge ourselves, but we should recruit others to the cause. I urge all MPs to go back to their constituency and draw up a list of 20 male figures who are influencers in their local community. They could be faith leaders, community activists, business owners, teachers, sportsmen or celebrities. Target those individuals and urge them to support the white ribbon campaign and to pledge to challenge violence against women in whatever form it takes.

Unfortunately, unlike in Australia, Ireland and Scotland, where central Governments have helped to fund the white ribbon campaign, the UK body receives no state funding. The Government might be interested in learning more about the white ribbon campaign's work, and I invite the Minister to meet me and representatives of the campaign to learn more about its campaigns and to look at ways in which the UK Government might be able to support that work.

Other organisations are working with young boys to prevent violence against women. That is the key battleground in prevention, and one project that I want to spend time talking about involves going into schools and working with pupils on the issue of violence against women. It might shock Members—it certainly shocked me—to learn that police figures suggest that between 2012 and 2015, more than 5,500 sexual offences were recorded in schools, including 600 rapes. That is an appalling state of affairs and underlines the point that much more preventive action is required.

We need to understand the reasons why a young boy grows up to commit such violent acts. I believe that no one is born a violent person, but along the way something happens that makes them become a violent individual. Working with schools is one way that we can help to address that issue. In 2012, the End Violence Against Women coalition published a schools guide to address violence against women and girls, which includes a factsheet setting out the different forms of abuse that women and girls disproportionately experience. The guide helps parents, students and local women's groups

to work with their schools to promote girls' safety. The coalition also accepts that we need to intervene early to prevent violence against women from ever occurring and, in addition to producing its schools guide, it has called on the Government to commit to long-term investment in public campaigns to change harmful attitudes and behaviours; and to ensure that all survivors of abuse have specialist support, whether or not they report it.

The End Violence Against Women coalition's young people's service focuses on interventions with young people who use violence and abuse in close relationships. That work targets young people aged between 10 and 25 years old and focuses on relationship abuse, parent violence and abusive behaviour within the family. That is an important area of work as it helps to change young people's attitudes and behaviours and create more positive relationships between young men and their peers.

Some fantastic work is being done in schools by teachers and by groups such as Respect, which goes into schools to intervene when there are signs of abusive behaviour. However, a lot of that necessary work is interventional in nature. We should be looking to use the expertise of groups such as Women's Aid, the white ribbon campaign and others by letting them go into our schools early and often to speak to young children about relationships, respect and domestic violence. There is evidence to suggest that boys' attitudes harden when they reach their teenage years, so to get through to them, engagement needs to be either early in high school or later on in primary school, or in my opinion, both.

Will the Minister expand on some of the other work going on in schools that is aimed at preventing violence against women? That is an important area, as we want our boys to treat girls with respect and as equals from a young age. Can she assure us that she will consider implementing a formal national programme of engagement, rather than the current fractured localised work? I would also like her to respond to the calls from Women's Aid and others for the Government to make sex and relationships education and personal, social, health and economic education a statutory part of the national curriculum. That would help to ensure that all boys and girls had the opportunity to learn about healthy, mutually respectful communication and the meaning of consent, and to be encouraged to develop broader, more flexible gender roles.

The Government have made progress and have done reasonably well in some areas, but they need a helpful shove in others. If we are to achieve the success that we all want in ending violence against women, we need an effective justice system that truly understands the issue and punishes those who commit such atrocious acts. That includes working with those who are serving time in the justice system as a result of committing violent acts against women.

Respect works with perpetrators of domestic violence, and as well as running an advice service for male victims of domestic violence, it runs a series of specialist domestic violence prevention services. Those services focus on changing perpetrators' behaviour and managing their risk, and the safety of victims, including children, is at

[Gavin Newlands]

their heart. Such services help to prevent repeat cases of domestic violence and help us gain knowledge of why people resort to violence in the first place.

A four-year study conducted in the United States evaluating a similar service to Respect's specialist domestic violence services showed a clear de-escalation of re-assault and other forms of abuse over time, with the vast majority of men reaching sustained non-violence. The services that Respect provides are extremely important, and I urge the Government to work with it, because we need to do more work with perpetrators. We need to help change their behaviour to prevent repeated abuse and to gain knowledge of the causes of domestic violence. All perpetrators of domestic abuse should be encouraged to enter rehabilitation programmes during and after their incarceration.

My final point is about the ratification, or lack thereof, of the Istanbul convention. The Government signed that document on 8 June 2012. Three and a half years is a long time to delay ratifying something to which they have already agreed. This morning, the Minister reassured us that the convention will be ratified once the one remaining issue with the devolved Administrations is resolved. What is that issue, and is she in a position to give Members an indication of when it will be resolved so that ratification can take place? The convention is important as it argues that no single agency or institution can address violence against women alone. The legally binding framework stresses the need for partnership working, intervening early and having a series of integrated policies that stretch across all Government Departments and across sectors. Ratifying the convention will send a clear and strong message about the UK Government's commitment to eradicating violence against women from our society.

Tackling and defeating violence against women is one of the rare issues that unifies this Parliament. However, we should not allow that consensus to foster complacency. There are still too many women who are afraid of doing or saying anything at home in fear of violent repercussions. There are still too many young teenage girls in abusive relationships who are too afraid to get out of them. There are still too many children who go to bed at night and cannot sleep because they hear the violence that is poisoning their home. I for one have had enough. I pledge never to commit, condone or remain silent about men's violence against women in all its forms. Today, as Members of this House, we must resolve that we can, should and must do more combat the abhorrent violence inflicted on women in homes across our constituencies and across the UK. It is an inexcusable shame and a national scandal that these violent acts persist in our society. We have a duty to fight back and eradicate this scourge once and for all.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair):** Order. I intend to call the other two movers of the motion now, starting with Mr Andrew Percy.

1.50 pm

**Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan. I apologise that I must leave this debate early. I mean no discourtesy

to the House, but I am chair of a governing body and we are discussing the new school uniform this evening, which is somewhat controversial, so I must be there.

It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands); I agreed with much of his speech. Given the time constraints and the fact that I am leaving early, I shall endeavour not to repeat much of it. I pay tribute to him and to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips), who also sponsored the motion. I have been a member of and an ambassador for the white ribbon campaign for two or three years now; it is great to see them here at this debate. The issue is important.

Having said that I would not repeat what the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North said, I will now do so. We are aware that domestic violence does not affect only women; in fact, sadly, sometimes when I have posted on social media about this particular campaign, I have been instantly attacked by people saying, "Ah, but what about the men who are victims?" Nobody involved in any of these campaigns is trying to brush that under the carpet. We know that it is not the case that all women are victims, or that all men are perpetrators, but it is a fact that the majority of people who suffer domestic violence are women, and the campaign seeks to address one particular element of that: the role that men can play in tackling violence against women.

Actually, as the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North said, it is about men and boys, because boys are an important part of the campaign. I know as a former high school teacher that unfortunately, teenage boys in our communities sometimes have views of women and girls that are entrenched from an early age. It used to sadden me often in the community where I taught. It was a difficult community; we had considerable social problems. Unfortunately, one of the biggest problems that we had to deal with was boys' views of women and girls, often because the person they came up against most in their lives, such as their primary caregiver, was a woman. Their behaviour towards them became unacceptable, and their view of women was concerning. We used to deal with that quite a lot.

I am open-minded about personal, social, health and economic education—I used to teach it—but I am not sure that it has a particular impact or value in schools. As a result of the new workload agreement, it is often not taught by teachers but delivered by others within the school. Unfortunately, when a subject is not examined—even when it is statutory, as religious education is throughout the English curriculum—the priority given to it by the school and the quality with which it is delivered are sometimes questionable. I would argue that equality should be embedded throughout the school curriculum, in both the pastoral role that tutors play and through delivering the curriculum. That is the most effective way to deliver on a theme across schools.

We heard from the hon. Gentleman about the cost of domestic violence, which is estimated at about £23 billion to the United Kingdom and £3.1 billion to employers. Of course, putting a figure on it does not do justice to the real cost of domestic violence, which is human and emotional suffering by the victims and their children. We also heard from him that one in four women will experience physical abuse, and almost half will experience

some form of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking. As he said, two women a week in the United Kingdom are killed in that context.

Although progress has been made, and in many respects it is encouraging that women now feel able to report far more than they used to, it is worrying that back home in Yorkshire, one in five cases of reported domestic violence are not pursued any further. Public interest issues are sometimes claimed, as are other reasons. That is a major concern, but progress has undoubtedly been made. The hon. Gentleman talked about that, so I will not repeat it, but domestic violence has more repeat victims than any other crime in the United Kingdom, and we should bear that in mind.

The hon. Gentleman also outlined much of the Government action that has been taken. I am pleased that this is the sort of debate that unites people across the House. We all want to go in the same direction. We may debate and discuss how to get there—comments have been made about local government funding and all the rest of it—but I think that the issue unites us politically, and we should pay tribute to this Government and the previous Government for the progress that they have made and the action that they have taken on the issue, some of which he reported.

I will not repeat what he said, but I will mention my local authority. The reason why I became a white ribbon ambassador involves Steven Marshall, the South Australian Liberal leader, of all people, who is a good friend. I noticed that he was involved with the white ribbon campaign in Australia. I thought that it looked like a thoroughly good thing to do. He signed up on behalf not only of his constituents and his party but ultimately, if his party forms one, of the Government, to support the campaign. I thought that that seemed sensible, which is why I approached the white ribbon campaign a couple of years ago to ask how we could engage in it better in my own area. My area is served by two local authorities: the East Riding of Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire.

I approached our leader—Baroness Redfern, as she now is—in North Lincolnshire and asked if she would sign up the council to become a white ribbon council and Scunthorpe to become a white ribbon town. She was pleased to do so. I encourage other Members to ask their local authorities to do the same. Local authorities are already undoubtedly spending a lot of money and engaging a lot of time and effort to tackle domestic violence, but what the white ribbon campaign can bring is important, including getting councils to rethink how they view the issue.

We have engaged Scunthorpe United, which I am pleased to say has now hosted us for two signings. However, it is not just about signing up, getting an award and all the rest of it; it is about what the local authority is actually doing. My authority is now rewriting all its policies, and there are some progressive examples that would read across to other authorities. The entire domestic violence policy is being reviewed in light of the white ribbon campaign.

Importantly, the council is also reviewing its code of conduct for employees. The current code of conduct states that employees must not behave in work or outside work in a way that calls into question their suitability to work for the council. We do not think that that is tightly defined enough, so the local authority is seeking to

make it absolutely clear by writing it into the code of conduct that any employee who engages in domestic violence is never suitable to work in North Lincolnshire. I would say that they are not suitable to work anywhere, particularly if they deal with other vulnerable people.

When commissioning and procuring services, the council will ensure that the principles of the white ribbon campaign are written into new contracts as much as possible, so that anybody with whom the council contracts is aware of them too. The council is also considering a youth engagement strategy, which is important. I agree with what the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North said. I know what it is like, as a former teenage lad and a teacher of teenage lads. The people they look up to are, frankly, not Members of Parliament. I am sure that the public generally look up to and respect Members of Parliament, but a really good way to teenage lads is their role models in sport—in the local football team, in rugby and, I hope, increasingly in American football, a proper sport. That is how to engage lads of a particular age, which is why a youth engagement programme run by the local authority with sports teams—not just football, but other sport clubs—is important.

There is no doubt that in northern Lincolnshire, we have a big ethnic and minority population who can be difficult to reach on this issue. We have teams operating in those communities, and the council is looking to engage them to find role models there as well, which will be important. Getting the local leaders to take a stand is important, so we have engaged with people in business and local solicitors, and we are encouraging all the elected members in the cabinet to sign up and become ambassadors for the campaign. Then, of course, there is the training for staff and all the rest of it, which is so important.

There is a lot that the council can do. I am really interested to see whether one idea comes to fruition. It is to consider a graduate placement or apprenticeship opportunity in this field, specifically to promote the white ribbon campaign in North Lincolnshire, which I think would be really innovative.

A lot is being done; there is a lot more that could be done. Local authorities have a really big role to play in this area, as do schools. The NHS is also important, because one issue that still comes up repeatedly is whether or not the training on domestic violence provided within the health system is as widespread or as sufficient as it should be.

I will not say much more than that, Madam—Mrs Gillan. It is a pleasure to take part in this debate. I believe that this issue unites the House. As I have said, a lot is being done. I pay particular tribute to the white ribbon campaign. If we can get Government working more closely with campaigns such as that, it will be all for the better. I agree that we need to look at the Istanbul convention and consider where we are with that.

There is a real leadership role here for Government, but we will never tackle this problem from the top down; we will tackle it from the bottom up. That means men taking a stand and making it absolutely clear that we will not remain silent whenever there is domestic abuse or violence perpetrated against women, or tolerate it. We have a responsibility. Those of us who are not involved and never will be involved in domestic violence

[Andrew Percy]

have a responsibility to make it absolutely clear to those of our gender who are involved that we will not stay silent if they engage in that sort of behaviour.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair):** I call the other sponsor of the motion, Jess Phillips.

2.1 pm

**Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab):** Thank you for calling me to speak, Mrs Gillan—Madam Gillan—the many variations on what you have been called today—

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair):** Order. Madam Chairman or Mrs Gillan will do.

**Jess Phillips:** Madam Chairman, Mrs Gillan, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairship.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair):** Thank you.

**Jess Phillips:** When we look at the fight to stop violence against women in the UK, we see protest after protest by women: reclaiming the night; laying down red shoes to signify the women murdered at the hands of their partners; and women with banners and signs. I know from all my work and from endless academic studies that tackling women's rights issues here and around the world is always best organised and best realised when women self-advocate. We will not be given a break; we will have to take it. I know that men should not lead this fight, but we women will achieve nothing without the world's men joining in and helping us.

It is a shame that I have to say this, but I am glad that, as a man, the previous speaker—the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy)—also felt he had to say it. Time and time again, people with egg-faces on Twitter accuse me of thinking that all men are rapists. So, for the record, I will say that I do not think that all men are rapists. I am sure that it is strange for many people out there to hear that I am married to a man, and I have never said that I think all men are rapists, regardless of how many times it has been quoted as something that I have said.

I do not think all men are sexist and I do not think that all men commit violence against women, or against anyone for that matter. Most men are absolutely smashing. Most men would gladly stand up, shoulder to shoulder with their sisters, and demand better. In fact, in a recent Survation poll undertaken by the Fawcett Society, nearly nine in every 10 men surveyed said that they wanted women to have equality in all areas of their lives, which was a higher proportion than the proportion of women who said that. The truth is that men out there want equality, and now we have to help them to act on that.

Unfortunately, a very tiny minority of very vocal men are not like that. A tiny minority of men rape women; a minority of men hit their partners. In any group, there is a tiny minority who let the majority down. It is the same tiny minority of men who get incredibly defensive when women speak up about this issue. I am here to say to them, "Dude, don't always assume that we're talking about you."

It would be fair to say that sometimes I can be clumsy with my words. Sometimes, my emotions and frustration pour out in words that perhaps I should consider just a little more, but I get angry because it is an unpalatable truth that women are sexually harassed and assaulted and physically abused hundreds and hundreds of times every day in this country, and always have been. For every man who has tweeted me, emailed me and called my office this week to say that that is total rubbish, three times as many women have sent me messages telling me their experiences. The most wonderfully heartening messages this week, and I think they were the messages that I received most frequently, were those from hundreds of men showing their support for the women in this country.

Violence against women is not something that just happens on a TV drama or in one section of society; it is everywhere. I have worked with women who have the most horrific tales to tell and I have tried to retell their stories; stories of rape as a weapon of war, and stories of a life of torture and fear. This violence exists—it happens—but the reality of violence against women is far less bombastic, and far more pedestrian and everyday, and that is what people find so hard to believe.

Here are some of the stories from my life, and from the lives of others who have been in touch with me this week. I will start with my own story.

When I was 19, I was having a drink in a bar and a man pinned me against the wall, and stuck his hand up my skirt and inside my knickers, in full view of all of his mates. I slapped him in the face, as I am sure everybody in this room today would expect me to do, and I was thrown out of the bar, even though I told the security staff what had happened. The man and his mates laughed at me as I was ejected. I was terrified, and I am sad to say that that was the not the one and only time that I have been terrified by a member of a tiny minority.

Following my recent outing on "Question Time"—an occasion when my words could possibly have been chosen better—I received hundreds of messages from around the country. Here are just some of them:

"I was dancing on the dance floor. A group of lads started to lift up my skirt and try to pull down my pants. I just walked away."

"I am a beautician and I was in a consulting room with a client. He asked me if I offered extra. I said no, he exposed himself to me and started to masturbate. I asked him to stop, he said sorry, he couldn't control himself. I am visibly pregnant. It didn't stop him. He's been in since as if nothing happened."

"I was on the tube this week. A man kept putting his hand on top of mine on the rail, every time I moved it he did it again. I moved my hand, to tip-toe and reach the handle above me. I'm not tall so it was difficult. He then stood so close behind me that his groin rubbed against me. I couldn't do anything."

"I stopped going to clubs because I was fed up of being touched inappropriately by strangers. Now, as a barmaid, I just have to deal with 'banter' in a work context!"

"I first got my bottom groped in a pub when I was 15. I thought nothing of it. When I was 20, I woke up from a nap on a long-haul flight to find the man in the neighbouring seat with his hand inside my blanket. I was too shocked to respond."

She said she just sat there with him the whole way. She continued:

"At 21, I was on a train when a man knelt on the floor in front of me and ran his hands up my legs—again, I did nothing."

This story is from a teacher:

“Last week in the corridor at school, I overheard a girl tell her boyfriend to wait while she just went to the loo. After she walked off, the boy’s two mates laughed at him. One said to another, ‘Don’t let her order you around, keep that bitch on a leash.’ They were 14.”

My story and every one of the hundreds of stories that I have read this week have one thing in common—the victim never mentioned the incident to their parents, their partners and certainly not the police. Figures will never show the reality; this is just part of our everyday normal life. Women shrug it off—“Just one of those things.” For most women, this is an accepted part of life; we think of it as an annoyance. Having to tell a man, and I have done this repeatedly in my life, “No, I don’t want to get into your car”, is a pain but no biggie.

I have met girls who did get in the car. Certain men know where to look for the vulnerable girls who will get in. They are the girls in Rotherham, Rochdale, Oxford and—before we congratulate our own areas—pretty much every town and city pretty much everywhere in the country.

Violence against women is everywhere; on every street, a woman is taking a beating, or just keeping quiet and waiting for the ordeal to be over. In every nightspot in the country, some teenage girl is being groped and shamed. Every school in the country has a kid whose time there is respite from what they see at home. When a problem is everywhere, we need everyone to join in the fight to stop it.

The first part of this fight is for us to ask the question a lot more. I ask every person in this room, both men and women, to ask the women in their lives—their daughters, wives, sisters and friends—if they have ever been frightened by the behaviour of a man. You will be shocked and surprised by what you hear.

We need action. We need every man who sees his mate touching a woman’s bottom to speak up—don’t laugh; it is not just one of those things. We need every man who hears another man referring to a woman as a worthless bitch, a whore or a slag to speak up. No man should ever let the statement, “She was asking for it”, pass without comment. If men think their mates, their sons or their dads are being a bit lairy, tell them to pack it in. Most of all, when a woman says, “It happens,” do not tell her she is wrong. Do not think that it means she thinks all men are like it or that it means she thinks you are like it. Just listen.

The white ribbon campaign is brilliant. It gives a space for men to pledge to fight against violence. If every man who was on our side spoke up, it would drown out the very loud minority who do not support women’s rights. As I am speaking, hundreds of the noisy men are taking to the internet right now to shout at me and say things like, “She wishes someone wanted to rape her”. Let us not let them be the voice that stands out.

Here in Parliament, I have been proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with men in the fight to protect refuge funding. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) and my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith) have fought valiantly to protect domestic violence refuges across the country. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) dedicated much of his previous life as the Director of

Public Prosecutions to improving the harrowing situation for victims of domestic and sexual violence in the criminal courts. He now stands shoulder to shoulder with me and the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) and many of our female colleagues from all parts of the House in trying to improve how women and children cope with the family courts.

**Dr Huq:** My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. She referred to the courts. Last week, the Court of Appeal found against the bedroom tax for discriminating against domestic violence victims. Does she agree that it beggars belief that the Government seem more intent on fighting that decision than protecting those victims and compensating them?

**Jess Phillips:** I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. There is one particular man seemingly fronting up the case to take the issue back to the courts and to try to damage women who have been put in specialist supportive accommodation. I ask that particular man, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, to stand with me and pledge, as part of being a white ribbon ambassador, to do his bit to stand against violence against women. Unfortunately, I fear that that request will fall on deaf ears.

Our network of specialist services is under threat, and I ask everyone in this place to stand with us and fight for them. I ask Ministers today, as my colleague from over the border, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North, asked, to answer how we can make our safe spaces and refuges sustainable for the future so that they are not merely living hand to mouth every year. I ask all the men in Parliament and Parliament itself to sign up to the white ribbon pledge. How councils have done that and the definite beneficial effects have been outlined.

This is not an us and them issue for women and men. Women fighting for their rights to live free from violence are not attacking men; they are defending women. The more men who join us in the fight against violence against women, the less it will happen. More women will speak up and more women will be free to go out dancing, to settle down with a partner and to live full lives. We must encourage every woman who suffers violence to report it to the police. I wish I had. All I ask of every man is simple: please just tell us that you believe us. Otherwise, we will just keep keeping it secret; just taking it as if we deserve it. I want to give a massive thank you to the men in the Chamber and especially to my colleague the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North for calling the debate. Men are brilliant, funny, kind and caring. We do not just want them in our lives, we want them in our fight, too.

2.14 pm

**Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con):** I want to speak about one specific issue: the need for this country to have a sex buyer law. Sex buyers are a key reason why vulnerable young women are lured by traffickers into Britain to be brutally exploited in the sex trade. They are a key reason why sexual slavery is worth at least £130 million annually in the UK. They are a key reason why in 2016 we must continue our fight against human trafficking. One way to do that would be to criminalise paying for sex. At this stage, I pay tribute to the Minister

[Fiona Bruce]

for all the work she has done in the fight against human trafficking, and I know she continues to work on that and that she will be listening carefully to what I have to say.

Even if they do not agree on many other issues—the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) and I have smiled about such disagreements on more than one occasion—no one of fair mind could fail to be moved by the heartrending accounts of young girls lured to the country by the promise of work in a nail bar or a hairdresser, only to have their passport confiscated by the person who accompanied them through passport control. Often that person is an apparently charming young man who suddenly changes once they reach this country. He takes her to a place where she is effectively imprisoned, and then she is repeatedly, horrendously abused. She is often fed with drugs and often raped by several men until she is broken down. She is then told that to repay the debt she owes for having entered this country, and effectively to gain her freedom, she must service countless other men for an interminable time. I say countless; one anti-trafficking organisation that I know well and does excellent work supporting such victims told me of one girl who decided that she would count the number of men she was forced to service with sex in one day. It was more than 100.

Most men do not pay for sex, but most of those who do pay for sex are men. Many men recognise that transaction—paid-for sex—for what it is: sexual exploitation. Sex buyers are the critical link in the human trafficking chain, so far as these women who are exploited are concerned. If we can break that link, we can do so much to change their situation and the lives of countless other young women who otherwise will continue to be exploited and brought into this country in that way.

Right now, paying for sex in this country is legal. As Alan Caton, a former detective superintendent of Suffolk constabulary, said:

“Sex buyers feel the current law gives them licence to exploit vulnerable women—and they are right.”

We have to remove that licence to exploit. The legality of paying for sex is a crucial factor in whether a country is an appealing destination for sex traffickers. An analysis of up to 150 countries found that reported human trafficking inflows were bigger—much bigger in some cases—in countries where prostitution is legal. Countries such as the Netherlands and Germany which have legalised paid-for prostitution now face the challenge of continued exploitation and high rates of trafficking. A retired police detective from Germany has described the country as a traffickers’ magnet and a

“centre for the sexual exploitation of young women from Eastern Europe, as well as a sphere of activity for organised crime groups from around the world.”

In a moment, I will explain why there is such a contrast between such countries and countries where paid-for prostitution has been criminalised.

Britain needs a sex buyer law: a three-pronged legal framework that criminalises paying for sex, decriminalises selling sex—we have to recognise that these women are victims—and supports those who are exploited through the sex trade to exit. When Stephen Harper’s Government

introduced that approach in 2014, Peter MacKay, Canada’s former Justice Minister, explained that those who are paid for sex are decriminalised

“not because it authorizes or allows selling it, but rather because it treats sellers as victims of sexual exploitation, victims who need assistance in leaving prostitution and not punishment for the exploitation they’ve endured”.

Such a law here in the UK would send out a strong message, backed by legislative sanctions, that to exploit a person by trafficking them for sex is totally unacceptable and that those who do so will face consequences.

Sweden was the first country to adopt the sex buyer law in 1999. Under that law, by which it is an offence to buy sex, there have been approximately 3,000 convictions. The message has gone out loud and clear that there is no point trafficking people to Sweden to sell sex. Conversations between traffickers have been intercepted in which they have said, “Don’t bother sex trafficking to Sweden.” An official evaluation of its impact noted in 2010 that,

“according to the National Criminal Police, it is clear that the ban on the purchase of sexual services acts as a barrier to human traffickers and procurers considering establishing themselves in Sweden.”

Norway followed suit by adopting the sex buyer law in 2009. Again, an assessment of the law’s impact, which was commissioned by the Norwegian Government, concluded:

“A reduced market and increased law enforcement posit larger risks for human traffickers. The profit from human trafficking is...reduced due to these factors. The law has thus affected important pull factors and reduced the extent of human trafficking in Norway in comparison to a situation without a law.”

The nation to most recently adopt the sex buyer law was Northern Ireland. Proposed by Lord Morrow in his Human Trafficking and Exploitation Bill, it entered into force in June 2015. At a parliamentary event that I chaired to mark its introduction, I had the privilege of listening to the powerful testimony of prostitution survivor Mia de Faoite, who had testified before Northern Ireland’s Committee for Justice during their deliberations on the legislation. She very movingly told us that

“prostitution is the systematic stripping of one’s human dignity, and I know that because I have lived and witnessed it.”

Mia spent six years in prostitution on the streets of Dublin. The sex buyer law, she said,

“is about the protection of human dignity”

and

“the protection of freedom”.

As a member of the Modern Slavery Bill Committee in 2014, it was clear to me that to end sexual slavery we must end the demand driving it. That requires adopting a sex buyer law. Although the Modern Slavery Bill did not offer the legislative vehicle for this reform—the Committee did discuss it—it is crucial that we now move quickly to provide one. As I said in Parliament when speaking on that Committee,

“the majority of people who sell themselves for sex are incredibly vulnerable and subject to real exploitation.”

Whether or not they have been trafficked, they are

“often homeless, living in care and suffering from debt, substance abuse or violence. They have often experienced some form of coercion either through trafficking or from a partner, pimp or relative.”—[*Official Report, Modern Slavery Public Bill Committee*, 4 September 2014; c. 203.]

In adopting this reform, we would bust a business model for pimps and stop Britain being a lucrative destination for sex traffickers.

I welcome the Home Affairs Committee's current inquiry into prostitution laws. It is possible to obtain a consensus across parties on this issue, and I hope that MPs of all parties will support the proposed sex buyer law and take this opportunity to stand up for vulnerable women from across the UK and, indeed, the world.

2.22 pm

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): It is genuinely a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship here today, Mrs Gillan. I am also grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) for securing this debate.

The debate is timely, given all that has transpired in Scotland over the past week and the media coverage that has focused on a certain individual whom we have come to know as Roosh V: a name that many people would not have been aware of until this week. Judging by the overwhelmingly negative public reaction to his media coverage, I can confidently declare that the vast majority of men are appalled at his suggestion that rape should be legal on private property. Roosh V's views are clearly abhorrent, but the events organised in his name offer us an important reminder. No matter how much progress we have made or continue to make on preventing violence against women, we can never become complacent.

Unfortunately, the views of too many men remain stubbornly fixed in the ancient past, and sometimes such views will become uncomfortably apparent to us. We have all been there when—some day, some place—a person makes a joke that we find offensive. When we do not laugh or we perhaps express our dismay, the response is usually the same: “It's just a joke”. However, we know better; it is not just a joke. It is a reflection of something deeply hidden: a misplaced and perhaps unintended view against a person, situation or aspect of life that we believe is not suitable to be mocked or laughed at.

Why is it, though, that I believe one thing and another person can be comfortable believing another? You may think in this Parliament that we might have a greater understanding of a person's views and how they originate. After all, we as parliamentarians spend practically all our waking moments expressing our views, opinions and beliefs. But dissecting an opinion into its constituent parts to find the root cause is not an exact science. And so we all go on, stumbling in the dark, trying to understand the human condition.

What makes a man violent? What makes a man violent against a woman? Is it nature or nurture? Is violence a fundamental part of the male psyche? Does it emanate from prehistoric times when the leader of the tribe felt that violence was an acceptable tool at his disposal? If that were a simple truth, all men would be violent against women, and we know that that is not the case. So, rather than making excuses for the unforgivable behaviour of a minority of men, we need to address nurture and the reasons why some men are violent.

Violence is a choice. It is something undertaken by some men who continue to accept outdated views of women: views that should never have been tolerated in the first place. Other factors undoubtedly contribute to this choice, whether that is mental health issues, stress or substance abuse. Studies also suggest that exposure to domestic violence as a child increases the likelihood that an individual may be violent within their own family. We should be adamant, however, that while it is

important to understand these factors, they can never be used to excuse or justify violence against women. Equally, we must recognise the scale of the problem, and the ramifications for individuals, families and the country if we fail to take effective action.

The white ribbon campaign reports that one in four women in the UK will experience physical abuse in their lifetime, with almost 1 million children in the UK witnessing domestic violence every year. Across the EU, it is estimated that around 62 million women have experienced physical or sexual violence since the age of 15.

A consultation on a specific offence to tackle domestic abuse across Scotland was launched last December. The consultation is a significant leap forward in tackling domestic abuse in our communities. It will make Scotland world leading in responding to this most heinous of crimes and protecting those who are some of the most vulnerable in our society. Scotland will be one of only a handful of countries across the world to introduce dedicated legislation that will not only capture forms of conduct that are already criminal, but other types of psychological abuse and control that cannot usually be prosecuted under the existing criminal law.

There is also Clare's law, which is being implemented across Scotland. Clare's law allows people to contact the police and request information on their partner's background if they suspect that they have a history of domestic abuse. The scheme was trialled for six months in Ayrshire and Aberdeen, with a total of 59 applications received and 22 disclosures made. Each case is considered carefully by Police Scotland and other agencies to determine whether disclosure is lawful, necessary and proportionate to protect the individual from their partner. The initiative was named after Clare Brown, who was murdered by her violent ex-boyfriend in Greater Manchester in 2009. She was unaware of his history of violence against women. The initiative was brought about as a result of a campaign led by Clare's father, Michael Brown. It is a powerful example of men's constructive role in preventing violence against women.

At a national level, the Scottish Government have shown a firm commitment to tackling domestic abuse. Between 2012 and 2015, more than £34 million has been invested in a range of measures to tackle all forms of violence against women and girls. Although this financial support is welcome, if the Scottish Government, or any Government, are to achieve its long-term goals of bringing about social, cultural and attitudinal change, men need to take a more active and positive role.

The role models of our young men should not be those who threaten and attack women. It must be those who are caring and take their family and community responsibilities seriously. Men are in a unique position to speak out and step in when male friends or relatives insult, abuse or attack women. By doing so, we can create a culture of zero tolerance and a culture that reflects the position of those who think that domestic abuse can never be justified.

Roosh V and his handful of supporters want us to regress to an earlier age. I stand alongside the vast majority of men who reject his views. It is encouraging that a growing number of men are finding their voice on this issue. With effective action, we can permanently change attitudes and ensure that violence against women is consigned to the past for ever.

2.29 pm

**Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab):** My delight at serving under your chairmanship is absolutely undiluted, Mrs Gillan—unless you intervene in some way that I do not like very much. I apologise, because I know it is unusual for a member of the shadow Cabinet to take part in a debate such as this, but I remember that when you were in the shadow Cabinet you used to do so occasionally, so I am following in your footsteps. Indeed, I remember that you took forward a private Member's Bill at one point.

**Mrs Cheryl Gillan (in the Chair):** Mr Bryant, I have called you to speak, and we are looking forward to hearing what you say.

**Chris Bryant:** I wanted to speak in this debate for the simple reason that in my constituency, the Rhondda, probably the single biggest issue that takes up the most police time and causes the most damage to the individuals and the community I seek to represent is domestic violence against women. Every Thursday, Friday and, in particular, Saturday night is a tough night for the police in the south Wales valleys, and certainly in the Rhondda. They often have to deal with issues for many days afterwards. Sometimes things are very complicated because somebody makes a complaint and then wants to withdraw it. There are many complicated issues relating to whether and how the police should pursue such matters, let alone how the Crown Prosecution Service acts. In my 15 years as an MP, the majority of murders in my constituency have involved one partner killing another, and there have been several cases in which the man has killed both his girlfriend, wife or partner, and the child or children. There is no issue that is more important to my constituents. Unfortunately, in recent years we have seen a dramatic rise—by some 23%—in violent crime in Wales, particularly south Wales.

Some weekends are far worse than others for domestic violence in Wales. It is not because of the sport that we all love in Wales, rugby—I do not think there is a direct causal relationship—but it is a simple fact that when there are big international rugby matches on, and sometimes football matches as well, the number of domestic violence incidents rises dramatically. That is why we in Wales in particular have to look deep into our souls when it comes to domestic violence in our country. I am a great rugby fan. I go to matches and I enjoy it—I broke my leg playing rugby at Twickenham once—but we need to look very hard at the cultural issues in Welsh life that affect violence against women.

Some public attitudes in the valleys do not help, such as the attitude towards alcohol—that it is best to drink lots and lots and get absolutely blotto on a Thursday, Friday and Saturday night, and if you can do it all day Sunday as well, so much the better. Then there is the belief that young people prove themselves by drinking large amounts of alcohol. Not everyone participates at all. In fact, I recently surveyed all 16 to 18-year-olds in my constituency, and the percentage of youngsters who drink alcohol to excess is lower in my patch than in many others. None the less, that strong attitude is imbedded in many people from an early age.

There is a similar attitude towards the perfect male shape, which is often influenced by anabolic steroids. The use of steroids in many gyms is well documented.

Successive Governments have found it difficult to deal with the problem, which perpetuates the image of what a real man should look like: physically strong, silent, not necessarily very good at communicating, but good at communicating with their fists and prepared to take physical action if they want to. That whole concept of being a real man—of manning up—is a serious part of the problem. It is bad for men as well, and not only because of the fights outside pubs on weekend nights, some of which have led to deaths in my constituency; it is also bad for them on the rugby pitch. All too often, when someone has a concussion, they are determined to go back on. We need to change that attitude to concussion in sport. It is not the manly thing to go back on or to force somebody back on. The manly thing is for people to be responsible about their own health and take sage advice: if ever in doubt, sit it out.

I raise all those points because there is one issue that particularly troubles me. The six nations starts this weekend, and that is wonderful, but when there is a rugby match, we on the Welsh terraces will all sing “Delilah”. I know that some people will say, “Oh, here we go, he’s a terrible spoilsport,” but the truth is that that song is about the murder of a prostitute. It goes right to the heart of the issues we are discussing. There are thousands of other songs we could sing. We Welsh know every song in the book—we even know some of the words. “Cwm Rhondda” is a pretty good one to start with. I have sung “Delilah” as well—everybody loves doing the “She stood there laughing” moment—but if we are really going to take this issue seriously in Wales, we have to change how we do things.

In some years, the Welsh Rugby Union has been involved in really effective campaigns. Last year’s was called “Not In My Name”, and I am glad to say that several Welsh rugby clubs have signed up to the white ribbon campaign, but it is a shame that it is not every year and throughout the year. The decision about when the big internationals should be played is made entirely around money and broadcasting. Perhaps it should also be made taking into account the effect on people’s drinking habits and what they will do to their partners when they get home.

I am enormously grateful to the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) and the other Members who have secured the debate, who are from different parties. I should also mention bullying in schools towards not only girls as a whole but lesbians and trans people. I have tried so many times before, but I want to say to the Government that we will never be able to address these issues unless we have proper sex and relationship education. I know that some people will think, “That means you’re going to teach kids how to have sex.” It is quite the reverse. It is about making sure that every young person has the self-confidence to make good decisions for themselves—whether about alcohol, or friendships, or when they want to have their first sexual experience.

All the evidence from every country in Europe and around the world suggests that where there is good sex and relationship education, kids delay their first sexual experience, the number of boys who are violent towards girls is cut, relationships between boys and girls are improved and bullying is cut. I cannot see why we are prepared to continue with a situation in this country where some schools do it brilliantly and many schools

do it abysmally; and where it is the one class that a teacher dreads having to teach and kids dread having to go to. We have to have a whole-school approach, and it has to be on a statutory basis. Of course individual parents should be able to say that they do not want their kids to engage in it, but no schools or set of governors should be able to say, "Sorry, we are just not going to do that," because in the end, when that happens we are consigning kids to bullying and more girls and women to violence in their lives. It is about self-confidence and respecting one another.

I have never wanted to live in a tolerant society, because that always sounds like people are simply tolerating those who are different from them. I want to live in a society of respect, where we respect one another's sexuality, one another's right to say no, and one another's right to say yes. We will never have that unless we look deep into our souls when it comes to these cultural issues. I am deeply grateful to have had this opportunity speak, and I am glad to stand with others who seek to end the violence that has been perpetuated through the centuries, with women and children being called chattels and treated as things to be thrown around and used and abused. One day, we will put a stop to it.

2.38 pm

**Patricia Gibson** (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): Like all the speakers before me, I am delighted to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) and the other Members who were involved in securing this debate.

Gender-based violence is a function of gender inequality and the abuse of male power and privilege. It takes the form of actions that result in physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering to women and children, or of affronts to their human dignity, including the threat of such acts. It is men—not all men, but a tiny minority—who predominantly carry out such violence, and it is women who are predominantly the victims of it.

Talking about gender-based violence highlights the need to understand violence in the context of women's subordinate status in society. It cannot be understood in isolation from the norms, social structures and gender roles in the community, which greatly heighten women's vulnerability to violence. For far too long the issue has been confined to the shadows, and what has gone on behind closed doors has remained private. Violence should never be considered private. An attack on one woman by a male perpetrator is an attack on all women, because it goes to the heart of how the perpetrator views women and their relation to men. How we recognise and respond to such violence goes to the heart of the kind of society we seek to build. Violence against women should never be confined to the shadows, and it is shocking that it ever was. Thankfully, times have changed and our society is beginning to shine a bright light on the issue. No woman should ever feel trapped in a cycle of violence, and no man should ever feel that perpetrating violence against his partner is a private matter.

Shamefully, in 2013-14 almost 60,000 incidents of domestic abuse were recorded by the police in Scotland, and that figure increased by 2.5% in 2014-15. As we know, the real figure is likely to be much higher, because

domestic abuse is under-reported for a variety of reasons. The latest figures show that women make up the overwhelming majority—80%—of victims of domestic abuse. The overwhelming majority—94%—of serious sexual assaults are carried out by men, 83% of victims know the offender and 54% of victims identify the perpetrator as their partner. That is a matter of deep concern to all of us, because violence against women—indeed, violence against anyone—is a fundamental violation of human rights.

We must recognise the role that men can and must play in preventing and countering violence, particularly violence against women. It is important to acknowledge, as other hon. Members have pointed out, that the vast majority of men are not violent towards women, but the evidence shows that such violence is perpetrated overwhelmingly by men. Although it is important to deal with the aftermath of such violence, we must confront its root causes and reflect on the role of men. Specifically, we must address the attitudes, behaviour, identities and relationships of men who exhibit violence. Many men understand that it is important that we engage them in this debate, and we must underline the fact that they have a positive role to play in helping to prevent violence against women.

It is heartening that so many men across Scotland, the UK and the globe support the white ribbon campaign. The campaign aims to raise awareness among men and boys, promote discussion and provide information and resources to support personal and collective action by men. I am delighted that my local authority, North Ayrshire Council, participated in and supported the white ribbon campaign's 16 days of action. It joined millions across the world in that international crusade. North Ayrshire Council has its own comprehensive violence against women strategy.

**Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Several Members have referred to the importance of teaching positive relationships and personal, social, health and economic education in schools. Does the hon. Lady agree that we need to think seriously about the process of the socialisation of young men—particularly those who grow up without a role model, those with violent or serial fathers and those who have no access to information and no role models other than people who are violent in relationships? We must concentrate on that crucial area if we want to make a sea change.

**Patricia Gibson:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very valid point. In Scotland we are trying to recruit more male primary school teachers to provide positive role models for young boys who lack them at home and in their wider family circle. I understand that that is happening across the United Kingdom, and it is to be encouraged and supported. There other social outlets, too. For example, schools can identify children who do not have positive male role models and direct them towards activities such as football clubs.

Our ultimate goal must be to create a society in which women are equal to men and feel safe and respected. I am proud that the Scottish Government have committed to achieving that goal in Scotland. They have provided record levels of funding and introduced legislation to ensure that Scotland works towards the prevention and eradication of all forms of violence against women.

[Patricia Gibson]

I will not go over the ground that my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North covered, but there have been many funding initiatives in Scotland to tackle the issue. The Caledonian system works with men convicted of domestic abuse offences to address the underlying causes of their behaviour and to further protect women. Only a few days ago, the Social Justice Secretary in the Scottish Government, Alex Neil MSP, announced more funding for women's support groups across Scotland, but there is clearly much more to do.

If a mother is not safe in her own home, it is extremely unlikely that her children will be. Children frequently come to the attention of agencies when the severity and length of the mother's exposure to abuse compromises her ability to nurture and care for her children. Make no mistake, living with domestic abuse is a form of emotional abuse for children. Many children can vividly describe incidents of violence in the home and their feelings of terror, powerlessness and fear. Children may also witness coercive, intimidating or manipulative behaviour, or direct threats. Such behaviour is as frightening and harmful as physical violence, and its long-term effect on children cannot be measured.

Although some women manage to escape from their violent partner, that can have a profoundly damaging effect on their children and can leave them distressed and confused. That deep sense of loss can cause lifelong emotional scars. Therefore, when men inflict violence on their partner, they harm people other than the woman against whom the violence is directed.

The Scottish Government are committed to Clare's law, which my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North spoke about. I will not go over that ground again, but that is a powerful example of the constructive role that men can play in preventing violence against women. In Ayrshire—my neck of the woods—interesting things are happening. Individuals who have committed domestic violence are monitored by the police. At times when spikes in domestic violence are anticipated, such as the festive period, the police deploy domestic abuse cars manned by officers dedicated to dealing with domestic abuse. Visits similar to interventions are paid to those known by the police to have a history of committing domestic abuse, to proactively let them know that such behaviour will be pursued and to divert them from it.

I urge the Minister to reflect on the fact that to escape from domestic abuse, women need to be financially independent from their partner. Women experiencing domestic abuse face many barriers when trying to escape from that situation. Universal credit will replace benefit payments that are paid separately to each member of a couple with a single payment to one claimant in the household. That will increase women's financial dependence, prevent them from leaving abusive homes and increase the risk of harm to them and their children.

It is essential that we engage positively with men—our important allies in tackling the problem of men who exhibit abusive behaviour. Rather than imposing a sense of guilt and shame on all men, we must make every effort to ensure that men understand that they are able to play a crucial part as positive role models in the prevention of violence against women. By challenging the attitudes of peers, by teaching our children from a

young age about equality between the sexes and by refusing to condone the objectification and commercial sexual exploitation of women at any level, the prevention of violence against women can be achieved through the positive engagement of non-perpetrating men, who make up the vast majority of men out there.

2.49 pm

**Naz Shah** (Bradford West) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Gillan. I congratulate the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) on securing this debate, which is timely given the urgent question earlier today about the visit by the rape apologists from—

**Jess Phillips:** I don't know where they're from.

**Naz Shah:** When we consider violence against women, we always look at the woman and the family, but there are wider implications. As someone whose mother served time in prison for killing an abusive partner and as a woman whose own forced marriage is well documented, I want to provide a cultural narrative to the debate from a BME perspective and to enlighten people about the issues around women in prison. In this country, two women a week are murdered by their partners, but some women are driven to kill because they see no other way out and have nowhere else. Services are not responsive due to language barriers or a lack of understanding. As my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) mentioned, some women are still not believed. My experiences happened over 23 years ago, but many women face the same issues and obstacles. Language barriers and cultural differences are a double whammy, leading to more hurdles to overcome to access services. We must be mindful of the barriers that women face.

I am pleased to see Ikram Butt, the first Asian rugby player to play for England, present today. He is a white ribbon champion and has come all the way from Yorkshire. He has canvassed me many a time about wearing my white ribbon, which is important because he is a role model for Asian people and Asian young men in sport. Sport is one way in which we need to engage with young people and young men in particular.

I had a natural hatred of men and of my own community because of my experiences, but my hatred was alleviated by the good men whom I came across and worked with, who taught me that our communities do contain decent men. However, that fact does not take away from the inequalities that women suffer. Turning to women in prison, the majority—nine out of 10—of women incarcerated in our prisons committed a crime because they were a caregiver or because they suffered some form of abuse. When women with children are imprisoned, the system not only incarcerates the woman but punishes the whole family. The entire family, including the children, are set up to fail because services are not geared correctly towards children. I was lucky that I was 18 and not in the care system and was able to look after my siblings, but the experience of prison affects young people as well. When discussing violence against women, we should not talk only about the woman who has been violated. Whole families and communities are affected. When a man commits violence,

he is perpetrating a crime against a whole community or people. It is not just about the woman who is physically hurt or controlled, whether financially or mentally.

I am disheartened by the Government cuts that have affected charity organisations. Last year, I led a debate on cuts in the voluntary sector in this very room. Since my election, Bradford has seen the closure of two local charities that helped women. Both the Blenheim Project, which was a refuge, and the Manningham Mills Community Association, which was a place for women to come together and seek support, have closed. In addition, more than a third of the women who go to Women's Aid are unfortunately turned away because of the cuts since 2010. There has been an increase in reports of rape this week in my local area alone. We need to address the cuts to local authorities, police forces and organisations such as Women's Aid. It is fantastic that we are empowering men, and it heartens me to see so many men taking part in this debate and that the debate was led by a man. However, we are setting our communities up to fail if we do not address the wider issues of the funding that should be available to communities.

I urge the Minister to consider the implementation of the Istanbul convention, which has been signed by the United Kingdom but has not yet been ratified. I also advocate making awareness of gender-based violence the focal point of our school curriculums. I am unsure whether we are doing enough to address children's anxieties about the role of women and power and control. If we are to address the matter, we cannot just address what is currently happening; we need preventive work for the long term. Young people have even more issues now, such as body image, and I have an 11-year-old daughter, so I am familiar with the pressures that young people face and I am exasperated by them.

Social media has a massive part to play in violence against women. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley has been persecuted, and such action is unacceptable. I have experienced Twitter trolling, but nowhere near that of some of my colleagues. I stand by my hon. Friend and I retweet things, as do many others, but we need more men to do that. I encourage the men in this room to troll the trolls. I would like the Minister to commit to embed such issues in our curriculum, so that we can empower young people and teach them that the way to get real power and control is not through the persecution of others but through being comfortable and by empowering women. Like my hon. Friend, I thank the fantastic men out there. I have two sons of my own. Men are wonderful, but we need more of them to help us. Be the majority, not the minority.

[MR CLIVE BETTS *in the Chair*]

2.57 pm

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I am trying not to be a paranoid politician, but the previous Chair left just as I was about to speak.

I congratulate the Backbench Business Committee on granting this debate. All the Members who have contributed have made really powerful speeches. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah). Her life experiences and the comments made in earlier speeches tell us everything that we need

to know about today's debate. I also commend my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) for his commitment to the white ribbon campaign.

One of my senior caseworkers used to work for Women's Aid and I pay tribute to its work and that of similar organisations. We cannot forget that some situations are so grave that support workers actually put themselves at risk in their quest to help others, which is a forgotten consequence of violence against women. My final tribute is to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) who has worked in this field and continues to campaign on the subject and for women's rights in general. She made another strong speech today, but her contribution on the impact of housing benefit was really powerful and the lack of response from the Minister that day was shameful. I hope that we can get that addressed today.

Everyone here abhors domestic violence, no matter who the perpetrator or victim, but I must admit that I sometimes wonder in these days of heightened equality whether we should differentiate between genders in domestic abuse. The blunt facts speak for themselves: 80% of domestic violence perpetrators in Scotland are male. Clearly, therefore, for a significant reduction in this abhorrent crime, or to break what can be a vicious circle of repeat behaviour with different partners or perpetrators' children becoming future offenders, we need to tackle men's attitudes and behaviours.

In fairness, society has come on leaps and bounds since the time of such oft-used phrases as "a woman's place is in the home" or "a woman's place is in the kitchen", which perpetuated women's status as second-class citizens, fuelling bad behaviour in the demands of men. Equally, although we have not completely eradicated such views, we have to remember that it is not even 100 years since women were first deemed worthy of a vote. Without doubt, we have come a long way.

We politicians have a real job to do on women's place in society, in particular in international relations. One of our big middle east allies, Saudi Arabia, has a poor attitude towards women's rights—women are not even allowed to drive. I have mentioned that before, in a human rights debate in the main Chamber, but we have to keep the issue to the forefront, because too many people have blind spots when dealing with Saudi Arabia.

In the UK, to change attitudes and prevent violence against women in a domestic situation and men's role in that, education is clearly the most important tool. With education, we need to remember that most men have grown up to see hitting a woman as disrespectful or even unmanly—in Scotland it is often said, "You never hit a woman"—but we know that it happens. So there is a bit more to education—it is about getting people to understand how they change their moral compass and justify things. Vigilante mobs can justify their violent actions, but cannot see the irony in them doing violence.

3.1 pm

*Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.*

3.8 pm

*On resuming—*

**Alan Brown:** I was talking about men and changing their attitudes. That is why campaigns such as the white ribbon one are so vital—it is about making men see

[Alan Brown]

what domestic abuse is, as well as what the figures for it are. In that, I commend previous adverts from the Scottish Government that highlight how domestic abuse can be not only about violence but about controlling behaviour. Phrases such as “You’re not going out dressed like that”, or suggesting not meeting so-and-so or not going to a certain place, are controlling behaviour, which is a form of abuse that erodes self-esteem and can even lead in the end to domestic violence. As men, we need to recognise such behaviours and speak out against them.

To give an example of controlling behaviour, one of my constituents ended her marriage early due to domestic abuse but, some years later, she still has not managed to get a divorce settlement, because her ex-partner is deliberately dragging matters out, preventing her from truly moving on. He is now seeking an unrealistic settlement with regards to her property, towards which he has not paid one penny. We need a better support system in terms of the law and to assist women to move on. I realise that that is an “after the event” scenario, but it would help victims, confirm that they are the injured party and, importantly, put down a marker about unacceptable behaviour.

In terms of general court support, I pay tribute to the Scottish Government, who have allocated nearly £2.5 million to increase court capacity, reduce delays and expand access to legal advice as well as £1.85 million to Rape Crisis Scotland. We have heard that the Scottish Government are committed to rolling out the disclosure scheme known as Clare’s law. The need for that law underlines what we as men have to do to bring about social, cultural and attitude change in the coming years.

We must get to the heart of gender equality and engage in and support equality issues. Women being seen and treated as equals might not eliminate violence, but it will go a long way to changing the behaviour of many men. We also need to stand against people who use the derogative term, “That’s just the PC brigade” when we speak out. Those who use and hide behind such phrases are demonstrating that they have the wrong views and attitudes in the first place.

We must also speak out when misogyny occurs on social media. I welcome the general abhorrence of the Return of Kings event and I must put it on record that for Roosh V to advocate that rape should not be defined as such when a female willingly enters a property beggars belief. We cannot allow the spreading of such views, which tie in with some men seeing women purely as objects, which we must resist at all costs.

We also need to ensure that women do not feel that they have caused themselves to be victims. Over the years we have heard horror stories of court rulings in which judges have ruled that the way women dressed or the fact that they had had too much alcohol were mitigating factors. We need to fight those attitudes at all costs and, frankly, those judges need to be flushed out of the legal system.

As politicians, we must support initiatives such as the Scottish Government’s desire for gender-balanced boardrooms, recognise Scotland’s gender-balanced Government and understand why we have women-only shortlists in politics. We need a proper, equal society.

On governance, we need to understand wider policies and strategies and how they are interlinked, such as the Scottish Government’s proposals for minimum unit pricing for alcohol. We know that alcohol cannot be used as an excuse for violence, but no doubt it is a contributing factor. In Scotland, we have too big a dependence on alcohol—I feel a slight hypocrite as I was at the bar last night—so we should commend the Scottish Government for trying to tackle the subject head-on. The UK Government should think about that, because that is another subject on which the Conservatives have done a U-turn in the past.

Another unintended consequence from policy is the state pension equalisation fiasco, which in some cases has caused women to be more dependent on their partners as they struggle financially. That is clearly unhealthy, creates tensions and limits the choices women can make in controlling their destinies. I have touched on the housing benefit limit and the cuts imposed by the Government. The effect that that policy may have on women’s refuges means that it needs to be rethought or, as a minimum, that some form of exemption needs to be made. We cannot possibly tackle the scourge of domestic violence if the safe havens are at risk of closure. That is wrong from both a moral and a long-term financial perspective—the proposals do not make sense.

To return to Scottish statistics, there was a 2.5% increase in reported crimes in 2014-15 compared with the previous year. Increases are often attributed to the fact that victims are more likely to come forward, so I hope that that is the main reason for the increase, but we need to be careful not to use that as a comfort blanket. We need to understand trends fully and ensure that we keep on top of them if we are to make true inroads into ending violence against women. I am confident that continuing education, the calling out of misogyny in social media, listening to women and encouraging them to speak up, and having better joined-up Government policy will help us get there and eradicate violence against women.

3.15 pm

**Angela Crawley** (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I congratulate the Members on bringing forward this important debate, which is the first of its kind, from the Backbench Business Committee. Considering the number of years this place has been dominated by men, it is refreshing that the debate was led by a man. None the less, the fact that domestic violence continues to occur both here and internationally highlights that Governments of all nations must make a strong statement.

The white ribbon campaign is a prime opportunity to give men that voice and allow those such as my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) and the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) to have their say. It will take positive male role models such as Members of Parliament, sportsmen, celebrities and other high-profile figures in public life to condemn violence against women and girls and make a strong statement about what men’s role is in preventing and eradicating violence against women.

This conversation is not new. For years women have been speaking out loudly, and feminists have been condemned as outspoken, radical and extremist simply

for saying something that should be common sense to all of us: violence against women and girls should not and cannot be tolerated. Men and boys need to take an active role on their contribution to violence, but we also have to accept that it goes the other way. Many Members have mentioned that there are occasions—they are few—where women are the perpetrators of violence, so it is about educating girls and boys, and men and women about their role and their relationships with one another, because as we have heard this is not a women's issue; it is a human rights issue. I am glad that this debate is happening today.

The first priority is to ensure that our educators and local figures are making that strong statement condemning violence in all forms. One of the most alarming statistics I have read has been touched on but not covered. The title of the report published by Women's Aid this year is "Nineteen Child Homicides", which brings home the wide range and impact that domestic violence can have on women and girls and children. Violence does not happen just to women; it affects fathers, husbands, sons and brothers. In fact, perhaps no member of a family is untouched by violence, and that is why it will take all voices across the community to advocate the removal of violence in all forms.

We have heard a lot about different laws and policies as well as the law of unintended consequences of some of the policies that are affecting women's lives, which needs some acknowledgment from the Government. While much of the debate has centred around heterosexual relationships, statistics show that there is the exact same level of violence in same-sex relationships. Broken Rainbow has sought to highlight in its campaign that domestic violence is not unique to one relationship. It happens across all relationships and across all genders and sexualities.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North and the hon. Members for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) and for Brigg and Goole for securing the debate and highlighting this truly important issue. I hope that we will go some way towards eradicating violence.

3.19 pm

**Cat Smith** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I pay tribute to the hon. Members for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) and for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) for securing this debate.

I would like to particularly mention the comments made by my hon. Friend, whose experience is unrivalled in this House in terms of the work she has done year after year with women who have been victims of domestic violence. I thank her for her contributions on everyday sexism, which highlighted the experiences to which even we, as MPs, are not immune. The story of a man reaching to touch a woman's hand on the tube when she grabbed the rail sounded very familiar. Like my hon. Friend, I experienced an incident of groping not that long ago. Unlike her, I did not go for physical violence, but I certainly gave it quite a bit of verbal.

It is clear that violence against women remains a hugely significant problem in Britain, with 900,000 calls relating to domestic violence made to the police in the

12 months up to March 2015. That equates to a staggering 100 calls every hour of every day. Recently released figures show that 33% of crimes involving violence against the person were linked to domestic abuse, as were 12% of sexual offences. Women are overwhelmingly more likely than men to be victims of domestic violence, and it is vital that we work to tackle violence against women and girls. I welcome the opportunity today to discuss the role that men can play in that.

I would like to ask the Minister some specific questions. If she does not feel able to answer them today, I am happy to receive answers by letter. What measures is she taking to ensure that community rehabilitation companies fulfil their contract requirements to provide better offending behaviour programmes, and in particular the Building Better Relationships programme? What steps will be taken to hold them to account if that provision is not made available to all men who require it? What assurances will she give to the courts and the judiciary that any sentence they impose on a perpetrator of domestic violence will be delivered in full and will involve attendance on the Building Better Relationships programme if they choose to impose that sentence?

The campaign to end violence against women has historically been led by women. Women have campaigned energetically for many years for improved legal protection from gender-based violence and have been largely responsible for the delivery of support services, including women's refuges and rape support services. The leadership role of women in ending gender-based violence is vital. For a subject so intricately linked with female disempowerment, it is crucial that women are at the forefront of those efforts.

However, the leadership role of women does not and must not preclude the involvement of men in the campaign. Gender-based violence has been recognised by both the United Nations and national Governments as a human rights issue. Violence against women is almost always perpetrated by men. Those harmed are men's wives, mothers, daughters, sisters and friends. Violence against women cannot for a moment be considered an issue only for women.

There is an unfortunate tendency to seek to deflect from discussions of violence against women and girls by pointing to statistics on male victims of domestic abuse. That often presents an obstacle when discussing the role of men in ending violence against women and girls. It also decidedly misses the point. There are, of course, a significant number of male victims of domestic violence. That group, like any other, needs and deserves our support and attention. We can and should support victims of domestic violence, whatever their gender or sexual orientation, but we must also not ignore the substantial imbalance between male and female victims of domestic violence.

The full involvement of men and their active engagement with the campaign brings significant benefits. Men are best able to challenge the attitudes of their peers, who may condone or even engage in violence against women. Unless men are encouraged to speak out, we cannot hope to confront the attitudes and cultural norms that underpin gender-based violence.

Challenging negative gender attitudes also benefits men directly, as articulated by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant). The negative stereotype of a "real man"—tough and emotionally

[Cat Smith]

distant—is as damaging for men as it is for women. The suggestion that for a man to be open about his emotions is somehow unmanly can cause real harm. That attitude is pervasive and can be a significant barrier to men seeking help. The benefits of men's involvement in ending violence against women requires productive engagement. Rather than impose a sense of guilt or shame or resort to a view of men as only perpetrators, we must instead help men to understand the important role they can play as allies and role models. Organisations such as the white ribbon campaign have made real strides in that area, but work remains to be done.

So how best can men help to confront this insidious problem? First, as I previously alluded to, men can challenge the attitudes of other men and confront their peers. Where anyone—man or woman—witnesses abuse or harmful attitudes, they must not remain silent or offer excuses. As Members may be aware, the virulently misogynist organisation Return of Kings had planned to hold events in the UK on 6 February. The group has called for women to be banned from voting, described a woman's value as dependent on her "fertility and beauty", and claimed that women with eating disorders make the best girlfriends. Articles posted on the group's website have included "5 Reasons to Date a Girl With an Eating Disorder", "Don't Work for a Female Boss" and "Biology Says People on Welfare Should Die". Furthermore, the group's founder has publically advocated legalised rape.

Those views will be abhorrent to the vast majority of men and cannot be allowed to go unchallenged. It is welcome that in the face of vocal and sustained objection to those events, the group was forced to cancel its plans. That shows clearly the difference we can all make when we make it clear that misogyny will not be accepted. I thank the Minister for her response to the urgent question in the Chamber this morning on that topic.

Sexist attitudes can be seen as harmless, and some men may remain unaware of the impact of destructive attitudes they may hold or of their behaviour. Gender-based violence is often underpinned by sexism. Where sexism is challenged, it frequently elicits the same response: "Get a sense of humour." Let us be clear: sexism is not harmless and it is not funny. It is deeply damaging and must be confronted. It is important that we all—men and women—learn to recognise abuse when we see it. Physical violence may be the most visible form of abuse, but emotional violence and coercive control can be just as damaging. If we learn to spot abuse in all its forms, we can make a real difference.

We must also introduce compulsory and universal education programmes on healthy relationships. There is currently no statutory requirement for all children to be taught about what a healthy relationship is and what abuse is. Current provision is piecemeal at best, and that cannot continue.

Men should also have the courage to look inwardly and confront their own attitudes. That can of course be problematic, and many men may become defensive or feel under attack, but if we are to truly end gender-based violence, we must address the mentality that allows it to be perpetrated or ignored. We must encourage men to understand themselves and to work to change attitudes that may knowingly or inadvertently perpetuate violence.

Unfortunately, where men express sympathy for or an understanding of what are perceived as women's issues, they are often met with questions about their own masculinity. That can prevent men from speaking up. We must challenge damaging assumptions about men as much as we must confront negative attitudes to women. We must encourage men to have the confidence to speak out.

What role can politicians play? We can lead by example, as men and women who are not afraid to speak out on gender-based violence or confront the attitudes that allow it to continue. We desperately need role models to make it clear to men that they should never stand idly by or condone violence. Influential men in all walks of life, including MPs, can play a part in that by pledging their support.

Men can and should play a full role in ending gender-based violence. We must ensure that we do not resort to inflicting a sense of guilt, but instead encourage men to become involved and help them to understand that they can play a crucial part in securing real change. If we work together, we can consign violence against women and girls to history.

3.28 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Karen Bradley):** May I start by saying what an honour it is to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts, and what an honour it was to serve under the chairship of your predecessor, Mrs Gillan? I congratulate the hon. Members for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) and for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) and my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) on securing this important debate. I also congratulate all Members on the thoughtful and constructive points raised.

I want to start by saying that any form of violence against women or girls is absolutely unacceptable. The physical, psychological and emotional impact of domestic and sexual violence on victims cannot be overestimated. As the Minister for Preventing Abuse, Exploitation and Crime, I have the ambition to end those terrible crimes. We owe it to victims of domestic and sexual violence to do everything we can to afford them the protection and support they need. I will work closely with victim support services and police and criminal justice agencies to ensure that we are doing just that.

Many points have been raised today and I will do my best to address as many as possible, but if I fail to address any I will endeavour to respond in writing, as the shadow Minister invited me to do, and particularly as some of her questions were about technical criminal justice matters and are probably better addressed in correspondence.

It is important to reflect that—the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North started with this—both women and men may be victims of domestic or sexual violence, forced marriage or stalking. It is also important that the response for all victims is as good as it can be. The hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) talked about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender relationships. We realise that there is abuse in all forms of relationship and the measures we have in place are available in all forms of abuse in all relationships.

However, we need to say that women and girls are far more likely to be victims of such crimes and we recognise that inequality and gender play fundamental roles in violence against women and girls. We all have important roles to play in challenging the cultural norms and stereotypes that underpin violence against women and girls.

The hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) talked about women being used as chattels. When I was training to be a chartered accountant and filling in tax returns, women's earnings were her husband's. There was an extra column on the tax return. Only in 1990 did women have their own taxation system. It is unbelievable that I am standing here having filled in tax returns when a woman's income was her husband's. She was her husband's chattel and that was how she was treated in law.

Gender inequality manifests itself in ways that can limit women's and girl's aspirations and life chances, and put pressure on men to act in certain ways, as the hon. Member for Rhondda said: to be physically powerful, emotionally detached and in control. The relationship between gender and violence is complex, but we must never forget that in the most extreme cases we are working to save people's lives. It is a sad fact that over 80 women a year still lose their lives to domestic homicide. We must never think about the matter just in terms of numbers, as the hon. Members for Paisley and Renfrewshire North and for Rhondda both said. We need men, women, girls and boys to work together to end violence against women and girls in all its forms.

Before responding to the contributions to this debate, particularly those on the role of men in ending violence against women and girls, it is important to address some of the concerns about increases in domestic abuse and sexual violence. We all want the prevalence of these terrible crimes to fall and ultimately to end, but we know that they are hidden and under-reported.

At least in the short to medium term, we want increased police recording of crimes of violence against women and girls. The Office for National Statistics clearly states that increases in police recorded rape, sexual offences and domestic abuse are due to greater victim confidence and better recording by the police. We should all welcome that. That these increases are a positive development is reinforced by our best measure of the prevalence of all crimes or how many people experience domestic and sexual violence, which comes from the self-completion module of the crime survey of England and Wales. That data show both the general downward trend in sexual assaults since 2005-06 and the fact that 8.2% of women were the victim of any domestic abuse in the last year. That is the lowest estimate since these questions were first asked in the 2004-05 survey.

We need more of the increased number of reports leading to effective police and criminal justice action. Again, while there is undoubtedly more work to do to bring perpetrators to justice, it is important to reflect that the number of police referrals to the Crown Prosecution Service, the number of prosecutions and the number of convictions for all crimes were all higher in 2014-15 than ever before. For example, prosecutions for domestic abuse have increased from just over 30,000 in 2004-05 to over 90,000 in 2014-15. That is the highest level ever. However, let me make it clear that 1.4 million women

experiencing domestic abuse every year is still unacceptably high. Over 300,000 victims of sexual assault is unacceptably high. We need collectively to do more to prevent these terrible crimes from happening, and the role of men is critical.

I met the white ribbon campaign—many of us are wearing our white ribbons—with my colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Women and Equalities and Family Justice. We heard about its inspiring work with boys and its programme of actions to challenge abusive and violent behaviour by men and boys, as well as its continuing work to increase the number of organisations accredited with white ribbon status. The Government will continue to promote the campaign's work and to support greater co-ordination between existing groups of men and boys who act as change agents, develop evidence of what works to engage men in challenging violence against women and ensure full understanding of appropriate, safe and effective action to give men the confidence to speak out and challenge unacceptable behaviour.

When I was on the Select Committee on Procedure, we looked at introducing iPads in the Chamber. I am pleased to have my iPad in the Chamber because it has given me the chance to look at the white ribbon campaign's latest figures; 24,377 pledges have been made and I hope that that will start to go up as people watch this debate. I want to make a few points about the website. The hon. Member for Rhondda and others talked about the importance of sport to young boys and men. I know from my two young sons that if a footballer says something, they tend to listen, so it is great to see that Juan Mata has signed up. A comment on the website states:

“Most men are not violent towards women, but many of us ignore the problem, or see it as something which doesn't have anything to do with us.”

That sums up what we have been talking about in this debate. I congratulate the white ribbon campaign. We will continue to work with it. It is great to see so many women wearing the white ribbon, but I want to see more men wearing it. I am sure that the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North and my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole, as great champions of the campaign, will make sure more of their colleagues wear it and make the point.

I want to touch on the Return of Kings group, which was raised by a number of Members and was the subject of an urgent question today. I repeat that we condemn in the strongest terms anyone who condones rape and sexual violence or suggests that responsibility rests with victims. Responsibility for such crimes always, unequivocally rests with the perpetrator. The shadow Minister and many others have made the point that the vast majority of men do not share the views of the group, which are laughable. If the individual concerned did not take them seriously, we would laugh at him because they are utterly ridiculous.

The point has been made that we need to engage with young men. Our “This is Abuse” campaign was talked about during discussion of the urgent question and included specific messages to boys about abusive behaviour. It is an approach informed by research into what works in changing boys' behaviour, like the Boys to Men project of Professor Gadd at Manchester University. It is vital that those of us in a position to speak out about violence and abuse do so, but we also need to realise

[Karen Bradley]

that, sad as it may seem, teenagers may not listen to politicians. We must engage credible voices that young people will listen to.

Our previous campaigns accordingly used vloggers—video bloggers—to produce online video blogs to reach thousands of young people through social media and online platforms, and to help young men to understand what constitutes abusive behaviour. I will talk later about some of the other work we have been doing to deal with perpetrators and to change that behaviour. We have also worked through the campaigning partnership with MTV to develop adverts with a wide range of high-profile celebrities to act as a counter narrative within the sometimes highly sexualised environment of music TV.

Evaluation of the campaign's impact showed that 67% of boys who saw its adverts were more likely to seek consent as a result, 70% said they felt more likely to recognise if someone does not want to have sex and 80% agreed that the videos made them understand that abuse is not always physical. We have invested £3.85 million in the next phase of the campaign, which will continue to build teenagers' awareness of key issues, such as consent and healthy relationships, including engaging with boys and young men.

I also want to make the point about young women. One thing that we have been working on through our ending gang violence and exploitation programme—that is the new stage of our original ending gang and youth violence programme—is about the exploitation, including sexual exploitation, of young women by gangs. It is incredibly important that we educate young women that they should not expect to be treated in that way. Being part of a line-up is not acceptable. They should not be made to perform sex acts on boys. That is something they should say no to.

It is also important that we treat the young men and make them understand that. Last year, I had a powerful visit to one of the London gang charities. A young man who had been in a gang said that until he was spoken to by that charity, he had never understood that such behaviour was wrong. No one had ever told him that it was not the way to treat women. No one had ever said to him, "Women need to be respected." That was because unfortunately he had grown up in a household where domestic abuse was the norm. It was what he had seen all his family and friends do. He thought that it was normal. Only when there was an intervention did he understand that it was not the way to behave. It is so important that we do all we can to educate both young girls and young boys, and I will say more about education shortly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce), who I know cannot be here now because she is taking part in the debate in the main Chamber, talked about prostitution. We debated that topic at length during the passage of the Modern Slavery Bill last year—we are approaching the 12-month anniversary of that becoming an Act—and of course we now have new measures to protect victims of trafficking and criminalise those who traffic them. We are looking at the evidence that is available. My hon. Friend referred to, and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley is a supporter of, the Nordic model. There is no unequivocal view on

that; there are different views on it, and we need to understand how it works. Northern Ireland is a Province that we will be looking at carefully—because it has a very similar legal system to the UK—to see how it works, but there are conflicting views on the Nordic model. I will also be taking a great interest in the inquiry by the Select Committee on Home Affairs on this topic, because I know that many hon. Members are very interested in it.

How can we effect change? How can we change people's views? In every area of life, we need to see everyone, including men, playing their part in challenging violence and abuse. I am encouraged by the many promising initiatives to engage professionals, friends, family and the wider public in tackling what is unacceptable and criminal behaviour.

These are just a few examples of what is happening. Citizens Advice has trained front-line staff to ask about violence and abuse. I visited Citizens Advice in Harlow recently. The volunteers are asking questions of people who have come in to talk about debt problems, because the debt problem could be the result of domestic abuse. It is very powerful to be able to see the training that volunteers at Citizens Advice have had to enable them to recognise what might be a domestic abuse situation.

Public Health England and the University of the West of England have been working on a bystander programme to help to challenge sexual abuse on campus. Housing providers can play a critical role in identifying those carrying out domestic abuse and those at risk, including children, and a nationwide alliance is working to improve the housing sector's response. The alliance is arming professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills to support residents to live safely and free of abuse.

I am pleased that, as this debate has definitely demonstrated, our understanding of what constitutes abuse is becoming more sophisticated. For example, the new offence of domestic abuse, which was commenced on 29 December 2015, not only addresses a gap in the law to tackle controlling or coercive behaviour but can be used as a vehicle to build wider public awareness that domestic abuse extends beyond episodes of physical violence, and that patterns of psychological manipulation and control can be just as harmful. I am interested to hear that the Scottish Government are looking at introducing a similar measure.

Refuge, in partnership with the Co-operative bank, has launched a powerful new campaign called "My money, my life" to raise awareness of financial abuse in intimate relationships. Its research found that one in five people in the UK report that they have experienced financial abuse within an intimate relationship. That campaign is informing those experiencing financial abuse about their rights and empowering them to make positive choices about their own financial future.

A number of hon. Members raised the Istanbul convention, and we also discussed it during the urgent question today. The UK Government signed the Istanbul convention in 2012 and have since been putting in place all the measures that are required in order that we can comply in full. There is one article—article 44—that we are not yet in compliance with. That is the extraterritoriality measure, which basically means that the criminal law in the UK would extend to conduct abroad. I hope that hon. Members from Scotland and other devolved

Administrations will understand why there may be some problems in ensuring that the two jurisdictions' legal systems work with that particular issue. We will need to introduce primary legislation in the UK to put that in place, but when we have done that we will be able to ratify the Istanbul convention. We do not wish to ratify a convention until we are absolutely confident that we comply with it 100%.

A number of contributors raised the topic of PSHE, and it is fair to say that there were slightly different views about whether it should be on a statutory basis. My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole perhaps disagreed with the hon. Member for Rhondda as to whether—

**Chris Bryant:** Well, he was wrong, and he left.

**Karen Bradley:** My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole is a teacher with great experience of such things.

We do need there to be education. The Government have made it clear in the introduction to the framework for the national curriculum that all schools should teach PSHE, and we are committed to working with schools and other experts to ensure that young people receive age-appropriate information that allows them to make informed choices and stay safe, but the point is that it must be good-quality PSHE across the board and not, as my hon. Friend said, the add-on that no teacher wants to do.

It is probably worth mentioning the tools that we have introduced for prevention and protection, which, as I have said, apply to all relationships—LGBT, men to women and women to men. Domestic violence protection orders and the domestic violence disclosure scheme were rolled out across England and Wales from March 2014, and those tools put the responsibility for violence and abuse squarely with the perpetrator.

DVPOs can prevent the perpetrator from returning to a residence and from having contact with the victim for up to 28 days. Latest figures show that magistrates have granted more than 2,500 DVPOs. The domestic violence disclosure scheme, also known as Clare's law, which a number of hon. Members have referred to, enables the police to disclose to the public information about previous violent offending by a new or existing partner where that may help to protect them from further violent offending. The latest figures show that more than 1,300 disclosures have been made. The Government will build on those achievements by evaluating Clare's law and DVPOs to identify how we can strengthen those important tools.

We have also strengthened significantly the law on female genital mutilation, including through FGM protection orders, and last year we introduced two new measures—the sexual harm prevention order and the sexual risk order—to make it easier for the police and courts further to restrict and monitor the activities of individuals who pose a risk, including when they have not been convicted of a previous offence.

I want to touch on the issue of stalking. Being stalked by a stranger can have terrifying consequences, so we are consulting on the introduction of a stalking protection order. That will explore whether positive requirements can be placed on perpetrators at an early stage, to help

to stop their behaviour. By that we mean a perpetrator being forced, for example, to attend mental health sessions so that we can try to stop the behaviour before it becomes criminal. We are ensuring that new measures include a focus on the perpetrator—disrupting their activity, removing them from the home where necessary and ensuring that they engage with appropriate interventions to help to stop their offending before it escalates.

Hon. Members have made a number of points about the right approach to take. The question is, what is justice for a victim of domestic abuse? What will help that person to get control of their own life, and what is the right outcome for that individual? There are many different ways to tackle the problem, and it is clear that one size does not fit all.

Refuge provision has been discussed at length. The Government are committed to refuge provision. We have announced £40 million between 2016 and 2020 for domestic abuse services including refuges, and a £2 million grant to Women's Aid and SafeLives to support early intervention, but refuge is not the answer for every victim. The hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) talked about victims being turned away from refuges. I have spent time with refuge providers, who have told me that often a victim has such complex needs and so many difficulties that the refuge they go to is not the right place for them, and they may need different provisions and support.

I am committed to ensuring that refuges provide the appropriate safety net for people. However, for some families a better outcome might be achieved if a woman can stay in her home with her family, and if the perpetrator is removed from that home and is not just allowed to move in with the next partner to start the cycle of abuse all over again. I do not pretend that that will always be possible, but it is a better outcome for some victims. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley knows better than anybody that there are many different needs, and I have enjoyed our conversations on the matter. We need to think about how we can tackle the problem and break the cycle, and that means dealing with perpetrators.

**Alan Brown:** The Minister is saying that refuges are not the only answer, but they are important and required just now. Given that the local housing allowance cap is a threat to refuges, does she support protecting them from it?

**Karen Bradley:** As I said, the Government have committed £40 million to provisions, including refuges. I want to ensure that refuges are available to victims for whom they are the right answer. Organisations have told me that victims sometimes do not feel that they can come forward because they do not think the services are there. We want victims to have the confidence to come forward, and we need to tell them that they will be supported and looked after so they can get the support they need and we can break the cycle.

Preventing abuse depends on changing the attitudes and behaviours of perpetrators. Addressing the root causes of violent offending forms an integral part of our refreshed strategy. There is evidence that experiencing adversity, including violence and abuse, can have serious consequences. We need only consider that 41% of the prison population have witnessed or experienced domestic

[Karen Bradley]

abuse to understand the wider social harms such crimes cause. We are working with agencies and in local areas to ensure the availability of appropriate perpetrator programmes, prison and probation rehabilitation approaches and, where needed, mental health interventions that may lead to a reduction in offending and sustainable behaviour change.

National organisations SafeLives and Respect have formed a partnership to create a new type of intervention for perpetrators of domestic abuse. The model, referred to as the Drive project, will involve working with perpetrators of domestic abuse on a one-to-one basis to reduce their offending, using support and disruption where appropriate, and ensuring that victim and family safety is embedded within the response.

The troubled families programme that we ran in the previous Parliament worked with 120,000 families. We found that a high proportion of families in the programme had experienced domestic abuse, even though that was not a reason for families enter the programme. Domestic violence is therefore now a specific criterion for identifying families for support in the next stage of the programme. For families who suffer domestic violence, it is seldom the only problem affecting them. The “Understanding Troubled Families” report showed that 39% of families who experienced domestic violence included a young offender, 37% had drug or alcohol dependencies, 62% had a truanting child, and 60% included an adult with a mental health problem, compared with 40% in families where there was no domestic violence.

**Patricia Gibson:** In the light of the Minister’s comments, will she specifically address the changes to universal credit? Given the statistics she just mentioned, the changes will only increase a woman’s financial dependency on her partner, because the payment that is made will be changed to a single payment to one person in the household, which we know will usually be the man.

**Karen Bradley:** I was a member of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions when universal credit was being discussed, and that point was made at the time. I am sure that changes to the benefit system will not cause a reduction in levels of support for victims of domestic violence and abuse, and they will provide help towards housing costs. Those living in supported accommodation that meets the definition set by the Department for Work and Pensions will receive funding outside universal credit, and we will continue to provide flexible funding to help to meet the higher costs that sometimes arise from providing refuge to women escaping domestic abuse. I understand the hon. Lady’s point about financial control. It is important that we make people understand, through the work of Citizens Advice, Refuge and the Co-operative Bank, that they can have control of their money and that they should not be controlled by their partner when it comes to financial matters.

The hon. Member for Bradford West talked very powerfully about her own experiences. If she would allow me to, I would like to sit down with her at some point to talk about the work we are doing, particularly on the forced marriage unit, which the Home Office

runs jointly with the Foreign Office. Perhaps we can learn from her experiences and her knowledge what more we can do to help women in that situation.

I am proud of the progress we have made in getting to grips with complex offending behaviour, the effects of which can be deep and long-lasting for victims, but there is more that we can collectively do. The Government are working closely with experts on violence against women and girls to develop a refreshed strategy later in the year. Today’s debate has been timely, helping to inform what more can be done to engage men and boys in the agenda and to support their crucial role in preventing violence against women and girls. I congratulate the hon. Members who secured the debate, and I congratulate the white ribbon campaign on its work. I assure Members that, as the Minister responsible for preventing abuse, exploitation and crime, I am determined to do everything I can to protect victims and bring perpetrators to justice.

3.57 pm

**Gavin Newlands:** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Betts. I thank the Minister for her thorough response, but there were a few holes in it, which I will come back to at the end of my contribution.

I thank all hon. Members who have contributed today, and I thank the white ribbon campaign for attending the debate. It has been a good debate that has included many varied points. To highlight the breadth of the debate, I will touch on a few of the contributions that were made. The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Andrew Percy) made strong points about local authorities and the power of sport in getting the message across to young men. My hon. Friend—I will call her that—the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) spoke about her undying love for all men, perhaps bar the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies). She also gave us a powerful account of her own experiences and those of others, reminding us of how far we have to go.

My hon. Friend the Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) made a powerful point about subconscious misogyny and whether violence against women is nature or nurture, and my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) spoke of abuse as a fundamental abuse of human rights, and of the good work of her local council.

The hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) gave her own deeply personal story, giving us a different cultural perspective by talking about misogyny and abuse in the black and minority ethnic community. My hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) paid tribute to Women’s Aid for its work and shared his concerns about our relationship with countries such as Saudi Arabia, whose record on gender equality is atrocious.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley) spoke about the importance of education and the powerful Women’s Aid report, “Nineteen Child Homicides”, and highlighted the fact that the issue exists just as prominently in the LGBTI community. The shadow Minister reminded us that the UN views tackling violence against women as a priority and listed a number of detestable posts by Roosh V, who has been renamed in Scotland as Sssh V.

The Minister, in her lengthy response, spoke about the “what’s hers is his” nature of tax collection as recently as 1990. She spoke about promoting the white ribbon campaign but stopped short of promising any funding. Will she look at that again, and will she meet me to talk about a national prevention strategy in every school? She spoke about the Istanbul convention, which the Scottish Government are keen for the Westminster Government to get on with ratifying.

On refuges, nobody said that they are the only answer, but I ask the Minister to give the groups involved some certainty. The funding ends on 31 March, and they

would like to know whether they will have any funding thereafter. It is clear that, despite some small differences, we can and will move forward together to end violence against women.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the role of men in preventing violence against women.

4 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Statements

Thursday 4 February 2016

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### General Data Protection Regulation

**The Minister for Culture and the Digital Economy (Mr Edward Vaizey):** My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (jointly with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport) and Minister for Intellectual Property has made the following written ministerial statement.

This Government have decided not to opt in to the Justice and Home Affairs provision within the EU general data protection regulation (GDPR). Negotiations on the regulation were concluded on 15 December 2015 and a proposed final compromise text was communicated to the European Council on 17 December. The final text for the GDPR is expected to be formally adopted in due course.

The compromise text contained wording in article 43a, which triggers the UK's opt-in under protocol 21. This article deals with the recognition and enforcement of judgments, and includes content that falls under article 81 (judicial co-operation in civil matters) and article 82 (judicial co-operation in criminal matters) Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, thereby triggering the UK's JHA opt-in. The text restricts a member state from enforcing a judgment requiring the transfer or disclosure of personal data where there is no international agreement or treaty.

As a result of concerns relating to the integrity of the UK legal system, the UK will not exercise the opt-in to the parts of article 43a which trigger the protocol 21.

[HCWS511]

## DEFENCE

### Northern Ireland Executive: Gifting of Surplus Accommodation

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mark Lancaster):** I have today laid before Parliament a Ministry of Defence Departmental Minute to advise of the intent to gift up to 59 surplus service family accommodation to the Northern Ireland Executive. This gift forms part of coalition Government's financial settlement with the Executive and the commitments set out in Building a Prosperous and United Community: One Year On, in which the Government and the Executive set out plans to work together to build on political stability.

It is intended that legal transfer of title will be completed by late spring 2016, with the disposal value of the sites estimated at £3.5 million as at April 2014. Her Majesty's Treasury has approved the proposal in principle. If after 14 sitting days, no objections to the gift have been received, the transfer will proceed.

In addition to the gift, 605 surplus service family accommodation that cannot be gifted for operational (security and training) reasons inside our existing perimeters; 286 at Aldergrove, 199 at Ballykinler and 120 at Holywood, costing a total of £3.6 million, will be demolished. Enabling works have begun and demolitions will start

in late 2016, with the land then being retained for training. The Ministry of Defence will continue to look for surplus properties to gift as part of the shared commitment of the Government and the Executive to take forward plans to build a shared future.

[HCWS509]

## EDUCATION

### Reformed GCSE and A-level Content

**The Minister for Schools (Mr Nick Gibb):** We are reforming GCSEs, AS and A-levels to make sure that they give students the best possible preparation for further and higher education, and for employment. We want new GCSEs to set expectations which match those of the best education systems in the world, with rigorous assessment that provides a reliable measure of students' achievement. The reforms are extensive and represent a new qualification gold standard.

Schools are now teaching some of the new reformed GCSEs and A-levels, and we have already published reformed subject content for those GCSEs and A-levels to be taught from September 2016. Content for reformed GCSE subjects and for AS and A-level subjects can be found on gov.uk.

The new GCSEs will be more academically demanding and reformed AS and A-levels will better prepare students for undergraduate study.

Today I am publishing revised subject content for some of the GCSEs and AS and A-levels that will be taught in schools from September 2017:

GCSEs in ancient history, classical civilisation, electronics, film studies, media studies and statistics; and

AS and A-levels in accounting, ancient history, archaeology, classical civilisation, electronics, film studies, law and media studies.

Accounting AS and A-level requires students to understand and to apply double entry accounting methods. A greater emphasis is placed on the use of accounting concepts and techniques in the analysis and evaluation of financial information. There is also a better balance between financial and management accounting.

The new ancient history GCSE, and AS and A-levels will require students to study events, individuals, societies, developments and issues drawn from the period 3000 BC to 500 AD. At GCSE students must study the history of at least two societies, at least one of which must be Roman or Greek. At A-level students must study the history of both ancient Rome and ancient Greece. At GCSE students will have to undertake one period study covering at least 50 years, one longer period study covering at least 150 years, and two depth studies focusing on shorter time spans. At A-level students will undertake two period studies of at least 75 years and two depth studies.

The new archaeology AS and A-levels will require students to study two archaeological contexts in depth (one at AS) and what the archaeological evidence can tell us about that society's social structure, belief system, art and technology. Through two breadth studies (one at AS) students will also study at least three different societies in relation to specific issues such as religion and ritual, or economics and material culture.

The new classical civilisation GCSE, AS and A-levels will require students to study both Roman and Greek civilisation (and their surrounding worlds). All students will now study literature (at least 30% of the GCSE and A-level) and visual/material culture (at least 20% of the GCSE and 15% of the A-level), and at A-level students will also study classical thought. Students will develop their understanding of the classical world through study of the social, historical, and cultural context of the literature and sources selected.

The new electronics GCSE increases the demand of the subject by increasing the breadth and depth of content students are required to study. The new electronics AS and A-levels have improved depth and breadth with new topics such as the principles of semiconductors added. The GCSE, AS and A-level content also includes strengthened mathematical requirements and a detailed list of equations that students will be required to know and understand.

The film studies GCSE, AS and A-levels will require students to study critically recognised, culturally and historically significant films. At GCSE and AS students will study at least six films including at least one British, one non-English language and one independent film and at least one historical film made before 1961. A-level students will study at least 12 films from at least three continents covering pre-1930 to present day, including documentary, experimental and silent film. Overall the content emphasises a more academic approach with greater emphasis on a critical and contextual understanding of film, and at A-level of film theory.

The new law AS and A-level content will ensure students study a greater number of areas of substantive law: at AS one area of public law and one area of private law; and at A-level at least three areas of law. Students also need to study the nature of law including links to moral concepts, how law interacts with society, and the English legal system.

The new media studies GCSE, AS and A-levels will ensure that students have an understanding of the main theoretical concepts underpinning the subject. Students will study media language, representation, media industries, and audiences, and will apply all four of these to at least one audio visual, one print and one online media form. Overall, students will study nine forms of media and all products studied must be culturally, socially and historically significant. The AS and A-level also require students to study a wide range of specified theories and theorists.

The new and more demanding statistics GCSE requires students to study the statistical enquiry cycle and to perform key statistical calculations such as interpercentile

range and standard deviation. Students will be required to know and use fundamental formulae, for example to determine Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. New content has been added, such as using collected data and calculated probabilities to determine and interpret risk, and interpreting the characteristics of a binomial distribution.

[HCWS508]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Police Grant Report England and Wales 2016-17

**The Minister for Policing, Crime and Criminal Justice (Mike Penning):** My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has today laid before the House, "The Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2016/17" (HC 753). The report sets out, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's determination for 2016-17 of the aggregate amount of grant that she proposes to pay under section 46(2) of the Police Act 1996, and the amount to be paid to the Greater London Authority for the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime.

At the time the provisional police grant report 2016-17 was laid on 17 December 2015 I said that I was also considering whether a limited amount of police capital grant would be reallocated. After careful consideration I have decided that £10.4 million will be reallocated to support police national technology services. This will assist in providing necessary investment in these critical police services.

To assist police and crime commissioners and chief constables with their medium-term financial planning, I have also decided to provide further information on the police funding settlement over the spending review period. Please note that these figures are indicative only. Home Office Ministers will decide on the level of reallocations for each year on an annual basis, but PCCs should assume that these will be broadly in line with those in 2016-17. PCCs should plan on the basis that their direct resource funding—consisting of formula funding, legacy council tax grants, national and international city grants and precept—will remain at broadly flat cash levels when compared with 2015-16, throughout the spending review period.

This statement also includes details of other funding streams that the Home Office, the Department of Communities and Local Government and the Welsh Government intend to provide to the police in 2016-17.

Table 1: The 2015 spending review settlement for the police

	15-16* (£m)	16-17 (£m)	17-18 (£m)	18-19 (£m)	19-20 (£m)	Change (£m)	Cash change (%)	Real change (%)
Government funding (excl CT)	8,271	8,378	8,497	8,631	8,785	514	6.2%	-1.4%
o/w Home Office	8,099	8,204	8,321	8,453	8,604	506	6.2%	-1.4%
o/w DCLG	37	37	37	37	37	0	0.0%	-7.2%
o/w Welsh Government	135	137	139	141	143	8	6.2%	-1.4%
Precept	3,105	3,194	3,286	3,379	3,474	369	11.9%	3.8%
Total	11,376	11,572	11,783	12,010	12,259	883	7.8%	0.0%

\*Central Government funding includes Airwave which has been brought into the police settlement and council tax freeze grant amounts which were not known at the time of the 2015-16 annual police settlement.

Table 2: Indicative breakdown of the 2015 spending review settlement

£m	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Total central Government funding*	8,355	8,461	8,583	8,725
o/w ESMCP	80	175	160	55
o/w Police transformation fund and other reallocations (including Airwave and PFI)	491	545	725	1,017
o/w Direct funding	7,784	7,741	7,698	7,653
Precept**	3,194	3,286	3,379	3,474
Overall resource funding***	10,978	11,026	11,076	11,127

\*These figures include baseline adjustments for HMIC and NCA.

\*\*Assumes a tax base increase of 0.5%. These figures are based on conservative tax base growth assumptions used at the time of the spending review announcement. These will be updated over time in line with the latest projections from the Office for Budget Responsibility. Figures assume that all PCCs maximise their precept up to the 2%/£5 referendum limit in each year and PCCs in Wales increase precept by 2% each year. These figures assume the 10 PCCs in the lower quartile receiving this additional flexibility remain the same as in 2016-17.

\*\*\*Direct resource funding consists of formula funding, NICC grants, legacy council tax grants and precept.

Note: figures may not sum due to rounding.

Table 3: Police revenue funding 2016-17

Police funding	16-17 £m
Central Government funding*	8,995
o/w CT Police Grant**	640
o/w Airwave	204
o/w Police Private Finance Initiatives	73
o/w Legacy Council Tax Grants	545
Overall core Government settlement funding	7,534
Reallocations	218
o/w Direct Entry	4.6
o/w Emergency Services Network	80
o/w Independent Police Complaints Commission (for the transfer of integrity functions)	32
o/w Innovation Fund	55
o/w Major Programmes (HOB and NPDP)	21.8
o/w Special Grant	25
Transformation Fund	76
Total direct Government funding	7,239
Government formula funding	7,061
cash change	-41
cash change percentage from 15-16	-0.6%
real change percentage	-2.3%
National and international Capital City Grants	178
o/w City of London Police	4.5
o/w Metropolitan Police	173.6

Table 3: Police revenue funding 2016-17

Police funding	16-17 £m
Precept	3,194
Overall resource funding***	10,978
cash change	51
cash change percentage	0.5%
real cut	-1.2%

\* includes £14 million baseline adjustment for NCA in 2016-17. A separate baseline transfer has been applied for HMIC.

\*\* Additional capital of £30 million will be provided for CT policing.

\*\*\*Comprises formula funding, NICC grants, legacy council tax grants and precept.

Detail of Police Transformation Funds (totals indicative)

Transformation fund	76.4
o/w new transformation funding	37.8
o/w Firearms	34
o/w Digital justice (CJS)/digital investigations (DII)	4.6

Table 4: Police Capital 2016-17

2015-16 Police Capital	£m
Police Capital Grant	54.1
Special Grant Capital	1
National Police Air Service	16.5
Police Live Services	10.4
Total	82

Table 5: Revenue allocations for England and Wales 2016-17

Local Policing Body	2016-17					Legacy Council Tax Grants (total from HO)
	HO core (including Rule 1) £m	Welsh Top-up	WG	Ex-DCLG Formula Funding		
Avon and Somerset	105.0	-	-	56.5	14.7	
Bedfordshire	40.3	-	-	23.3	4.6	
Cambridgeshire	48.5	-	-	24.4	6.5	
Cheshire	61.5	-	-	44.8	8.3	
City of London	18.4	-	-	33.6	0.1	
Cleveland	46.2	-	-	38.5	7.7	
Cumbria	28.7	-	-	30.8	4.8	
Derbyshire	62.1	-	-	37.7	8.7	
Devon and Cornwall	102.7	-	-	63.1	15.5	
Dorset	41.2	-	-	17.3	7.9	
Durham	42.7	-	-	37.0	6.1	
Dyfed-Powys	32.1	5.1	12.9	-	-	
Essex	102.8	-	-	55.9	13.1	

Table 5: Revenue allocations for England and Wales 2016-17  
2016-17

Local Policing Body	HO core (including Rule 1) £m	Welsh Top-up	WG	Ex-DCLG Formula Funding	Legacy Council Tax Grants (total from HO)
Gloucestershire	34.4	-	-	19.5	6.1
Greater London Authority	861.5	-	-	749.8	119.7
Greater Manchester	226.6	-	-	181.4	25.7
Gwent	42.4	-	30.1	-	-
Hampshire	120.0	-	-	63.1	12.9
Hertfordshire	71.4	-	-	36.4	10.2
Humberside	67.2	-	-	46.6	10.0
Kent	106.3	-	-	66.6	13.3
Lancashire	100.6	-	-	79.2	12.8
Leicestershire	65.3	-	-	39.6	8.9
Lincolnshire	38.4	-	-	20.3	6.8
Merseyside	122.5	-	-	112.8	15.6
Norfolk	50.2	-	-	28.8	9.3
North Wales	46.3	4.9	21.6	-	-
North Yorkshire	41.7	-	-	27.0	7.9
Northamptonshire	43.2	-	-	24.2	6.6
Northumbria	110.1	-	-	107.4	8.2
Nottinghamshire	77.9	-	-	48.1	9.7
South Wales	87.5	-	72.2	-	-
South Yorkshire	100.6	-	-	77.5	10.9
Staffordshire	66.5	-	-	39.9	12.0
Suffolk	40.7	-	-	22.9	6.8
Surrey	62.2	-	-	29.2	9.2
Sussex	97.8	-	-	53.9	13.2
Thames Valley	141.2	-	-	73.9	15.3
Warwickshire	31.0	-	-	17.4	5.2
West Mercia	66.3	-	-	43.4	12.0
West Midlands	250.8	-	-	180.3	19.0
West Yorkshire	171.5	-	-	129.3	16.7
Wiltshire	37.5	-	-	20.7	5.2
<i>Total England and Wales</i>	<i>4,112.0</i>	<i>9.9</i>	<i>136.8</i>	<i>2,802.2</i>	<i>507.4</i>

Table 6: Change in total direct resource funding\*

Force Area	2015-16 £m	2016-17 £m	£m	Cash change %
Avon and Somerset	269.3	270.7	1.4	0.5%
Bedfordshire	99.6	100.0	0.4	0.4%
Cambridgeshire	128.1	128.9	0.8	0.6%
Cheshire	169.5	170.9	1.4	0.8%
City of London	55.4	56.8	1.4	2.5%
Cleveland	122.3	122.5	0.3	0.2%
Cumbria	99.2	99.7	0.5	0.5%
Derbyshire	160.7	161.4	0.7	0.4%
Devon and Cornwall	278.0	279.5	1.5	0.5%
Dorset	118.4	119.3	1.0	0.8%
Durham	112.5	112.7	0.2	0.2%
Dyfed-Powys	93.3	94.1	0.8	0.8%
Essex	260.8	263.4	2.5	1.0%
Gloucestershire	104.3	105.1	0.8	0.8%
Greater London Authority	2,517.4	2,522.4	5.0	0.2%
Greater Manchester	541.2	542.9	1.7%	0.3%
Gwent	117.8	118.5	0.7	0.6%
Hampshire	299.1	300.6	1.5	0.5%
Hertfordshire	181.1	182.9	1.8	1.0%
Humberside	169.4	169.8	0.5	0.3%
Kent	273.1	275.5	2.4	0.9%
Lancashire	258.9	259.5	0.6	0.2%
Leicestershire	167.7	168.5	0.7	0.4%

Table 6: Change in total direct resource funding\*

Force Area	2015-16	2016-17	£m	Cash change %
	£m	£m		
Lincolnshire	108.4	109.1	0.7	0.7%
Merseyside	307.0	307.0	0.0	0.0%
Norfolk	145.5	146.5	1.0	0.7%
North Wales	139.8	141.1	1.3	0.9%
North Yorkshire	137.1	138.2	1.1	0.8%
Northamptonshire	119.2	119.9	0.7	0.6%
Northumbria	259.5	260.3	0.8	0.3%
Nottinghamshire	188.9	189.5	0.6	0.3%
South Wales	255.1	256.5	1.5	0.6%
South Yorkshire	239.1	240.0	0.9	0.4%
Staffordshire	176.7	177.6	0.8	0.5%
Suffolk	110.9	111.6	0.6	0.6%
Surrey	205.0	207.1	2.1	1.0%
Sussex	249.7	252.1	2.5	1.0%
Thames Valley	369.7	371.9	2.2	0.6%
Warwickshire	89.5	90.1	0.6	0.7%
West Mercia	198.5	199.8	1.3	0.6%
West Midlands	522.8	524.0	1.2	0.2%
West Yorkshire	404.6	406.3	1.7	0.4%
Wiltshire	102.8	103.5	0.6	0.6%
<i>Total</i>	<i>10,927.0</i>	<i>10,977.8</i>	<i>50.8</i>	<i>0.5%</i>

\*This includes all formula grant, NICC grants and legacy council tax grants and police precept. This assumes that PCCs in England increase their precept to the maximum referendum limit in 2016-17, PCCs in Wales raise council tax by 2% and tax base growth of 0.5% across England and Wales.

Table 7: Capital allowances for England and Wales 2016-17

Local Policing Body	2016-17 £m
Avon and Somerset	1.2
Bedfordshire	0.5
Cambridgeshire	0.6
Cheshire	0.8
City of London	0.4
Cleveland	0.6
Cumbria	0.4
Derbyshire	0.7
Devon and Cornwall	1.3
Dorset	0.5
Durham	0.6
Dyfed-Powys	0.4
Essex	1.1
Gloucestershire	0.4
Greater Manchester	2.7
Gwent	0.5
Hampshire	1.4
Hertfordshire	0.7
Humberside	0.8
Kent	1.3
Lancashire	1.3
Leicestershire	0.8
Lincolnshire	0.5

Table 7: Capital allowances for England and Wales 2016-17

Local Policing Body	2016-17 £m
Merseyside	1.6
Metropolitan	14.3
Norfolk	0.6
North Wales	0.5
North Yorkshire	0.5
Northamptonshire	0.5
Northumbria	1.5
Nottinghamshire	0.9
South Wales	1.1
South Yorkshire	1.3
Staffordshire	0.8
Suffolk	0.5
Surrey	0.7
Sussex	1.1
Thames Valley	1.7
Warwickshire	0.5
West Mercia	0.9
West Midlands	2.9
West Yorkshire	2.1
Wiltshire	0.5
<i>Total</i>	<i>54.1</i>

[HCWS510]



# Ministerial Corrections

*Thursday 4 February 2016*

## TREASURY

### Bank of England and Financial Services Bill [*Lords*]

*The following is an extract from the Second Reading debate of the Bank of England and Financial Services Bill [*Lords*] on 1 February 2016.*

**Harriett Baldwin:** My right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster spoke up for his constituency. He mentioned a problem with interest rate swap claims running out of time, which I would like to take up with him on a separate occasion, if I may. I want to clarify that the power to appoint deputy governors is not the Governor's alone; it is actually an appointment of the Queen, with the consent of the Chancellor.

*[Official Report, 1 February 2016, Vol. 605, c. 699.]*

*Letter of Correction from Harriet Baldwin:*

An error has been identified in my winding-up speech on the Second Reading of the Bank of England and Financial Services Bill [*Lords*] on 1 February 2016.

The correct response should have been:

**Harriett Baldwin:** My right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster spoke up for his constituency. He mentioned a problem with interest

rate swap claims running out of time, which I would like to take up with him on a separate occasion, if I may. I want to clarify that the power to appoint deputy governors is not the Governor's alone; it is actually an appointment of the Queen, **on the advice** of the Chancellor.

### Financial Conduct Authority

*The following is an extract from the debate on the Financial Conduct Authority on 1 February 2016:*

**Harriett Baldwin:** The FCA has established a redress scheme for small businesses that were mis-sold interest rate hedging products to ensure that eligible businesses are compensated. So far the scheme has paid out on 18,000 cases, and more than £2 billion has been paid in redress, including £464 million to deal with consequential losses.

*[Official Report, 1 February 2016, Vol. 605, c. 747.]*

*Letter of correction from Harriett Baldwin:*

An error has been identified in my response to the debate on the Financial Conduct Authority.

The correct response should have been:

**Harriett Baldwin:** The FCA has established a redress scheme for small businesses that were mis-sold interest rate hedging products to ensure that eligible businesses are compensated. So far **banks have sent more than 18,000 determination letters**, and more than £2 billion has been paid in redress, including £464 million to deal with consequential losses.



# ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 4 February 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>CHURCH COMMISSIONERS</b> .....	1079	<b>ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL</b>	
Church Leadership: Women and BME Groups .....	1081	<b>AFFAIRS</b> .....	1061
Credit Unions .....	1081	British Food .....	1066
Ethical Investment Policy.....	1080	Broadband Services.....	1072
Queen's 90th Birthday .....	1079	Chemical Spills (River Tamar) .....	1061
Street Pastor Teams .....	1079	Emissions Standards: Fines.....	1062
		Flood Defence Programme .....	1064
		Flood Defences: Farmland.....	1071
		Flooding: Agriculture Industry.....	1068
		Food Waste .....	1063
		Nature Improvement Areas.....	1070
		Topical Questions .....	1072
<b>ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE</b> .....	1077		
EU Referendum .....	1077		
Policy Development Grants .....	1078		

# WRITTEN STATEMENTS

Thursday 4 February 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT</b> .....	31WS	<b>EDUCATION</b> .....	32WS
General Data Protection Regulation .....	31WS	Reformed GCSE and A-level Content .....	32WS
<b>DEFENCE</b> .....	31WS		
Northern Ireland Executive: Gifting of Surplus		<b>HOME DEPARTMENT</b> .....	34WS
Accommodation .....	31WS	Police Grant Report England and Wales 2016-17...	34WS

# MINISTERIAL CORRECTIONS

Thursday 4 February 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
<b>TREASURY</b> .....	7MC	<b>TREASURY—continued</b>	
Bank of England and Financial Services Bill		Financial Conduct Authority.....	8MC
[Lords].....	7MC		

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## CONTENTS

Thursday 4 February 2016

**Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 1061] [see index inside back page]**

*Secretary of State for Environment Food and Rural Affairs*  
*Church Commissioners*  
*Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission*

**Return of Kings [Col. 1083]**

*Answer to urgent question—(Karen Bradley)*

**Business of the House [Col. 1091]**

*Statement—(Chris Grayling)*

**Collapse of Kids Company [Col. 1109]**

*Select Committee statement—(Mr Jenkin)*

**Backbench Business**

**Parliamentary Sovereignty and EU Renegotiations [Col. 1119]**

*Motion—(Mr Baron)—negatived*

**Yemen [Col. 1158]**

*Motion—(Kirsten Oswald)—agreed to*

**Delay Repay Scheme: Rail Commuters [Col. 1191]**

*Debate on motion for Adjournment*

**Westminster Hall**

**Preventing Violence Against Women: Role of Men [Col. 465WH]**

*General Debate*

**Written Statements [Col. 31WS]**

**Ministerial Corrections [Col. 7MC]**

**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

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