

Tuesday
12 April 2016

Volume 608
No. 141



**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Tuesday 12 April 2016

House of Commons

Tuesday 12 April 2016

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

EU Referendum

1. **David Warburton** (Somerton and Frome) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect of the EU referendum on the UK's diplomatic relations (a) within the EU and (b) globally. [904400]

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): Other Governments respect the fact that this is a decision for the British people. Our EU partners agree that many of the reforms that we have secured in the renegotiation will benefit Europe as a whole, and more and more of our friends and allies around the world are telling us that they value this country's membership of the European Union.

Mr Speaker: Order. It would be a courtesy to the House to tell Members what I think Front Benchers know—namely, that the Foreign Secretary is away on ministerial business.

Mr Lidington: I apologise for not doing so at the start. My right hon. Friend is in the far east on the final leg of a tour covering several countries.

Mr Speaker: We are grateful, and we look forward to the right hon. Gentleman's imminent return.

David Warburton: Does my right hon. Friend agree that whatever the outcome of the referendum in June, the threats we face mean that our bilateral intelligence-sharing relationships with other European countries will remain vital, and that, working with those outside the EU, European relationships will continue unimpaired to ensure we remain as safe as we can be from external threats?

Mr Lidington: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is important to maintain strong bilateral relationships in intelligence sharing between the relevant agencies here, in Europe and around the world, while strengthening the intelligence sharing and sharing of information between our police forces. The recent renegotiation confirmed that responsibility for national security rests solely with national Governments, but EU membership

enhances our ability to co-operate with other European countries to combat crime and terrorism and keep the British people safe.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): What contingency planning is under way with our European and NATO allies for a new provocation from President Putin after our referendum? Putin is of course hoping and praying that Britain votes to leave the European Union and, as the Minister will know, there is a widespread view in security and foreign policy circles that Putin is planning just such a fresh provocation after the referendum, whatever the result.

Mr Lidington: Given the recent history of the Kremlin's activities, not only in Ukraine and Georgia but the pressure brought to bear on the Baltic states and the use of the energy weapon against central European countries, we are right to be on our guard. This will be a matter of prime concern at the forthcoming Warsaw NATO summit, and it is important that NATO is prepared for hybrid aggression from the Kremlin that might involve information, the use of energy and the use of soft power, as much as conventional hard power.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Our EU partners will see the EU referendum as a question of our solidarity with them. What lesson will our Italian partners draw from our lack of absolute solidarity with the Italians over the case of Giulio Regeni?

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend will want to know that the Minister for the Middle East recently saw the Egyptian ambassador about this case and emphasised that the British Government want to see a full and thorough investigation. Given Mr Regeni's nationality, the Italian Government and authorities are in the lead, but we remain in very close contact with them and are giving every possible assistance to try to secure an outcome that will give some answers to Mr Regeni's family.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): When the Prime Minister described European discussions as "abrasive" and "difficult", he was not talking about other European countries; he was not talking about debate across the Floor of the House; he was not even talking about debate within the Conservative party. Rather, he was talking about discussions within his own Cabinet. What does that fractious disunity do to the credibility of this Government's foreign policy in Europe and beyond?

Mr Lidington: Our counterparts around Europe are robust democracies and they recognise that this country's membership of the European Union has divided politicians of all parties for very many years, and that it is possible for people on the right and the left to come to opposite points of view. What the Prime Minister has secured—a firm Government position to support our continued membership of the European Union but with licence given to Ministers to express their dissent in a private capacity—is a fair outcome.

Alex Salmond: Does the Minister not feel that the robust democracies in Europe and beyond—not to mention the people of this country—are crying out for a debate on our future in Europe that rises above the internal divisions in the Conservative party?

Mr Lidington: That is precisely what the Government are leading at the moment. I think that at the end of this week, when the Electoral Commission designates the two campaign organisations for remain and leave, we will indeed see that debate continue, and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman and his party will wish to play a constructive part in it.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): There has just been a referendum in the Netherlands, where the people overwhelmingly rejected the extension of privileges to Ukraine and its membership of the European Union. How will our Government recalibrate our policy on that?

Mr Lidington: The Dutch vote was a consultative referendum on a Dutch parliamentary decision to ratify the European Union-Ukraine association agreement. It is a matter entirely for the Dutch Government and the Dutch Parliament. The United Kingdom remains a strong supporter of the efforts being made by Ukraine to defend its national sovereignty and integrity in the face of Russian aggression, and to implement much-needed, far-reaching political and economic reforms that will benefit everyone in Ukraine.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that the only thing that Nigel Farage, George Galloway and Vladimir Putin have in common is that they want Britain to leave the European Union? Does that not say a lot about the consequences of our possible departure from the EU?

Mr Lidington: There are indeed some strange bedfellows in that particular camp, and none of those three gentlemen is one from whom I would want to take advice about where the best interests of the British people lie.

Migration (Western Balkans)

2. **Karen Lumley** (Redditch) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effectiveness of recent steps to reduce migration to Europe through the western Balkans. [904401]

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): The Government believe that the EU-Turkey agreement will make a genuine difference to the migration flows into Europe and through the western Balkans. The plan disrupts the smugglers' business model, and breaks the link between getting into a boat and settling in Europe. We continue to monitor the impact on the ground and help countries in the region to manage the pressures that they currently face.

Karen Lumley: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the Government will continue to help Greece to manage the pressures on its borders and avoid the distressing scenes that we have witnessed in the western Balkans?

Mr Lidington: Yes. To date, we have allocated more than £19 million to Greece for urgent aid such as food, water and medical assistance. We are also supporting organisations that are helping the Greek Government to build their capacity to manage arrivals and monitor borders. So far this year, for example, we have offered

139 months' worth of screening and debriefing expertise to Frontex to help it to beef up the capacity of the Greeks to manage the very large number of asylum claims that they will need to process.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I understand that the British Government have also contributed eight judges, but I also understand that the shortfall in expertise amounts to 2,500 staff. What more can the Government do to support the Greeks?

Mr Lidington: We continue to consider whether there are ways in which we can help further. We are not members of the Schengen group, so under the group's rules we are barred from providing some forms of assistance. However, the Prime Minister talked to Prime Minister Tsipras very recently about what more we could do, and we continue to discuss with Greece and our other European partners how best we can help to manage the pressures on Greece. It is in all our interests that European countries come together to manage the crisis in the Aegean and ensure that migrants are treated humanely but also fairly, and that if they do not have well-founded asylum claims, they can be returned.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): If a migrant claims asylum in Greece and then makes his or her way to the United Kingdom, we are unable to send that individual back to Greece because the Greek asylum system is deemed unfit for purpose. What steps is the Minister taking with his EU counterparts to ensure that Greece brings its asylum and detention systems up to the requisite standard?

Mr Lidington: Anyone in the circumstances that my hon. Friend describes who was not a Greek national would need a visa to enter the United Kingdom from the countries to which asylum seekers are going from Greece. The whole purpose of the EU-Turkey agreement and of the assistance we are giving to Greece is to manage the situation in the region so that we do not face the pressures he describes.

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): Thousands of Yazidi women who have been kidnapped, tortured and raped by ISIS cannot come through the Balkans and are unable to access the medical and psychological support they need in the region. Will the right hon. Gentleman encourage our EU partners to follow the example of Germany by admitting some of those women so that they can access the medical support they need? Will he also talk to the Home Office about allowing some of those women access to Britain so that we too can assist them?

Mr Lidington: Each asylum claim in Greece has to be considered according to international law and judged on that basis. The United Kingdom is giving strong financial and political support to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, which are bearing the brunt of supporting the very large numbers of refugees coming from Syria, including the Yazidi women about whom the hon. Lady is particularly concerned. She is right to be concerned about those people, but the best way to offer them the help they need is to ensure that the money that was promised at the recent London conference on Syria is provided to give them assistance in the first safe country

they get to, rather than encouraging them to make a perilous journey across the Aegean sea in the hands of the people smugglers.

Daesh

3. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What discussions he has had with other members of the international coalition on improving diplomatic co-ordination of steps to tackle Daesh. [904402]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): Britain has helped to create the global coalition against Daesh that now includes more than 60 countries. The last meeting of the smaller group of countries, which the Foreign Secretary and I attended, took place in Rome in January this year.

Kevin Foster: I thank the Minister for his answer. As reports emerged of the genocide being committed by the Nazis, the allied Governments made a co-ordinated joint statement on 17 December 1942 to condemn those crimes and pledge to bring those responsible to justice at the end of hostilities. Does my right hon. Friend the Minister agree that co-ordinating a similar statement today would be appropriate, given the evidence of similar crimes being committed by Daesh against Christians and other religious minorities?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend makes a powerful argument. The regular images on our screens confirm the scale and the barbarity of Daesh's inhumane treatment of minorities. We are now witnessing systematic and horrific attacks against Christians, Yazidis and others, based on their religious beliefs or their ethnicity. I too believe that acts of genocide have taken place but, as the Prime Minister has said, genocide is a matter of legal rather than political interpretation. We as the Government are not the prosecutor, the judge or the jury. Such matters are determined first in the international courts and in the United Nations Security Council, but we are helping to gather evidence that could be used to hold Daesh to account appropriately.

Jo Cox (Batley and Spen) (Lab): Daesh poses a particular threat to civilians in Syria, as does the ongoing besieging of communities across that country. With the Syrian regime continuing to block United Nations trucks, less aid is now reaching those communities than before the cessation of hostilities. Does the welcome news on Sunday that the World Food Programme was able to deliver 20 tonnes of aid to Deir ez-Zor in a successful airdrop demonstrate that the Foreign Office, along with the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence, should now re-examine the possibility of airdrops to all besieged communities in Syria?

Mr Ellwood: I pay tribute to the work that the hon. Lady does in this particular area, and to her knowledge of these matters. She is right to recognise the extra work that is being done to ensure that aid gets through to those difficult areas. This is one of our focuses as the cessation of hostilities begins to endure. We must ensure that those who have been caught up in this horrendous war are able to receive the aid that they require.

22. [904424] **Stuart Andrew** (Pudsey) (Con): Tackling Daesh online is as important as tackling the menace on the battlefield. Together with the international community, what more can the Government do to ensure that social media is closed down when it poisons the minds of young people and opened up to promote tolerance, fairness and opportunity?

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The difference between Daesh and al-Qaeda or others before it is that this and future groups will use the internet to recruit, to fund themselves and to encourage people to fight. That is why we formed the coalition's strategic communications working group. In London, we have formed a cell that shares best practice to ensure that we stop the movement of funds and fighters and that we challenge the poisonous ideology that Daesh puts out online.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Yesterday, the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors met and carried out an assessment of its ability to face terrorism, stating that its capability to deal with the international terror threat was imperfect. Will the Minister indicate whether he will host a conference with Garda officers and draw up a plan to ensure that the threat does not permeate our border?

Mr Ellwood: That is a little bit off my beat, but it is something that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe, the Home Office and I should want to move forward. We have been at the forefront of sharing best practice in recognising when extremism starts to embed itself, whether in universities, prisons or elsewhere, but if lessons are to be learned and if co-ordination can be better, we should absolutely look into that.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): The international peace agreement is effectively dead as a result of recent Russian action in Aleppo. What further action can the group of countries that my hon. Friend mentioned in answer to an earlier question take to tackle Daesh more effectively?

Mr Ellwood: I understand that my hon. Friend considers these matters closely, but I do not agree with his analysis. Russia is playing an important role in the cessation of hostilities given its influence over the Assad regime. He is right to identify the consequences and challenges facing Aleppo, which is Syria's largest city by some margin. There has been an awful lot of frustration at the lack of humanitarian aid, which Staffan de Mistura, the UN special envoy, is focusing on to ensure that support can get in.

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): Daesh is trying hard to radicalise sub-Saharan Africa as well as the Maghreb. What efforts are the Government making to ensure that east African countries, such as Kenya, and the nations of the Sahel—Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad—do not fall prey to this malignant cancer?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman is right to focus on not only the challenges of Daesh in Iraq and in Syria, and we are also familiar with what is happening in Libya. Further afield, unless we are able to work and encourage local police and forces and local capability to

recognise extremism, we will see it permeate other places, such as sub-Saharan Africa. That is exactly what we are doing with our local programmes in each of those countries to ensure that they have the strength and capability to recognise when extremist groups, such as Daesh, al-Shabaab, and Boko Haram, are trying to penetrate their areas.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Unfortunately, progress is rather slow today. I am keen to accommodate as many questioners as possible. A short sentence by way of question and a short sentence by way of reply will usually suffice.

EU Referendum

4. Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect of the EU referendum on UK trade with countries with which the EU has a free trade agreement. [904404]

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): The Government believe that the UK will be stronger, safer and better off by remaining in a reformed European Union. Were we to leave, we should expect to lose our preferential access to not only the European single market, but the 53 markets outside the EU with which the EU has free trade agreements.

Richard Graham: The EU has preferential trade agreements with 53 countries, including high-growth Asian nations such as Vietnam and Korea, where I believe the benefits have boosted British trade by some £2 billion a year, and talks with Indonesia and the Philippines start soon. Will my right hon. Friend explain whether we would easily be able to replicate those 53 agreements in the case of Brexit and how long that would take?

Mr Lidington: May I congratulate my hon. Friend on the work he does as the Prime Minister's trade envoy to the ASEAN—Association of Southeast Asian Nations—region? I agree with him that the record shows that alternative trade agreements would take years to negotiate and there would be no guarantee whatsoever that we could obtain terms that were anything like as good as those that we enjoy through the European Union today.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Conservative Members do not like to hear this, but will the Minister confirm that he listened to the wise words of David Miliband on Radio 4's "Today" programme this morning? Is what he said not absolutely true: our international trading partners are already postponing decisions on investment in this country and ceasing to hire in this country?

Mr Lidington: I missed that interview this morning, but I do agree with what Mr Miliband says. What I hear direct from businesses in this country is that they are concerned about the uncertainty, that some have indeed postponed decisions and that many more would consider reducing the levels of employment or of investment in this country if there were a decision to quit the European Union.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Does the Minister really believe the guff and propaganda he is spouting?

Mr Lidington: I would point my hon. Friend to the fact that the Government's case—that we are better off remaining in the EU—is supported by the overwhelming majority of business leaders and of trade union leaders in this country. I just wish he and others who advocate leaving the EU would, for once, come up with a coherent and consistent description of the alternative.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): As we know, the Government are in favour of the European partnership, trade and the benefits of remaining in the EU. The EU referendum provides the opportunity to display exactly that, so when will the Minister be inviting and, we hope, welcoming President Hollande and Chancellor Merkel to the UK, with the strong campaign message, "Shoulder to shoulder. It is better for the UK to remain in the EU"? Will he welcome and invite them?

Mr Lidington: Both Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande have made it clear that they believe the United Kingdom contributes a huge amount to the political and economic weight of the EU in the world, and they want to see us vote to stay within the EU. They are also clear that this is a decision for the British electorate to take, and they respect that fact.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): In answer to the Minister's question, our vision of the UK outside the EU is very simply that we would be like most other free trading nations around the world: trading as we see fit. I suggest the Government are playing with fire, because the more they wade in in favour of remaining during this referendum debate, the more the referendum will be seen as being unfair, and that could create further uncertainty, particularly if the vote is narrowly for staying.

Mr Lidington: The Government are not going to be silent or neutral on an issue that we believe is central to the future prosperity and security of the United Kingdom. I am glad that my hon. Friend seems to believe, on leaving, we should continue to be part of the European single market, but he is yet to say how that would involve not having to accept freedom of movement, agreement to all European rules although we would have no say or vote on them, and contributing to the EU budget. That is the situation Norway and Switzerland are in today.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): Given the claims some have made about possible free trade deals outside the EU, is the Minister for Europe aware of any major trading partner that wishes the UK to leave the EU?

Mr Lidington: No—none.

Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): The key point here is of course that we have a free trade agreement with the European Union, as we have with other nation states. There is a question that has to be answered: why are so many of the states that have said we should stay in the EU the ones that the other side seem to think we can have some sort of agreement with?

Mr Lidington: The consistent message that we hear from friends, allies and partners, not just in Europe, but in the Commonwealth and around the world, is that they want to see us stay in the EU. I am still waiting for the advocates of quitting to come up with an example of a friendly international leader who supports their case.

Pat Glass (North West Durham) (Lab): There are more cars manufactured in one city in the north of England in one month than that great car-producing country Italy makes in a year, and the vast majority of those cars are exported to Europe—and that is just one city in one region. We see that being replicated right across the country. Early assessment suggests that any post-Brexit deal would place a tariff of up to 10% on every single car manufactured in the UK and sent to Europe, and that, over time, that would damage both manufacturing and jobs in the UK. Will the Minister confirm the possibility of a tariff of at least 10% being placed on every car manufactured in the UK?

Mr Lidington: That is indeed the case. If we were outside the single market, and World Trade Organisation rules applied, we could expect that 10% tariff on every car exported to the rest of Europe from the United Kingdom, which is why exit would be such a bad deal.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I made an appeal for a speed-up a few moments ago, but unfortunately, to put it bluntly, the Member concerned made a mess of it and did not speed up. We must now speed up.

Honour-based Violence

5. **Jake Berry** (Rossendale and Darwen) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support other countries in tackling honour-based violence. [904405]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): Tackling violence against women and girls—including so-called honour killings—and the promotion of women's rights remain central to UK foreign policy objectives. We work closely with the most affected countries, including with the Governments of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Jake Berry: I support the work that the UK Government have done with the Government of Cameroon in tackling the abhorrent practice of breast ironing. Does the Minister agree that unless we seek to find ways for these so-called honour-based crimes to be prosecuted in their country of origin, we will struggle to pursue prosecutions here in the United Kingdom?

Mr Ellwood: I pay huge tribute to my hon. Friend for the work that he does in this area. He has called debates in Westminster Hall and in other forums to ensure that we recognise the important role that Britain and the international community must play in relation to female genital mutilation and breast ironing. As he says, those are abhorrent crimes, and we are working with other Governments in countries where such practices exist.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): Karma Nirvana based in Headingley in my constituency does amazing work highlighting this so-called honour-based violence, which is a scandalous practice. It trains police officers. Will the Minister tell me what he is doing to work with foreign Government to ensure that they are also training their police forces?

Mr Ellwood: We have doubled our commitment to human rights and increased the Magna Carta Fund to promote better understanding of these issues. What we find is that states have the laws in position, but they do not apply them. That is where we need to work closely with Governments to make sure that they follow through the laws that are already in existence.

Middle East

6. **David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the likelihood of a two-state solution in the Middle East. [904406]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): I visited Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories in February and I remain clear that a two-state solution is the only credible way to resolve the conflict. We continue to work closely with international partners to preserve the viability of the two-state solution and to encourage a return to meaningful negotiation.

David Mowat: In 2016, there has been an acceleration of evictions and property destruction on the west bank. By these continuing actions, the Israeli Government are showing complete contempt for the notion of a two-state solution—a fact recognised by President Carter. When will the Government update UK policy to reflect reality on the ground in this area?

Mr Ellwood: During my meetings with the Deputy Foreign Minister and indeed with the Prime Minister, I found that they remained committed to the two-state solution, but my hon. Friend is right to recognise that measures are being taken and events are taking place that seem to take us in another direction. We need to ensure that people are able to come back to the table, and that we are able to make progress. There is no other solution to this. We cannot continue with the status quo.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Hezbollah is constructing a base in Syria to fire Iranian ballistic missiles into Israel. How seriously does the Minister regard that?

Mr Ellwood: Again, the hon. Lady highlights the challenges that the region faces. We need to ensure that we work with the international coalitions to prevent such events from taking place. Iran is starting to take incremental steps towards greater responsibility in the region. Unless it is able to control Hezbollah and have an influence, we will see that this nuclear deal will mean little.

Sir Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): There have recently been two initiatives in the region: the extension of fishing rights for Gazan fisherman with

Israeli co-operation, and the naming of a basketball tournament after a terrorist who killed 36 people, including 12 children. Which of those two initiatives does the Minister think is more likely to bring about a two-state solution?

Mr Ellwood: My right hon. Friend highlights the dilemma that we face. We need grassroots initiatives on a low level such as extension of fishing rights, for which I have pressed for some time. Oil and gas reserves can be tapped into off Gaza, which will also help the economy. At the same time, basketball courts and, indeed, schools and streets are being named after terrorists, which does not suggest that the Palestinians are as serious as they should be.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): The Minister will know that Israel is demolishing Palestinian homes and other structures at three times the rate at which it did so last year. I was in the region last week, with the hon. Members for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst) and for Hazel Grove (William Wragg), and Lord Warner, and we saw that for ourselves. Given that a number of these structures are EU-supported and EU-funded, what are the Government going to do not simply to express concern but to hold Israel to account? What mechanisms are available to do so?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman highlights a challenge that we face. Britain has been working closely with Israel to change the approach that Israelis have taken on administrative detention. We have also funded and facilitated independent reports on the challenges that we face, and I raised this matter with the Deputy Foreign Minister, Tzipi Hotovely. I will continue to press Israel to move forward. Again, this takes us back—it is a retrograde step.

Dr Tania Mathias (Twickenham) (Con): Will the Minister tell me if he managed to visit—

Mr Speaker: Question 7 would be a good start. No more today about the Israelis or Palestinians—the next question is about the Chagossians.

Chagos Islands

7. **Dr Tania Mathias** (Twickenham) (Con): What progress his Department has made on allowing Chagossian people to return to the Chagos Islands. [904407]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge): This is much more familiar territory for me.

Officials met over 500 Chagossians in their communities in the UK, Mauritius and the Seychelles. The public consultation we published in January received over 800 responses. I recognise that Chagossians have urged us to announce a decision soon, and we very much hope to do so.

Dr Mathias: Does the Minister agree that the £60 million estimate for the resettlement of the Chagos islanders, at 0.002% of the international development budget, is a price that the Government must pay this year so that

the Chagos islanders can return home? Every day they are not allowed to do so is a day of shame for this country.

James Duddridge: Perhaps I might outline for the House some of the costs. We estimate that the initial costs would range from £55 million for a 50-person pilot on Diego Garcia to £256 million for a 1,500-person resettlement on Diego Garcia and the outer islands. In addition, operating costs would range from £5 million to £18.5 million a year on a potentially open-ended and escalating basis.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Will the Foreign and Commonwealth Office commit that financial resource, which is desperately needed, to recognise the human rights of this group of people who have suffered for so long under many different Governments?

James Duddridge: Following the detailed KPMG report and subsequent consultation, Her Majesty's Government are looking closely at the matter. The hon. Lady will forgive me if I do not come to a conclusion at the Dispatch Box, but go through due process, and I will try to do so as quickly as possible.

Refugees: Middle East

8. **Chris Philp** (Croydon South) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in the EU, Africa and the middle east on steps to tackle the refugee crisis in the middle east. [904408]

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): Ministers have frequent discussions with both EU and non-EU partners about migration and refugees. Our focus is on securing a durable solution to the crisis which tackles the causes of migration as well as the consequences, and we continue to play a leading role in that work.

Chris Philp: The Libyan Government recently requested help to prevent illegal migrants from departing from their coast. When does the Minister think we will be in a position to begin returning those intercepted in the Med to the north African coast, rather than allowing them to make landfall in the EU?

Mr Lidington: We are ready to respond positively to requests for support and assistance from the new Libyan Government to tackle the criminal gangs of people smugglers and prevent tragic deaths at sea. We have not yet had a specific request for assistance on tackling migration as my hon. Friend described, but we are ready to take action if we receive such a request.

21. [904422] **Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): What is the Minister's current assessment of political progress in Tunisia, and what are the British Government doing to support the progress there? I do not mind if the Minister with responsibility for the middle east answers.

Mr Lidington: We continue to support the democratic evolution of Tunisia, and we are working actively to support the Tunisian authorities to ensure that they have control over their borders so that there can be

checks against the risks of terrorists moving across borders and in order to disrupt the work of people smugglers.

Royston Smith (Southampton, Itchen) (Con): As we successfully engage Daesh in Syria and northern Iraq, what assessment has the Minister made of the threat of Daesh moving to Libya?

Mr Lidington: It is a very serious threat indeed. That is why we give such a high priority to international work to establish a proper system of government in Libya and very much welcome the work that has led to the creation of the Government of national accord. We are working actively with European and wider international partners to ensure that that new Government get the support that they need.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): Many on the Opposition Benches strongly agree that there should be a strategy in which the UK is involved to strengthen countries in order to stop their people wanting to flee. However, far more should be done by the UK to allow more people in, and one process would strengthen the other. Does the Minister agree?

Mr Lidington: No. We have given a commitment, on which we are delivering, to resettle 20,000 vulnerable Syrian refugees from camps in the region during the lifetime of this Parliament. Let us not forget that we also pledged £2.3 billion in humanitarian assistance to support Syrian refugees, giving them help in the regions where they are present and trying to deter them from taking the appalling risk of putting themselves in the hands of the people smugglers.

EU Referendum

9. **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What discussions his Department has had with the Department for Work and Pensions on the potential effect of the UK leaving the EU on employment. [904409]

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): The Government's view is that the UK will be stronger, safer and better off remaining in a reformed EU. More British people are in work than ever before, and nine out of 10 people in work in this country are UK nationals.

Mr Hanson: Airbus, which is based near my constituency, employs 15,000 people directly, has 100,000 people in associated businesses and has taken the unprecedented step of writing to all its employees urging them to vote yes to stay in Europe, because it says that "we...don't know what 'out' looks like."

Will the Minister endorse that decision and tell the House what "out" looks like?

Mr Lidington: Airbus is typical of a large number of advanced manufacturing companies that are based across national borders within Europe but benefit from the European market, and which also give business opportunities to a host of small enterprises through their supply chains. That reinforces my view that it would be a severe blow to employment and hopes of growth for this country to withdraw from the EU.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Given the cross-departmental nature of the question, does my right hon. Friend agree that the Prime Minister could very helpfully agree to go before the Liaison Committee to deal with all these cross-departmental questions?

Mr Lidington: The Prime Minister agreed with the Liaison Committee that he should make three appearances during 2016. The next one is scheduled to take place before the summer recess. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has also been at this Dispatch Box on many occasions to answer questions about European policy, and my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) has taken ample advantage of the opportunity provided by those events.

Mr Speaker: I doubt that that will satisfy the Liaison Committee, but I note what the Minister says.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): It is not just those in employment, but pensioners who would suffer the consequences of Brexit. What can the Minister say about any British pensioners living in Europe who may be caught up in the "frozen pensions" scandal if we leave the European Union?

Mr Lidington: It is the case that British pensioners and other expatriate UK citizens who are resident in other EU member states get certain rights and benefits as a consequence of our EU membership. We cannot guarantee that in the event of a British withdrawal, the negotiations on exit would lead to those rights and benefits being retained.

Sir Gerald Howarth (Aldershot) (Con): In the Minister's publicly funded glossy brochure—I have a copy here—which claims to set out the facts, the Government state: "Our EU membership magnifies the UK's ability to get its way on the issues we care about."

Will my right hon. Friend explain how that squares with the fact that the UK has been outvoted every time it has voted against an EU measure—72 times in total, and 40 of those defeats under this Government?

Mr Lidington: I suggest that my hon. Friend checks the footnotes to the leaflet, which have been published online so that everybody can see the basis on which those statements are made. We have been successful in roughly 87% of votes in the Council of Ministers, and most outside observers say that we have a better track record than most other member states in getting our own way.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Given that after 40 years the European Union has still not managed to negotiate a trade deal with the United States of America, surely if we left and regained control of settling our own trade deals, we would be able to make trade deals much faster than the EU.

Mr Speaker: In relation to employment.

Mr Nuttall: And create job opportunities as a result.

Mr Lidington: I am glad to hear that my hon. Friend speaks for that faction of the Brexit camp that supports the transatlantic free trade agreement, because not

everybody on his side of the argument does. The United States, through its chief negotiator and the head of its chamber of commerce, has made it clear that it is interested in a deal with 500 million people, the biggest market in the world, but not terribly interested in giving priority to a deal with a country of just 65 million people.

Yemen

10. **Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the security situation in Yemen. [904410]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): The level of fighting in Yemen has reduced in recent weeks, and I am pleased to welcome the cessation of hostilities, which began on 10 April.

Carolyn Harris: We finally have a fragile ceasefire in the region, but not before thousands have been killed and millions displaced. There have been wide accusations of serious war crimes. Will the British Government now finally support a full investigation into the allegations?

Mr Ellwood: I join the hon. Lady in welcoming the cessation of hostilities. The peace talks will begin on 18 April in Kuwait. A number of organisations have been created, including the Yemeni national independent commission of inquiry, which is the appropriate body to look into human rights issues in Yemen. The Saudis have themselves organised their own investigative committee in order to analyse and put their hands up when mistakes were made.

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): I commend the Minister for his tireless work in seeking an end to the horrendous conflict in Yemen. What steps are the Government taking to support the UN-sponsored peace talks in Kuwait in little under a week's time?

Mr Ellwood: We have participated fully in bringing together what has been a very complex situation. Often people simply try to knuckle it down to one, two or three sides, but al-Qaeda is in Yemen, as is Daesh. There are not only the Houthis and other groupings, but many militias that are looking at which way the winds will blow. I have spoken on a number of occasions to President Hadi, and indeed to Ismail Ahmed, the UN envoy, to encourage the ceasefire. I hope that we will see real progress when the talks commence in Kuwait on 18 April.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): I welcome the ceasefire, but since Sunday there has already been an attack on Taiz. Will the Minister confirm that he will be in Kuwait on 18 April and that he will do all he can to ensure that the ceasefire holds?

Mr Ellwood: I cannot confirm at this moment whether I will be attending, but the right hon. Gentleman is right to outline the breaches, which are taking place not only in Taiz, but elsewhere, including east of Aden, where 15 Yemeni soldiers were killed, and not by the Houthis or any other militia, but by al-Qaeda. It is important that we ensure that the talks work and that the international community supports them fully.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): May I just push the Minister on the answer he gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) about the Saudi investigation into the conduct of the coalition campaign in Yemen? Does he have faith that the investigation will be thorough, independent and transparent? Does he expect the initial findings to be published? What follow-up will the UK take if allegations of war crimes are substantiated? Will he also outline the steps that the Government have taken to ensure that the UK liaison officers supporting the Saudi military campaign have not been unwittingly involved in potential war crimes?

Mr Ellwood: As I have said in the Chamber a number of times, we have one of the most robust systems of arms export control licences in the world, and it is important to make sure that they are robust. We have been working closely with the Yemeni authorities, but also with the Saudis, to make sure they put their hands up when a mistake is made. We have frank conversations with them privately to make sure that the investigation will work as we expect it to.

Topical Questions

T1. [904350] **Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for Europe (Mr David Lidington): My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is currently in Vietnam holding meetings with Vietnamese Ministers about trade and political relations. This follows visits to China, where among other things he pressed the Chinese authorities for action to bring greater stability to world steel markets, and to Japan, where he represented the United Kingdom at a meeting of G7 Foreign Ministers.

Richard Graham: In the wake of the recent visit by Premier Modi to the UK and the current visit by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge to India, can my right hon. Friend highlight the trade and investment benefits to both countries from these important high-level exchanges?

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Hugo Swire): Indeed I can. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the current visit by Their Royal Highnesses, which is going extremely well. We have incredibly good bilateral relations with India, and the visit here by Mr Modi was a great success. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to point to the soft power we have in our diplomatic armoury, from the BBC, to the British Council, the GREAT campaign, the Newton Fund and the Chevening and Marshall scholarship programmes. All those are part of the jigsaw that helps us to do business and to project British values right around the world.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Prime Minister said yesterday that all of Britain's overseas territories and Crown dependencies, apart from Anguilla and Guernsey, have now agreed to provide our law enforcement and tax authorities with full access to information on beneficial ownership. Why will there not be public access to the registers, given that the Prime Minister wrote to the overseas territories on 25 April 2014 to say that

making such information open would help “to tackle crime”, and given that, from June this year, the British register of beneficial ownership will be open to the public? If openness is good enough for the UK, why should we accept a different position in our overseas territories?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (James Duddridge): It is disappointing that the shadow Secretary of State does not congratulate the overseas territories on the enormous progress they have made on tax transparency and on opening up for law enforcement agencies. This is really superb progress, but as the Prime Minister outlined yesterday, it is not an international standard, and we need to move towards eliminating all corrupt, terrorist and money laundering practices across the globe. While there are states in the US where people can open companies and not have full public registers, it is only fair to say to the overseas territories, “Congratulations on progress so far.” Longer term, the Prime Minister and the Government are clear that we want greater transparency, and that will be about a move towards public access.

Hilary Benn: I do welcome progress; I was just asking why the overseas territories will not meet the standard Britain is going to set.

Our membership of the European Union helps us in the fight against money laundering, terrorist financing and tax evasion—an example being the fourth anti-money laundering directive, on which the UK has taken the lead. The directive will, for the first time, oblige all member states to keep registers of beneficial owners and to make those open to tax and law enforcement authorities and to others who have a legitimate interest, including investigative journalists. Does that not show that leaving the EU could hinder the fight against financial criminality in Europe, because the best way to tackle such criminality is to work in partnership with our neighbours?

Mr Lidington: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that there are many ways in which we benefit, in taking action against crime, through this kind of European co-operation. What I hear from the police service is that almost all serious crime these days has an international dimension of some kind, and countries need to work together to tackle that. The current system, where we can choose whether to opt in to individual justice and home affairs measures, really does give us the best of both worlds.

T2. [904351] **Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): What more can be done to prevent vulnerable people from being indoctrinated to become suicide bombers?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Tobias Ellwood): The Koran actually forbids suicide, and if we look at the profile of suicide bombers from Sousse to Bali, we will see that martyrdom is sold by extremists as a fast track to paradise to people who have scant knowledge of the Koran. They are promised a ticket to heaven with little, if any, service to God. If we are genuinely to defeat extremism and stem the tide of vulnerable recruits, greater emphasis needs to be placed on duty to God in this life as well as the next.

T3. [904352] **Tom Elliott** (Fermanagh and South Tyrone) (UUP): The Minister will be aware of reports that Libya paid \$1.5 billion into the US compensation fund for relatives of victims of terror blamed on Libya. Why have the UK victims of IRA terrorism that used Libyan Semtex not received similar support? The Minister recently indicated that he would support those victims of IRA terrorists who used Semtex. What is he doing and what support is in place for them?

Mr Ellwood: It is for a previous Government to explain why that opportunity was missed when the United States advanced discussions in that area. What I have done, in meetings both in Belfast and here in London with those victims of terrorism that involved Semtex or, indeed, that was supported by Gaddafi, is facilitate a visit to Tripoli when the security measures allow it.

T4. [904353] **David Mowat** (Warrington South) (Con): Could a Minister update the House on the support we have given to the Government of the Ivory Coast following the terrorist attack in Grand Bassam in March?

James Duddridge: Last week I visited the scene of the attack in Grand Bassam in Côte d’Ivoire, which killed 19 people and injured more than 20, and laid a wreath on behalf of Her Majesty’s Government. Furthermore, I met President Ouattara and discussed how the UK can support efforts to prevent the radicalisation of young people in his country. We all offer our condolences, support and, indeed, solidarity.

T9. [904358] **Helen Hayes** (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): Developing countries lose three times as much to tax havens as they gain in international aid. Although yesterday’s announcement was a welcome, partial step in addressing that, registers of beneficial ownership will be ineffective unless they are public. Does the Minister agree that the Prime Minister’s anti-corruption summit next month would be an appropriate deadline to insist that all of the UK’s overseas territories and Crown dependencies adopt public registers of beneficial ownership?

James Duddridge: First, we should congratulate the Prime Minister. This is the first international conference on anti-corruption. We have already made great progress on beneficial ownership, but it is not the only issue of corruption. Having visited Ghana last week, I know that many other issues need to be tackled. Although beneficial ownership is an important issue, it is not the only issue for that corruption conference.

T5. [904354] **Kit Malthouse** (North West Hampshire) (Con): The huge Mosul dam is crumbling and might collapse. If it does, Mosul will be covered with up to 70 feet of water and 1.5 million lives will be threatened in Tikrit, Samarra and Baghdad. What work is under way to maintain the integrity of that structure?

Mr Ellwood: To use your superlative, Mr Speaker, this is one of the most serious things that Iraqis face, on top of everything else that is going on in Iraq. If a 14-metre tsunami along the Tigris goes through the Mosul dam, it will take out the city of Mosul and put Baghdad under 5 feet of water. The Iraqi authorities

need to recognise the sense of urgency with regard to the dam, which is built on gypsum, and put in place emergency measures and alerts. We have already taken precautions at the embassy.

T10. [904359] **Mrs Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): When did the Minister last make representations on the plight of the Baha'is in Iran?

Mr Ellwood: I raised the issue of the Baha'is and other minorities in meetings with the Foreign Minister when he visited in March. I also have regular meetings with the chargé d'affaires—the ambassador in waiting—in London.

T6. [904355] **David Warburton** (Somerton and Frome) (Con): Could we have an update on the Havana process, which is working to bring an end to the conflict between the FARC rebels and the Colombian military, and which should offer the best opportunity to focus much more on tackling the drugs trade?

Mr Swire: I do not think we need to get too hung up on the actual date; what is important is the result, which is the big prize towards which all have been working for a considerable amount of time. We again congratulate the negotiating team under President Santos, as well as the Cuban Government in Havana on the part they have played. I am also pleased to say that the United Kingdom has helped the process with advice and financially, with an EU trust fund and a UN fund.

Ms Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh (Ochil and South Perthshire) (SNP): Last week, the Secretary-General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, said that there is a greenhouse effect in terms of the extremist groups that are bringing their influence to bear in the wake of the Syrian conflict. Can the Minister confirm what the Government's strategy is for defeating Daesh, as opposed to simply displacing it?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Lady is right. Not only is that the case at the moment, but when the Bali bombing took place, there were 21 registered terrorist groups from a British perspective, and today that number is more than 50. It is important that we focus on eradicating Daesh in all its forms not only in Iraq and Syria, but where it is starting to spread, and its franchises, such as the Khorasan group, the Taliban, al-Shabaab and Boko Haram. Those other groups are trying to get support from Daesh. Internationally, we must wake up and focus on the scale of the problem.

T7. [904356] **Rehman Chishti** (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): Given that so many are now using the proper name for the terrorist organisation Daesh to defeat its ideology, propaganda and appeal, is it not unfortunate that the BBC still refuses to do so?

Mr Ellwood: I congratulate my hon. Friend, who, I think, got an award in your presence, Mr Speaker, for his campaign on that very issue. I am puzzled about why the BBC, from John Humphrys to John Craven, continues to use the term Islamic State. There is nothing Islamic and nothing state-like about it. I do not know what more we need to do. Perhaps we need to write to "Points of View".

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): I am sure the whole House will join my condemnation of the human rights abuses, documented by the United Nations and Amnesty International, that have been committed by the South Sudanese Government forces, which included deliberately suffocating men and boys in a container and allowing government soldiers to rape women in lieu of wages. Following his recent visit to South Sudan, can the Minister tell the House what representations he has made to the Government of South Sudan and what process is in place for peace?

James Duddridge: I made a number of representations to President Salva Kiir and to Riek Machar during the African Union meeting. The UK Government secured agreement at the UN for a new commission on human rights, and the Government of South Sudan must now fulfil its commitment to co-operate with the commission, which is charged with investigating gang rapes, the destruction of villages and attacks on civilians that may even constitute war crimes.

T8. [904357] **Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): Many of my constituents have expressed concern about the possible admission of Turkey to the EU. Is it still the Government's policy to support Turkish admission? Bearing in mind public hostility, are they prepared to reconsider their position?

Mr Lidington: As the Prime Minister said the other day in the House, Turkish membership of the EU is not on the cards for many years indeed. That is not least because there would have to be a Cyprus settlement before Cyprus lifted its block on a whole number of the negotiating chapters. That is not something that we are likely to face in the lifetime of this Parliament or the next, and possibly not in the one after that.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): The recently elected MPs of the new Hluttaw in Myanmar are acutely aware of the scale of the task that they face in building democracy in their country. On my recent visit, I was really quite touched by the extent to which they appreciate the support of the UK Parliament for the work they have to do. On that note, may I ask what dialogue the Government are engaged in to promote freedom of expression and political rights in Burma?

Mr Swire: I am glad that the hon. Lady called the country Burma towards the end of her question, unlike the BBC, which continues to call it Myanmar. We are hugely supportive, as she knows, of the new Government of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who has just appointed herself State Counsellor and Foreign Minister, among other titles. She is basically running the Government. It is very early days.

We continue to support Burma across the whole range of issues, from human rights, to the issue in Rakhine, to the peace process and the ceasefires. I congratulate hon. Members from across the House who have taken the trouble to go to Nay Pyi Taw to try to teach some of the new politicians there the basic elements of how to run a democratic Government. There is a long way to go, but I believe that we are moving in the right direction.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): This Government and the previous Labour Government have deliberately undermined authoritarian regimes such as those of Saddam Hussein, Gaddafi and Assad, and they have unleashed totalitarian regimes as a result. Will the Government accept that Assad, however unpleasant, is not going to go? Will they accept *realpolitik*, pick up the phone and try to broker a deal between Russia, Assad and the other anti-Daesh movements in order to try to get some chance of peace in the benighted Syrian countryside?

Mr Ellwood: It is for the people of Syria to decide who should lead their country. The majority of people in Syria do not accept that Assad should be part of its long-term future. He has used barrel bombs, he has used chemical weapons and he should have no part at all in the long-term future of the country.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): Will the Minister give us an assessment of how far away Libya is from having a stable Government? What is the strength of Daesh there, and are real steps being taken to bring in ground forces to push them out of the country?

Mr Ellwood: I am pleased that Prime Minister Siraj and the Presidency Council are now meeting in Tripoli. It has taken a long time to get the General National Congress and the House of Representatives to agree to support the Prime Minister. These are important initial

steps, but the hon. Gentleman is right to recognise that Daesh has a foothold in Derna and Sirte. That is why the sooner the Prime Minister is able to make the important decisions, the sooner the international community can come in and provide support to make sure that Daesh does not gain a long-term foothold.

Mr Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): British exports to China have more than doubled since 2010, led by firms such as Havant-based manufacturer Colt. Will the Minister join me in congratulating Colt, and encourage other firms to follow its lead?

Mr Swire: Indeed, I congratulate all the companies in my hon. Friend's constituency. Trade with China, despite the recent setback, is still doing extremely well. Our bilateral relations have been reset, following the successful state visit to this country of President Xi. The Foreign Secretary has just been in Beijing. We both encourage British companies to trade more in China—it is a huge market—and all of us, as local Members of Parliament, to do everything we can to encourage our small and medium-sized enterprises to trade with China. Equally, the United Kingdom still continues to attract huge Chinese investment in our infrastructure, which of course provides employment and jobs.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but, as usual, demand has hugely exceeded supply and we must now move on.

Points of Order

12.36 pm

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have made the Minister for Community and Social Care aware of my intention to make this point of order. In an answer to my written parliamentary question asking for the number of deaths that have occurred in child and adolescent mental health units since 2010, the Minister said that only one such death had been recorded by the Care Quality Commission. However, freedom of information requests conducted by Inquest have found that at least nine young people have tragically died in England while receiving in-patient psychiatric care since 2010. In response to this research, the Minister stated in an interview on last night's BBC "Panorama" programme that he did not know how many children and adolescents have died in psychiatric units in recent years. This discrepancy between the Government's account of the number of child deaths and the data collected from FOI requests raises serious questions about how the deaths in psychiatric care of some of our most vulnerable people are treated, recorded, investigated and learned from.

Can you advise me, Mr Speaker, whether you have received any indication from Ministers that they intend to clarify for the parliamentary record what the accurate figure is for the number of children who have tragically died in all NHS-funded psychiatric in-patient settings since 2010?

Mr Speaker: Extremely important questions are raised by this matter and by the broadcast, although not for me. We cannot have Question Time on the basis of points of order, but as the Minister of State is in the Chamber and apparently willing to say some words, we are happy—exceptionally—to hear him.

The Minister for Community and Social Care (Alistair Burt): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I am very grateful to you for allowing me to respond. I appreciate the fact that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) gave me notice of her point of order. Some very serious questions were raised by the "Panorama" programme last night. I have agreed to meet Inquest's Deborah Coles, the lady who put in the

FOI request. There is a discrepancy in the numbers. There are difficulties in definition in relation to this matter, but the present situation is not acceptable. I will look as quickly as possible at finding a way of correcting the record as soon as we know exactly what the figures are, and at making sure we have sorted out this data problem effectively for the future.

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the Minister for his courtesy. On a personal note, may I wish the Minister very well in that important meeting with Deborah Coles? She is a very formidable character, as I know myself, because we knew each other at university. She is very formidable indeed, and I wish him well.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We have just had questions to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. We had an excellent team of Ministers here, but we did not have the Secretary of State. The Minister for Europe made the point that the Secretary of State was on the last leg of an overseas visit. I thought it was a convention of this House that Parliament came first and that Secretaries of State should be here for questions unless an emergency took them away from the House—clearly this trip was planned. Will you give guidance to the House on whether Secretaries of State should be on overseas trips when questions to their Department are scheduled?

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Things may have changed since I was paying attention to this—it is 25 years since I was a Minister—but in my day, a Minister for the Government spoke with the same authority no matter what rank of Minister they were.

Mr Speaker: Certainly the team communicate with the House as a team. That is undeniable. This is not within the power of the Chair. The Secretary of State did courteously write to me to notify me that he would be absent. My sense is that he is not likely to be absent on anything like a regular basis. If that were to happen, it would be strongly deprecated not just by the Chair but by Members across the House. Let us hope it does not happen again. If there are no further points of order, perhaps we can move on to the ten-minute rule motion.

Events and Festivals (Control of Flares, Fireworks and Smoke Bombs Etc)

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

12.41 pm

Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make it an offence to be found in possession of, or to use, certain articles or substances capable of causing injury or behaviour likely to lead to injury at, or in transit towards, certain events, concerts or festivals or other public gatherings; and for connected purposes.

In plain English, this Bill proposes to prevent audience members at concerts and festivals from using dangerous pyrotechnics such as flares, fireworks and smoke bombs. There are places where items like these can safely be used, but not in the close confines of a live music audience.

Flares can burn at up to 1,600 °C; fireworks can be even hotter, at up to 2,000 °C. There is also the added danger of an unexpected projectile. Smoke bombs are also hot and pose particular risks at indoor venues and also for fellow audience members with asthma or other such breathing difficulties. The surprise throwing of pyrotechnics from within a crowd can also create dangerous and distressing crowd disturbance.

In 2014 there were 255 incidents involving flares at live music events, both indoor and outdoor, ranging from festivals such as Electric Daisy Carnival and T in the Park to popular city venues such as Brixton Academy. Like many right hon. and hon. Members and our constituents I enjoy live music, but no one should be seriously burned as part of a fun afternoon or evening. No one wants to see panic at the disco or any other music event. We want to get the number of these incidents down to an all-time low.

Gigs and festivals are particularly popular with young people. They and their parents have a right to feel safe both in attending and in sending their children. Unfortunately that was not the experience of an 18-year-old girl who attended an Arctic Monkeys concert and required three dressings to burns on her arms from a flare that had been thrown, or of the 17-year-old girl at the Reading festival who suffered a panic attack after being burned across her abdomen and thighs by a smoke bomb.

When I mentioned the subject of the Bill to other people, many outside the music industry were surprised that audience use of pyrotechnics was not already banned. Their surprise is understandable given that such protection has long been afforded to football fans by the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol etc.) Act 1985, which made it an offence to enter or attempt to enter a football ground while in possession of a flare, smoke bomb or firework. Courts have taken such public endangerment very seriously, and even those without previous criminal records have been given custodial sentences of one or two months and banned from football grounds for up to six years.

The numbers bear out the fact that that is an effective approach, both legislatively and judicially. By contrast with the 255 incidents at music events in 2014, there were just three incidents at football grounds.

In my capacity as chairman of the all-party group on music, I have found broad support for the Bill throughout the music industry. Live Nation, one of the largest concert organisers and ticket providers in the UK, has been campaigning on this subject for a considerable time, as yet without success. I would like to see that change sooner rather than later, because, with the right support, these injuries and incidents are absolutely avoidable. The Association of Independent Festivals, which represents many popular events including the Secret Garden Party and the Isle of Wight festival, has asked for the law's support:

"It is the responsibility of organisers to provide a safe and enjoyable environment for fans and the Government should support this objective by creating a level playing field between music and sports fans."

Concert organisers have every reason to want to protect concert goers. Unfortunately, with their powers basically limited to expelling someone from a venue, they feel rather toothless when it comes to deterring this kind of dangerous behaviour, despite their desire to do exactly that.

Unlike at football grounds, the current legal situation at festivals and music venues is as follows. Under-18s are banned from carrying fireworks, a classification that also includes smoke bombs, in public places. However, an overwhelming majority of concerts and festivals occur on private property. There is no such regulation for flares, which are not controlled under the Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 because they are not intended for entertainment use. There is no offence for adults carrying fireworks or smoke bombs, unless it can be proven that it is done with intent to cause injury. Concert injuries from these articles are usually a case of—I will be frank—bone-headed disregard for others and stupidity, rather than malice. Essentially, it all amounts to no rules or protection when it comes to audience possession of pyrotechnics at music events. When an industry wholeheartedly welcomes a proposed law not as a burdensome regulation but as an essential tool to protect safety surely this is one of the most clear-cut cases where Parliament should act. We would not be doing our duty if we ignored it.

The Minister for Policing, Fire, Criminal Justice and Victims confirmed in a letter to Live Nation in March 2015 that in his view the matter required

"proper examination of how best to deter the misuse of these devices".

That is a view I share and welcome, but little progress has been made. I believe that proper examination of the effective results achieved by the ban on the misuse of these devices at football grounds leads to the conclusion that a ban covering music events would be the best next step. Thus, in proposing the Bill, I believe the time has come to take that forward.

Right hon. and hon. Members will know that I am not, by instinct, someone who likes to ban things. By and large, I believe people should have the right to choose to take risks and make informed decisions for themselves, even if they are not decisions we would make ourselves. However, audience members have not chosen to be exposed to the danger of flares and fireworks deployed in improper conditions, possibly by those who do not know how, or are in no fit state of mind, to use them. They have come to enjoy live music, and these incidents both endanger them and ruin their events.

[Nigel Adams]

To be entirely clear, my Bill would apply only to audience members and spectators at these events. There has been a little misreporting today online on the “billboard” website. Venues and artists would still be able to use pyrotechnics in their act and in their stage set-ups as they currently do. I certainly do not want to curtail the ability of trained professionals to put on a vibrant and exciting show. Having enjoyed many a gig myself, I know that “the fire has always been burning since the world’s been turning”, and that when tested properly and used safely it can be part of a great spectacle. I am not sure whether you are a fan of the Kings of Leon, Mr Speaker, but I am sure you would agree that we should ensure that nothing untoward is ever on fire.

There is support from the industry, venues, artists, fans and colleagues from across the House—I am grateful to my co-sponsors for showing there is cross-party agreement. This is a problem on which there is a consensus of concern among music fans and the music industry, and I am grateful for the opportunity to bring it before the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Mr Nigel Adams, David Warburton, Steve Rotheram, James Heapey, Mark Pritchard, Pete Wishart, Valerie Vaz, Byron Davies, Craig Williams, Kevin Foster and Nigel Huddleston present the Bill.

Nigel Adams accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 April, and to be printed (Bill 157).

UK Steel Industry

Emergency debate (Standing Order No. 24)

12.51 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Tata Steel’s decision to sell its UK steel operations; and action the Government is taking to secure the future of the UK steel industry.

Mr Speaker, may I place on the record my thanks to you for granting this debate under Standing Order No. 24? Such debates are rare, but the situation facing the steel industry cannot be categorised as anything other than an emergency. Today’s debate provides an opportunity for the Secretary of State to come to the House with a comprehensive plan to secure the future of our vital steel industry which is hanging by the thinnest of threads. Anything less from him will be an abdication of his duty.

Yesterday, the Secretary of State said he was looking at the possibility of “co-investing” on commercial terms. I hope he will take the opportunity to explain to us in more detail exactly what this means. Call it what you like—“co-investing”, “part-nationalisation”, “temporary public stewardship” or “sheltering the assets”—it is clear that circumstances might require the Government to do this. They should spare their ideological blushes and just get on with it.

It is also important that today the Business Secretary hears directly from Members of Parliament who represent steelmaking communities. Between them, they have great expertise and knowledge that I hope will inform his response to the crisis from now on. Up until now, the Government and the Secretary of State have been found wanting. They have been behind rather than ahead of events. Their response to the biggest crisis in steelmaking for a generation has been warm words but little effective action. There has been what can only be described as an ideologically driven reluctance to get involved as the crisis has deepened. It has been a mixture of indifference and incompetence.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Eagle: I will give way, but I must say that I will not give way as generously as I normally do, because this is a three-hour debate and it is really important that Members from steelmaking communities have their say.

Simon Hoare: The First Minister of Wales has called on all parties to come together to work towards a future, rather than—for want of a better phrase—political point scoring. The hon. Lady is very passionate on this issue, as we are on the Government Benches—it is vital that we have a British steelmaking sector—but will she assure the House that she and her colleagues are taking that combined political approach between the parties to secure that future, rather than trying to drive a wedge between the parties?

Ms Eagle: We will judge the Government by their actions and their achievements rather than their words.

The complete absence of either a manufacturing strategy or an industrial strategy has hampered the Government’s ability to think strategically about what is needed, and

never has it been more urgent that the Business Secretary does so. This is urgent because on 29 March Tata announced it would sell its entire steelmaking operations in the UK, leaving the future of the UK steel industry hanging by a thread and putting 40,000 jobs in communities up and down our country at imminent risk.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): As someone with a Tata presence in my constituency, I wonder whether the shadow Secretary of State shares my concern that although we knew about this on 29 March—people going to Mumbai knew it was going to happen—we have not discussed it formally until today, and yet three years ago, the Prime Minister reconvened the Chamber within two days, during an Easter recess, to talk about the death of Margaret Thatcher. What does that say about the Government's priorities?

Ms Eagle: It is regrettable that there was not a recall of Parliament, but we are where we are, and we have this debate now, thanks to you, Mr Speaker.

It is imperative to underline the fundamental importance of this industry for our economy and our country. Steel is a foundation industry. While it might make up just 1% of total manufacturing output, that output is crucial. I believe that our world-leading automotive, aerospace and defence industries and our rail and construction sector all depend on a strong and sustainable domestic steel industry.

Our manufacturing sector is already facing tough times. The Secretary of State said yesterday in the House that manufacturing was up since 2010, but Office for National Statistics figures show a different picture. Manufacturing output in the last quarter of 2015 remained frozen at the level of five years ago, while output in January was actually lower than the year before and is still 6.4% down on the same period before the global crash.

In his 2011 Budget speech, the Chancellor espoused his vision of a Britain

“carried aloft by the march of the makers.”—[*Official Report*, 23 March 2011; Vol. 525, c. 966.]

But he has failed to match his rhetoric with reality, because since then the manufacturing sector has actually shrunk. His much promised rebalancing of our economy has in reality failed to materialise. In this context, the challenges facing the steel industry represent an existential crisis for the UK's manufacturing sector as a whole. I do not believe we can safely allow it to shrink further. And I for one am glad that the Government appear finally to have realised this.

Now we need action. Beyond the impact on manufacturing, the crisis in the steel industry matters for the wider economy too. Much has been said about the cost of supporting our steel industry, but far too little has been said about the costs of letting it be destroyed. Recent estimates show that its collapse would lead to additional costs to the Government of £4.6 billion through reduced tax receipts and increased benefit bills. It would also suck demand out of the economy, reducing household spending by £3 billion in the next decade. There would be secondary shocks, too, especially in the steelmaking communities up and down the country. For example, Tata is the biggest business rates payer in Rotherham, with an annual bill of £3.2 million. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and Dearne

(John Healey) pointed out today, the loss of this revenue stream to the local authority is equivalent to a 1.8% increase in council tax there.

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the way forward was shown by the Labour Government before the 2010 general election, when they introduced the car scrappage scheme to support our automotive sector? It was supported by all parties in the House at a time of dire threat to the sector. As a result of intervention and an intelligent industrial strategy, the automotive sector was preserved and now prospers. Is not that the model we have to follow?

Ms Eagle: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I hope that the Secretary of State is taking note.

The loss of our steel industry would worsen our already record-breaking trade deficit, which is now the worst since 1948. The value of the goods and services we import now exceeds the value of those that we export by £32.7 billion. The loss of steel and our current exports of steel combined with the need to import far more steel would make this barely sustainable record deficit even worse.

Beyond the economic cost, there would also be an intolerable social cost. There are 15,000 jobs directly at stake in the industry and a further 25,000 jobs at stake in the wider supply chain. These are the kind of high-skill, high-paid jobs of which we need to see more. The end of steelmaking in the UK would be devastating for 40,000 workers and their communities. Some people have highlighted the potential costs of intervening to save the steel industry, but I believe the costs of letting steel fail are far greater.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): I do not want to pre-empt what the hon. Lady may say, but will she confirm that it is the policy of Her Majesty's Opposition that the steel industry should be nationalised, and should remain in public hands until it can successfully go back into private hands?

Ms Eagle: What needs to be done is what is necessary to preserve, restructure and ensure the survival of our steel industry for the future. That is the Government's job. We will be as supportive as we can—I shall set out some parameters later in my speech—but this is about the Government getting their act in order. The Opposition are holding the Government to account for their actions, rather than just their words. That is what this debate is about.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): On that point, we heard nothing yesterday from the Secretary of State, either at the meeting of the all-party group on steel and metal-related industries or in the Chamber, about what action the Government will take on energy costs and business rates—costs that are burdening the steel industry, and on which the Government could act, yet we have seen no sign at all that they will change their policies in these vital areas.

Ms Eagle: I hope that we will have the chance to hear about concrete action from the Government in this debate.

[Ms Angela Eagle]

I was talking about the costs to the community of letting steel fail. The costs to manufacturing and the economy are high, but the costs to the workers and their communities would be much higher. We very much welcome the recent commitment from the Business Secretary to do everything he can to protect steel-making and processing in the UK, but this Business Secretary has form. Warm words are all very well, but they are worthless, as the community in Redcar know to their cost, unless they are followed up with meaningful action.

Opposition Members are in no doubt that there are huge challenges facing the UK steel industry, but we believe that it can have a strong and sustainable future, and we know that decisions made by this Government now will ultimately determine whether it does. That is why I welcome the commitment the Business Secretary appeared to make in yesterday's statement to what he called co-investment. Perhaps he will tell us whether he is considering co-investment to save the blast furnaces at Port Talbot, because we did not get an answer to that question in yesterday's statement.

Will the Business Secretary confirm here and now that he will avoid a fire sale of these assets, and ensure that irreversible mistakes are not made in the way that they are sold? If Tata is to act as a responsible seller, it must consider only those offers that seek to maintain both upstream and downstream assets—that is, both the strip business at Port Talbot, and the specialist business based in and around Rotherham, Stocksbridge and the rest of south Yorkshire. The Government must also make sure that enough time is made available to ensure that an appropriate consideration of responsible offers can take place. It took nine months for the Scunthorpe deal to be developed, yet Tata has indicated that it wishes to exit the UK in four months. What is the Business Secretary doing to reassure the existing customer base that their current and future contracts will be fulfilled during this period of uncertainty? The plants cannot be saved if their order books disappear.

Let me turn to a number of areas where I believe the Government can make a positive difference. The most significant cause of the crisis facing the steel industry is the dumping of huge amounts of cheap Chinese steel on the market. It is priced below the cost of production; Chinese state-owned steel companies are making billions of pounds in losses, yet they continue to pour out more and more product. UK steel producers simply cannot compete with this state-subsidised unfair trade, which is threatening to destroy the European industry as well as ours. We are not calling for protectionism, but we are standing up for fair trade, and calling for quick and effective tariffs that will help to level the playing field. The Business Secretary must abandon his opposition to the abolition of the lesser duty rule and block unfair Chinese imports.

Granting market economy status to China must not be automatic. China meets only one of the five criteria that must be met if this status is to be granted, yet the UK Government support granting market economy status to China as early as the end of this year. Action to level the playing field using trade defence instruments, and on market economy status for China, would give potential buyers of Tata's UK steel operations the surest sign that the Government stand ready to act.

On procurement, the Government should take concrete action to ensure that UK steel producers are able to benefit from large public sector contracts. The Ministry of Defence will spend £178 billion on defence equipment over the next 10 years, yet the Conservative-led coalition Government scrapped Labour's defence industrial strategy, which made British jobs and industries the first priority in all decisions on MOD contracts. We are now in the deeply regrettable situation of an aircraft carrier, British surface ships and armoured vehicles all being manufactured in the UK with mainly imported steel, when, with more planning, our domestic industry could have supplied those needs.

The Government must also take action on infrastructure investment. Despite all the Government public relations about this, public sector net investment in the UK will in reality be lower as a percentage of gross domestic product at the end of this Parliament than at the start, and half what it was under the last Labour Government. Of the projects announced in the Government's infrastructure pipeline, just one in five is actually under way. For the sake of our steel industry and the wider economy, Labour calls on the Government to bring forward shovel-ready projects that require a significant amount of steel, and to ensure that the changes to the procurement rules, which the Government keep boasting about, actually begin to make a difference.

Ian C. Lucas: I would like to share with my hon. Friend the fact that I received a letter from the Prime Minister yesterday praying in aid and praising an infrastructure project investment in the railway between Wrexham and Chester. However, this is being funded by the Labour Welsh Government and, unfortunately for the Prime Minister, it appears to be the only example that he could put forward of investment in rail in north Wales.

Ms Eagle: My hon. Friend makes a telling point, and I hope that the Government will connect those two things in their procurement efforts, so that we can make a real difference to the potential customer base for UK steel at this very difficult time.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend share my concern that certain major procurement projects, such as High Speed 2 and nuclear, are being given to the Chinese? My fear is that they will naturally want to use Chinese steel. Also, if these were British companies, they would be paying British corporation tax, national insurance and income tax, and would be developing supply chains and export capacity. Does my hon. Friend share my fear that there is no proper joined-up industrial strategy to protect our jobs and our future?

Ms Eagle: I agree with my hon. Friend, and when we see the Chancellor travelling around China and asking the Chinese to bid for all these contracts, it is hard to avoid realising what is happening.

Business rates represent a far higher cost for UK steel producers. There had been reports that the Government were planning to exempt plant and machinery from business rates, which EEF has described as a "tax on investment". The Chancellor reportedly even costed this change with a view to including it in his now

infamous Budget last month before dropping it at the last minute. It seems that the measure, which would have significantly improved the future prospects of the industry, was sacrificed in pursuit of his economically illiterate and increasingly unachievable surplus target.

I said earlier that part of the problem is ideology. Labour has been calling for a modern and intelligent industrial strategy, and I am pleased to say that in yesterday's statement the Business Secretary actually uttered the words "industrial strategy" for the first time. Now that that Rubicon has been crossed, all we need is action to match the words. Today, let us spare a thought for the thousands of steelworkers whose futures hang in the balance. The Government ignored the warning signs for far too long, and now they must act to find a suitable buyer, and to work with the steel producers, the workforce, and the clients and customers to ensure that the industry is placed on an even keel. The cost of failure, both economically and socially, is unthinkable. We need urgent action to save our steel.

1.10 pm

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills and President of the Board of Trade (Sajid Javid):

The whole House will have been deeply concerned by the crisis that has affected the global steel industry over the past year. The facts are familiar, but they bear repetition. Around the world, steelmaking capacity is about 35% higher than demand. In China alone, excess steel capacity is 25 times the United Kingdom's entire annual production. Demand has slumped in China as its economy grows, and demand here in Europe has yet to return to pre-crash levels.

That surge in supply, coupled with a fall in demand, has inevitably led to a large fall in prices, and the knock-on effect for steelworkers around the world has been, quite simply, devastating. Here in the UK, we have sadly seen the closure of the SSI plant in Redcar after its Thai parent company ran up unsustainable losses. Across Europe, some 70,000 steelworkers have been laid off since 2008. Last week we heard that the United States Steel Corporation, the biggest steelmaker in the United States, was laying off a quarter of its non-union workforce, and earlier this month, the owner of one of the two heavy steel mills left in Australia went into voluntary administration.

This is, of course, about more than just numbers. It is a human tragedy. When we talk about job losses in the abstract, it is easy to forget that each of them represents a person: a hard-working, highly skilled man or woman. Many of those men and women will have husbands, wives, children and other dependants to support, or there will be local businesses that rely on their custom, and the same pattern will be repeated throughout the supply chain. That is why, when job losses have happened in Britain, we have done everything we can to support the communities affected.

Mr Anderson: The Secretary of State said that we must not forget. I assure him that there are people in this House who do not forget. I am one of the people whom his Government did this to some 30 years ago, when they closed the coal mines. They looked at the economics, and they did not care about the social cost, which destroyed areas like mine. The Secretary of State needs to bear that in mind during this debate.

Sajid Javid: I am sure the hon. Gentleman agrees with me that when there are job losses and the Government can help, of course they must do so.

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sajid Javid: I will plough on, but I will give way in a moment. I am about to speak about Redcar, and I know that the hon. Gentleman is interested in that as well. We have committed up to £80 million to helping people affected by SSI's closure. That includes more than £16 million to help local firms to employ former SSI workers, and a further £16 million to support firms in the SSI supply chain and the wider Tees valley. Millions more are paying for retraining at local colleges. For example, there was a £1.7 million package to help former SSI apprentices to remain in employment, education or training.

Tom Blenkinsop: The Secretary of State said that the Government would do everything possible for the communities and people affected. As he knows, on the day of the liquidation at Redcar, he announced an £80 million total package—

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): It is £90 million.

Tom Blenkinsop: Oh, is it £90 million now? We have heard previously, from that Dispatch Box—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Shush, junior Minister. We do not need you to burble from a sedentary position. Be quiet! Your burbling is not required. Learn it. I have told you so many times; try to get the message.

Tom Blenkinsop: Not so long ago, at that Dispatch Box, the Secretary of State changed the figure to £50 million. Moneys on top of that have only been acquired because the Community trade union claimed a protective award from the tribunal to ensure that the workforce got what they were entitled to. The Government could have fast-tracked that some seven months ago.

Sajid Javid: I thought I heard the hon. Gentleman say "up to £90 million". What we have always said is "up to £80 million", and that has not changed. I agree that there is a long way to go, but so far, in respect of Redcar, nearly 700 jobs have been created, safeguarded or supported, and only a quarter of the more than 2,000 workers at SSI were claiming jobseeker's allowance at the end of February.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I do not want to take up too much time, because I shall be speaking later, but the figure of 600 jobs relates to those who are in work or full-time training, not just those who are in work. That is important, because it is work that will be vital at the end of the training.

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady has made a very important point: at the end of the day, it is about work. Training can lead to work, as can retraining, so it is important to invest in it. I know that, to the people of Redcar, this seems like a drop in the ocean. When a community is built around a single industry, the death of that industry

[Sajid Javid]

takes away more than just the jobs. I do not want to see any other steelmaking community suffer the same fate, and that is why the Government have been taking real action to support the industry.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State begin to appreciate how this flows into the community? A medical centre on Teesside that I visited recently lost two nurses, who had to give up their bursary-funded training programmes because their husbands lost their jobs at SSI. The consequences and the ripples spread right out. It is not 2,200 people who have lost their jobs; it is up to 9,000 people, and the Secretary of State should understand that.

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: there can be a devastating effect on the community that goes way beyond the actual job losses at SSI. That is why we must do everything, together, to prevent the same thing from happening to any other community, and we must support the supply chain, because, as he says, there is a ripple effect throughout the community on many, many businesses.

Geraint Davies: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sajid Javid: I will give way once more, but then I must plough on.

Geraint Davies: The Secretary of State may know that I worked very hard with Members on both sides of the House to secure a proper pension for the Visteon pensioners from Ford when it had short-changed them. Given that Tata has almost fully paid up its pension fund, will the Government socialise that fund, so that the pensioners can be secure in the knowledge that they will have a pension in future, and so that prospective buyers need not be concerned about that?

Sajid Javid: I will move on to the subject of Tata in a moment, but the hon. Gentleman is right to identify pensions as an issue, and we are considering all possible solutions.

Let me say a little about the action that we have already taken. We have taken action on power: £76 million has already been paid to steelmakers to compensate for high energy bills, and we expect to pay more than £100 million in the current financial year alone. In the autumn statement, just five months ago, we announced that we would go further. Energy-intensive industries will be exempted from renewable policy costs—a move that will save the steel industry more than £400 million by the end of this Parliament.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Surely my right hon. Friend agrees that, rather than compensating businesses for a tax that we levied, it would be far more sensible and logical to scrap the tax.

Sajid Javid: Given what my hon. Friend has said, I presume that our move towards exemption rather than compensation is exactly what he wants to see.

Mr Betts: Does the Secretary of State accept that the support that the Government are giving our steel industry in respect of energy costs is only a fraction of the support

that Germany and other countries are giving their steel industries? It will still leave our industry with much higher energy costs than those of other European Union countries. Is the Secretary of State not prepared to consider going further to help our industry when it is in such a difficult position?

Sajid Javid: By calling it a fraction, the hon. Gentleman underplays the help that this support is providing to the industry. The manufacturers in the industry see this as a big game-changer in how they account for the cost of power. I can agree with the hon. Gentleman, however, in that I think there is still more to look at in this area, particularly with regard to Tata and securing a buyer.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): In a meeting with the Industrial Communities Alliance, which represents traditional industrial areas in the UK, the EU Commission reiterated its commitment to change the trade defence instruments, which would tackle the cheap steel issue. We are in line and the Commission is in line. Will the Secretary of State get in line to ensure that we can make these changes?

Sajid Javid: I will come on to trade defence instruments in just a moment.

I want to talk about the delivery of a new flexibility on emissions regulations. This was asked for by the industry and we have delivered, potentially saving the industry hundreds of millions of pounds. We have also taken action on procurement, and we have become the first country anywhere in Europe to take advantage of EU rules to make it easier for the public sector to buy British. That is on top of our proud record of procuring British steel.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State makes much of the changes he is making on procurement. The Minister for Defence Procurement, the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), who is sitting next to him, told me in answer to a recent question that the Ministry of Defence did not even have full records of where it was getting its steel from for UK defence projects. How can we be sure that the Secretary of State will follow through on his commitment on procurement when Government Departments are not even keeping records and when so many UK defence projects are being made in Korea, China and elsewhere?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman might hear more from the Minister for Defence Procurement in the coming days, but I can tell him that the two new Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers are being built with almost 100,000 tonnes of British steel, that Crossrail, the biggest construction project in Europe, is using almost exclusively British steel for its 26 miles of tunnels, and that 96% of Network Rail's spending on steel rail goes directly to British firms. It buys 1,500 miles of steel rail every year from Tata in Scunthorpe. That is enough to build a two-track line from London to Edinburgh.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): I certainly agree that Network Rail provides a case study in how to do procurement, and it is to be commended. However, we need to ensure that the DONG energy contract for developing the North sea wind farm, which will be the

second biggest in the world, will use UK steel. What progress is the Secretary of State making with his colleagues to ensure that that happens?

Sajid Javid: We have had meetings with that particular company and many others in a similar situation. The hon. Gentleman will know that many of them are private companies and therefore not subject to all the rules around procurement, but there are ways of trying to encourage them to invest more in British steel, and that is exactly what is happening.

The question of trade defence instruments was raised earlier, and the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) mentioned the point as well. We have been working hard on this issue at EU level, and that work began long before this crisis broke. I hear a lot in this House about ideology, but I am just interested in one thing: what actually works. When evidence shows that tariffs against unfair trade will make a difference without harming British businesses or British consumers, I will always support them. That is why last July the UK voted to impose a 16% tariff on wire rod; since those duties were imposed, imports from China have fallen by as much as 90%.

In November, we voted to impose a 28% tariff on seamless pipes; since those duties were imposed, imports from China have gone down 80%. In January, we voted to impose an 11% tariff on rebar, and since then, imports of that particular steel product have fallen by a massive 99%. In February, we voted for a 15% tariff on cold rolled flat products, and that move has already reduced imports from China to almost nothing. This is real action with real tariffs and they are making a difference for British steelworkers.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): The European Steel Association's spokesperson, talking about the change to the lesser duty rule, has said that

"the fact that the UK continues to block it means that when the government says it's doing everything it can to save the steel industry in the UK and also in Europe, it's not."

Is not that the truth about the Secretary of State's efforts?

Sajid Javid: I will turn to that in just a moment.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): I thank the Business Secretary for taking my intervention. I hope that he will also answer the question that my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) has just asked him. On the question of procurement in relation to energy, the Government are intervening more than ever before in the energy market through contracts for difference. Has the Secretary of State looked into ensuring that when those often very generous contracts are negotiated, they contain a requirement to buy British-made steel?

Sajid Javid: I can tell the right hon. Lady that no stone remains unturned in our efforts to help sell as much British steel as possible. The hon. Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) asked about the lesser duty rule, and this point is raised repeatedly by Labour Members, but Labour had no problem whatever with the rule when it was in government. Scrapping the rule altogether would cost British shoppers dear. It would raise prices on everyday items that we rely on. For example, the rule saves British shoppers £130 million on footwear in one year alone. However, I told the House

yesterday that I would be more than happy to look at any ways of specifically helping the steel industry, and I hope that Members will come up with ideas during the debate. I will, of course, be listening.

Ian C. Lucas: I referred earlier to the Labour Government's intervention on car scrappage before the 2010 election. They stepped up to the plate to support the industry at that time. May I suggest that the Secretary of State approach the aerospace and automotive sectors and ask the Automotive Council and the Aerospace Growth Partnership to place on their agenda ways in which they could assist the UK steel industry by stepping up to the plate at this time of great difficulty for the industry?

Sajid Javid: As the hon. Gentleman will know, we have sector councils for both those industries, and we meet regularly and have a regular dialogue. This is exactly the kind of thing that those sector councils are designed to focus on, and it is exactly the kind of work that they are doing. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I have read some very interesting statistics in the past week. There has been a 43% decline in the foundation industries across the United Kingdom since 2000, but the figure across the other OECD countries is only 21%. Why does the Secretary of State think the decline across the UK since 2000 has been twice that of the other OECD countries?

Sajid Javid: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman gets his numbers from, but this brings me to a useful point. The hon. Member for Wallasey said earlier that I had stated yesterday that manufacturing output in this country had gone up since 2010; she suggested that that was somehow incorrect. I can tell her that manufacturing output has gone up 2.2% in real terms since 2010 and that it is up 18.7% in current prices. Those are the official numbers, and manufacturing employment is also up. If she wants to hear about when manufacturing output actually fell, I can tell her that it was during the last Labour Government, when it fell from 18% of GVA to about 10%.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): Steel companies are seriously concerned that the granting of market economy status to China will severely jeopardise their ability to take Chinese and other companies to court for steel dumping. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of that threat?

Sajid Javid: First, that will be a decision for the EU. We will, of course, have an input, but it will be a collective decision. Secondly, if any country wants market economy status, it must earn it. Whatever the country, it must show that it is behaving in a responsible way. Thirdly, we must remember that even when countries get market economy status, tariffs can still be imposed. Russia and the United States would be good examples.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Does the Secretary of State accept that many on this side of the House believe that it is for this House and this Government to decide when a country such as China is dumping? We

[*Sir Edward Leigh*]

should decide whether to impose tariffs. Indeed, many of us think that if we had been outside the EU months ago, we would have imposed tariffs on Chinese dumping and would have solved the problem.

Sajid Javid: We have led the way in taking action, which has resulted in the right tariffs, which have helped the steel industry while protecting producers and consumers. My hon. Friend will agree that when action is taken through tariffs, we want to ensure that they are at the necessary level to help the industry without hurting consumers and producers.

Stephen Doughty: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sajid Javid: I will give way once more on this.

Stephen Doughty: While we are still on tariffs, the Secretary of State mentioned the tariff on rebar and the drop in production. Increasing the tariff in that industry is obviously crucial, but other facts are at play. Rebar exports shunted up production before the tariffs came in, so we may have seen a drop-off due to that; there are also the exchange rate differentials. Does the Secretary of State still think that the rebar tariffs are high enough or should they be even higher to deal with the changes going on in that industry due to other factors?

Sajid Javid: We should always be driven by the evidence. The 99% fall in imports year on year, resulting from the tariff, suggests that it is effective, but we should always keep the situation under review and ensure that it remains effective.

Richard Fuller: My right hon. Friend mentioned the action that the Government have taken on procurement and their response on tariffs and power. Yesterday, he talked about Government co-investment. Will he please take this opportunity to clarify what is meant by that?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend will know that that comment related to Tata's decision to sell its strip products business. What I said was really to show that when the Government say that we will consider all options to help create a long-term, viable business with a commercial operator, that would be such an option. The key point is that any co-investment would have to be on commercial terms. Investment can take a variety of forms, such as debt, but what I said was a demonstration of all the options that the Government are considering. I will move on to say a little more about Tata strip products in a moment.

Mr Bailey: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Sajid Javid: Not now.

The action taken on tariffs, energy costs and procurement has sent a powerful message to investors around the world that the British Government are standing up for UK steel. That commitment is not new; I have been working with the steel industry from my very first day as Business Secretary, long before the current crisis made it on to the front pages. As I told the House yesterday, Tata contacted me several weeks ago to warn

that it planned to sell parts of its strip business and to close its Port Talbot site immediately. Thanks to the groundwork laid by my team and colleagues over the past year, we were able to secure a reprieve while a buyer is found. I am leading the Government's efforts to help to find a buyer for the strip business, and we will update the House on progress as soon as possible.

When that buyer is found, the Government stand ready, as I have said, to support it in any way we can to help to get the deal done. We have already set out some of the ways in which we can help. It would not be prudent to go into the detail, but the goal is to find a commercial buyer, with the Government helping to secure that transaction and a long-term, viable future for the business.

Tom Blenkinsop: I understand where the Secretary of State is coming from but, taking a broader view of co-investment, one option is R and D. The steel sector does not have Catapult status. Will the Secretary of State look at that as a potential route for co-investment in the steel sector, particularly in respect of organisations such as the Materials Processing Institute, to get an R and D link with our domestic steel industry?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. He will know that Catapult centres are a partnership between Government, business and academia. If that can help the steel sector, I am more than happy to look into it if a proposal comes forward.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): Hundreds of apprentices at the Port Talbot works receive on-the-job training while attending local colleges and universities. Swansea University has approximately £40 million in active grants to support research and innovation in the steel industry at the Materials Research Centre. If the steel-making facilities are removed and sponsorship is subsequently lost, future generations will be deprived and the UK will miss out on the potential to be at the forefront of materials development.

Sajid Javid: The hon. Lady makes a key point about the importance of skills and training, and I can assure her that we are already working with the Welsh Government on that. I have already started discussions with both the Minister for Universities and Science and the Minister for Skills to ensure that the issue remains front of mind.

We heard yesterday about the deal between Tata and Greybull Capital, and we will do everything we can to help finalise that transaction for Tata's long products division. Yesterday's announcement has also helped safeguard almost 5,000 jobs; alongside Liberty House's acquisition of steelworks in Scotland and the west midlands, it is a real vote of confidence in Britain's steel industry.

I would not have been able to do this work alone and I want to praise my right hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise, who has been absolutely tireless over the past year in her efforts to protect steel, as has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales. I have also had the pleasure of working closely with the First Minister of Wales and the leader of the Welsh Conservatives in the Assembly. They have both proved to be positive, constructive allies in the fight to save Port Talbot. The steel unions,

particularly Community, have been equally constructive, consistently coming forward with solutions rather than complaints. For that, I thank them once again.

Investors everywhere know that British steel is the best in the world and that British steelworkers are the hardest working in the world. They know that the British Government stand with the steel industry. We will do whatever we can to support it and to help it become more competitive. The challenges we face are great and the crisis facing the steel industry is global, but I am fighting for Britain's steelworkers every hour of the day. I was fighting for them long before this crisis hit the headlines and will go on fighting for them as long as it takes. Britain's steelworkers are the best in the world, and they deserve no less.

1.37 pm

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) on securing this debate; I appreciate your discretion in permitting it under Standing Order No. 24, Mr Speaker. I will speak briefly from the SNP Front Bench, to allow colleagues from steel communities both in Scotland and in England and Wales to contribute to this short debate.

Yesterday, the Business Secretary tried to dig himself out of the hole he had dug by claiming credit for the news that Tata may have found a buyer for the Scunthorpe plant. He told us that this Government had done everything they could for the steel industry and that workers in England and Wales, with their jobs on the line, should be grateful to the Tories. It is welcome news that Tata appears to have found a buyer for its operations in Scunthorpe, and I hope that buyers can be found for Port Talbot and other sites. If the Government have been involved in the deal, I commend that, but I am concerned at reports of a possible erosion of workers' terms and conditions as part of the deal. Is the Business Secretary aware of that? If he had discussions with Greybull Capital, did the changes come up? Will he now make representations to it on that matter?

I am also keen to probe a bit further the Business Secretary's apparent flirtation with direct UK Government investment and the potential co-ownership of steel sites, including Port Talbot. He described it as co-investment in "commercial terms". Perhaps he could clarify that, because it was as clear as mud yesterday and left more questions than answers. Indeed, it appears that this morning No. 10 was briefing against his flirtation, saying that nationalisation is not the answer. How uncoordinated and shambolic!

Tom Blenkinsop: On what the hon. Gentleman said about terms and conditions, that ends up going to ballot, after being negotiated with lay reps on site, including those at Skinningrove in my constituency. The reductions in terms and conditions and the pension contributions are for 12 months only. In collective bargaining that is usually called a short-term working agreement, and I have negotiated those many times in order to save sites. It is also an industrial matter; it is not really a political matter for this place to discuss.

Neil Gray: I take the hon. Gentleman's intervention in the spirit in which it was clearly given.

As I said yesterday, the fact that the Business Secretary was literally on the other side of the world at the height of this crisis two weeks ago when Tata made the

announcement is a perfect metaphor for the Tory approach to the steel industry. Yesterday, I believe, was the first time this Government have proactively engaged with the House on the steel issue, and even that was after a shambolic recess, when there were calls for a recall of Parliament. On every other occasion I have been involved in discussions—certainly on the vast majority of occasions when steel has been discussed in this House—it has been because the Government have been dragged here by Opposition parties, as they have been again today. It is clear that the Government have been comfortably behind the curve on the steel crisis.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): We had a statement yesterday!

Neil Gray: I have already said that yesterday was the first time the Government had proactively done this, and that was after a shambolic recess. They have clearly been comfortably behind the curve on the steel crisis; we have seen poor, defensive reactions, rather than proactive and practical support. That is in stark contrast with the proactive, professional and diligent way the Scottish Government approached the crisis facing the Scottish plants at Clydebridge and Dalzell. Nicola Sturgeon said her Government would leave no stone unturned in saving a crucial industry, and that is exactly what happened.

The Scottish steel taskforce was quickly assembled, and I am delighted to say that my hon. Friends the Members for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) and for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier) contributed to that, and that Liberty House has now bought these sites, to maintain a crucial industry in Scotland.

Yesterday, the Business Secretary was noble enough to commend the Scottish Government for their actions and efforts, and I thank him for that, but the mask slipped later on in the exchanges when my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West asked whether the UK Government had learned anything from the approach taken in Scotland. He said the only reason why Scottish steel has a bright future is the strength of the UK economy. That was utterly complacent, arrogant and ignorant of the facts.

SNP Members now stand in solidarity with the steelworkers of England and Wales as they struggle and fight for their jobs and their industry, alongside their union representatives. We now hope the UK Government can work more co-operatively with EU colleagues on anti-dumping measures, energy costs and the other issues facing this industry, so there can be a long-term future for a crucial part of the manufacturing sector.

There needs to be a credible strategy for manufacturing and heavy industry in the UK, as the shadow Business Secretary said. This Government are facing a massive, record-breaking trade imbalance. The only way of rectifying that is if we start making things and if this Government start supporting those areas of the economy, rather than relying so heavily on other areas. Imagine what could have been achieved had the Prime Minister spent the last year touring European capitals pressing for action on steel, rather than testing the patience of European colleagues on his EU referendum gamble.

Yesterday, I asked the Business Secretary a simple question and he dodged it. He now has the opportunity to hear it again and perhaps he will take the opportunity

[Neil Gray]

to answer it. Will he publish details of all the meetings, phone calls and correspondence with the EU and with international and trade counterparts that he, the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and other members of the Cabinet have made in respect of the steel industry, and any such visits they have made? If he has done the work he claims to have done and if he has indeed strained every sinew for the steel industry, he can have nothing to hide. Indeed, publishing would help to show if he really had the grip on this issue he claims to have had.

I suspect that the Secretary of State dodged that issue and question yesterday because the reputation he has gained for himself in steel communities across these isles is ringing true. What we needed to hear, today and yesterday, was the commitment of this Government to save this crucial industry, not just for the workers—saving their jobs, and their skills and livelihoods—but for the wider economy. I wonder whether we will ever hear that commitment from this Government.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. On account of the level of interest, there has to be a time limit. We will begin with a six-minute time limit on Back-Bench speeches.

1.44 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray), who speaks for the Scottish National party. I have to say that I thought some of his remarks were more designed for party political purposes than to deal with what we are facing today. We are dealing with people's livelihoods and with whether they have jobs, and I hope the tone of the House today will be about a solution and what we can do, rather than about making party political points. I also regret, Sir, that Parliament was not recalled last week, as this was a matter of such urgency that we could have come back to have a proper debate, and Members interested in this vital issue would have attended. It was quite right, Sir, that you allowed this Standing Order No. 24 application and that it was unanimously approved by this House—there was no opposition to it.

I know that many Members wish to speak, so I will keep my remarks brief. I declare an interest, as some of my constituents work in the steelworks in the neighbouring constituency and have contacted me about their concerns. This is about not just the people who work directly in the industry but those who rely on the economic benefit from it. I also spent 13 years in south Wales, so I know how important the industry is there.

The shadow Business Secretary analysed the situation very well. There has to be a steel industry in this country, and I think Members on both sides of the House agree on that. We cannot be left without a steel industry, and there is one reason for that: if there is a war in the future—I hope there will not be—we have to have our own steel industry or we cannot defend ourselves. Everyone accepts that we need a steel industry and everybody wants to work towards a solution. I know that the ministerial team have been working very hard but I do think they are working with one hand tied behind their back.

The shadow Business Secretary's analysis was absolutely right: the problem our steel industry has is the unfair dumping of Chinese steel, and now perhaps Russian steel, on to the market, backed by state-controlled companies, which can put millions of pounds into their industries with no problem at all. If I was sitting in China and I wanted to keep my industry going, the classic way I would do it would be by selling my product abroad at less than what it costs to produce. What then happens, as we have seen, and as the Secretary of State has made clear, is that businesses across Europe close. When those industries are knocked out, the main supplier—in this case, China—takes a bigger share of the market and can then bump the price of steel up and hold the whole world to ransom. That is just what happens.

Where do I think the one hand tied behind the back is? It is the European Union. We have heard from Members on both sides of the House that the problem has been delays in the European Union dealing with tariffs. If we were in the United States, the President would just impose a tariff of 266% and that would shut off Chinese steel coming into the USA. Whatever we think about the issue and whether we think the Government have been poor in pushing for tariffs or not, I hope the whole House can agree that if this matter was totally in the hands of this Parliament, the Government could make their decision and act, and the Opposition could criticise and vote against it if they did not agree.

Sir Edward Leigh: This is a vital national industry. Can my hon. Friend imagine any previous UK Government, in war or peace, allowing our steel industry to go down the tube? My constituency abuts Scunthorpe, and many of my constituents cannot understand the situation. If we had control of our own destiny, surely we could just stop this dumping overnight. This is unfair, unreasonable and ridiculous dumping, and we should stop it.

Mr Bone: My hon. Friend is correct. That is the problem. I am afraid that the two Front-Bench teams cannot deal with this situation because of their position on the European Union. If the referendum had not been going on at the moment—

Stephen Doughty: I was in agreement with much of what the hon. Gentleman was saying until he got on to his usual track about the EU. Celsa in my constituency is a Catalan company that operates across the whole of the EU. If we were to leave and to lose access to the single market, we would still be bound by World Trade Organisation rules on state aid and other issues. The uncertainty, damage and risk to jobs in south Wales, which he said he cared about, would be immense. It is grossly irresponsible to suggest that leaving the EU would benefit the steel industry in this country.

Mr Bone: I completely disagree with the hon. Gentleman. I think that his analysis is absolutely wrong and that his ideology is driving his comments.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con) *rose*—

Mr Bone: I will not give way again

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): On that point—

Mr Bone: No, I cannot give way, because other Members wish to speak.

It is interesting to note that, by the time this debate ends, a cheque for £7 million will have been written by the Chancellor to send to Brussels—that is how much money we send every three hours to the European Union. Just a fraction of that money could be used to protect our steel industry.

On the question of whether we should renationalise the industry or sell it off, I have to say that I have no problem in that regard. A partial ownership of the steel industry for a period makes sense, as this is a strategic industry, but there is no point in doing that if we cannot solve the overall problem of the dumping of steel in this country. Put simply, we must cut out the cancer first. I have not come here today because of the European Union—*[Interruption.]* No! I have constituents who are concerned and worried about their jobs. Let me tell the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) that it is because of the European Union that they may lose their jobs. It is no good him smiling and laughing, because that is the truth. He should be ashamed of saying otherwise.

If we really want to solve the problem of the steel industry, we must stop the dumping. I know that some Opposition Members do not like this, but the only way to save the steel industry is to come out of the EU and make our own decisions in this House. If we had left the EU months and months ago, we would have imposed tariffs on China. If Members want to save the steel industry, they will have to vote to come out of the EU.

1.52 pm

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): I wish to start today by thanking both the shadow Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), for securing this debate, and you, Mr Speaker, for granting it.

I also thank the Secretary of State for his statements yesterday and today and for attending the special meeting of the all-party group on steel yesterday afternoon. However, although I am grateful to him, I regret to say that those meetings and statements have done little to address investor and customer confidence, which are of paramount importance at this time. Alongside the efforts the Government need to make to find and support a commercial operator, the priority at the moment should be securing the order book.

Erosion of the customer base is the most pressing issue facing the British steel industry. If the customer base goes, it will not come back. Unless the order book is secured, it does not matter what else happens. No one will buy a business if it has no customers—it is as simple as that. That is why I was so deeply concerned by the Secretary of State's response to my question at the APPG yesterday, when I asked him to outline the specific actions he was taking in that regard. He said that he would be happy to engage with customers as and when they approached him. That is simply not good enough. The Secretary of State should be on the phone. He should be reaching out to the chief executive officers of Honda, Nissan, Jaguar Land Rover and others, making it clear that production of the world class steel that they have come to expect and to rely on will continue, come hell or high water.

This House and every steelworker in the country now looks to the Secretary of State to take action. He should set out precisely, and in specific detail, the representations that he intends to make in the coming days and weeks to the companies that comprise the customer base, which is the lifeblood of the British steel industry.

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the companies in the supply chain and the customers, and he is absolutely right to do so. What I have said to him and to others is that we are engaging with many of those organisations—I know that the Secretary of State for Wales is, too—but what he must understand is that much of this is commercially sensitive. Many of those suppliers would not like us to discuss who we are talking to and what their concerns are. I hope that he understands that it would be quite improper for us to divulge that information.

Stephen Kinnock: I fear that the Secretary of State has misunderstood me. I am simply saying that it is very important to be on the telephone to the customer base. *[Interruption.]* We on the Opposition Benches and the steelworkers of this country would like a little bit more detail. *[Interruption.]* Ministers must forgive us for being sceptical about what they are doing or for thinking that there may be a lack of action.

The Secretary of State talked about co-investment yesterday. Although I welcome the fact that he has belatedly converted to the fact that the Government and industry can work in partnership, I am not entirely sure what co-investment means in his terms. I agree with him that nationalisation is not a long-term solution, but what customers need to know is that, come what may, they will still be able to purchase strip products from the Tata sites. Such security can be offered only if the Government commit to keep all options on the table. Can the Secretary of State make such an assurance to the House?

The men and women working in steel and connected industries across this country are among the most highly skilled and effective people in Britain. The Port Talbot workers are already turning the business around, with improved productivity leading to tangible improvements in business and financial performance. Their skill and dedication is matched by that of Roy Rickhuss, the general secretary of Community, who was even praised by the Secretary of State yesterday.

The surprise announcement that we really needed yesterday was not that of a Conservative praising a trade union leader, but that of the Government announcing an end to their *laissez-faire* attitude. What we needed from the Government was a list of all the discussions that they have had with the customer base, but what we got was yet more prevarication and procrastination. What we needed from the Government was the announcement that all options were on the table, but what we got was ambiguity. What we needed from the Government was the announcement that they would put down their pom-poms and give up their role as China's chief cheerleader in Europe; that they would end their championing of market economy status for China; and that they would end their campaign against trade defence reform, but what we got was more of the same.

[Stephen Kinnock]

Yesterday, the Secretary of State only confirmed something that we already knew—that the Government's approach has been characterised by a dangerous combination of indifference, incompetence and a rolling out of the red carpet for Beijing.

Andy McDonald: Was my hon. Friend as surprised as I was to hear that, when the Chancellor went to China, he invited it to take part in the HS2 project and to bid for the steel? That would mean having Chinese steel in one of our major infrastructure projects.

Stephen Kinnock: I was not surprised. Let me remind the House that 80% of the Chinese steel sector is state owned. On what planet can that be considered a market economy? I leave that to the House to decide.

The Secretary of State's claims that he has been working on these things for months simply do not stack up. Yesterday, both in this House and at the APPG meeting, he claimed to have been aware of Tata's decision to sell before it was publicly announced. If that was the case and if he really knew what was coming, why on earth was he on the other side of the world when the board meeting was taking place? Why was he caught so unaware? If he really was in the know as he claims to have been, why did he have to rush back to the UK in a mad panic?

The Secretary of State also boasted yesterday that it was his actions and his actions alone that prevented Tata from closing rather than selling Port Talbot and the rest of its strip products division. I must admit that my jaw hit the floor when I heard that claim. I was out in Mumbai. I was there for the board meeting with Roy Rickhuss and Community. The Secretary of State was not. Tata has expressed deep disappointment and frustration with the lack of support that it has received from this Government. We have seen delayed action on energy compensation, with many companies still waiting to receive their money, and weasel words on procurement from a Government who got the steel for the latest set of Ministry of Defence frigates from Sweden. Above all, Tata saw a Government who refused to support the steel sector in tackling Chinese dumping by opposing trade defence reforms, while championing market economy status for China. Therefore, this supposedly pro-business Government's influence on Tata is very limited. What really made the difference was Community's high profile "Save our Steel" campaign, and the fact that Labour MPs have raised the issue of steel on more than 200 separate occasions since the general election.

The clock is ticking. Tata has said that it will give the sale "all due time". Yesterday's news about Scunthorpe took almost nine months, and it is still not fully complete. The deal on Port Talbot and the rest of Tata's strip operations may also take time. Let us therefore hope that today's debate marks a step change in attitude and action by the Government. Let us hope that they work proactively to protect the entirety of the order book and that they save the future of the heavy end in Port Talbot.

Jonathan Edwards: The hon. Gentleman will know that his colleagues in the Welsh Government have spent £80 million on a conference centre in Newport and £58 million on the airport in Cardiff. Does he think that the £60 million allocated to Tata in Port Talbot is sufficient?

Stephen Kinnock: There is a stark contrast between the actions of the Welsh Government and the actions of the UK Government. There is £60 million on the table, and the Welsh Assembly was recalled, and that should have happened in Westminster, so the contrast is clear.

Let us hope that the Government develop and execute a proper industrial strategy, so that the Opposition do not have to raise this matter a further 200 times in the weeks and months to come. Let us hope that they will stand up for steel.

2.1 pm

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), but it is unfortunate that his speech veered towards the critical, rather than the constructive. However, he can be forgiven, because he is one of many MPs speaking in this debate with a significant steelmaking presence in his constituency.

My constituency is not one of those constituencies, but in Parliament we talk as one community for all our constituencies, and discuss how different constituencies and communities can reach out to communities that are severely affected when things go wrong in an industry or because of a natural disaster. Let me repeat that the issues in the steel industry are not going to go away. We face many years of brutal competition in the global steel industry. If my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his team can, over the coming months, successfully find long-term solutions for steelmaking plants in Motherwell, Scunthorpe and Port Talbot, that will be a significant achievement in these times.

As someone who does not have a steelworks in his constituency, I believe it is important to discuss what the rules ought to be on what is fair for communities across the country. The OECD in its report last year on the steel industry said:

"In competitive economies, it is the responsibility of the steel companies themselves to identify ways to adapt to changing market conditions."

We have to accept that many steel companies in the UK have failed to do that. The OECD goes on to say:

"The role of governments should be to allow market mechanisms to work properly and avoid measures that artificially support steelmaking capacity."

The OECD understands the ways in which developed and developing economies can prosper, and it is important that the Government bear those words in mind. It is also important—and I should like to hear from my right hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise on this in her closing speech—that while we prepare for the best we also prepare for the worst. I should like to know what the Government are doing to prepare support for Port Talbot if all their best efforts to save the steelworks do not come to fruition. May I make one point from my memory of the coal-mining communities in the 1980s? The Government can never give enough support to communities that rely on a single industry.

Caroline Flint: Mrs Thatcher did not have an industrial strategy.

Richard Fuller: No, this is a lesson that we all need to learn. [Interruption.] If the right hon. Lady stops chuntering, I can make a point with which she might agree. Lessons have been learned from the 1980s, and in

communities with a significant concentration of industries the Government always have to do more than they think they have to do.

Duties have been mentioned a number of times, so let us clear up the lesser duty rule. The point, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, is whether the duty is effective. We follow the lesser duty rule, and in the three instances that he mentioned, import penetration has all but disappeared. Giving up the lesser duty rule is not about stopping more steel coming in, but about raising prices on those products. If a 14% tariff is increased to 50% when imports are eliminated that will result in inflationary pressure from the steel industry to other markets, and might be regarded as supporting subsidies from one part of the steel industry to another. It is not right to give up the lesser duty rule, which is the underpinning of the World Trade Organisation, and to take the US approach of zeroing in on tariffs.

On the 267% tariff that America imposed on Chinese cold rolled flat, it was part of the same US decision that imposed a 31% tariff on Tata steel. Tit for tat on trade tariffs does not work.

David Mowat: Does my hon. Friend have a view about why Chinese dumping affects the UK industry much more than the German and Dutch industries? Indeed, Tata is trying to consolidate in Holland. Why have we been affected differently?

Richard Fuller: My hon. Friend speaks very intelligently. Private companies make decisions in different markets across the European Union. I disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), although we agree on Brexit, as I am not sure that the EU is pertinent to the decision that will affect the steel industry. The Government have taken effective action on procurement and power. Having served on a Bill Committee on the privatisation of Royal Mail, I think that a case can be made for the Government to take action on the pension requirements for members of the British steel industry, which was a nationalised industry. There is plenty of scope, for people like me who believe in the free market, to argue that the Government can take action on that basis.

The Opposition say that they believe in nationalisation. The hon. Member for Aberavon said that he believes in nationalisation, but that it is “not a long-term solution”. Opposition Members do not know when the crisis in the global steel industry is going to end. The global capacity glut is over 30%. I am afraid that if we nationalised, we could not determine when we could return the industry to the private market. If people nationalise, they do so for as long as it takes, and I believe, although I understand why my right hon. Friend will not do so, that the Government should rule out nationalisation, which is a step too far for the British economy in supporting the steel industry.

Finally, may I put the issue of the steel industry in context? During the time that most of us will spend in the House—I am looking at older Members—we will live through a global over-supply of capacity. That will be true not just of steel but of other sectors of our economy. We need to understand and abide by the rules that have created a free trade system that has been one of the biggest supports in improving living standards around the world. Supporting WTO rules on the lesser

duty tariff is important, as is avoiding a tit for tat war on tariffs. Supporting communities with a significant industry that is affected and making sure that the Government do more than they think they need to do to support those communities are part of making sure that our economy supports them. I commend the Government on their actions, and I will continue to support them critically.

2.8 pm

Mr Iain Wright (Hartlepool) (Lab): It is an absolute pleasure to follow my colleague on the Select Committee on Business, Innovation and Skills. I do not agree with much of what he said, but the rigour of his analysis, both in his speech and in his work on the Committee, makes the Committee much sharper in what it does, so I commend him for that.

I welcome the emergency debate, because steel industry is facing a real emergency. It has faced it for some time. The Committee found, going back 40 years, that successive Governments failed to value manufacturing and domestic steelmaking capability as the foundations of an innovative economy. Other countries—and this is in reference to an intervention from the hon. Member for Warrington South (David Mowat)—value their domestic steel industry more than we do, which makes them more resilient to the perfect storm of over-production and low steel prices affecting global steel markets.

I want to put it on the record that the challenges facing all steel manufacturers around the world are vast. China produces more steel than all other steel manufacturing nations put together. In two years China has produced more steel than we, the inventors of modern steelmaking, have produced since the start of the industrial revolution, so even if the Government were doing all they could, those challenges would remain vast.

The Government could do more, because Britain does not face a level playing field in respect of steel production. One contributing factor is the high pound. I know that the Government will not do anything to affect that, but they can intervene directly on uncompetitive energy costs and business rates, which put British-based steel manufacturers at a disadvantage.

In December we on the Business, Innovation and Skills Committee published our report on the Government response to the steel crisis. That was prompted by big turbulence, particularly the closure of SSI in Redcar in early October. It revealed the shocking absence of an effective early-warning system in Whitehall designed to detect and address mounting problems in the industry. Industry had been crying out for some time, with five asks concerning procurement, business rates and energy costs, but the Government had been deaf to such pleas. Had they been alert, they would not have had to resort to crisis management and preside over the tragic hard closure of an integrated steel facility, the second most efficient blast furnace anywhere in Europe, and the loss forever to the steel industry of jobs and skills.

The Select Committee's report found that the Government recognised the vital importance of the steel industry, but the increased activity had not yet translated into a measurable impact on those in the industry and the communities that they sustain. Five months on from the closure of SSI, with other losses

[Mr Iain Wright]

such as Caparo, and with the decision last month by Tata to sell its UK steel operations, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that lessons have not been learned and that increased activity has not resulted in positive outcomes.

Andy McDonald: My hon. Friend talks about the absence of an early-warning system. In his capacity as Chair of the BIS Committee, does he have any concerns that there is insufficient capacity in the Department to respond to challenges as they emerge on world markets?

Mr Wright: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills should be looking out for the British economy, making sure that it is the Department for future economic growth. It needs the civil service capacity to do that, and the proposal for it to lose 30% to 40% of its headcount will have enormous consequences for those early-warning systems and for the expertise and knowledge of the steel industry and other key sectors that are needed to ensure that Britain can thrive.

Today and yesterday in his statement, the Secretary of State stated that he was aware that Tata was planning to hard close its steel operations in Port Talbot and elsewhere, but that he prevented that from happening. He was fully aware of the enormity of the crisis, yet he still flew to Australia rather than Mumbai. The evidence surely suggests that he was left blindsided by Tata's decision, which again demonstrates that no effective early-warning systems were in place. The Secretary of State should have gone out with Roy Rickhuss and with my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) to the Tata board meeting to bat for British steelmaking. The fact that he subsequently went to Mumbai, days after that key board meeting, shows that he knew he had made an earlier error.

The contrast must be made with the events of 2012, when Vince Cable as Business Secretary went to New York to persuade General Motors to make a long-term commitment to the UK, despite overcapacity and loss making in car-manufacturing operations in Europe. As a result of close partnership between the Government of the day, trade unions and local management, GM closed a plant in Germany and committed to build the new Vauxhall Astra at its Ellesmere Port facility. Given the great industrial relations in steel, fantastic trade unions, exceptional steelworkers and committed local management, why cannot this model be adopted for the steel industry?

We must look to the future and ensure that we have a sustainable steel industry. I have mentioned the existential threat to British steelmaking, but it is important to recognise that steel should be seen not as an obsolete industry, but as one whose future is essential to much of British manufacturing. We should be honest about the challenges, but we should not talk the industry down, which would further hasten the signing of its death warrant. We all have a responsibility to ensure that customers do not take flight.

The Government can help significantly with that. They have brought forward welcome changes to procurement rules that should favour British-made steel and its products during the awarding of public contracts. Something similar was announced in October following

the steel summit, but we have no tangible evidence in the form of new contracts flowing to British plants and mills. Not a single pound of value has been seen. I asked the Secretary of State yesterday after his statement how greater and urgent collaboration was taking place between the Government, the Steel Council and the strategic sector councils such as the Automotive Council, the Aerospace Growth Partnership and the Offshore Wind Industry Council. Will the Minister provide further clarity about that?

Steel plays a major part in the infrastructure of the country. On 23 March, six days before the Mumbai meeting, the Government published the national infrastructure delivery plan. It contains one reference to steel. Will the Government commit to talking to the Cabinet Office to make sure that more can be done? This is incredibly important for my constituency in respect of the steel pipe mills and for the future of British manufacturing. It is important that we move from warm words to tangible action to safeguard British steel.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: A five-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches will now apply.

2.15 pm

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright), whose constituency has a downstream Tata production site. We share that similarity, and I share much of the sentiment that he expressed.

The present situation is of great concern to 600 families in Corby. As the local Member of Parliament, I think about them all the time in the work that I am doing on a cross-party basis in our area to try to support them and the steel industry in general. Margot Parker, the UKIP MEP, Tom Beattie, the Labour leader of the council, and I are working closely together to campaign on the issue. That is what local people and those who work at the local plant expect us to do. I was very pleased that the Minister was able to come and join us in those efforts last week.

I am also pleased to be working with Dougie Fairbairn and the Community union representatives at the Corby plant. That relationship is very important. Their feedback helps me to participate in debates such as this, ask questions and put their concerns to Ministers. That needs to be replicated nationally. There is far too much knockabout. I want to see us all getting round the table, working with the unions, Ministers, Back-Bench MPs and employees to make sure that we find solutions to these pressing problems.

The visit last week was useful not just to meet employees, but to get a briefing on where things stand in relation to the Corby plant. A clear message came across that both investment and time are needed. We should bear that in mind as we move forward. That leads me to the challenges that the industry so clearly faces.

The first one is so evidently the overarching challenge of dumping. The unfair, uncompetitive practices that we are seeing are unacceptable. We have heard a lot about Chinese dumping, but the particular concern in Corby is Russian dumping. We have all acknowledged

that we have a brilliant steel industry. The product produced in this country is world-leading, but it currently cannot compete because the playing field is not level. That frames the whole of the ensuing debate.

The Chinese objective is clear. It is to dominate the world market and put other suppliers out of business so that the Chinese can raise the price and reel in the profits. For some industries, cheap steel at present might be an attractive prospect, but the longer-term consequences will be much more serious. Industry in this country and around the world needs to recognise that. We need to respond with strong tariffs and emulate some of the actions that President Obama, for example, is taking, although I do not agree with him on very much.

Mr Nick Clegg (Sheffield, Hallam) (LD): The hon. Gentleman makes a compelling point on anti-dumping tariffs. Does he agree that the issue is not just how high the anti-dumping duties are set? The Government have got the lesser duty rule completely wrong. It is not fit for purpose to deal with the scale of dumped steel from China. Also important is the speed with which decisions are taken. In vetoing that decision, the Government are blocking a more accelerated timetable for the imposition of anti-dumping duties.

Tom Pursglove: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that intervention. We ought to take another look at the lesser duty rule. It makes sense to refresh our thinking on these matters all the time. However, speed is important. One of the frustrations that I was going to speak about later is the time it took in the European Commission last year to approve the energy compensation package. Those delays were unacceptable. It took far too long. We need quicker action.

Mr Bone: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who I know was at the Corby steelworks three times last week. Does he agree with the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg) who criticised the European Union for being slow and ineffective in dealing with the steel industry?

Tom Pursglove: The former Deputy Prime Minister probably knows better than most how inefficient the European Union is.

Mr Clegg *rose*—

Tom Pursglove: I am not going to give way, because I am very conscious of the time.

As well as getting the tariffs right—I think we should have another look at them—we should consider the market economy status argument that is being made, which is very important. I happen to take the view that if the Chinese are not going to play by the rules, they should simply not be allowed to have market economy status, and I hope that the European Union reaches that conclusion as well.

On energy costs, we have heard a lot in recent years about climate change. We need to be thinking constantly about the consequences of the policies we introduce and the agreements we sign up to. The Government must not act with a silo mentality in relation to these matters; they must be looking constantly at the implications of changes in energy policy. We must always bear that in

mind. I welcome the energy compensation package to which I alluded a little while ago, but it did take months and months to approve. Yesterday the Secretary of State mentioned the package of measures that the Government are seeking to introduce in relation to exempting, and we heard about potential delays in that. I would be very interested to hear in his final remarks today exactly where we are with the exemption package, because I think it is an important step forward.

I happen to take the view that we ought to get much tougher on procurement. We have seen some really positive steps, but it is simply unacceptable for any public bodies in this country not to be using British steel at this time. We are seeing big procurement projects and fracking is coming on stream, so we ought to be exploring all the possibilities and ensuring that our procurement policy reflects exactly that. The integrity of the order book is very important, but so too is the integrity of supply chains. We need suppliers to keep on supplying, as well as buyers to keep on buying.

On business rates, at a time when we are trying to find somebody to buy the Corby site and the others that Tata owns in this country, it makes little sense that we are asking investors to step up to the mark and consider buying plant or the portfolio but then penalising them the moment that investment is made. It makes no sense whatsoever. I advocated a business rates holiday for the industry before the Budget, and I would like Ministers to have another look at that, because this is about trying to show signs of confidence that the Government are backing the industry and that we are all coming together to do just that. It is a bizarre anomaly.

In relation to trying to find a buyer for the Tata sites, I take the view that all options must be on the table. We should not rule anything out. I know that people will say, “But you are a free market Conservative,” and I am, but the fact is that our steel industry is not competing on a level playing field at the moment, and that requires action that does not necessarily go with the normal grain. We should therefore not rule anything out. If a short period of public ownership is required in order to find a buyer for the sites, I think that is exactly what we should do.

Angela Smith: Co-investment.

Tom Pursglove: That is absolutely right. I want to hear a little more to be able to ascertain exactly what Ministers are thinking about that. In trying to find a buyer, we must not let state aid rules get in the way. If they get in the way, we should simply ignore them and do what is right by our steel industry. That is the message that my constituents expect me to convey as their local Member of Parliament.

2.23 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this very important debate, particularly because I have 900 very good quality jobs on the line at Tata Speciality Steels in Stocksbridge. I support everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) said earlier. I will not rehearse the usual arguments that have been articulated so ably by so many Members already, such as on energy costs

[Angela Smith]

and business rates. I will not talk about co-investment, because many comments have been made about that already, too.

Instead, I want to focus on confidence in the future of the steel industry. We risk seeing the industry undermined by people posing as experts in the field, such as commentators in the print media, and giving the impression that the industry's day is done. It is not done; it has a great future. One example is the TaxPayers Alliance—let me make it clear that this is not an ideological attack—which stated last week:

“Unlike German plants which produce specialised products used in the car industry, UK plants have tended to produce basic products using out of date technology.”

I just want to put it on the record that every Formula 1 car made in this country, apart from Ferrari, has a bit of Stocksbridge steel in it, as does every aircraft in the sky. It is Stocksbridge steel that lands the planes safely, because it is used in the landing gear. It is Stocksbridge steel that makes up part of the Rolls-Royce engine that keeps the aircraft in the sky. We in Stocksbridge are incredibly proud of what we do, and the workforce are passionate about the industry's future and they intend to have a long-term future, but they need the Government's support.

I want to illustrate the other things that the plant in my constituency is doing. We have just secured £50 million of investment so that we can make the steel and remelt it to make even purer steel, at the VIM, or vacuum induction melting, plant, which the Minister knows about, so that we can go even further up the value chain, instead of just aerospace steel.

Just to correct the record, let me say that Stocksbridge is not a downstream operation. Tata Speciality Steels makes its own steel, remelts it and makes some of the best steel in the world. We have four projects at Stocksbridge, one of which involves making powdered steel, which is worth £30,000 to £40,000 per tonne. If we get the investment for that, with the atomizer plant that will go on the side of the VIM plant, our future will be spectacular. We must secure that future.

By the way, I make that point in relation to all the Tata plants at risk. People say, “Let's go niche. Let's specialise.” Actually, Stocksbridge is very specialised, but the steel made at Port Talbot is also specialised and very high quality. It is a different type of steel and it is made according to a different process—it uses blast furnaces, rather than electric arc furnaces—but it still makes fantastic, good quality steel. We make some of the best steel in the world.

In conclusion, too many commentators are focusing on steel as an industry of the past, but it is an industry of the future. I will finish by looking at the reports recently published by the Government's chief scientific advisor, Mark Walport. He made it clear that manufacturing will be transformed over the next 30 years or so. The future of our manufacturing industry is focused on adaptability, in terms of the rapidly changing intellectual and physical infrastructure that we need. The steel industry is very well placed to do that. Tata has been completely focused on doing that; it just needs the support to get there—or rather, the new owner will need that support.

Mark Walport also made it clear that we need shorter and more integrated supply chains, because of issues relating to quality and safety standards. Our steel industry delivers that. Aerospace companies such as Airbus and Boeing know that they need those integrated, short supply chains, and they get nervous if the supply chains are disrupted. That is why we need to maintain confidence in the industry. I call on the Government to play their part by doing whatever they can to save our steel.

2.28 pm

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): I, too, want to thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this important debate. Steel is a huge part of the economy of my home town of Newport. In fact, my first job was at British Steel. I declare an interest as a British Steel pension holder, although what that pension will be worth after all this, I do not know.

Members on both sides of the House have spoken very well. The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) made the point that the fundamental problem is the vast amount of steel that has been coming into the marketplace from China since about 2008, and the fact that the demand for it is just not there. In reality, as he says, nobody can do anything about that fundamental problem, but there are certainly things the Government could do to help. Tata was losing about £1 million a day—we had the figures a few weeks ago. Frankly, the Government are not doing enough to help; I will not mince my words today.

One problem is that there has been a lack of consistency on both sides of the House. We need to ask ourselves a fundamental question: do we want heavy manufacturing industries in this country? Of course, people say the answer is yes, and I think the answer is yes, but if it is, one has to ask why, over the last few years, Governments of all parties—this Government, the coalition Government and certainly the Labour Government—have enacted policies that have made it much harder for heavy industry to continue.

Those Governments swallowed lock, stock and barrel the idea that carbon dioxide is a pollutant that is causing runaway global warming, and they enacted a series of policies that made things very expensive for any industry that emits CO₂, and made it expensive for heavy manufacturers to buy in energy. We have brought in renewables obligations and carbon floor prices, and as a result, we now have the highest energy costs in Europe. That point was made to us on the Welsh Affairs Committee by manufacturers and the unions. Dealing with the issue may not resolve the fundamental question, of course, but it could make the difference between an industry that is profitable in some areas and one that is not. It could also make the difference to companies such as Tata when they are deciding whether to maintain a plant here or in the Netherlands.

It is important that we think about things consistently. To be honest, I do not buy the argument that carbon dioxide is causing runaway global warming. I have spoken about this before, and I cannot deal with the issue in the next two minutes, but there is simply no correlation with the tiny increase we have had in temperature. Therefore, the Government need to rethink their policy.

Instead of deciding to get rid of the carbon taxes and energy taxes that helped to create the problem in the first place—taxes supported by Governments and MPs of all parties—the Government have brought forward a compensation package. The package is all right as far as it goes, although it had to go through a great big bureaucratic steeplechase in the European Union, which Members on both sides also support, and which I certainly do not. However, having got there in the end, and with the first cheques going out as we speak, what have we actually done? We levied a huge tax on an industry, and now we will give some of that money back, because the tax is having exactly the impact we thought it would, which is to punish the industry. I put it to the right hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) that it would surely be much more sensible to scrap the carbon taxes in the first place. There is not much point having a tax if one has to compensate people for its effect.

Mr Bone: My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Will he explain how our industry is supposed to compete with the industries in continental Europe when we pay twice the energy price they do?

David T. C. Davies: My hon. Friend makes an important point. However, if Members on both sides truly believe that carbon dioxide is a pollutant and is causing runaway global warming, they should stand up, take a bow and explain to steelworkers that those workers losing their jobs is a price worth paying to stop the minute increases we have seen in temperatures—although, in fact, we have not seen any increase in about 17 years. The whole thing is absolute nonsense.

We should say that of course we want heavy manufacturing industries in this country. It is not just steel that is threatened; this is also not just about Tata. The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise will be aware that one other steel manufacturer in south Wales has said that it may face severe economic problems unless something is done about high energy prices. Sanjeev Gupta, a constituent who is head of Liberty House, has said that we need to scrap the carbon floor price. As I said, this is not just about steel; it is about glass, chemicals, cement and all sorts of other heavy manufacturing industries. If hon. Members truly believe that these industries are polluting the atmosphere and causing a great increase in temperature, although we have not actually seen any evidence of that for 17 years, they are doing exactly the right thing. However, I happen to think that all of them, and this Government, are doing the wrong thing.

It is high time we stopped trying to tax our manufacturing industries, stopped taxing companies that could be profitable, and stopped handing the money to expensive wind farms that generate electricity at two or three times market rates, particularly when the wind farm companies involved are not even willing to buy steel from this country, and import it all instead. In the Committee, the Minister described the policy as barmy, and she was right, although she was probably being far too polite.

I have no problem at all with CO₂ being emitted. I want a viable heavy manufacturing industry in this country, and I want to see lots of jobs and low taxation. I am perfectly relaxed about CO₂ emissions.

2.35 pm

Tom Blenkinsop (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): This is not just about the obvious news stories about Port Talbot or the strip industry; it involves all Tata sites, including Aldwarke, Thrybergh, Stocksbridge, Shotton, Llanwern, Orb, Corby and Hartlepool; this is a UK steel crisis.

I reiterate that Tata has to behave like a responsible seller, and we need to remind it of its antics in 2010, when Kirby Adams, the then chief executive of Tata in Europe, tried to use skulduggery to shut Redcar. We solved that problem, but it took more than two years—two years in which there was not one hard redundancy. We need to remind Tata of its previous behaviour and not see it happen again.

British steel is not a basket case, a failed industry or a sunset industry; it is a very successful industry. We had evidence of that recently, when Liberty Steel bought Dalzell and Clydebridge—integral parts of any programme for Trident renewal. Teesside Beam Mill, Skinningrove, Scunthorpe, York, Blaydon and, indeed, Hayange in France, which is part of the long products division sold off to Greybull, are another success story of assets that investors want to buy into. They also demonstrate the European aspect of the previous Corus-British Steel envelope, and we still have sites in IJmuiden and Hayange.

British steel has always relied for its totemic name on its quality and its research and development. Places such as the Materials Processing Institute in Teesside at the old labs at Grangetown, as well as the research and development capacity in Rotherham and Sheffield, when linked with blast furnaces and electric arc furnaces, gives us the ability to control the destiny of metallurgy in our nation. That means we can innovate and create new products. That must be remembered.

I am interested in the notion of co-investment, whether that is in cash terms, or whether it is about an equity stake, a loan, R and D or, more importantly, Government policy. If we are to have a real discussion in this place, we have to look at the different options for co-investment. That is not about the individual commercial parties that may be interested in purchasing, but about putting ideas on the table so that we can actually plan an industrial strategy, because we have not done that in the last five years.

Let us take the issue of Chinese dumping. This is a new phenomenon; it has been going on for four and a half years. Before that, it was not happening. The circumstances have changed, and that is why the Government have to change the way they behave on the lesser duty rule and other legislation. There are no precedents, and that is why we cannot stick to rigid dogma, or even analytical argument around World Trade Organisation rules. On co-investment, I have to question whether we are properly looking at issues such as shale gas, and whether parties are being honest about the policy on that, because we are talking about gas-intensive industries.

On carbon capture and storage, the Government have to come clean. They have pulled the rug from under energy-intensive industries on carbon capture and storage. How will they maintain energy-intensive industries—whether it is chemical processing, shale, steel, light manufacturing, glass, cement or bricks—without a proper strategy on carbon? Taxes can be implemented

[Tom Blenkinsop]

under the EU emissions trading scheme or unilaterally, by bringing in the carbon price floor. They did that in the Budget some years ago, and they promised to give compensation. However, they did not calculate that if they wanted to compensate people for their own unilateral British tax, they could do so only via the European Union. They had not done the requisite work; they looked at the margins that a Treasury civil servant brought forward and just applied a rule, and they are now reaping the consequences of that.

Ultimately, Port Talbot, the strip and every single other site need time. In 2010, Redcar was saved over two years; SSI had six weeks and fell. We have to give British Tata sites time so that they can be saved. We need proper definitions of co-investment for the community to discuss.

Richard Fuller: The hon. Gentleman is talking a lot of sense. On the issue of time and co-investment, the Government could provide a bridging loan that extends beyond the period for which Tata is prepared to subsidise the steelworks, until a future buyer is found. Is that the sort of co-investment that the hon. Gentleman has in mind?

Tom Blenkinsop: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and for giving me some more time. I really appreciate his comment.

Continued production is another pillar. If we are to save these sites, production has to be continuous or skills will be lost. In Redcar in 2010, the then regional development agency, One North East, along with Government agencies in Whitehall, provided a £60 million package. That came from RDA and central Government budgets. It retained people in the area on training courses while we—I was a union officer at the time—negotiated with other parties, such as Marcegaglia, Dongkuk and SSI, to get that site bought. It is vital to look at continuous production, time and other elements of co-investment, not just the cash element.

2.41 pm

Byron Davies (Gower) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this extremely important debate. I thank the Secretary of State and his team for keeping the House informed—in particular for keeping in continuous contact with me and other Members. I thank the Government for the extremely constructive and close way in which they have worked thus far with the unions and other parties.

I congratulate the Community union, whose evidence to the Welsh Affairs Committee was very impressive indeed. Representatives were here yesterday. I am pleased that the Government have kept in contact and ensured that everybody has been kept informed at every stage, because this is about livelihoods. As someone who grew up and was schooled with many who went on to the local steel industry, I recognise how important the industry, the supply chain, the steel stockholders and the maintenance companies that look after the Port Talbot steelworks are to families in my constituency of Gower.

The Government's interesting announcement yesterday about co-investing with a buyer highlights their commitment to the people who work at Port Talbot. That will help to ensure the survival of the steelworks, but it also

demonstrates the need to work on a vast number of issues, many of which have been mentioned today and during the past week, to ensure a viable long-term future for the industry.

It is crucial that parties work with each other in this Chamber and go beyond party politics to ensure the survival of steelmaking at Port Talbot. I want briefly to discuss one of the areas that we need to consider as part of our long-term strategy: the use of British steel in infrastructure projects. I know that there are rules and guidelines, but we must think strategically about our use of steel.

The Government's increased investment in infrastructure means that British steel has had more opportunities to be used, as a result of which our workers, their families and our communities have been supported. For example, 98% of the steel that National Rail has used has been British, while 95% of that used by Crossrail has been. Indeed, HS2 and Crossrail 2 will provide further huge opportunities for our steel industry. As we have heard, something like 94% of the steel used in manufacturing aircraft procured by the Government has been British and, of course, the Great Western Railway electrification to Swansea will provide a further opportunity to use steel.

We need to ensure that our infrastructure strategy and investment tie in very closely with the use of British steel. I was extremely pleased when the Government and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer set up the National Infrastructure Commission, headed by Lord Adonis, to give this country the infrastructure to support future economic growth. Will the commission examine how projects could make use of British materials such as steel and support vital industries? Infrastructure projects support local families, local businesses and local communities.

From the coffee shop to the hairdresser and the baker, businesses across south Wales, particularly in the Swansea bay region, are deeply concerned about their future. We need to look at a wide-ranging and long-term strategy to make the industry viable for south Wales. A joint strategy that supports economic growth in the region could consider projects such as the Swansea bay tidal lagoon, which is the type of infrastructure project that would not only add jobs, but continue to support those workers and families just over the bay in Port Talbot.

We must work together. Political grandstanding will not save jobs, provide a long-term viable future for steel production in Port Talbot or support businesses in the supply chain across south Wales. The history of steel in our communities runs deeper than political point-scoring, which causes confusion. Only last week, I spoke to a lady constituent who is a Tata employee, as is her husband, and both of them were appalled and disappointed by the political rhetoric from certain quarters.

We have a shared history and experience of steel in south Wales. Our communities, our social fabric and our lives have all been built or touched by the steel industry. Only by working as one can we provide the future we all want for steel in Port Talbot. Politicians who grandstand in an attempt to ingratiate themselves with steelworkers will not help. We need action, and that is what the Government are clearly providing, constructively and conscientiously. I applaud their actions

to date and look forward to a positive outcome for the people of Port Talbot and the many employees who reside in my constituency of Gower.

2.46 pm

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Tata's announcement that it would no longer support its operation at Port Talbot came as no surprise to Labour Members. We had been warning the Government for months that that was coming down the line, but they chose to do nothing. The Secretary of State was on the other side of the world when the announcement came, and he now clings to the claim that he somehow saved the plant while he was in Australia. As workers at Redcar found out, this Government do too little, too late, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) has said, they offer warm words but no action.

This crisis now affects the whole of the UK steel industry, not only Port Talbot. The media have a habit of describing the whole UK steel industry as loss-making, but that is far from the truth for a lot of those plants that add value. Shotton steelworks galvanises and colour-coats steel. It is a profitable business that employs 800 people—quality jobs that are vital to the economy of Deeside. Profitable it may be, but that does not ensure its long-term survival. Shotton relies on steel from the Port Talbot operation. If Port Talbot closes sooner rather than later, it would not be long before Shotton would have to cease its operation due to lack of supply.

The idea that someone can just pick up the phone and buy in from China or anywhere else lots of cheap steel of the quality and quantity needed for a plant such as Shotton is far from reality. To ensure the future of Shotton—I made this point to the Secretary of State yesterday—we need a lot of time. That is a common theme of what colleagues on both sides of the House are saying.

Time is needed not only to find a buyer for the whole of the UK business that will invest and commit to the future, but to allow the downstream businesses to find an alternative steel supplier should the worst happen. I do not want to see that, but the Government have to plan for all scenarios. As many other colleagues have said, we have to reassure the customer base as well. If we do not do that, there will be no businesses to sell to, because the customers will start to leave and walk away. They need assurances.

Shotton, probably more than anywhere else, knows about the impact of job losses in industry. In 1980, despite the gallant efforts of my predecessor, now Lord Jones, and the trade unions, Shotton saw its steelmaking cease and more than 6,500 people lose their jobs. At the time, it was the largest number of job losses at a single plant on a single day anywhere in the history of western Europe. Although the area has recovered and new employers have moved in and grown, the scars of the events of 1980 remain.

On Deeside, nearly everybody has a family member or a friend who worked in the industry. Some people never worked again. The lesson is that such large-scale job losses affect not only the individuals who once worked the industry, but their families and the whole area. Such job losses destroy whole communities, which take many years to recover. The Government have an opportunity to save the industry and assure its long-term future, but they need to act—and they need to act now.

2.50 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): We have two important debates this afternoon: this one on steel, and the debate later on the contaminated blood scandal. As a steel group member, I am incredibly pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) has been able to secure the debate. I gently reassure anyone who has come to lobby on the contaminated blood scandal that hon. Members will be here to speak for them in that debate later. It will be a very long day for those who have travelled from far and wide to get here. Both of the debates remind me of "Groundhog Day", because we have to come back time and again to rehearse the same arguments and press for action.

Understandably, much of the focus has been on Port Talbot, and I praise my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) for his efforts with the steel unions. As has been said, however, this is a UK steel crisis. Steelmaking may have ceased in 2001 in Llanwern, but slab has been imported by rail from our sister plant in Port Talbot ever since. Our steelworkers are proud to roll UK steel, and they want to continue to do so. They are looking to the Government to ensure that happens.

At Llanwern, we have taken a cumulative hit over the last few years. Hundreds of jobs have been lost, to the point where we have 700 left. It has been painful. Many of the Llanwern steel workers have transferred to Port Talbot, and they now face uncertainty there. As my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) has said eloquently, steel could have a great future. At Llanwern, we have the Zodiac line, which is Tata Steel's world-class coil galvanising line. The Zodiac line is doing well. Orb Electrical Steels, which produces a type of high-tech electrical steel, is in profit following a period of restructuring a few years ago. As is often said in debates such as this, steel is cyclical, and Orb demonstrates that. The order books are healthy.

We have had much in the way of warm words, with phrases such as "do all we can to help"—that has been said again today—but what do they mean in practical terms? The asks from the unions have been well rehearsed today, and I would like to add to them. The unions want fast action to protect the order books to ensure the businesses are saleable. It is crucial to the future of Llanwern and Orb that they are not undermined by seepage of business elsewhere before any sale or transferring of work. The unions want time for the sale, as my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop) has said. It is important to know the timescale. Long Products took nine months, and Tata appears to be saying four months. As the shadow Business Secretary has said, we need time for an appropriate consideration of offers. What is the news on the Secretary of State working with Tata to ensure that it is a responsible seller?

I have many steelworkers in my constituency but also a large number of steel pensioners. Can the Government give those pensioners and future steel pensioners some reassurance about their pension fund, and can the Secretary of State outline the actions that the Government are taking?

The asks from the steel industry in recent times have been for action on Chinese dumping, on which the Government have failed. They have also failed to act on

[Jessica Morden]

the lesser duty rule. It is ironic that while our Government have been slow to act on tariffs to protect our industry, the Chinese Government have just imposed 46% tariffs on electrical steel. Although Orb no longer exports to China, companies in other countries do. They will be looking for alternative customers in other countries, and that could mean issues down the line for our electrical steel industry sales.

We have asked for action on energy prices. That took two years to deliver, and is only just coming through now. That is too slow. We need real action on procurement, not simply the souped-up advice note that came out last week. Will the Minister tell us today what specific projects he has in mind? The Welsh Government have done all they can to help with the levers that they have had at their disposal. That has included setting up the steel taskforce to work on practical ways to help. I know from my union reps who came here yesterday how much that relationship is valued.

References were made yesterday to grandstanding, and they have been repeated today. I assure hon. Members on both sides of the House that steel group members have raised issues to do with steel time and time again in the Chamber. It is not grandstanding; it is personal. It is personal because our constituents are loyal, resourceful, highly skilled and incredibly hard-working. We understand what they are going through in tough times. These are valued jobs.

The issue is also personal because I look around the Chamber and see my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), who worked at Llanwern, as did his dad; I see my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), whose dad also worked there. I see my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn), who worked as an industrial chemist in Llanwern. My parents met in the steel industry at Ebbw Vale. There are many others. We cannot let our steelworkers down, and I make no apology for speaking up for them.

2.55 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): I thank all those who managed to get your permission to hold this debate, Mr Speaker.

I was a member of the Scottish steel taskforce, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier). The Scottish steel taskforce was a partnership of Tata Steel, local authorities, trade unions, political parties, the UK Government and Scottish Government agencies such as Scottish Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland and Partnership Action for Continuing Employment. The taskforce was put together by the Scottish Government to help to find a buyer for the threatened Scottish plants in Dalzell and Clydebridge. The taskforce did a great job, as some Members and the Minister may well know.

The handover took place on Friday, based on a back-to-back agreement whereby the Scottish Government bought the plants from Tata and sold them on to Liberty House. It was a wonderful day. We were surrounded by all the members of the taskforce, the steelworkers and their families and friends. It was an emotional day. Steel is an iconic industry in my constituency, and it is

responsible for some of the specialised steel that is used in the defence industry and in the oil and gas industry. It could not be allowed to go under, and the Scottish Government did not allow that to happen. They took a very proactive approach to the threat. They put forward legislation that introduced a one-year relief on business rates for a prospective buyer. The assessor agreed to look at the state of the steel industry when revaluation takes place next year.

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency worked closely with the taskforce to make sure that any prospective buyer or anyone who was interested got the best possible advice as efficiently and quickly as possible. The Scottish Government have produced a new responsible procurement policy, which echoes and, in some instances, betters that which has been produced by the UK Government. [Interruption.] The Minister chunters; I am sorry, but I have lost my place.

The Scottish Government are working to reduce overall energy consumption and energy cost. The Scottish Government were very pleased that the EU cleared the energy intensive package in December last year, after the UK Government were prodded into action by the UK steel summit. Skills Development Scotland developed an upskilling programme to help to retain key staff and to help them to move back into employment once a buyer was found. Those were the very people who were there on Friday. Sanjeev Gupta of Liberty Steel said that the transfer of ownership could not have happened without the efforts of the Scottish Government. He has also indicated that 150 jobs will be created to get the plants back up and running again, which gets us almost back to where we were.

The UK Government cannot rely on helping workers after the event. It is the Government's duty to be proactive, and to be seen to be so, in securing buyers for effective plants, following the Scottish Government model. Scottish Government phoned prospective buyers, kept in touch with the customer base and, at the same time, maintained business confidentiality. They can do it, so the UK Government should be able to do it. The Scottish Government also launched a manufacturing strategy only this February, which proposes to boost the Scottish economy by investment and education in order for Scotland's businesses to compete globally. What are the UK Government doing in that regard?

Finally, may I give the Secretary of State a piece of advice? He should speak to the Scottish Government to see how saving plants can be done using actions, not words. As the First Minister has said:

"The steps we have taken in Lanarkshire should give hope to those in other parts of the UK that with the right support and a strong Government there can be a future for steel."

3 pm

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): There have always been the strongest of links between the constituency of Torfaen and the steelworks at Newport. I speak today for not only the steelworkers in Torfaen, but the many more steel pensioners, including my father, whose time at Llanwern was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden).

I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) said: the steel industry can and should have a great future. There are so many

great things about our steel industry. It is an industry that has always involved working together—between workers, management, unions and owners. It is an industry that has some of the most skilled and committed workers to be found in any industry anywhere in the world. It is also an industry that I believe is vital to our national security: we cannot have a country that is secure unless a native steel industry is available to us.

We should not forget that, over many years of change, the steelworkers have been a constant. The industry has gone through change—it was nationalised after world war two; most of it was reprivated in the early 1950s; it was renationalised by the Wilson Government in the 1960s; it was privatised again under the Thatcher Government—but the steelworkers have always shown their central commitment and demonstrated their skills during that time. It is unthinkable that there should be no steelmaking at Port Talbot, just as it is unthinkable that we should not look at this as a UK-wide problem.

It seems to me that the Government have to look strategically at two things. They must look at what they are doing practically to support the sale process at Port Talbot, and at what they can do to support both the aspects we are now coming to: the expressions of interest and the due diligence period that will follow. There are far wider questions, however, in relation to how the Government will be judged on their actions and what they actually do to help the steel industry.

The lesser duty rule has been mentioned a number of times in this debate. Let us be clear: as long as it is in place, the duty imposed will always be lower than the margin of the dumping. The European Commission wants to scrap the lesser duty rule. The World Trade Organisation rules do not even oblige the European Commission to apply the lesser duty rule. It is for the UK Government to make the case within the European Union for it to be scrapped, but of course the fact is that they are not doing that. The European Steel Association spokesman said:

“The fact is that the UK has been blocking this. They are not the only member state, but they are certainly the ringleader in blocking the lifting of the lesser duty rule. The ability to lift this was part of a proposal that the European commission launched in 2013”.

What has the Secretary of State done on this since then? The answer is absolutely nothing. There is also the issue of market economy status for China. I thought that Mario Longhi, the chief executive of the biggest steelmaker in America, put it best when he said, about even thinking of granting market economy status for China,

“where you have all the evidence in place that denies them that right it's just ridiculous”.

The Secretary of State should bear that in mind.

The Secretary of State does have a choice, particularly when it comes to the lesser duty rule and market economy status for China. Where do his loyalties lie: do they lie with Beijing, or with the steelworkers of this country? Would it not be the most supreme irony if a Secretary of State who is supposedly ideologically wedded to free markets ends up granting market economy status to a country where 80% of the steel industry is owned by the state? Is that seriously what the Secretary of State is going to do? It is time he put aside his obsession with Beijing and acted for our steelworkers.

3.5 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) for securing this hugely important debate.

We on Teesside are still reeling from the Government standing by and allowing steelmaking to die at the SSI plant at Redcar. People have very long memories, and it is a shame that it has taken another six months to discover the concept of co-investment, because that has come a little bit late. However, I very much welcome the securing of the long products division, and I congratulate the unions on their initiative in progressing the discussions to such a successful conclusion.

This is the most bizarre of circumstances: we are fearing the collapse of steel production in the UK, but we have the most superb industry, with a brilliantly skilled workforce and an excellent industrial relations history. It is therefore essential that we send out the message that we have a steel industry that is very much worth fighting for. We need to instil confidence in steel customers and suppliers alike that our steel operations are very much open for business. Steel has a bright future if we can get through these next few months.

On development, I am grateful to the mightily impressive Chris McDonald of the Materials Processing Institute for pointing this out:

“Two-thirds of the steels in use today were not even invented 15 years ago, and steel remains a vital ‘economic enabler’ for UK economic growth without which our successful high-value manufacturing sector simply could not exist.”

The automotive, aerospace, defence, nuclear and rail sectors all need the development of new steels in the pursuit of ever improving productivity, and our leading companies undoubtedly benefit from research partnerships with domestic steel producers. He went on:

“If the steel industry were to disappear altogether from the UK, reliance on overseas producers would not only mean the loss of thousands of jobs, but also slow the pace of development and risk the offshoring of the whole manufacturing supply chain”.

We should therefore grasp the opportunities presented by Tata Steel's sale offering of its assets in the UK.

The debate is about more than just Port Talbot, but that is vital. There is an overwhelmingly strong case for the continuation of steelmaking at Port Talbot, with its advanced steelmaking equipment, its experienced workforce and its capability of making world-leading, high-quality steel for the most demanding applications. Labour Members are in no doubt that the plant can not only compete, but have a highly profitable future. In addition, there is a huge opportunity for new mini-mill operations based around electric arc furnaces, utilising 100% recycled raw materials and offering a step change improvement in carbon emissions.

I plead with Ministers to include all aspects of the future of UK steel in their thinking: the exploitation of, and commitment to, innovation and research and development will undoubtedly pay rich dividends. There is a research and development proposal on the table from the MPI, TWI Ltd and the Institute of Materials, Minerals and Mining. The proposal will leverage recent and secured future investments, which have been used to upgrade materials, research and support facilities in Rotherham, Port Talbot and Cambridge, as well as on the two sites in Tees valley. I urge Ministers to look closely at that proposal. The automotive industry has

[Andy McDonald]

been turned round to become an enormous success, and we can do the same with the steel industry.

The timescale is crucial, but it is ridiculously tight. The kindest thing to say is that the seller is incredibly ambitious to think that such a process can be undertaken in such a short space of time. Crucially, in the final analysis, the state will indeed step in. Call it temporary nationalisation, public sector stewardship or whatever we like, but let the customers, suppliers and workers know that the UK steel industry will endure, and it will not only endure but thrive.

3.9 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): In the middle of 2014, Tata announced that it would dispose of its long products business. It has taken until this week for the conclusion of a process that involved first interest from one buyer, its pulling out and then the work that everyone—trade unions, the management team, Tata itself, Greybull Capital and suppliers, who have also had to contribute to the process—has done locally. The way forward is tough and the process is not yet complete. I welcome the Secretary of State's statement yesterday that he would do everything possible to ensure that those matters that still need to be resolved are resolved satisfactorily, so that the sale goes ahead and there can be a future—I believe that, although different from the past, that future will be a positive one. That will be positive for all the communities throughout the long products sector, including those in Scunthorpe—the site of the largest steelworks in England, which I am proud to represent.

When the Secretary of State was first appointed I wrote to him to ask for a meeting, because I knew that the steel industry was facing a crisis. Unfortunately there were other pressures on his diary at that time. Back in September I asked the Prime Minister for a steel summit. Eyebrows were raised by Government Members then, but to the credit of the Minister and the Secretary of State, we got a steel summit in Rotherham, which helped to focus on this issue.

Let us look at the issues that we have been arguing about—I have been arguing about them for four or five years now. The Government have moved on energy costs, but that movement has been slow and laborious. They brought in a unilateral carbon floor tax, then found themselves in a mess. It has been more than three years now and the money for mitigation is only just getting into the coffers of steelworkers. Frankly, that does not give the message of confidence needed to take the industry forward. However, I welcome the Secretary of State's comments today that he is looking at doing that by exemption rather than through the current methods. We are seeing movement, which should be welcomed.

It is deeply disappointing that the Chancellor was unable to bring us good news about business rates. Listening to what Ministers have said in many speeches, I believe that they have been fighting their corner on that. It is deeply disappointing that the Government at the highest level were unable to move on that, as it would have made a real difference. Ijmuiden, a larger plant in the Netherlands, pays less in business rates than the Scunthorpe plant. That is not right. The playing fields need levelling.

I very much welcome the Government's movements on procurement and the production of better guidelines but, as I have said all along, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, when the guidelines are tested. I point again to DONG Energy's development of the Hornsea project on the North sea. That is happening because of a very generous contract for difference that the UK Government have given to that private sector company. Public money is invested in that project, and the energy coming from the development will be paid for by UK taxpayers and UK energy bill payers. It will be outrageous if UK steel is not in those monopiles, blades and turbines going up in the North sea. I urge the Secretary of State to work tirelessly with his Cabinet colleagues to ensure that private companies delivering public projects also deliver on procurement for our steel industry.

Finally, much has been said about Chinese dumping. The Secretary of State's mood music has changed on that issue, which I welcome, but the change has been very slow. We have seen action, which should be approved. We have heard from the whole steel community—from Eurofer, for example, which represents steel communities and employers across Europe—about how important it is to tackle the lesser duty rule. That would give a signal about confidence, which is what the industry needs more than anything else—and confidence not just that we are getting warm words, but that those warm words are supported by actions. Such actions should be prompt, not laggardly. Save our steel.

3.14 pm

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): Although I thank the shadow Business Secretary for securing this emergency debate, I find myself asking how many times, exactly, we are going to have to debate the crisis facing the UK steel industry before the Government take it seriously. That crisis has not arrived recently, unannounced, or sprung up overnight. The warning signs were there. There has been a constant siren of Opposition voices forewarning the Government that action was urgently needed. The steel industry has been crying out collectively for action to be taken. The all-party parliamentary group, of which I am a member, has made countless representations to the Government, spelling out exactly what action needs to be taken.

Although the Government have jumped into action recently, they are unfortunately still not going far enough. We are yet to see meaningful action on dumping. The steadfast opposition to scrapping the lesser duty rule has meant that little can be done to stem the flow of cheap Chinese imports. The Government have not only been reticent, but have apparently been leading the charge on a European level, actively blocking action. The UK Government are guilty of negligence in their approach to the dumping of cheap steel on world markets by China. While the UK is bending over backwards to accommodate Beijing's request for market economy status—that would make anti-dumping cases much more complicated—our industry is suffering.

What has just happened in Scotland is testament to how a proactive Government, working closely with industry, unions and the workers themselves, can protect jobs and safeguard this vital industry. It is crucial that the UK Government now follow that example, and make a similar concerted effort to save steel plants in England and Wales. They must work co-operatively

with the EU on anti-dumping measures. We need a credible strategy, not just for steel but for ceramics and all other energy-intensive and heavy industry in the UK. Make no mistake: the industry in Scotland still faces challenges, but the Scottish Government's diligence in saving it has given a renewed confidence that steel has a bright future there.

On the Scottish National party Benches, we stand in solidarity with steelworkers in England and Wales. Despite all the warning signs, I want to see a bright future for steel right across Britain, and not just north of the border. For that to happen, we need a complete change of tack from the Business Minister. Throughout the crisis, the SNP has consistently called for a comprehensive and revised industrial strategy for heavy industry in the UK. The SNP recently launched a bold vision for a manufacturing future for Scotland, spelling out how industries such as steel are viewed as vital strategic assets in the Scottish economy. Although that might seem like a common-sense approach for any Government, it is visionary by comparison with Westminster's strategy, or lack thereof.

Last Friday many workers, as well as many union representatives, attended the handing over of the keys from Tata Steel to new owners Liberty House at the Dalzell plant in Motherwell. The sense of relief, optimism and renewed hope for a better future was palpable. Beneath all that, however, there is a resilience—we can call it steely determination if we will. This is a centuries-old industry that has learned to adapt to many changes over the years. As Charles Darwin said, it is not the strongest of the species nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change. The steel industry is up for the challenge, and the Government need to step forward.

I hope that the change for our steel industry in Scotland is a success, but I want a successful, productive future for all of our steelworkers throughout the UK. I really do hope that the Government are listening today and will leave no stone unturned—the phrase of today—to save our steel. Our highly skilled, dedicated steelworkers need a positive future—indeed, they truly deserve that.

3.18 pm

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): First and foremost, I praise my Front-Bench colleagues for securing this debate and Mr Speaker for granting it. I also want to praise the work of the First Minister of Wales, Carwyn Jones, who has worked constructively with the UK Government to try to find a solution. He has been head and shoulders above in speaking out, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) and so many others. I am proud to have him as our First Minister in Wales.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), I want to underline the point that the steel industry in this country has a future, and that future is at the heart of our future infrastructure and defence projects. Just as she is proud of the steel produced in Stocksbridge, I am proud that steel produced at Celsa in Cardiff, in the heart of my constituency, is at the heart of Crossrail and so many other construction and infrastructure projects across the UK. We must never lose sight of that. This is not an industry of the past; it is an industry of the future—if the Government get behind it fully.

I want to touch on three issues. Regardless of the welcome announcements about Scunthorpe and, I hope, Port Talbot, we still need to address the market fundamentals that have brought us to this point in the first place. They affect the UK steel industry as a whole and will continue to affect it if we do not address them. I want to flag up some of the strategic choices and risks we face, and I want to debunk some of the myths that have, unfortunately, been propagated about the role of the EU.

First, I want to mention energy, which is at the heart of the debate. We have the highest industrial electricity prices across the EU. According to UK Steel, they are 89% higher than in other EU countries. Whatever nonsense we hear about the EU being to blame, the fact is that four of the main policies causing the higher prices for industrial energy users in the UK come from the UK Government. I welcome the steps talked about with regard to exemptions and compensation, but the fact is that those prices have come from the UK Government. The hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) says we should not do anything about climate change, but that is not the issue. I have made the point repeatedly that offshoring our carbon emissions to places such as China and Turkey would be absolutely absurd. I ask the Government to continue to review every aspect of this tax regime and see what the net result is for industrial energy users in this country. Are they paying more or are they paying less? If they are not paying less, we will face this problem again and again and again. It is all very well talking about a compensation package, but when I went to Celsa in my constituency just a few days ago it still had not received the money. The Government have been far, far too slow to act.

On dumping and tariffs, we heard very powerful arguments about the lesser duty rule from my hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds) and others. I reiterate the question I put to the Secretary of State earlier about the tariffs on rebar. We need to consider whether they are still high enough. He says they have gone down by 99%, but other factors are at play. I welcome what he says, but we need to keep them constantly under review.

I absolutely agree that we should not grant market economy status to China. That would be an absolute absurdity. On procurement, we have to see concrete steps. I was pleased to hear what the Secretary of State said about potential announcements with regard to the defence industry, but they should have happened a long time in advance. We have produced product after product after product without using UK steel. The Government talk about aircraft carriers, but what about the offshore patrol vessels, tankers and scout vehicles? They have not been produced using UK steel. We need to get in there and make sure that British steel is being used. I await that announcement with interest.

This is not just about the role of the Government in procurement, but construction companies. With other MPs, I have written to construction companies across the UK to ask them whether they will adhere to using UK steel in their products, and whether they will adhere to the BS 6001 standard, which uses high-quality British construction steel rebar. There is a responsibility for both Government and companies. I worry that unless we address these issues and maintain a diversity of production in our steel industry, using blast furnaces

[Stephen Doughty]

and electric arc furnaces to produce different products, we will lose capacity in certain areas. Once that is gone, it will be lost forever. Others, such as the Chinese, will come in and whack their prices up. That will also be a risk to our national security.

The EU is not to blame. It would be absurd if we took action now to save the steel industry and then dealt it another body blow by leaving the EU. The reality is that half of our exports go to the EU. If we lost the single market, they would be gone. State aid rules apply in the World Trade Organisation as well. We would have less capacity to act on dumping, working with others, than we have at the moment. The EU, working together, has delivered 37 EU measures to tackle dumping, 16 of which relate to China. It is the UK Government who have not done the work. It is with the UK Government that I place the blame, not the EU. We can save our steel, but only if we work together to do it.

3.23 pm

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): Port Talbot is an industrial jewel in the crown of Swansea bay. Thousands of people in the community and beyond rely on it. Clearly, we are looking to the Government to support our steel industry in its time of need. The Welsh Government, under Carwyn Jones, have come forward, and my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock) has shown leadership. We want guarantees on the socialisation of pensions.

I am not here to criticise Tata. It invested £6.2 billion to buy the Port Talbot steel plant in 2007. It spent another £2 billion to cover losses and £185 million on a new blast furnace in 2013. It is a long-termist organisation. The reality, however, is that worldwide steel production has doubled because of Chinese production. As a result, world prices have halved. Tata cannot compete with the threat of China, which is 80% state owned. We need to hold on in there and do what we can to ensure a sustainable future. China is thinking strategically, whether through very low prices with HS2 and nuclear procurement, or by buying assets globally from its balance of payments surplus. We need to understand what it is trying to do and ensure that our long-term interests are sustained.

Swansea University is investing in new types of steel: multi-layered steel that generates its own electricity. It has a negative carbon footprint when it is used to clad major public buildings. We have high quality Margam coal, which is particularly good in steel production. I want guarantees from the Secretary of State. He talks about co-investment, but what co-investment are we going to have? Will the Government have an equity share in the short term? What guarantees can he give about a more level playing field on energy?

Christina Rees: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government could see the current threat to the UK steel industry as an opportunity to change the way to do things, so that a structure can be established to protect the industry for many years to come? The Government could look to other sectors, such as the care sector, and to other parts of the world to learn from tripartite models of delivery involving public-private sector investment, as well as third sector involvement in the shape of a management-worker buyout.

Geraint Davies: We need to look creatively at company structure and procurement. We also need to think about the fact that we are in the process of displacing clean steel with environmental protection for dirty steel. There is a case for considering carbon tariffs on steel and other manufacturing products, because we share a common environment.

On procurement, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon made it clear that we need to know who the Government are talking to and what reassurances are being given. We have been told that this information is commercially confidential, but what those consuming steel to build cars and so on want to know is whether, if they make an order now, in a year's time the steel will be delivered at the price paid. We need to be able to give those guarantees to secure the future. We need to hold our nerve. The need in this case, and with any business, is cash flow sustainability. The Government therefore need to think about financial packages, so that the cash flow of the business can be sustained on the back of future orders at known prices.

It has been mentioned that half our exports go to Europe. It would be a complete disaster for us to leave Europe, with the extra tariffs that might be imposed. It is important that we move past the referendum period, so there is security for prospective buyers in knowing that we are still in the single market without more tariffs being imposed. Our first duty is to secure the livelihoods of our communities, as well as our strategic interests. It is important that the Government do not give the impression that they have given up and simply want a buyer. They need to come forward and offer any of the benefits they would offer to a prospective buyer to Tata Steel. If there is to be pension buy-out to provide security for a buyer and for pensioners, and if there is to be co-investment, it should be available to Tata as well as others. Tata showed before that it was there for the long run, but because the Government showed that they were not, it pulled out. We want a sustainable future, and it is important that Tata is brought back around the table, alongside other prospective buyers.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. We are running out of time, so I am afraid I have to reduce the limit to four minutes.

3.28 pm

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): Yesterday, the Secretary of State pledged his commitment to the steel industry, which I welcome, but I would like him to spell out exactly why his Government are now willing to consider co-investment with a potential buyer for Port Talbot, when they ruled out anything like that for Redcar—at the time because they said that state-aid rules prevented their supporting SSI, and after SSI was liquidated because they refused to put any British taxpayer money into the Thai banks that owned the site. Why were the Thai banks not suitable for co-investment? It could have bought us time for a sale or enabled the mothballing of the blast furnace. I would like the Government to give us a full explanation of that decision.

In the weeks prior to closure, SSI asked the Government for a loan to enable it to restructure and keep the plant going. It was refused. I sat down with Ministers and

potential investors—a company willing to run the coke ovens and run, or at least mothball, the blast furnace while a buyer was found—who did not want a single penny of Government money, but the Minister said it could not be done. What has changed? Does she now regret not listening to the people of Teesside, the unions and the companies we presented to them in order to keep steelmaking alive on Teesside? The cost of hard closure has been far greater than that of intervention would have been. I want to say something about that cost in the time available.

First, on the local economic cost, 2,200 direct jobs were lost overnight at SSI and over 900 further jobs were lost in the immediate supply chain, from those who provided the parts and maintenance to the companies that provided the gas or loaded the slab at the ports to those who cleaned the overalls and fed the workforce. Plus, there is no way of measuring the knock-on impact on local shops, hairdressers, builders, nurses—as my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) mentioned—and childminders. We know they are all feeling the pain. Unemployment in my constituency has jumped by 16.2%. We now have the tenth-highest unemployment rate in the country. The steelworks were the foundation industry for many businesses large and small across Teesside. For 175 years, that industry powered the local economy, providing jobs and security for local people and a source of immense pride, as our steel built the cities of the world.

Secondly, I want to talk about the cost to the Exchequer and the state. It is currently understood that the Government are paying over £200,000 a week to maintain the site in its unrecoverable coma status. Recovery of the land for future use is expected to cost the state well over £1 billion. As for the British steel industry itself, we have lost Europe's second-largest blast furnace and coke ovens, in which millions of pounds had been invested and which were in very good shape.

Andy McDonald: Does my hon. Friend agree that trying to land a bill of £1.1 billion on the Teesside communities for the remediation of the site is totally unacceptable? I know that the Minister is ignoring it, but it will be a huge issue for Teesside if it is landed with that bill.

Anna Turley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I want a further commitment from the Government that they will maintain their support for the site as it stands, meet that cost and enable local people, businesses and representatives to decide the future of the site and how it can contribute to our local economy.

We have lost our blast furnace and coke ovens, in which millions of pounds had been invested—expensive national assets belonging to the British steel industry now laid to waste. We can add to that a loss to the Exchequer of the tax intake from those 3,000 workers; the £50 million—and it is £50 million, not £80 million—paid for retraining; and the further £30 million for redundancies and other costs. We must bear it in mind that the majority of workers are still awaiting payment of their protective award, on which I would be grateful for an update from the Minister. Finally, there is the loss to Redcar and Cleveland Council, which has already suffered a £90 million loss after six years of Tory austerity, of £10 million a year in business rates from SSI alone.

Thirdly and most importantly, I want to speak about the human cost. Six hundred workers are back in work or full-time training, according to Department for Work and Pensions figures. I pay tribute to them, my taskforce colleagues and all those in the jobcentres and colleges who have worked hard to achieve that, but 600 of over 3,000 workers six months after closure still leaves us with a lot of work to do. What about the thousands of others? They are signing on, many for the first time in their lives, and many are approaching the six-month cut-off point for contribution-based jobseeker's allowance. Those with a partner with an income of more than £114 a week will soon lose their JSA entirely.

People are moving out of homes, cars are being given up and many are reliant on hardship funds to pay the bills. One worker can no longer afford to keep his rented house to have his children stay overnight because of the bedroom tax. He is having to be rehoused in a one-bedroom place and cannot have his children to stay. The effect on family relationships has been huge. There has been a widespread loss of identity, comradeship and pride in a skilled trade. Redcar and Cleveland Mind has seen a 91% increase in mental health referrals in the last year, and is doing a fantastic job, but many of my constituents are under the radar. One has not even left the house since he lost his job last September. Families have been destroyed and lives shattered. Our town has been through a tragedy. The financial and human cost of inaction is far higher than that of intervention would have been. I say to the Government: you let us down last year, but please do not let down any other steel town in the UK.

3.34 pm

Kate Hollern (Blackburn) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate, and I would like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) for securing it when the steel industry is in crisis and it is so important to consider and discuss the issues today.

I am sure that all Members are keen to take all the steps necessary to secure the steel industry in our country. Today we have heard a number of options put forward—on energy, business tariffs and various others—but I would like to talk about defence. The last Labour Government had an industrial defence strategy, and at its heart was making British industry and British jobs the first priority in all decisions by the Ministry of Defence. The Government should perhaps reflect on implementing such a policy in this time of crisis for the steel industry.

Wherever and whenever possible, British steel should be used to build equipment, weapons, vehicles and ships that our armed forces need to keep us safe. *[Interruption.]* I can see that some Conservative Members find this funny, but sadly the current Government abandoned the industrial defence strategy, and we can see the implications of that decision today. Three new ships for the Royal Navy are being built in Glasgow with 60% of the steel bought from Sweden, 20% from other countries and only 20% from the UK. A £3.4 billion contract to build 590 Ajax armoured vehicles is also using Swedish imports for the majority of its steel requirements. The Government are refusing to guarantee that the Navy's new Type 26 frigates will be built using British steel; the Defence Minister would say only that there would be an opportunity to bid. All that paints a picture of a Government who are willing to talk the talk, but not walk the walk.

[Kate Hollern]

The MOD has a £178 billion budget for defence equipment over the next 10 years, and Labour will continue to press the case that that money should be spent, where possible, to secure British jobs and the British steel industry.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Kate Hollern: No. [Interruption.] Perhaps the Minister will listen, because to avoid a fire sale, which would be an irreversible mistake, the Government must demonstrate to all stakeholders in the industry that they are taking a proactive approach to ensure that continued take-up of operations. The Government must look to reverse the decision to scrap the defence industrial strategy, and they must make a public statement—with haste—to make it clear that they believe in supporting British steel and British jobs.

3.38 pm

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): I am pleased to participate in this important debate, and I am delighted that the Speaker granted it. As the son of a Teessider, I am a regular visitor to Teesside and to Redcar. I was there only a few weeks ago, and to see the site of that plant, now empty and derelict, with no flame after 175 years of steelmaking, is shocking. My thoughts are with the constituents of the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) and the people in the surrounding Teesside constituencies. As has been said, when 3,000 jobs are lost, many more thousands of jobs and lives are affected. The Government are at least finally taking very slow action; what a shame that they did not take that action then, to try to prevent that closure.

As my parliamentary neighbour the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright) has pointed out, what a contrast there is between what this Government are doing and the industrial strategy of the previous Business Secretary, the internationally respected Vince Cable, who sought to ensure that we maintained our existing industry while transitioning to new technologies. That is entirely lacking now. The current Business Secretary was so proud to say that there was now a Conservative Business Secretary, but he simply does not have an industrial strategy for the United Kingdom.

What an extraordinary situation this is. The Conservative party, while preaching free trade, is rolling out the red carpet for, and seeking to do sweetheart deals with, a communist nation whose subsidised basket case of a steel industry is producing steel that no one in the world needs or wants. It is wrecking a perfectly viable situation. Let me read the House an interesting quotation:

“Redcar has already paid the price for this ultra-free trade ideology, and Port Talbot is about to follow. There will eventually be little left if the current drift in trade policy is allowed to continue.”

Who said that? Was it the Leader of the Opposition, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the leader of the Scottish National party? No; it was the international business editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, Ambrose Evans-Pritchard. That is a damning indictment of the Government's lack of an industrial policy, and of the fact that they have turned their back on steel.

All that the Chancellor is doing is saying to the Chinese, “Can you make a little bit less steel, please?” That is all that he is prepared to do, because of his desperation to court China over projects such as the Hinkley power plant. Although China is closing five steel mills, it will still be producing 1.13 billion tonnes by 2020, according to figures from the Library. That is still far more than the world needs, and it will cause devastation.

Only six months ago, when we were seeing inaction from the Government, the Liberal Democrats called for Ministers to set up a Minister-led steering group to look at the whole steel industry so that a strategy could be delivered to save that great British industry. The Government ignored the call, and failed to act. What we are seeing today is not leadership but panic; the Government are doing too little, too late.

Ministers must now at least do what they can to reverse the present position. They must keep the Port Talbot plant operational while a buyer is sought, and they must be a little less arrogant. They must listen and learn some of the lessons of the past, including the lesson of what Vince Cable did when he went to talk to General Motors. They must ensure that we have a steel industry in the future to support the UK economy.

3.42 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Yet again, we have had a very good debate on the steel industry, featuring plenty of contributions from Back Benchers. I think that I counted 21 Back-Bench speeches during our short debate. We heard from the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone), my hon. Friend the Member for Aberavon (Stephen Kinnock), the hon. Member for Bedford (Richard Fuller), my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright), the hon. Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove), my hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies), my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Tom Blenkinsop), the hon. Member for Gower (Byron Davies), my hon. Friends the Members for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) and for Newport East (Jessica Morden), the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows), my hon. Friends the Members for Torfaen (Nick Thomas-Symonds), for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) and for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Margaret Ferrier), my hon. Friends the Members for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty), for Swansea West (Geraint Davies), for Redcar (Anna Turley), and for Blackburn (Kate Hollern), and the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland).

I join others in paying tribute to the Community trade union and the leadership of Roy Rickhuss and others. I also pay tribute to Carwyn Jones, the Welsh First Minister, who has been mentioned today, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), the shadow Secretary of State for Wales, for all her efforts.

Our role as Her Majesty's loyal Opposition is to hold the Government's feet to the fire on this issue. Our industry has to have a future, and we must make sure that it has one. We are having to do this because immediately after the general election, the new Secretary

of State for Business, Innovation and Skills signalled, clearly and overtly, that he would not continue the consensus that had been emerging and growing over the last decade on the need for a UK industrial strategy. *[Interruption.]* I wonder whether the new Secretary of State for Wales wants to learn that his job is to sit there and shut up and listen during this debate. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Let us stay calm. The hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) may wish—I would strongly suggest—to rephrase what he has just said.

Kevin Brennan: I think that the new Secretary of State needs to sit there in silence and listen to what is being said about a very important issue that affects Wales in particular, which is his responsibility.

The UK needs an active, modern industrial strategy that understands the importance of foundation industries such as the steel industry to the rebalancing of our economy. I understand why the Business Secretary, given his City background and professed laissez-faire philosophy about politics, does not want to use the term “industrial strategy”. He is wrong about that, however. *[Interruption.]* From a sedentary position, I am being asked what my background is. I worked at the Llanwern steelworks for six months and my father worked there for more than 20 years, so I do not need questions about my background from a Secretary of State for Wales who cannot sit there and shut up and listen to the debate as he should do on behalf of his constituents in Wales.

I understand why the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills does not want to use the term “industrial strategy”, but I am afraid he is wrong not to do so. Unless the Government are prepared to support British industry strategically, the Chancellor’s so-called march of the makers will simply become a death march of the makers in this country. We will not stand by and let that happen. We believe that there is a future for the steel industry in the United Kingdom, and I put it to the Secretary of State that that future should not just be about steel recycling; we need to hear that he is committed to steelmaking, and not just to the recycling of steel, important though that is.

We have been asking the Secretary of State for months to make clear the Government’s view on the minimum strategic steelmaking capacity that they believe must be maintained in the UK’s national interest. They have not been prepared to give that information, which inevitably leads to a suspicion that they do not have a view on the minimum steelmaking capacity necessary for the UK’s long-term economic interest. That doubt at the heart of the Government is like an impurity in steel being poured at a steel plant. If we do not get rid of that impurity, it could lead to a disaster, and it will be a disaster if the doubt at the heart of the Government’s policy is not got rid of.

We need to make sure that the blast furnaces at Port Talbot remain. We also need to ensure that the ability to make new steel—not just to melt down old steel and reuse it—remains in the armoury of UK plc. That is why it is important that we have an industrial strategy, and not just an industrial approach. We need clarity on

steelmaking, not just vague warm words. In short, we need strategic leadership, not the laissez-faire laxity now undermining UK plc.

3.47 pm

The Minister for Small Business, Industry and Enterprise (Anna Soubry): I begin by paying tribute to all those who have spoken in the debate. With few if any exceptions, everyone has rightly spoken with passion in their heart on behalf of their constituents and our great British steel industry. It is important that we look to the future and make sure that the message sent out from this place in all our doings is one of confidence in the continuing success of our British steel industry. Over the past seven days, I have had the real pleasure of going to Rotherham. I pay tribute to the wise words of the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith), although I do not always agree with her. I went to Rotherham, and I now understand speciality steels, which are separate from the great work being done at Port Talbot; they are almost a stand-alone industry. I then went to Corby and had a great day there meeting excellent workers and excellent management, all of whom are rightly proud of the superb quality of the products that they make.

It is really important that this message of confidence should continue to unite us, for the sake of customers and suppliers alike. Despite the unfortunate remarks made by the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), there is much that brings us together on this important matter. We all agree that steel is a vital industry, and that this crisis is not confined to the United Kingdom. We should also agree that, unfortunately, the Government do not have a magic wand with which to control the price of steel. We agree that the industry is vital for not just our national economy but, as we have heard from many hon. Members, the important role that it plays in local communities, through the workers it employs directly and through the supply chain right the way through the regions. In South Wales, for example, the industry is a vital component of the continuing success of that part of our United Kingdom.

I want to pay tribute to my Secretary of State for his tireless work and his outstanding leadership throughout this crisis. One of the problems we have had since we were appointed to our positions last May is that so much has been commercially sensitive. I am looking forward to the day when I will be the first to stand up and talk about the sort of work that this Secretary of State has been quietly and privately leading. That work began as soon as we were appointed. The reason why we get so agitated on this side of the House when we have these debates is that we started delivering for the steel industry even before the tragedy of Redcar, which I will deal with in a moment. That is why I ignored the advice of my officials and said that this country would vote in favour of tariffs on dumped steel. That is what we did in July and again in November.

With losses of £600 million over some three years, the situation in Redcar was very different. Debts ran to tens of millions of pounds, and not only did the local company go bust, but so did the parent company in Thailand. The contrast between SSI and Tata is stark. We would all agree that Tata is an excellent, responsible employer, and we look forward to supporting it in all we do to ensure a successful sale and a successful future for our steel industry.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered Tata Steel's decision to sell its UK steel operations; and action the Government is taking to secure the future of the UK steel industry.

Backbench Business

Contaminated Blood

3.51 pm

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House recognises that the contaminated blood scandal was one of the biggest treatment disasters in the history of the NHS, which devastated thousands of lives; notes that for those affected this tragedy continues to have a profound effect on their lives which has rarely been properly recognised; welcomes the Government's decision to conduct a consultation to reform support arrangements and to commit extra resources to support those affected; further notes, however, that the current Government proposals will leave some people worse off and continue the situation where some of those affected receive no ongoing support; and calls on the Government to take note of all the responses to the consultation and to heed the recommendations of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Haemophilia and Contaminated Blood's Inquiry into the current support arrangements so as to ensure that no-one is worse off, left destitute or applying for individual payments as a result of the proposed changes and that everyone affected by the tragedy, including widows and dependents, receives support commensurate with the decades of suffering and loss of amenity they have experienced.

I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting time for this debate today. This same topic was the subject of the first debate that the Committee scheduled after its establishment in 2010; it is sad that, six years on, we are still fighting for justice for those affected by the contaminated blood scandal. Also in 2010, during the general election campaign, my constituent Glenn Wilkinson came to see me with his wife Alison. They told me about Glenn's having been given infected blood during dental treatment at Hull Royal Infirmary and how it had affected his life, his health and his opportunities for work and how it had impacted on his family. From then on, I began to find out about the biggest treatment disaster in the history of the NHS.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Last year, my constituent Eddie Quigley came to see me in my office. Sadly, he has since passed away. On behalf of his son James and his widow Sally, I sincerely thank the hon. Lady for her persistence in bringing forward this debate and in ensuring that the issue is properly discussed.

Diana Johnson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those comments. I have received many emails and letters from affected families from all over the country. Sadly, I cannot refer to them all today. I want to set the scene and comment on the Government's proposals, and I will try to be brief to allow time for the many other hon. Members who want to contribute and talk about their constituents' views on the consultation.

Governments of both colours have introduced a patchwork of schemes and assistance over the years, but there has never been a complete package of support for those affected. That is in marked contrast to the response to other medical and treatment disasters, such as thalidomide, where full support and compensation has been put in place. I am sure that the whole House wants to pay tribute to all those who have fought for justice over many years and to the families and loved ones who supported them.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): My hon. Friend mentioned the various schemes that have been put in place, but does she agree that the process of applying and getting through those is very difficult, particularly for people who are so ill?

Diana Johnson: Absolutely. My hon. Friend makes a very important point and I shall come to it shortly.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Diana Johnson: I will make a little progress and then take an intervention. I was paying tribute to all those who fought for many years. I think we would all agree that they have been fighting for too many years to get a just settlement for what happened to them. Let us be frank: they are weary from fighting. They want to resolve this once and for all, and to get on with their lives. Sadly, more and more people are dying without seeing that justice. Each individual affected has been robbed of many of the opportunities we all take for granted—the opportunities to work, to have a career, to buy a home and to grow old with the person they love. Family members have had to care for their loved ones, perhaps giving up careers to do so, and watch their health deteriorate.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): My hon. Friend has been tenacious in her pursuit of this issue, which has been going on for many years. Like her, I have constituents who have been affected by it, and it is about time this was brought to an end and action was actually taken. She mentioned thalidomide, but that took many years to address and it took a determined Minister to introduce the scheme. If he did that, I cannot see why this Minister cannot do the same.

Diana Johnson: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments. It is important to recognise that in this case there has never been an admission of liability from the Department of Health or the NHS in respect of what happened to these individuals; they have always taken the view that nobody could have known at the time about the problem with the infected blood. I want to make the point that this is not a court of law; this is Parliament, and we are being asked to deal with a clear wrong that has been done to our constituents. We know that these people were damaged and harmed by the treatment they received from the NHS—by the state. What we need to do now is put together a proper support package to ensure that those affected and their families are at the heart of what we do and whatever scheme is proposed.

Mr Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): I apologise for having to leave very shortly, but I commend the hon. Lady on her sterling work on this cause. In the case of my constituent Mr Tony Farrugia and his brothers, who are campaigning here today, the situation is exactly as she describes; it is about the complexity of all the schemes. Because his father died in 1986, before the trust was set up, his mother never received any money at all, and that remains the case today under what is being proposed. That seems very unfair to me.

Diana Johnson: I absolutely agree—

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green) *rose*—

Diana Johnson: And I will give way to the hon. Lady.

Caroline Lucas: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way, particularly as she has made such great inroads on this subject; I commend her for that. Does she agree that it is completely unacceptable, particularly in the context she has set out, that any reform the Government introduce should make sick people even worse off? That seems to be the height of injustice. One of my constituents will lose £500 a month, and another, Graham Manning, is in the Gallery today. They need to see that justice is being done. That has to be a bottom line.

Diana Johnson: I agree entirely. Let me return to the point I was making about liability and the need now to put in place a proper support package, recognising the wrong that has been done. For far too long, the Department of Health has not done that. It appears to me that it has been far more interested in protecting the institutional reputation of the Department and of the NHS than in looking to right a wrong.

In the last Parliament, a concerted effort, from all parties, was made to seek a lasting settlement for all our constituents. The all-party group on haemophilia and contaminated blood led the way in producing a report showing that the current financial arrangements were not fit for purpose, were ad hoc and were overly bureaucratic. The right hon. Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) worked alongside the all-party group, with the Prime Minister's office, to finally get an apology made in Parliament and an agreement that the Government would consult on a proper support package for all those affected. The Prime Minister's apology a year ago and the announcement that £25 million would be made available for transitional support was very welcome. So, too, was the promise that there would be a full consultation on a comprehensive support package. I must say to the Minister that not one penny of that badly needed £25 million has yet been spent, and that the consultation on the new support scheme was announced only on 21 January this year—some nine months after the Prime Minister's statement.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Like many Members, I have a constituent here today. Sue Sparks has been visiting the Palace and is now in the Public Gallery. Is it not the case that the consultation does not seem to chime with the apology? What is on offer in no way seems to reflect what I am sure the Prime Minister meant as a sincere apology.

Diana Johnson: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We are now a few days away from the end of the consultation period. I understand that the Minister was advised—wrongly, I think—by her officials that she could not meet the all-party group during the consultation period. I know that that was not the case in Scotland: the Minister there met MSPs and individuals. We called for this debate so that the Minister could listen to the comments of her fellow parliamentarians about the Government's proposals and then feed them into the consultation.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I have many constituents in Taunton Deane whose lives are blighted by this issue of contaminated blood. Although I applaud

[Rebecca Pow]

the Government for bringing forward this consultation, there are many who believe that it is only adding fuel to the fire. In fact, it could be making the situation worse and causing more pain, not least because, in Scotland, people may get a better deal than those in England. I urge the Minister to look very carefully at the consultation so as not to penalise people who are already badly suffering.

Diana Johnson: I wish to move on now to highlight a few of the problems with the consultation. First, as has already been said, many of the existing recipients will receive lower payments under the new scheme. The Government's proposals would end all discretionary support, such as winter fuel allowance, child supplements and low income top-ups, which means that many people will lose out, potentially by thousands of pounds a year.

Secondly, most of the current beneficiaries have hepatitis C stage 1 and currently get no ongoing support. They are left begging for individual payments from the Caxton Fund. The Government proposals will provide annual payments for people in stage 1, which is welcome, but those people will be subject to regular individual assessments. That could result in fluctuating payments and reduced financial certainty for individuals. Assessments will also take only clinical factors into account. They will not look at the loss of education or employment, and decades of loss of amenity, ill health and loss of earnings. According to the information from the Government, those assessments will cost £500,000 a year to carry out. Would that money not be better spent on providing financial support to those people?

Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on her determination and her decision to champion this issue. She highlighted the decades of ill health from which many suffer. There is also the emotional stress and trauma. Does she agree that the consultation process itself has added to that burden for some of those people? That is certainly the message that I have received loud and clear from my constituent, Mike Webster, who came to see me on this issue.

Diana Johnson: The hon. Lady makes a valid point. I will proceed with my concerns with the consultation, because I would like other Members to speak in the debate.

My third point is about the inadequate provision for the "affected" community—the widows, the partners and the dependants of those infected. The proposals for widows appear to be extremely complex. They create six categories of widows, with big variations in what is offered within each category. Department of Health officials could not explain how they would work when they met the APPG's secretariat and have not provided an explanation of these proposals as promised. There also appears to be nothing here for dependent children.

Mr David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I have constituents who have been infected. I have also heard from infected partners who, because of the failure of the scheme, cannot get insurance for themselves. Those who have young children are worried about the long-term

implications. Does my hon. Friend not think that the proposal adds extra stress to what is already a very stressful situation?

Diana Johnson: My right hon. Friend makes an important point.

Fourthly, there are concerns that under the plans money will be used to pay for new drugs to treat hepatitis C, which will be bought separately from the NHS budget, so will cost more. Under guidelines from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, everyone with hepatitis C should be eligible for treatment with a new generation of drugs from the end of February 2016, so when funds are allocated for treatment, that means once again that money does not go directly to those who need financial support.

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend, who is making an excellent speech, agree with my constituent, who is affected and feels that the changes are deliberately punitive and exceedingly cruel, as they use requests for changes to support schemes to affect people in that way? My constituent has had to use the ex gratia payment from the Government to fund treatment refused by the NHS, as many other people have had to do. His annual payment will decrease over time and he will lose the additional support that is currently provided. People such as my constituent are hit again and again, so how can the consultation on reform go ahead on that basis?

Diana Johnson: I shall move on and complete my speech.

Fifthly, there is concern about the fact that beneficiaries in England will be worse off than beneficiaries in Scotland. The Scottish proposals are far more generous to hepatitis C stage 2 and HIV sufferers, who will receive £27,000 per annum or £37,000 if they are co-infected, which is welcome, but are much less generous for hepatitis C stage 1s, who will receive an additional lump sum payment but no ongoing support. The Scottish proposals have been broadly welcomed, partly because of the way in which the consultation was conducted in Scotland, and the clear acknowledgement, for example, that the existing trust structure will be scrapped.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Diana Johnson: I am conscious of time, and I am about to reach my allocated 15 minutes, so if hon. Members do not mind I will complete my speech.

Following the scrapping of the trust structure in the Scottish model, may I seek reassurance from the Minister that she will scrap trust structures in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which have been subject to much criticism? There is no mention in the consultation of any proposals on lump sum payments, which would enable those affected to make real choices about their own lives, such as paying off a mortgage, clearing debts or helping their children. I reiterate my belief that the £230 million the Government are set to receive over the next few years from the sale of Plasma Resources UK should be earmarked for lump sum payments for those people. This is money from the work by the Department of Health to create blood products, and it would be fitting to use it in that way.

I am disappointed that there is no mention in the Government proposals of allowing those who have been affected to be passported automatically through to the new benefits that have been introduced—for example, moving from the disability living allowance to the personal independence payment. There is no consideration at all of an Irish-style medical card to ensure that access to healthcare is as speedy as possible.

In conclusion, we have had a chance to consider the detail of the Government's proposals. I am disappointed, as they do not deliver what we all want: giving people dignity and allowing them to get on with their lives, rather than constantly having to battle to get support. That means they have to campaign to ensure that their lives do not become even worse, let alone see improvements. They need and deserve action in a timely manner. They do not want to end their lives as campaigners. Many of those who are infected have told me that they believe that the Government are just delaying a proper settlement as more and more people die. After their long and bitter experience who can blame them?

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con) *rose*—

Diana Johnson: I am happy to give way briefly to the hon. Gentleman, who is the former co-chair of the all-party group.

Jason McCartney: That is the point I was going to make. I should like to thank the hon. Lady for co-chairing the APPG on haemophilia and contaminated blood with me, and with many others in the last Parliament. Does she agree that the Minister should accept that we have a framework with the settlement in Scotland, which needs tweaking, and the comprehensive APPG report, which looks at the fact that trusts and funds did not operate to support the victims? If we heed experiences in Scotland and our report, we can begin to help the victims.

Diana Johnson: I thank the hon. Gentleman, who speaks with wisdom on this matter.

It is now time for the biggest treatment disaster in the history of the NHS to be settled once and for all. I hope the Minister will look again at the proposals in her consultation and think about what is in the best interests of the group in question, who have been so badly treated for so many years.

4.10 pm

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): It is a privilege and an honour to follow the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson). I commend her for her leadership in bringing Parliament together on this very important subject.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak in this important debate on such a sombre and saddening topic. I speak as the representative of a number of individuals in my constituency whose lives and the lives of those they love have been grievously, unfairly and irreversibly affected by the terrible injustice we address this afternoon.

The Prime Minister, on behalf of the Government, has apologised for the infection of individuals with contaminated blood—an apology that is now more

than a year old, for a scandal that is more than 20 years old. When he rightly addressed the matter last year, my right hon. Friend said that it was

“difficult to imagine the feelings of unfairness”—[*Official Report*, 25 March 2015; Vol. 594, c. 1423.]

that those who have been affected must feel. My constituents and others around the country were let down, when they or their family members were at their most vulnerable, by the health service that was supposed to keep them safe. It truly is difficult to imagine.

I am sorry to say that the feelings of unfairness have not been lessened by the proposals in this consultation; if anything, they have been made worse. Lives have been changed and lives have been taken. So much has been lost, but the Government must now focus on lessening and mitigating this loss as much as can ever be possible.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): On mitigating the loss, I am here to represent several constituents, but one in particular—Andy Gunn. He is extremely concerned by the Health Secretary's suggestion that the funding might come from the NHS budget. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that would be highly inappropriate?

Nadhim Zahawi: I have had similar representations from my constituents, and I hope that those on the Treasury Bench take on board the comments of Andy Gunn and of others in my constituency.

The vastness of the loss we are addressing today is such that even the ideal solution cannot do much to address it, but what has been proposed does so much less. The proposals contained in the consultation are far from what the victims of this injustice expected or were led to believe they would receive. I know that many of my colleagues have similar stories to tell. I have had constituents visit my surgeries who have always been so incredibly strong about what has happened to them and hopeful for the potential of a good settlement from the Government, but have now been left in tears. They feel let down and fear that these proposals will make life even harder for them.

Those are people whose lives have turned out to be radically different from what they had planned, through absolutely no fault of their own. They struggle to get insurance or pensions—things we take for granted in this place—and have had their careers curtailed. Even worse, they have been unable to have children, or have seen loved ones die tragically soon. These people should be helped and need to be provided with a full and final settlement that allows them to move on, without being worse off.

There remains much misunderstanding about the medical conditions of the victims and the treatments available. The improvements in care for those with HIV/AIDS have been a blessing for many. However, the disease remains incurable, and haemophiliacs and those with other conditions such as hepatitis C cannot take the medication that could help them. We must also properly consider those infected by more than one disease. Those with both HIV and HCV have a threefold greater risk of progression to cirrhosis or decompensated liver disease than those infected only with HCV. We should not misunderstand, underestimate or underplay the dangers of these diseases.

[*Nadhim Zahawi*]

My constituents, and the constituents of so many of us here today, have suffered a grave injustice. It is an injustice that they never expected to suffer, would never have been able to prepare for, and for which the blame rests entirely elsewhere. They or their loved ones have experienced terrible illness and their lives have been changed or ended. “Unfairness” does not seem strong enough to describe it, but that word is the best we can do.

The Prime Minister was right to apologise, but this consultation does not go far enough. When my constituents only have to look north of the border to see a better deal on the table, with talk about public monuments to those sadly lost, and are then faced with an option here that could leave them in an even worse position, anger and resentment are more than understandable.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is a danger that the consultation will undo the good of the apology? The impact assessment states that the intention of the policy is to safeguard the interests of those who are chronically infected and receive an annual payment, but that annual payment is no longer index-linked, and people have made their assumptions on that basis. My constituent, Norah Tracey, has had to take early retirement because she has hepatitis C, and she based her projections on those financial assumptions. If it is no longer index linked, we are making a mockery of what the impact assessment says and we are undoing the sincerity of the apology.

Nadhim Zahawi: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I have heard similar representations from my constituents. Indeed, the all-party group found that the representations were very similar across the board. I sincerely hope that those on the Government Front Bench are listening to these interventions today.

The Prime Minister said last year:

“As a wealthy and successful country we should be helping these people more. We will help them more”—[*Official Report*, 11 March 2015; Vol. 594, C. 289.]

I agree with him and support those words entirely. I hope that the Minister and the Department of Health will ensure that the settlement for the victims will meet the intentions of what the Prime Minister said last year.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. I hope that we can get through this debate without a formal time limit on speeches. The debate is not contentious, on one side of the House or the other, so I trust that Members will be courteous to each other by keeping their speeches to around seven minutes. That will allow everyone who has indicated that they wish to contribute to do so.

4.18 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I will do my very best to keep my speech within seven minutes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) and the all-party group for securing the debate, and to the

Backbench Business Committee for granting it. I also pay tribute to those members of the campaign who have travelled to be in the Gallery today. I know that many were unable to stay because of the important urgent debate on steel, but many have stayed and I thank them for their patience.

I am speaking today on behalf of my constituents the Smith family and Lin Ashcroft. Janet and Colin Smith lost their son Colin in 1990, when he was just seven. Just a few months earlier, Lin lost her husband Bill Dumbellton. I have spoken about Colin before in these debates, which many hon. Members have called to consider what has been described as the greatest treatment disaster in the NHS.

Colin went to hospital when he was eight months old for a minor ear infection. As a haemophiliac, he received factor VIII, which, following a freedom of information request, the family later learned had come from a batch from an Arkansas prison. He spent his short life fighting illness and died aged seven of AIDS and hepatitis C, although the family did not find out that it was hepatitis C until three years after his death. No parent should have to go through what the Smiths have gone through. As they have said, they want justice so that their son can rest in peace and they want justice for those who remain.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): That story is just one of the many we have heard from constituents. I heard from a constituent, David, who similarly spoke passionately about his circumstances. He will not even be affected by the consultation that is going on. Clearly, this is a UK legacy issue and a UK historical injustice. We have heard about the difference in Scotland and elsewhere. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to make sure the UK Government lead on working with the devolved Administrations—in Wales, that means the Wales Office—to ensure that we do not end up with a postcode lottery, with some people potentially in worse situations and some not getting the same justice as others?

Jessica Morden: My hon. Friend makes an incredibly valuable point, which I hope the Minister will listen to—I know it will be heard by the large contingent of Welsh campaigners who have come here today to listen to the debate.

Bill, the husband of another constituent, Lin Ashcroft, was one of the first haemophiliacs to treat himself at home with cryoprecipitate. He contracted HIV and hepatitis C from blood, and he lost his job with BT in the 1980s, after telling the occupational health department about his HIV status. Bill had no life cover, as no one would insure “people like him”, as it was put at the time. Following his death, Lin had to grieve and cope with the financial commitment she was left with. She eventually received some support from the Skipton Fund, but she found the process involved absolutely brutal—she felt she was jumping through hoops to get the money.

We have to keep telling these stories, because we have to remember what many people went through. We have to remember that they need a proper settlement because that can help to draw a line under this period, in so far as we ever can. These people have lost their loved ones, and they have lost great friends they have made during the campaign. As they have told me, it just becomes too

difficult in the end to attend the constant funerals, as members of the community pass away. These people want proper support for those who are still with us.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): The Prime Minister's apology gave my constituent Sandra Molyneaux hope that the wrong done to her and her family would finally be righted. Does my hon. Friend agree, though, that subsequent developments fly in the face of that? Sandra and thousands of others are telling the Government through us today, "Don't tell us you're sorry. Show us you're sorry."

Jessica Morden: My hon. Friend makes a fantastic point [*Interruption.*] And it is very well received. He anticipates the point I am coming to.

There was some hope last year when the Prime Minister made the much-needed apology for the contaminated blood disaster. He promised then to improve the financial support for the victims and their families. As he said, we are a "wealthy and successful country" and we should be helping these people more. There was some hope, and the consultation was launched into what the support should look like.

A year on, however, the victims have been let down again. Despite the headline announcement about the additional budget of up to £125 million in support, not a penny has been spent, as has been said. The majority of people currently receiving financial support will be worse off under the new scheme. Removing discretionary payments may mean that many lose to the tune of thousands of pounds a year. They will be significantly worse off than those affected in Scotland. Individual assessment could reduce financial security. Widows, partners and dependent children who have been bereaved will receive limited or no support. Lastly, the proposed reforms would just not deliver the sustainability and security the affected community so desperately needs. This is not the package that is needed. It is also not clear whether payments under the new proposals will be exempt from tax and benefit assessment.

What has been proposed is very different from what will be offered by the Scottish Government. For widows who have lost their loved ones, the difference is not just stark—the proposals are poles apart. I will leave it to SNP Members to elaborate on that, but the difference is very pointed.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Does the hon. Lady not accept that this is one occasion when there should be close working across the Administrations? I offer her the example of a constituent who was infected 35 years ago in Staffordshire. Although he has lived in Scotland for all that time, he will get compensation under the scheme devised by the Department of Health in England. Where is the sense in that?

Jessica Morden: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He is absolutely right and I am sure he will get the chance to elaborate on that point later. For parents and families who have gone through the trauma of losing a child like Colin, there is nothing at all.

Nigel Mills is here from Wales today and he is now receiving a new treatment for hep C. He has been able to access that treatment, although, mercifully, his condition has not resulted in cirrhosis of the liver. All those in

Wales who developed hep C and could benefit from those new drugs are now receiving them. The Haemophilia Society is very anxious that all those in England who could benefit should have access to them and that funding for new treatment should not be diverted to cover existing treatments.

How many times do we keep having to tell these very personal stories, and how many times do we keep having to call these debates and table questions? How many times do victims have to come to London to lobby MPs? The Haemophilia Society has responded fully, highlighting the weaknesses in what is being proposed and saying that the consultation should be withdrawn.

I ask the Minister please to reflect deeply on this, because what is proposed does not meet the needs of widows, partners, parents, children and those affected. But she should not reflect on it for too long: this has been an ongoing nightmare since the 1970s for thousands of families. The Government cannot bring back the dead or restore health, but they can award a package that will ensure that survivors and families are secure. The apology was a step forward, but let us not prolong the agony further for those who have suffered for far too long. Please listen to this campaign and give the campaigners what they deserve. Please right the wrong.

4.26 pm

Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): I welcome the Backbench Business Committee's selection of this important topic, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith) and the hon. Members for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) and for South Down (Ms Ritchie) on their efforts in securing this valuable debate.

I want to acknowledge the tremendous campaigning work of the all-party parliamentary group on haemophilia and contaminated blood. Its efforts have helped to pave the way for the current Department of Health consultation to secure a lasting financial and support settlement for those thousands of people infected with HIV and hepatitis C through contaminated blood in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Let me say at the outset that my heart goes out to those people who have been affected by the contaminated blood scandal, both in my constituency of South East Cornwall and across the country. The devastating impact on patients and their families and friends is immeasurable and lasts for a lifetime. We must all do what we can to ensure that those affected have as secure a future as possible.

I have personal experience of trying to help one constituent who has sadly been impacted by this terrible tragedy. My constituent was infected with contaminated blood in 1985 at the age of 35 and subsequently contracted full blown hepatitis C, which has now developed into cirrhosis of the liver.

My constituent, who understandably has asked not to be identified, has undergone three courses of arduous interferon-based treatment. The last course caused a life-threatening infection that required a month in hospital and some invasive surgery and extensive abdominal surgery.

Now aged 65, my constituent suffers from severe fatigue, physical weakness, brain fog, which means that she is unable to read anything vaguely complicated,

[Mrs Sheryll Murray]

constant itching, fever, sweats, depression and total and permanent hair loss. The stress of living with those conditions on a daily basis for 30 years must be immeasurable. The Government must do all they can to support patients and their families.

My constituent wanted me to highlight her case as an example of where anomalies in support for patients suffering from cirrhosis of the liver have led to financial hardship and additional worry at a very distressing time. She was very grateful for the lump sum she received and an income of £14,760 per annum. However, that figure would be £26,000 in Scotland, nearly double the sum offered in England. That is iniquitous.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): A constituent of mine—Janis Richards of Sudbury—has written to me, and hers is a very tragic case similar to that highlighted by my hon. Friend. I am struggling to explain to her why there are such different arrangements for constituents across the United Kingdom, given that this problem originally arose under a UK Government.

Mrs Murray: I completely concur with my hon. Friend. My constituent is particularly concerned about proposals to withdraw index linking from annual income and to refuse to increase it by any meaningful amount. I understand that there is a recommendation to fix annual payments at a flat rate of £15,000 a year, which would leave my constituent with a nominal financial increase of about £240. There are also proposals to withdraw back-up services for emergencies and to withdraw support, which my constituent will certainly require, given the severity of her condition.

May I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to clarify the position, and to take my constituent's concerns into account when formulating final proposals? My constituent previously enjoyed a successful career in the legal profession, but she became too ill to pursue it after her infection with contaminated blood. Her career was, sadly, cut short, as was her considerable earning potential and professional development.

Patients must be treated with fairness, and each case must be assessed and supported on its merits. I am grateful that the Prime Minister acknowledged the scale of the tragedy and apologised on behalf of the UK Government. I welcome the additional funding for England that was announced in 2015 to ease the transition to a reformed scheme and ensure its sustainable operation with patients at its core. That scheme must provide a robust and fair system that supports and compensates those who are affected and removes any unnecessary complexity and unfairness.

Steve Rotheram (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): At the start of her speech, the hon. Lady mentioned the excellent work of the APPG. It is right to highlight that, because it has shed a lot of light on the issue. In every constituency, there are heart-breaking stories like that of her constituent. I have two constituents who, through no fault of their own, received contaminated blood products, and one of them feels as though he has a death sentence hanging over his head. Does the hon. Lady agree that we should not, quite literally, add insult to injury, and that a just and fair settlement must be found as soon as possible? I

know that the Conservative Government were not necessarily responsible for the blood products, but it is in the gift of this Government to sort the matter out once and for all.

Mrs Murray: I sincerely hope that the Minister is listening to what the hon. Gentleman has to say, and that she and the Government will take action to make it easier for affected people to live as good a life as they can expect to.

There are currently five different organisations funded by the Department of Health to which affected individuals can apply for support. It is encouraging that staff in those schemes have said that the system would be more efficient and consistent if the organisations were combined. Other concerns that have been raised should be addressed through the consultation and subsequent proposals. Those concerns include the fact that beneficiaries are not individually assessed, and that bodies operate different payment policies. The APPG is quite correct to state that the system is not fit for purpose. The consultation that the Department of Health is conducting, which concludes this week, is a helpful step. I am pleased that the Department of Health has reached out to, and sought views from, affected patients and their beneficiaries, and I congratulate the Minister on that. The outcome must lead to a fair and sustainable solution for my constituent and for impacted individuals and families across the country.

4.33 pm

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): I want to express my admiration for my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) and the sterling work that she has done in raising the matter. I know from personal experience that she is a formidable campaigner on this issue.

An MP has no greater responsibility than to give a voice to those who feel as though they are not being heard, and I want to use this opportunity to tell the story of my constituent Alex Smith of Chadderton. Quite a lot of the debate has been about finance, and that is important. It is evident from the consultation and from the Government that the driver from their point of view is to squeeze this for every penny they can. However, I want to talk about the real human cost—the everyday cost for those affected.

Alex is ill. He struggles to get out and about. He often feels worn out and unable to live the fulfilling life that we take for granted. Despite his physical difficulties, he is to many, including me, an inspiring man. He has shown great strength of character, resilience and a pride that is the culture of many in our town. His story is not just heart-breaking, but unjust. In a fair society, those who are wronged should have fairness and the wrong should be put right.

Alex and his wife Brenda celebrated the arrival of their son in 1980. To put on record how long the family has waited for real justice, let me say that during that period—from the blood contamination to getting answers, getting proper compensation and, now, fighting for enough money just to pay the bills—I was born in a hospital down the road, went to nursery, went to primary school, went to secondary school, went to college, went out to work and had two sons of my own, of whom the eldest will leave school in two years' time. In the period

that Alex has had to wait for justice, I have lived my life, and I have done so without many of the difficulties that Alex has had. That justice is no justice whatsoever.

A year after her son's birth in 1980, Brenda was diagnosed with cervical cancer. She received treatment for that, including a blood transfusion. Separately, Alex, being a good citizen, gave blood in 1995, like hundreds and thousands of others. From the sample test, it was discovered that he had hepatitis C. To be honest, he did not really know what it was. He was told that, with treatment, it might well clear up. He went for treatment, and received most of it, but it was stopped early for other reasons. He thought that that was it.

Over the course of three years, Alex noticed he was becoming forgetful. He put that down to getting older and having a few senior moments, but it got worse and he became increasingly worn out, tired and lethargic. He struggled, but he had the support of his wife and family by his side. To fast-forward 10 years, the family had another tragedy when his wife Brenda passed away. The coroner ruled that the case was inconclusive and the cause of the death was recorded as "unascertained". We can imagine the grief the family went through, and throughout this time Alex continued to struggle, each and every day, with things we might take for granted.

In 2011, Alex visited his doctor again and underwent a routine blood test. He discovered that the hepatitis C had not gone away and was still there. He went through further treatment, but instead of making him feel better, it made him feel much worse. At that point, he was determined not just to get treatment, but to get answers. His quest started at the hospital where he felt it all began. The records had been destroyed, so he realised that if he was to get real justice and to get answers, he would have to track down the people who were there at the time.

Alex's mission led him to Bangor in north Wales, where the retired surgeon living there confirmed that Alex had had a blood transfusion with what was likely to be contaminated blood. That made him think, "If I received contaminated blood, could it be that Brenda, who received treatment in the same hospital, also received contaminated blood and may have had hepatitis C as well?" He went to the hospital to find the records, and the records said that Brenda had had hepatitis C. Cruelly and inexplicably, the hospital had not told Brenda and Alex that. It was only when he went back through the medical records years later that that was discovered.

Alex applied to the Skipton Fund and received compensation for himself and his wife, as a surviving stage 1 widower, but that did not make him feel any better physically. He describes every day—let us just imagine this—as waking up with aching flu. Imagine waking up every day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, with the flu and no end in sight. How would that drag us down and make daily life feel?

Alex and Brenda did not ask to be infected. Alex did not ask to spend his life in pain and poverty, or to be made to feel, during this consultation, as though he is begging for something that he is not entitled to. His life has been taken away. He wants justice, fairness and closure. He wants to be able to stop the campaign that has been necessary to get justice, and to live a decent lifestyle.

Rebecca Pow: The hon. Gentleman is making a very serious and sympathetic case. As well as people's suffering, is there not also the issue of their unrealised potential—the hopes dashed, the dreams never lived, the potential never reached? It is on that account that we really owe it to these people to speak up—I do so on behalf an unidentified constituent who does not want me to give his name—and urge the Minister to address the issue.

Jim McMahon: The hon. Lady makes an absolutely excellent point. When Alex came to my office in Oldham, he told me that with his compensation payment he had bought a van to go and work self-employed, but his illness stopped him and eventually he had to sell the van, which had ended up sitting on his driveway. The hon. Lady is absolutely right that people have been denied opportunities that many in this House would take for granted. It is far more than simply an aching pain, or not knowing whether tomorrow will be better than today; opportunities have been stolen from people. Given that it is the state's responsibility to put this matter right, we owe it as a nation to do so once and for all.

The payments we are talking about will seem quite small to many people here. In some ways, that is what makes this so unfair and so cruel. In one of the richest nations in the world, we are talking about penny-pinching from the poorest people in society, who did not choose to be in this situation and who need a way forward. A £2,000 payment taken away, or a winter fuel allowance, or prescription payments—support is being taken away. It is important to say that the £2,000 payments do not go to everyone, but are for people whose income is 70% below the average in that area. I do not want to make party political points, but it is a bit difficult not to do so when the Government of the day could put the matter right but are choosing instead to drag it out and prolong the agony and pain.

When Members vote in the Lobby of this House, we will be voting after having received a pay rise this year. Well done, all of us—aren't we fantastic? Well, the people out there are not asking for a pay rise. They are asking just to get by—to have the money to pay the bills—and for justice. The Minister has the opportunity to put the matter right once and for all. She should take it.

4.42 pm

Chloe Smith (Norwich North) (Con): I am very glad to be able to take part in this debate, having secured it along with hon. Members from both sides of the House. It is on an important and sombre topic.

Back in 2015, I spoke in this House on behalf of two constituents. One is, I believe, in London today. One has passed away—Annie Walker of Norwich. She was one of thousands of people nationwide given infected blood by the NHS during those decades. It left her fighting illness throughout her adult life—she contracted hepatitis C from an otherwise routine blood transfusion at the age of just 19. That caused cirrhosis of her liver and led to cancer in later years. Despite a liver transplant in the months since I last spoke for her in the House, she was told that the cancer had spread and was given just months to live. Like many others, throughout her illness she campaigned to increase hep C awareness and for better treatment of

[Chloe Smith]

those affected by the scandal. The first thing I want to do is to pay tribute to her courage and tirelessness in campaigning for others while she was suffering so badly herself.

I will add just a few points to the arguments that have already been raised, urging the Minister to do everything she can to put right this historical wrong. I urge her to look again at indexing. It is important to maintain the value of the payments made to those who are suffering. I also urge her to stick to her guns and make future payments simpler and more dignified, rather than people having to go cap in hand to a motley collection of charitable funds.

I urge the Minister to stick to what she laid out in this House, when she established her aim to get annual payments to those who had not, to date, received them. There are those who have not yet been included in the funds and they currently receive no regular support. It is good to seek to include some of those people in the scheme. Her other aim—not to remove payment from any person—is equally crucial. She has set out her aims to the House and we will all hold her to them. Like other Members, I welcome the doubling of the funding available through the NHS. I also welcome the action the Minister has laid out in relation to treatment, something I have argued for a number of times.

A third constituent came to see me after we last held a debate on this matter. He suffers from severe cirrhosis of the liver and needs the new generation of drugs. We should make those drugs available as soon as possible for those who could suffer less. The dreadful dilemma for doctors is whether they should treat the sickest first or those who could be prevented from getting sicker. I welcome the opportunity the scheme represents potentially to prevent that dreadful dilemma in doctors' surgeries and hospitals.

It is a very delicate matter to argue about who, among those who need treatment, should be prioritised. Unfortunately, that is exactly what we have to do in this place on behalf of our constituents. Doctors have to make such decisions every day. On balance, I think it is right to seek to fast-track those who are in the early stage of disease. The dreadful dilemma could perhaps be stopped, given such a historical wrong done to our fellow human beings. I could not possibly look the third constituent of mine in the eye and say that today I argued against possibly stopping that dreadful dilemma by arguing against the Minister's proposal. She is doing a courageous thing with that particular proposal.

In closing, I want to return to my constituent Annie Walker who has passed away. I supported my constituent and corresponded with her over many years. My heart goes out to the family and friends she leaves behind. Every individual death emphasises the tragedy of this scandal. It is a national scandal and a national tragedy. The fight must go on. Annie fought that fight during her lifetime, with my support. Many who have spoken today and the many who are able to be in London today are also fighting the fight. I urge anybody affected who has not yet come forward to do so and to look at the consultation before it runs out in a few days. We in this place can only attempt to get this right if we have information from those affected. That is our job.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady agree with the sentiments of my constituent Steve Bertram, who I believe is here today, who came to my office last week? He has a face that many would recognise. He looks like someone who has been repeatedly kicked in the teeth. He said:

“Our government needs to act for English Haemophiliacs – generously and properly. Like me, I hope anyone who responded to the consultation told the government in no uncertain terms how paltry, mean and demeaning the offer is.”

Chloe Smith: I will let the words of a fellow Norwich person speak for themselves. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has been able to vocalise them for his constituent.

It is up to us in this place to get this right and to listen to all such points carefully. Annie Walker once said to me that she did not have the strength to keep on fighting. Sadly, that has now come true. It is up to us to continue to speak out. It is up to us to right this historical wrong. It is up to us to do that with both finance and NHS treatment. I urge the Minister to listen carefully to what has been said today, but to listen even more carefully to the consultation.

4.49 pm

Dr Paul Monaghan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (SNP): One of my first actions, following my election to this place, was to highlight the plight of those infected with contaminated blood in the 1970s and 1980s. I did this by writing to the Department of Health, following discussions with Julie, a constituent of mine. In July 2015, I also tabled early-day motion 334 to recognise

“the ongoing hardship and challenges faced by those infected with contaminated blood”

and to encourage

“the Prime Minister to implement promised arrangements to distribute an additional £25 million to those affected as soon as is practicable.”

Infected blood is one of the most terrible chapters in the history of the NHS. Many people have died or suffered long-term disability and hardship as a result of infection. Relatives have had to sacrifice careers to provide care and support, and in some cases partners and loved ones have become infected. Patients, families and carers have dealt with those difficulties with immense and enduring courage. My constituent Julie was born with a rare genetic condition known as Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, which requires treatment, including blood transfusions. She was infected with contaminated blood in 1974—42 years ago—while a young woman with her whole life ahead of her. Following a transfusion that September, she quickly developed symptoms of hepatitis and suffers today from a range of chronic and debilitating health conditions that have rendered her unable to remain upright for longer than 10 minutes at a time without becoming fatigued, owing to liver and lung damage arising directly from the transfusions.

Although now living in Scotland, Julie was infected in England. The liability for the current ex gratia schemes is based on where the individual was infected, rather than residency. This means that the English schemes and the consultation recently launched by the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), are responsible for supporting Julie and delivering the financial support she will require.

Julie is currently classed as Skipton stage 1 and has received an ex gratia payment of £20,000 but receives no annual award. Her medical condition means that she has great difficulty meeting the qualifying criteria for stage 2, which would increase her ex gratia payment and provide approximately £15,000 per annum in badly needed support. I have reviewed her correspondence with the Skipton Fund on the reassessment and have found it unhelpful, perhaps even deliberately obtuse.

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I thank my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to raise the case of my constituent Susan Webster who lost her partner, Charlie, almost five years ago, after he contracted hepatitis C as a result of contaminated blood, leaving her and their now 14-year-old daughter without any financial support. Since Charlie's death, Susan and her daughter have received little or no Government help and have had to approach the Skipton Fund themselves. Today, they remain in a state of limbo while the Government dither over the future of the UK scheme. Does he agree that the Government, having dragged their heels for years, must now act to support the survivors of this scandal without any further delay?

Dr Monaghan: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. It is a tragic case that he outlines, and I will come to his specific point shortly.

On 21 January 2016, the Health Minister stated that the UK Government wanted to increase the amount of money on offer for victims of infected blood by £100 million, in addition to the £25 million announced in March 2015 by the Prime Minister. This takes the total to £225 million over the five years to 2020. As we know, there is a 12-week consultation on these proposals that closes this week, on 15 April. However, the proposed payment schemes have been heavily criticised by many of those affected for being outdated and confused in structure. That is my experience of them too. They also appear unfair.

The UK Government have estimated that the Department will spend a further £570 million over the projected lifetime of the reformed scheme, but analysis shows that the Department wants to cap annual payments for victims in England at £15,000 and that these will no longer be index linked and so will not increase with the cost of living. The UK Government also want to remove regular discretionary payments, including the winter fuel allowance and the £1,200 per child annual payment.

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): On the point about the cost of living, I have several constituents in the same situation. One suggested that pension payments be increased to at least the level of the living wage. What does the hon. Gentleman think of that idea?

Dr Monaghan: I would absolutely support that suggestion. I would also note that many victims in England now face cuts of up to £7,000 a year, together with cumulative losses from the freezing of six annual payments to patients of £15,000 a year, time-limited support for partners and spouses after patients' deaths, and the ending of help for the children and parents of those affected. Moreover, victims will no longer have access to grants for support with such things as mobility issues and modifications to property; nor will they have access to free expert advice.

The Haemophilia Society, which campaigns on behalf of victims of this scandal, has said that it has deep concerns about the proposals for England. It compared the proposals for England to those in Scotland, saying:

“These concerns are compounded by the fact that similar proposals in Scotland offer more generous payments to its affected community. There is a risk that, if both sets of proposals are accepted (as they currently stand), affected people in England will receive much lower incomes than those in Scotland.”

The Scottish Government have already provided £32 million over the last 10 years to the current UK-wide schemes, so they are already committed to support those infected in Scotland. Nevertheless, on 18 March this year, the Scottish Government announced a substantial package of increased financial support for those affected by infected NHS blood and blood products in Scotland, amounting to an additional £20 million over the next three years alone. The new Scottish scheme will see annual payments for those with HIV and advanced hep C nearly double from £15,000 to £27,000 a year, and those affected with both HIV and hep C will have their annual payments increase from £30,000 to £37,000.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): This is a pure inquiry. Would it have been open to the Scottish authorities to say that the increased levels of compensation would be available to all those affected within Scotland rather than on the basis of where people had acquired the infection?

Dr Monaghan: I do not think that would be possible because it would be an admission of liability, and these are ex gratia schemes with no liability in response to the payment.

In addition to the measures I have explained so far, a new support and assistance grant scheme will be established in Scotland to administer and provide more flexible grants to cover additional needs. Scottish Government funding for this scheme will increase from £300,000 to £1 million a year. In real terms, the new arrangements will mean additional financial support is available for all categories of infected people and their dependants in Scotland. In Scotland, we are clear that this is not the end of the process and that there will be ongoing work with patient groups on this matter.

In overwhelming contrast to the Scottish Government, the UK Government are proposing to cut funding for victims of this scandal, leaving vulnerable people thousands of pounds a year worse off. It is extremely disappointing that the UK Government do not think it important to support those who were infected in England, and it is clear that the proposed cuts demonstrate that the UK Government's priorities lie with austerity, not with the victims of this terrible scandal. It is time for the UK Government to support those whose lives have been ruined by this unprecedented scandal. For people such as Julie, anything less literally heaps insult on injury.

4.58 pm

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on securing this debate and on the valuable work that her all-party parliamentary group is doing in this area.

[Peter Heaton-Jones]

All Members, I am sure, receive a huge number of letters and emails from constituents, and hold face-to-face meetings with them on a huge range of issues. Just occasionally, an email arrives that has the power to stop us in our tracks, simply demanding the wider attention of the whole House. On 2 June last year, just four weeks after being elected to this place for the first time, I received just such an email. It came from my constituent Sue Threakall, from Barnstaple. Mrs Threakall is with us in the Gallery this afternoon, one of many who have travelled long distances to be here today. I pay tribute to them all.

With her permission and with the leave of the House, I would like to read a short extract from the email I received from Mrs Threakall, which sums up better than I could the real human impact of this national tragedy:

“my late husband was a haemophiliac who”,
in the 1980s,

“was given contaminated blood and...died in 1991 with AIDS, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C. His death ripped my family apart and to this day the effects are still there.”

Her children lead

“compromised lives compared to the ones they should have led. I have severe financial difficulties to this day, despite doing everything possible to help myself recover from a wrecked career as a...teacher, followed by retirement at 50 on a tiny pension. Since then I have worked in hospitals, but following three major surgeries in seven years have now more or less retired.

I have been campaigning for thirty years for truth and justice”.
Those are two crucial elements that we must discuss today: truth and justice.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I appreciate the hon. Gentleman’s generosity in giving way, and I share his concern about the impact on spouses. My constituent Mr Thomas Farrell was given 11 units of contaminated blood in 1989, and tested positive for hepatitis C nine years later. One of his biggest fears is that his wife will not have the security of knowing that she can pay the mortgage should he pass away before her. Does the hon. Gentleman agree with me that bereaved partners and spouses should have security and proper financial support for the rest of their life?

Peter Heaton-Jones: I absolutely agree that we must look beyond those whose are immediately affected personally by the health effects of contaminated blood, and take account of the effects on their wider families and loved ones. I shall say more about that later.

Truth and justice are what this is all about, and I believe that we have reached a stage at which we really could deliver both. The Government’s consultation is under way; the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), Friend made her announcement in January; and there is now a groundswell of public opinion. Those three factors mean that we are at a crossroads, and we may never have this opportunity again. Campaigners acknowledge that since 2010, the Government have listened. We have made progress—more progress than we have made in the past.

This, however, is the position: the Government’s consultation is due to close in just three days’ time, and it is clear that there is still a great deal of unhappiness

with the options on the table. The status quo—the existing scheme, with its confusing and inadequate provision—is not acceptable, but neither is the alternative, which would seem to fail to tackle the fundamental problem of fair financial provision both for those who received the contaminated blood and are living with the health consequences and, importantly, the families and loved ones who care for them or grieve for them.

We must be realistic. Like nearly every decision that we make in this place, this does in the end come down to money, and we know that money is tight. It would be unrealistic, indeed irresponsible, to stand here today and ask for a blank cheque to be written, or for funds to be taken from equally worthwhile projects elsewhere in the health budget. What I appeal for today from the Government—on behalf of my constituent, and other constituents who are with us—are two commodities that are perhaps even more precious: time and understanding. I ask for time for these people, including my constituent, to have their cases adequately heard by the Government, and not to be bounced into accepting one of two options, neither of which they believe to be fair or adequate.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a very powerful speech on behalf of his constituent. Does he agree that it would be a tragedy if, at the end of the consultation, some of the victims were worse off as a result of it?

Peter Heaton-Jones: None of us, of course, would want that. We must wait to hear what the Minister says at the end of the debate, but I am sure that we are all aiming for the same result. The least that the people who have fought so hard for truth and justice deserve is a fair hearing, but for many, time is running out. They find themselves in the heartbreaking position of facing the inevitable health consequences of what was, after all, an historical failure of the national health service.

Rebecca Pow: I, too, massively applaud the work of the all-party parliamentary group, which has been working for so long. My hon. Friend has mentioned time. I have just received a text from one of my constituents, who does not want to be named, but who points out that the stark reality is that those infected are dying at the rate of one a month. For these people, time really is of the essence.

Peter Heaton-Jones *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I believe that there was an informal time limit of seven minutes, and the hon. Gentleman has a minute to go. If we cannot get it down to six minutes, I will have to impose a formal time limit, which I do not want to do.

Peter Heaton-Jones: I understand, Mr Deputy Speaker; thank you.

My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) makes the perfectly reasonable point that time is running out, and that these people find themselves in an impossible position. I do not seek to extend this process unnecessarily, but the 15 April deadline cannot and must not be the end of the story. It cannot be a deadline after which a decision is simply handed

down. Let us give a proper, respectful hearing to those who believe that an injustice is about to be done, and let us try to put this right.

I also said that we needed understanding. These events have devastated the lives of many people, including my constituent, Sue Threakall. I shall end as I began, by quoting her words in an email. She says:

“At the moment I haven’t the slightest idea how I will be able to manage and am in complete despair. Over the last week it has occurred to me several times that after fighting this for over three decades...I really don’t want to carry on.”

I say to my constituent and to the other campaigners who are with us today: do carry on, and do keep telling us what we need to know. As my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), who has just left her place, said, it is by hearing the true life stories of those who have been affected that my hon. Friend the Minister, who I know is listening, will be able to take very careful note. Let us do all we can to deliver what my constituent and many thousands of others want and deserve: truth, fairness and justice.

5.6 pm

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Thank you for calling me to speak, Mr Deputy Speaker. I would like to join other Members of Parliament in thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for her work on this matter, which, among other things, has enabled us to take part in this debate.

Everything that we deal with in this House of Commons is about people, whether they are Syrian refugees or steelworkers from south Wales. Whatever we do deals with the lives of people, and we are somehow led to believe that the larger the number of people involved, the more important the issue will be. That is a basic problem about this issue. There is not, *sub specie aeternitatis*, a huge number of people who are affected by blood contamination, but those involved have been affected in a way that damages their lives every minute of every day. I would not have known about this issue if it were not for a person in my constituency called Mohibul Islam, who has been in contact with me year after year—I now have a file of correspondence so enormous that I could not bring it into the Chamber—and who has asked me to participate in the debate and to ask a specific question.

Let us be clear about this: I do not accuse the Government of being heartless. It would be easy to do that, given the suffering of the people involved. However, the Government do not seem to grasp the fact that a process that should have been followed to produce an effective outcome has been left in such a way that we still cannot believe that we are going to get a result. We still cannot believe that the outcome will be known to, and potentially satisfy, the relatively small number of our constituents who are suffering in this way. Also, when I say that this involves a small number of people, I must stress that it occupies 100% of their lives.

It may well be that every Member in this Chamber has in her or his family someone who suffers from some deeply upsetting illness, but unless one knows about blood contamination, it passes us by. The Government have not given the matter the active attention that it deserves, and that may simply be because the number of people affected is relatively small. This is not in any way

an accusation against the Government—I will make accusations against them when I need to—but there are no votes in this, because the number is small. However, the numbers suffering cannot be pinned down by statistics. Unless any of us in the Chamber have actually suffered from blood contamination or its consequences, we do not really know about it, even if we are told.

Mohibul Islam has asked me to put a specific question to the Minister, and I will ask her to respond to him, so that I can let him know that his voice has been heard in the House of Commons. He wants to know why, instead of raising payments and bringing them above the poverty threshold, the payment for the dual-infected group is being cut substantially, leading to some people being £7,000 a year worse off. For someone with tax relationships with Panama, £7,000 may not seem like a large sum of money, but it is everything to somebody who needs the money and goes day after day without any prospect of alleviation.

Barbara Keeley: We have heard Government Members say that money is tight, but like my right hon. Friend’s constituent, my constituent Mr Dave Gort has had to cover the cost of his own treatment and is facing a decrease in the annual payment. He will also lose additional support such as winter fuel payments and the prescription prepayment programme. Those affected also have issues with insurance, for example, with premiums being loaded even when the virus has cleared. I support my right hon. Friend’s points about hardship and the hit that the change represents.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: What my hon. Friend says is remarkably valid and I concur with it. As a consequence of what she and other Members have said and, most of all, of my communications from Mohibul Islam, I want to know why the Government cannot at least provide parity with Scotland. That would not solve the problem, but it would to some extent alleviate the financial consequences.

As I said, every one of us in this House, either personally or through someone in our family, has suffered the effects of some kind of health-related problem. In my case, my brother and one of my sisters died in suffering after a long experience of Alzheimer’s disease. There are many ways in which the human condition can be hurtful or troublesome. I am not looking for a solution—frankly, I do not believe that there is a solution in health terms—but I am looking for the Government to show that they care, that there will be an outcome, and that that outcome will, as a minimum, alleviate the anxieties and concerns of those who live with this affliction every single day.

5.14 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the Father of the House, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman), and to be able to follow on from all the work done to bring this debate to the Floor of the House. I congratulate the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on securing it; it was a pleasure for me, as a member of the Backbench Business Committee, to support the proposal that this debate be held today.

Contaminated blood and the impact on victims was one of the first issues to come into my inbox after I was elected. Someone came to my surgery who had had a

[Kevin Foster]

condition but had been otherwise healthy, only to find that they were to have decades of pain and disability because of the treatment they had for that condition—that is almost heartbreaking. Virtually all their life prospects have disappeared because of a treatment they received that they thought would make them better.

It is worth examining the scale of this disaster in our NHS system. We are talking about 4,700 people with bleeding disorders and 28,000 other people becoming infected with hepatitis C; and 1,200 with bleeding disorders and 100 other individuals getting HIV. Of course these people were getting that condition at a time when the medical understanding of it was very limited and the life expectancy was incredibly short. Thankfully, many people have benefited from the advances in medical science since 1985, which have allowed them to keep living, but they still face all the issues that come with that illness and—let us be candid—the stigma that still comes with it from those ignorant about what can cause it.

The issue is about looking at the time that has elapsed. I am sure that, like me, my predecessor, Adrian Sanders, who pursued a number of cases diligently during his time as the MP for Torbay, would not have expected that after 18 years his successor would still be talking about this issue and still be having to speak up for the constituents affected by this scandal, at least one of whom is in the Gallery today. We know that a patchwork of five schemes is in place, and reference has been made to that. To be fair, £390 million has already been paid out, but the impact on these people has been so devastating that it is right that we are looking again at what the appropriate level of compensation is.

It was appropriate that last year the Prime Minister issued an apology. That is something so simple, but it took until 2015 for it to happen. I agree that we are not in a court of law today, but it is right that we seek to provide some form of justice to those who for so long have found themselves on the receiving end of life-changing conditions.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): We have used the word “justice” all the way through this debate. I have listened to it all and I was not intending to intervene, but I must say that in fact there is no justice we can give people who have contaminated blood—that has been taken away from them. All we can do is give them the best possible help, financially and in care terms. They will never get justice, and it is improper to suggest they can—we cannot do it, it is too late, they have had that taken away and money will not compensate.

Kevin Foster: I thank my hon. and gallant Friend for such a thoughtful intervention. We cannot give them justice; we cannot restore them back to where they were before the impact of this scandal, but we can compensate them. We can try to mitigate the impact and give them a life that is appropriate, as best we can. Today’s debate is right to focus on that.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Kevin Foster: Briefly, but I am conscious of Mr Deputy Speaker’s guidance.

Mrs Drummond: My hon. Friend has mentioned some of the impacts, and I think there is an impact relating to housing. A lot of people with very low incomes are finding it difficult to access reasonable housing, including my constituent Sally Vickers, who has been told by Portsmouth City Council that she cannot be rehoused, despite a threatening condition caused by receiving contaminated blood. Does my hon. Friend not agree that the Minister needs to advise local authorities to make sure that the housing is adequate for such people?

Kevin Foster: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. This is also about making sure local authorities are aware of the support packages and the possible impact on benefit calculations. During my time as a councillor in Coventry I was approached by someone who was constantly being invited in for a fraud interview because they were receiving funds from one of the trusts. Those trained in these trusts have mostly retired now because of the time that has elapsed since this was put in place; the numbers involved are very small so new members of staff would not be so familiar with this. To be fair, that particular incident was resolved.

Initially, my constituents were pleased to hear that a consultation was going to happen and that £25 million would be available. They waited for it, but when it was announced it is safe to say that they were extremely disappointed. The problems, which have already been listed, include the fact that recipients could receive less than they do now, as some of the top-ups and support may be abolished. Some of the support could rely on assessments. I say that tentatively, as I have looked at this issue of repeated assessments. As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I have looked at the work of the Department for Work and Pensions, and there is no great enthusiasm to see more people going through an annual assessment, particularly when, for many of these people, only a miracle cure will make any form of difference. The conditions are lifelong and permanent. They have been with them for decades and are not likely to be something from which they will recover.

I hope that the Government will relook at the proposals they put out for consultation, and take on board the comments from the all-party group, which have been put forward in a constructive and genuinely helpful way. I ask the Minister to take a view on what is being done in Scotland, and to explain why the UK Government do not think that the Scottish model would be appropriate here. If there is a particular reason, let us hear it. For me, it seems that the model has been welcomed and could be taken forward here.

I do hope that, after 30 years, we can finally take a step forward, deliver justice and ensure that people get the compensation for which they have waited so long. They need a resolution to these matters, which have been going on for decades.

5.21 pm

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): I am extremely grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to speak in this debate today and to the Backbench Business Committee for allowing such an important issue to be brought before the House. I add my praise to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for her

outstanding leadership. As a member of the all-party group on haemophilia and contaminated blood, I feel strongly that it is right that the House consider this matter and that more should be done. I also feel that it would be unconscionable if any reform that did come about actually reduced the support currently being received by people who have been victims of this appalling episode in the history of our public health system.

As we have heard, between the mid-1970s and the late 1980s, 4,670 people with haemophilia were infected with hepatitis C through their NHS treatment and the transfusion of contaminated blood. Of those, 1,243 people with haemophilia were also exposed to HIV. Almost half of those infected with hepatitis C, and almost three quarters co-infected with HIV and hepatitis C, have since died. Many have experienced poverty and discrimination as a result of their infections. For so many of the victims, the simplest of daily tasks can become difficult and, in some situations, frightening. Such a scenario can be seen in the life of one of my own constituents, Mr Michael Gee, with whom I have worked on this issue since I first met him at a constituency surgery in 2013. Alongside many other victims, Michael has travelled to be here today to listen to this debate. The determination to be here is testament to the importance of these decisions. I pay tribute to Michael and to everyone else who is here today and who has been placed in a similar situation.

As a young boy, Michael was accidentally scalded when reaching for a pan of boiling water on the cooker while his mother was making dinner. Rushed to hospital, he underwent a number of blood transfusions. Due to the shortage of blood donors, the Government of the day had purchased blood supplies from abroad, and one of the bags used contained contaminated blood.

Michael was diagnosed with hepatitis C in 1987, and it is a condition that he has had to live with throughout his adult life. Hepatitis C causes chronic fatigue, organ damage as well as significant cognitive impairment and damage to the auto-immune system causing arthritis and muscle problems. There are also a whole range of significant practical everyday problems. Hepatitis C sufferers, for instance, struggle to get mortgages or proper insurance.

Michael is now a father, and due to the nature of his condition he is restricted in his interaction with his own child. Terrified that an open wound could transfer his virus, he often has to wear gloves to put his mind at ease, and keep the safety of his children paramount. Such a scenario is difficult to comprehend for any of us who are parents and we would not wish to see anyone placed in that position.

I do not think that any Government have done enough on this matter. In 2009, the Department of Health reviewed the support for the victims of the disaster, but 80% of those who were infected with hepatitis C were excluded from the financial help. That was on the grounds that their illness was considered to be at stage 1. They had been categorised as stage 1 because they could not prove a certain stage of liver disease. To make things even more unfair, there were serious differences in the help given to people with HIV and people with hepatitis C. One of the biggest and most obvious anomalies was the fact that if someone with HIV died their spouse

could apply for ongoing financial support, albeit means-tested, but if someone with hepatitis C died their partner received nothing.

The entire support system is inadequate, and is administered by a multitude of charitable trusts with different rules and criteria, which makes it harder to access. In 2016, the Government are in danger of repeating the errors of the past and once again letting down the victims and their families. Last month, victims of the disaster received letters from the Department of Health consulting them on reforms that could leave some of them up to £7,000 a year worse off. This is not acceptable, and it must not be allowed to happen.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): My hon. Friend mentioned the impact on families. My constituents, David and Vincent Farrugia, tragically lost their father Barry after he contracted HIV and hepatitis C from contaminated blood. The families and the bereaved are not included in the consultation—there is no provision for children, dependants or bereaved families. Does my hon. Friend agree that children and dependants who are now adults should be included in the consultation?

Jonathan Reynolds: I agree with my hon. Friend. When we learn the details of these cases it is clear that people's entire lives have been grievously affected, and it is only right that everyone associated with those injured parties is given the opportunity to take part in the remedy that is required. I would point out to the Department of Health that almost all of the victims of this disaster were infected at least 30 years ago, and there is substantial research evidence showing that by now they have suffered significant damage to their health and earning potential. That must be taken into consideration.

The cap proposed by the Government on annual payments once again shows the lack of compassion and reasonableness faced by these people. The fact that infected spouses will stop receiving payments is grossly unfair. The Prime Minister apologised in the House to the victims last year for what they had had to endure, saying that it was

“difficult to imagine the feelings of unfairness that people must feel”—[*Official Report*, 21 March 2015; Vol. 594, c. 1423.]

Given the latest proposals, do not those words now ring somewhat hollow? The chilling truth of this tragedy is that about half of the estimated 5,000 haemophiliacs who were infected have died without ever seeing justice.

I would ask all Members in the Chamber to think not only of those affected, such as Michael, but of the victims' families, who rely on financial support, which provides the security and stability they need and deserve, and which we as Members of this House have a duty to protect. This is one of the worst episodes in the history of public healthcare and the NHS. Any sense of natural justice leads, I believe, to the conclusion that it must be addressed. We cannot give these people back their health or their dignity, but we can give them closure. We can give them proper financial support—and, frankly, it is time we did.

5.28 pm

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): In my view, real progress has been made, culminating in January 2016 with the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon.

[Craig Mackinlay]

Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), outlining an additional £100 million, with principles laid out as part of the consultation.

As the Minister knows, I have followed this issue incredibly closely during my time in the House. It has been raised with me repeatedly by my constituent and victim Steve Dymond—the Minister is familiar with his case. Another constituent, Mr Lee Stay, has made himself known to me, and I am here to speak for him too. In the 1980s, he attended the Lord Mayor Treloar college in Hampshire, which was a specialist boarding school with a wing for haemophiliac children. He was given factor VIII, but the blood products contained HIV and hep C. He had a liver transplant, and now suffers from Burkitt lymphoma. He cannot work, and his house has been repossessed.

I know rather more about Mr Dymond, who is a tireless campaigner and advocate for his fellow victims. He has not been able to attend today. He is extremely unwell as a result of his hepatitis C infection, but I know that he will be watching and that the whole House will wish him and all the victims we have heard about today recovery where at all possible. Steve Dymond was afflicted by hepatitis C through no fault of his own, having received contaminated blood as treatment for haemophilia, as we have heard from many cases this afternoon. Every day of Steve's life since his infection has been lived through the lens of that condition. His capacity to work, to enjoy time with his family, to travel, to holiday and to do all those normal things that we take for granted has been fundamentally affected by his infection.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): My hon. Friend refers to family. I want to raise the case of a constituent of mine, which I had the opportunity to talk about when we last discussed this matter in July 2015. My constituent, who was affected by contaminated blood, was trying to have a child through IVF. The couple were entitled to one round of IVF through the normal procedures, but they applied for a second round. Despite the fact that their fertility was affected by contaminated blood, they were denied a second round of IVF and had to spend £8,000 of their family money in order to conceive a second child, who has just been born, to their delight. Does my hon. Friend agree that, in the context of family and support, it is extraordinary that my constituent had to go through such hardship to extend his family?

Craig Mackinlay: I entirely agree and thank my hon. Friend for his comments. That example highlights the issues faced not only by the victim, but by the family from young to old. It is remarkable that special cases such as he describes are not recognised by the system. I hope that as part of the review those instances will be resolved.

What happened to Steve, Lee and all the others whom we have heard about today was wrong. In many cases it was avoidable. They were blameless victims who were handed debilitating, dehumanising—as my hon. Friend's example shows—and degenerative infections that have caused heartache to all those affected. Although responsibility obviously lies with the commercial suppliers of the products, the NHS unwittingly administered

them, and society owes the victims a debt. We must do the best we can to alleviate the pain and illness that victims have suffered. The decision that this House and the Government take should place those victims front and centre.

There are two threads to the approach that we should take. First, we must provide treatment for the victims, who suffer from various complex conditions and symptoms that require advanced and expensive care. It is right that we invest in the care and treatment available for those conditions, and in research. Thankfully, medical advances are making rapid progress. Secondly, we must ensure that as much restitution as possible is made to those who have suffered in that way.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): My hon. Friend rightly talks about the blameless victims and the need for compensation. My constituent, who wishes not to be named, asked me about her husband, who was infected in the late 1970s and 1980s. He was a mild haemophiliac whose life was not previously at risk, but he is now living with conditions caused by contaminated blood. Does my hon. Friend agree that in the consultation on the proposals it is important that we consider the long-term impact on such families?

Craig Mackinlay: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. The issue is not just money or the obvious conditions. A holistic approach is needed to what those families have faced. The example that she gives of a minor condition is truly shocking.

Money has been discussed at length this afternoon. Money can never bring back what victims have lost, but it is important that the Government do what they can to bring dignity to the shortened lives of many of those who suffer.

I welcome what the Government have done in relation to treatment. On the new generation of drug treatments, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence is developing guidance on three further treatments, and NHS England announced last year that it had made available £190 million so that patients with confirmed cirrhosis from hepatitis C can benefit from new treatment options. The Department of Health estimates that around 550 individuals infected with hepatitis C through NHS-supplied blood and blood products can now access the new treatments under the NHS's interim commissioning policies.

Medical advances will continue, and there will be beneficial new treatments around the corner, which I hope will stem much liver damage. They may prove to be the salvation for many, but it is early days in this pioneering field of research. There remains some confusion from victims about where the money is coming from, so I would welcome the Minister's clarification on that. I will continue to push for the best treatments available, and for research so that even better treatments are around the corner.

On support for victims, I await the Government's conclusions on the current consultation. Central to all of this is the need to bring dignity to all those afflicted. Victims tell me that they feel that the current system has in some way belittled them and that it is insufficient. Clearly a more suitable settlement for such victims is needed. Care for bereaved next of kin, as we have heard this afternoon, remains at the forefront of victims'

minds. The settlement needs to be flexible, and I await the proposals that the Government bring forward to address these concerns.

It saddens me that some victims, including those in my own constituency, do not view the Minister as being committed to this cause. I personally refute that. I have found her to be diligent and dedicated to this tragedy. She has been honourable throughout. She has spoken honestly with me, and with great compassion. On every occasion I have spoken with her about the issue, often late in the Division Lobby, she has been both knowledgeable and committed to righting this wrong. Campaigners and victims, such as Steve and Lee, will not settle for a halfway house. Although we can never turn the clock back, I am confident that the Government will do what they can to give dignity to all those affected.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): Order. We are now getting closer to five minutes as the informal time limit on speeches. I ask Members to keep to five minutes, because otherwise we will not get everybody in.

5.36 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I, too, pay tribute to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for her amazing campaigning work, and indeed to the other hon. Members who helped secure this debate. I also pay tribute to the organisations Tainted Blood, the Contaminated Blood Campaign and the Haemophilia Society, which have campaigned for years to get justice for so many people. We should also pay tribute to the many individuals who have fought on and on for justice, often in very difficult circumstances.

The Minister should reflect on the extraordinary unanimity of view in this debate, on the reflections in the consultation, on the proposals that the Government have put forward and on the need to think again. This is not a party political issue, because all Governments are to some extent culpable—Labour Governments, Conservative Governments and, indeed, the coalition Government. This is a moral imperative—there is no doubt about that. We have to offer these people justice, and the Government must accept that.

The Government set out the principle right at the start, in their introduction to the consultation, by stating that they accept and recognise their responsibility to everyone infected as a result of NHS treatment, but that leaves out those people affected. This is about not only those infected, but those affected. What about all the loved ones, the children, the spouses and the partners bereaved as a result of loss of life? The Government should accept responsibility for them as well. They have to accept that when they respond to this consultation exercise.

Serious concerns have been raised about this set of proposals. The Prime Minister said—his words were very clear—that:

“We will help them more”—[*Official Report*, 11 March 2015; Vol. 594, C. 289.]

Yet the proposals, when we see the detail, include a proposal to cut the amount of money that individuals receive. That is not consistent with what the Prime Minister said, so surely the Government must think

again. It is surely unconscionable that people in very real need will lose out financially as a result of these proposals. What assessment have the Government made of the winners and the losers? How much will some people lose? It is really important that the Government are open about that. If the Minister cannot respond today, I would be grateful if she wrote to hon. Members to set out the assessment of the amount some people will lose, and of how many people are likely to lose, as a result of these proposals.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) and others have said, it is surely not right that people in Scotland benefit more than people in England. Surely everyone should be treated exactly the same as a result of this scandal.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Norman Lamb: I will not, because I am concerned about the time.

Ending inflation-proofing actually means that we plan a cut to what people are paid every year for as long as there is inflation. Surely we cannot begin to justify that.

I have a problem with the principle of funding new medical treatments at an early stage by taking money from people's financial support. That surely confuses two principles. We should leave intact the money that is available for people's financial security.

I am concerned that the money will come from the Department of Health. The impact assessment talks about the other things that cannot be done as a result. Surely the money should come from the Treasury. In the Budget, the Government cut capital gains tax. I heard recently of one individual who will benefit to the tune of nearly £1 million as a result. These are political choices. Do we as a country want to cut capital gains tax and give large sums to very wealthy people at the same time as cutting financial support for people who have lost out as a result of a national scandal? That is surely unacceptable.

I therefore say to the Minister: accept what the Haemophilia Society says, withdraw these proposals and think again.

5.41 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). I thank fellow members of the all-party group on haemophilia and contaminated blood for securing the debate. I pay particular tribute to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), who chairs the group superbly, and I start my remarks the way she ended hers—by saying that we are debating compensation proposals for what has been described as the worst treatment disaster in the history of the national health service.

Some 80% of victims are critically ill as a result of receiving contaminated blood and blood products. They suffer the side effects of past treatments, and they are in financial hardship, having been forced out of employment precisely because of the health issues caused by infection. They, their families and the families of those who have died should be treated with equal primacy.

[Chris Stephens]

Only weeks after my election, I was contacted by my constituent Cathy Young, who is a stage 1 widow. Cathy is a member of the Scottish Infected Blood Forum and a passionate advocate on this issue. When I met her last week, I asked her to give me her thoughts on what I should say this afternoon, so let me describe them for the next few moments.

Cathy said:

"I don't know due to the Scottish Government's recently accepting the review group's recommendations what can be said, but what I would say is how can the UK Government consultation regarding other UK widows be so far off the mark compared to Scotland. There is more work to be done particularly in relation to extra hepatic manifestations, other illnesses caused by hepatitis C other than liver disease. What will the UK Government do to address this?"

She sent me an email today saying she was sorry that today sees the funeral of another victim of contaminated blood.

As the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) and my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan) have pointed out, the Scottish Infected Blood Forum has identified 25 families resident in Scotland who would be covered under the proposed UK Government scheme, as the original incident took place while they were resident elsewhere in the UK. Therefore, MPs representing constituencies in Scotland may find themselves representing constituents with two distinct offers of compensation. That is not fair—it is completely unjust.

The Haemophilia Society has sent an email, which I think the Father of the House has touched on, about the differences between the UK and Scottish Government proposals. It is worth emphasising those differences for the benefit of those watching these proceedings. Those in the rest of the UK with advanced HIV or hepatitis C will get £12,000 less in annual payments. Those elsewhere in the UK who are co-infected with hepatitis C and HIV will get £7,000 less in annual payments, and there will be limited or no support available for the widows, partners and children of those infected. There will be substantially reduced ongoing support for those elsewhere in the UK.

The Scottish Government have, in effect, committed to almost doubling the support they give to victims, widows and widowers, and dependent children. The Haemophilia Society is concerned that, without significant revisions to their proposals, the UK Government will fail to follow the example set by the Scottish Government in offering victims of this terrible tragedy and their families the support they deserve. I hope that Ministers in this place recognise that and that they will address the issue.

There is now a very real concern that the UK Government have broken their promise to deliver improvements to the current scheme of payments. In early 2015, the Prime Minister said:

"I want us to take action. I am not sure whether that action will ever fully satisfy those who want this wrong to be righted, but as a wealthy and successful country we should be helping these people more. We will help them more, but we need Penrose first, and if I am standing here after the next election it will be done."—[*Official Report*, 11 March 2015; Vol. 594, c. 289.]

Where do we go from here? The First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, who represents part of my constituency in the Scottish Parliament, has summed it up beautifully:

"In total, of course, hundreds of people in Scotland died after being infected through blood transfusions and even after all this time it is still hard to imagine the difficulties, the anxieties, and the hardships that people and their families have had to contend with.

In addition to dealing with the illness itself, you've had to cope with uncertainty, with sorrow, and with grief. Many people, of course, feel stigmatised despite being utterly blameless. And I know that people still fight daily battles, both physical and physiological, to achieve some kind of normality in their lives... We as a society have a moral obligation to help people who are infected with an illness by the Health Service".

Let us use those words as a guide to how we take this issue forward, compensate the victims and their families, and provide for them what they truly deserve.

5.47 pm

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): It was 1958 when Dr Garrott Allen at Stanford started discovering the risks of contamination in blood. Over the next 20 to 30 years, he spent his time trying to persuade people that commercial blood companies probably knew early on—they certainly knew later on—that one in seven of those from whom they were taking donations was at high risk of contamination. It was not until 1991 that Crown immunity was lifted from the blood products laboratory. If people look at the taintedblood.info website, they will see the chronology, which is pretty accurate and very useful.

That does not solve the problem faced by the Government, Members of Parliament and those affected. I propose that, while the national health service should be treating people, responsibility for dealing with the compensation and trying to make up for the costs to those affected should be taken away from the Department of Health and held jointly by the Cabinet Office and the Treasury. I think that that is the only way of solving the problem of Scotland having to determine where those affected got the infection, rather than their actual situation and where they live. If we are going to have a national approach that not only recognises the autonomy of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish health service but treats people fairly, we have to find a way of getting the non-health aspects away from the Department of Health. I ask the Government to consider whether there is any way of doing that effectively.

Moving on to how people should be treated, I have received a message from someone on behalf of the nearly 200 co-infected people and the 2,220 mono-infected hep C stage 1 victims. Here are some words directly:

"Now about the way they are blackmailing us over the drugs!

I and every other Haemophilic have never paid for our Factor VIII, I have never paid for any of my HIV anti viral drugs, and my other prescription charges are covered by a pre payment certificate, my blood tests, ultrasounds scan, Fibroskans, and all my appointments are covered by the NHS? So why would they even consider asking us if we think the money should come out of the additional £100 Million they have offered as financial help?"

The answer to that is that it should not. By the way, to those for whom the proposals on which the Government are consulting would lead to a reduction in income, the Government certainly should say that they need to be red-circled—that their money will remain the way it

is—and no one should have their money reduced as a result of the changes. We are trying to extend help to people, not to reduce it.

I turn to another quote:

“Co-infected Haemophiliacs need a voice in the debate, we are so few left, dealing with two virus as you know has increased complications. We need to be respected and remembered as are the Scottish Haemophiliacs in the midst of all the mono Hep C victims.

Being co-infected with HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C is the equivalent of 2nd stage Hepatitis C, but at the top end where someone has received a liver transplant, has a limited life expectancy and has to take medication every day for the rest of their lives or die, but the co-infected also has the additional problems of having the illnesses both these viruses can cause—even to the point doctors cannot tell which virus is causing the problem. On top of this we have the life-long secrecy and stigma attached to HIV/AIDS virus.”

It seems to me that we have got to say to Government that they may be trying more now than Governments have tried before, but it is not appropriate for Department of Health Ministers to have to balance this against other treatments. It must come out of the Department of Health so that the money can go properly to those who have suffered because we made mistakes and the American blood companies made mistakes. We need to recognise that. I am not talking about liability; I am trying to deal with what should happen now.

As it happens, the first person in my family to take an AIDS test was my mother, who had a serious operation and received lots of blood. The second was my wife, who received eight units of blood in 1975 when the issue started to come out. I have my blood tested for HIV/AIDS and hep every 10 weeks as a blood donor. I only wish that we had remembered what Richard Titmuss said in his book about giving blood, “The Gift Relationship”. We do it for free, and we do not know who is going to benefit. The people who benefit do not know where the blood comes from, but at least it comes from people who have been tested to make sure that it is safe for our blood to be passed on.

5.52 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I add my thanks and congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) on what she has said today and on her outstanding leadership on this issue. She will be encouraged by the commonality of view—it goes further than consensus—across the House, and I hope that the Minister will take note. Back-Bench debates are often not party political, but I cannot remember another debate in which Members’ sympathies have been so clearly at one. I am sure that many Members feel, as I do, quite let down by the consultation. I will not personalise the matter by referring to the Minister. It is a Government responsibility, and this Government are now in power.

We need to bear some basic facts in mind. This is an NHS scandal. The Secretary of State, perhaps more than any other Secretary of State, has been keen to identify where things have gone wrong with hospitals, practitioners and events in the NHS, and to point the finger and say that what happened was not right. This is the clearest case of that, and it is the biggest scandal in the NHS. We are talking about innocent victims. Many of us—even if the Government do not admit

it—believe that there has been negligence and there is culpability, but I think we all agree that there is a moral responsibility.

I hope that we all still believe in the welfare state that was set up after the second world war, and that we all think that the state should act as a safety net. The matter goes further than that, however; it is about state error. It is about the state making mistakes that it is bound to correct. The state has made a variety of mistakes—Equitable Life, flooding and many others—after which it has been able to dig into its pockets and find money because it believes that there is a compelling case for doing so. Perhaps a closer analogy is mesothelioma. Mesothelioma victims have not had the complete compensation that they need, but at least the responsibility to make provision for those people has been recognised, even if one cannot point the finger and say that it is anybody’s fault in particular.

I want to say that this has been a very long struggle. I have been engaged in it only since my constituency boundaries changed in 2010 and I found that I had some sufferers, victims of incidents of contaminated blood, in my constituency. Since then, I have been pretty active as a Member by taking part in meetings, debates, reviews and the all-party group. There have been some important interventions. I credit the Minister for Community and Social Care for the work he has tried to do, and the Prime Minister for the apology he made in relation to that. There have also been concessions, such as that the existing schemes are inadequate and badly run, and that there are too many of them.

We have asked for a full and final settlement, for the overall impact on victims to be assessed and for each victim and their family to be dealt with as individuals, so I do not think that we expected to be in the position we are today. It is a position in which the Haemophilia Society can write quite baldly that

“the majority of people currently receiving financial support will be worse off under the new scheme.”

How did we get into this situation?

If I and other Members feel let down, what do our constituents feel? What do people such as my constituent Andrew March feel? His whole life has been fundamentally altered by this. His health, his life expectancy, his earnings ability and his career, as well as aspirational things such as the ability to own his own home and to live a normal life—I thought the Government believed in them—are all out of his reach now. This is a fundamental change, but it has been going on not for years but for decades.

I would say to the Minister that the issue of reduced income must be looked at in full, whether that reduction is because of discretionary payments or other reasons, as must the overall impact on the individual and their family, and the implications, more widely than simply health, on their whole lifestyle. We should not confuse treatment, including the good and innovative schemes that are now available—anybody should receive such treatment from the NHS, to which we all pay in, as of right—with paying proper compensation and ensuring that people are properly rewarded.

Let me end by making two quick points. First, it has been said that Scotland has set an example. It is not a perfect example, but I strongly believe that we should at least be able to match what happens in Scotland. Secondly,

[*Andy Slaughter*]

my constituents have told me that they do not feel comfortable filling in responses to the consultation. They do not believe the consultation is presented clearly and honestly, and the questions are phrased so prescriptively that they are unable to communicate what they think. The Government can do what they want—it would have been better if they had withdrawn the consultation, but that has not happened—but they do have the power to respond by saying, “We have made a mistake. We haven’t taken into account everything that should be done. We have to act with compassion and with honesty, and we have to give proper compensation.”

Finally, I must say that I disagree, as I rarely do, with the hon. and gallant Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). This is about justice, and justice can be delivered by recognising the needs of the community who have been infected in this way. I think that the Government have a duty to act.

5.58 pm

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I am very glad to be able to participate in this very important debate. I thank the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for securing it.

I am slightly sad to have to say this, but it is a shame that the debate is happening at this time of day. I know that constituents of many MPs around the country have travelled a long way to come to Parliament today. Some of my constituents were in the Gallery earlier, having got up at 3 o’clock this morning to come down from Glasgow, but they have had to leave to fly back up and go back to work. [*Interruption.*] I appreciate that, as the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Battersea (Jane Ellison), says, it was the Speaker’s decision. I am just reflecting on the fact that that is quite sad, and perhaps the procedures of the House should be looked at, particularly when already vulnerable constituents who do not have an awful lot of money have had to travel a great distance to hear what their MPs have to say. I went to join the lobby outside earlier this afternoon and spent a lot of time speaking to people, and their sense of frustration at having to wait so long for justice was compounded by their not being able to stay for the whole of this debate, after waiting for so long for a chance to come to the House to listen to us.

To move on to the more substantive issues, many of us are wearing ribbons given to us by the campaigners, so I will tell members of the public who may be watching at home what the ribbons mean. The red is for sufferers of HIV, the yellow is for people who have suffered from hep C, and the black is to remember those who have died waiting during this process. It is very profound to see the number of people who have lost their lives, over the piece, waiting for justice and for some answers.

The constituent of mine who was here today is Maria Armour. She contracted hep C in 1981 when she suffered a miscarriage in hospital and needed a blood transfusion. She did not find out that she had been infected until she turned about 35; she took ill and had to find out what was wrong. People did not know and could not tell her. She had to wait two years for a diagnosis, when she found out that she had hep C. The treatment that she began at that time further compounded her ill health.

She now has fibromyalgia and lupus, and also has issues with her bowels. That causes her great distress. She cannot go out and her life is on hold.

Despite all that, Maria is a very inspiring individual. I spoke to her today. She continues to campaign. She, like many people, has dedicated her life to others, and now wants to be able to spend time with her family rather than having to continue to fight this fight. I asked her what she would like to be highlighted this afternoon in the brief time available to us. She said that she is looking for fair and equal treatment. She does not want to be a charity case—to have to go to funds such as the Caxton Foundation, or send them begging letters for very simple things that most of us would take for granted.

In particular, Maria mentioned that she was turning 50. She applied for funds for a dress to wear to her 50th birthday party, because, unlike many of us, she did not have the general funds to go out to the shop and buy herself a dress. She has to put in three quotes for that dress—they choose which dress she gets—and gets vouchers to pay for it. She mentioned that when, in the past, she has asked for furniture, she had to have vouchers, so she had to go to the shop to buy the furniture and count out all those vouchers in the shop, in front of people, to pay for it. That is very stigmatising. It is unfair that people have to do that, and do not get money, which the rest of us have to go and buy the things we need to make our lives easier. She has a lack of choices in her life. She cannot go on holiday with her grandchildren, as she would like to. She does not have the funds to do all the things she would like.

It would be easier for many people in Maria’s situation if they got the fair funding that they deserve. I am glad that the Scottish Government have recognised that funding should be available at a higher level. It has been said that it is a shame that constituents in England, and the few in Scotland who are affected, will not get that higher level, but that is not an unfairness on the part of the Scottish Government. They have recognised the issue, listened to people, consulted, and done a lot of work, and have decided what they think is fair. The ball is now in the UK Government’s court—they need to decide what is fair.

Some people have waited a long time—in the case raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Dr Monaghan), 42 years—since the initial infection. They need to have what is fair and what is due to them. They are not at fault here. We need to recognise that and find the funds to enable those people to live their lives with dignity as we wish to live our own lives. People should not in any case have to write begging letters to get what they need to live their life with dignity. I commend that point to the House.

6.3 pm

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): First, I pay tribute to my predecessor, Jim Dobbin, who worked tirelessly on this issue on behalf of his and my constituents in Heywood and Middleton.

As many Members have already identified, this scandal has affected thousands of people who were infected with hepatitis C and HIV through NHS blood products in the 1970s and 1980s. It has been described as “the worst treatment disaster in the history of the NHS”,

and was responsible for the deaths of thousands of haemophilia patients. It has, quite simply, been a nightmare for sufferers and their families. It is a nightmare that continues. It has taken away the careers, hopes, dreams and aspirations of thousands of people, including constituents of mine, just because they needed blood.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) and the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Jason McCartney), the co-chairs of the all-party group on haemophilia and contaminated blood. Their inquiry into current support for those affected by the contaminated blood scandal in the UK is a superb analysis. The current system for administering compensation is a nightmare and a scandal in itself. We are still in the absurd position of having five trusts, two private companies and three registered charities which give various kinds of assistance to the people affected. The people who should be helped most, the victims, are very far from happy with the present situation.

The all-party group's report highlights that many beneficiaries are in poverty. At present, the widows and widowers of hepatitis C infectees receive no ongoing financial support whatever. The majority of people with hepatitis C—namely, those with chronic stage 1 hepatitis C—also receive no ongoing payments. People can apply for discretionary payments for all manner of items through the three charities, but, as has already been highlighted, many find the process of having to provide evidence of need for help deeply frustrating. They feel as though they are begging. Registrants report being left completely in the dark about what discretionary support is available to them. This has meant that some people have not received payments they were entitled to. Many more people with hepatitis C are aware of the trusts' existence, with considerable issues of low take-up. Many people with hepatitis C are unable to obtain payments from their trusts because the NHS has lost their hospital records, or because the trust has denied they are at the sufficient stage of hepatitis C infection to warrant support, even though their own hepatologists have insisted that they are.

The report recommends that the Government second a public health doctor to the five trusts to ascertain the needs of beneficiaries and set Government funding at the level commensurate with need. This also means extending some form of ongoing payments to those with stage 1 hepatitis C and giving the widows of hepatitis C infectees entitlement to the same payments as those of HIV infectees. The trust system has to be reformed and nobody should be left in the dark: they should be told precisely what support is available to them. Those facing difficulties providing proof that they were infected should also be able to get help with their applications.

During the Westminster Hall debate on contaminated blood on 9 September 2015, the Minister was questioned on the commencement date of the public consultation on support for those affected by infected blood. She stated it would occur before the end of the year. It was announced on 21 January 2016. The statement on the launch of the public consultation announced funding of £100 million for the proposals set out in the consultation. That is in addition to the current spend and the £25 million already announced in 2015. The Department of Health previously estimated £455 million as the future cost of

meeting payments for the assorted schemes. It is not clear whether the £125 million is in addition to that, or represents projected funding being brought forward.

We wish to know how the Department of Health intends to distribute the £125 million. I appreciate that the consultation has not concluded yet, but a rough outline would be appreciated. Is it intended to end all discretionary or top-up payments to those who receive ongoing payments? Are there plans to allow special discretionary payments for dependants—either partners or children? Will there be a review mechanism regarding the freezing of the level of payments at £15,000, or will the sum remain at £15,000 regardless?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Just before I call the hon. Member for South Down (Ms Ritchie), I should emphasise that I want to be able to call the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) by 6.26 pm. I am sure the hon. Lady will factor that into the equation.

6.9 pm

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for bringing forward this debate, along with the co-signatories. I was pleased to be one of them.

Today's debate is the latest in a number of discussions we have held in the Chamber and Westminster Hall on the support arrangements required for people infected with contaminated blood. I pay tribute to the many advocates throughout the UK on the vexatious subject of tainted blood and to the Haemophilia Society. The right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) said there was striking unanimity across the Chamber that this was not a party political issue but one that impacted on the lives of many people, not only the direct victims but the families, spouses, partners and children who, in many instances, have become carers. It has forced many people into poverty and destitution, which should never have been the case.

There has been a renewed urgency to this debate, particularly since last July's urgent question, and in that regard I would like to put on the record my thanks to and praise for the work of the all-party group on haemophilia and contaminated blood. However, I would not overstate that urgency, given that publication of the consultation has been repeatedly delayed since its announcement last July and the Prime Minister's apology on 25 March last year. None the less, I welcome the long-awaited publication of the consultation. I do not necessarily agree with many of the contents, but it is one further step to a full and final settlement for the victims of this tragedy and their families.

Sadly, many have died from their viruses, and for others, every additional day they live is a bonus. This must be dealt with comprehensively once and for all. Let no one be in any doubt: there is no scope for delay. We have spoken at length in previous debates about the impact that the use of contaminated blood products imported back in the 1970s and 1980s has had on people's lives. Lives have been devastated following the contraction of hepatitis C or HIV as a direct result of these contaminated products.

[Ms Margaret Ritchie]

I have spoken before, in Westminster Hall, about one of my constituents, Brian Carberry, from my local town of Downpatrick. I grew up with him and his family. He and his brothers were born with haemophilia. He received blood transfusions in the 1970s and 1980s, and as a result, his health condition became particularly complicated and he ended up with hepatitis C. Only five or six months ago, he was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer for which he now receives an aggressive form of chemotherapy.

I have also met two other constituents, twin brothers, from South Down, Michael and Seamus Sloane, who have met many difficult health, financial and interpersonal relationship challenges as a result of their haemophilia combined with contaminated blood transfusions. Their lives have been turned upside down. In all our meetings, they asked for a full and final settlement for people like them. It struck me what amazing advocates they were: they took a very sunny approach, they saw a better day ahead. But that better day ahead can be achieved only if the Minister indicates unequivocally that there will be a full and final settlement for people like my constituents and the many others described in this debate.

Mims Davies (Eastleigh) (Con) *rose—*

Ms Ritchie: I am sorry, but I cannot take any interventions because time is limited.

The health problems that thousands face as a result of this tragedy have been exacerbated by the distress and uncertainty around the support arrangements. Irrespective of how bad things have been, I would urge the Minister, having listened to the reasoned demands of Members of all parties, to state clearly that there will be a full and final settlement, that there will be proper transitional arrangements hereafter, and that people so affected will have the right and direct access to the medication required to help them live with their medical conditions, while the families affected by these problems will also be helped. The tragedy of this scandal must be ended and a curtain must be drawn on it.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP) *rose—*

Mr Speaker: Order. I think three minutes will suffice for the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). The hon. Members for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) and for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) have still to contribute, and we must try now to get back in time. It falls to the hon. Member for Strangford to exercise Executive leadership in the matter.

6.15 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is a pleasure to make a few comments in the debate. Let me first thank the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for setting the scene so well.

Let me start by quoting:

“You can’t give us back our health. But you can give us back our dignity. This tortured road has been too long for many of us. But for the rest of us, please let this be the final road to closure.” Imagine going to a British hospital in a British city in the middle of one of the richest and most advanced countries in the world for an operation or procedure,

and looking forward to getting home, but through no fault of your own, coming out infected with haemophilia or worse. We just cannot imagine what that must be like. For that reason, we must do everything we can to give people back their dignity, as one victim said to the all-party parliamentary group.

The current trusts and systems are not working as well as they could, and they are talking of doing away with aspects of the support for those affected. That is simply outrageous. Of course there are people affected by hepatitis who had nothing to do with the contaminated blood. I understand that we are talking about some 40,000 people across the country, and sadly there is an ever-growing number in Northern Ireland. Scotland has a strong track record through its “Sexual Health and Blood Borne Virus Framework”. It has set an example for the rest of the United Kingdom to follow.

Let me conclude quickly with these five points, because I am conscious of the timescale you have set me, Mr Speaker. The survivors are calling for a full public inquiry to be held under the Inquiries Act 2005 to investigate fully the events that led to thousands of British haemophiliacs and others with bleeding disorders becoming superinfected with a multitude of viruses and pathogens over many years. Full compensation for haemophiliacs and others with bleeding disorders and their families should be awarded in such a way that closure can be achieved for the majority of those infected and affected, including the widows and dependants of those who have died.

The right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) made an important point about the families. He said we should not forget them, and we are all saying the same thing. We hope that the Minister will respond to that, and we want a full and comprehensive acknowledgement by the Prime Minister. He has apologised, but the apology has been lost in the delays that there have been. There are also lessons to be learned from what happened to the haemophiliacs, and measures should be put in place to protect the patients of the future. There have been missed warnings, failures to pass on test results to patients, procedural errors and non-consensual testing.

Let me conclude. Imagine being one of those innocent people, and imagine the difference that delivery on some of these aspects would make. As the testimony I quoted earlier said:

“You can’t give us back our health. But you can give us back our dignity. This tortured road has been too long for many of us. But for the rest of us, please let this be the final road to closure.”

On such a sensitive matter, we need to be able to give our full empathy and sympathy to those affected. I really believe that the Government need to deliver.

6.18 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): We have paid tribute to many of the people who have come from across the UK to listen to today’s debate, but there is one group missing: members of Haemophilia Scotland, who are in Tayside attending a funeral of one of their members, the second of three brothers who have haemophilia. The remaining brother has had a transplant because of liver damage. I expect that everyone here would want to send their condolences to the family.

Let us recall that this scandal has been going on for over 40 years. People have been dying without being recognised and without being looked after for all that time. It really is a disgrace. We talk about not accepting liability. I have my specs on because I want to read out some quotations, which, as Members know, I do not normally do. I have a letter here. According to a leading doctor in the Food and Drug Administration in America, in May 1985, heat treatment of blood products had been available for some time, but non-heat-treated blood could continue to be produced with the current licences because the FDA was not going to do anything about it. It could have regulated the practice out, but it wanted things to be tidied up quietly. The doctor explained that although the FDA could revoke the licences through regulatory process, it did not want any attention to be paid to the fact that the practice had been allowed to continue for so long; it wanted the issue to be

“quietly solved without alerting the Congress, the medical community and the public.”

I have a copy of a letter from John Major, the former Prime Minister, who was at the time Chief Secretary to the Treasury. In 1997, he wrote to Tony Newton, then a Health Minister, raising the possible consequences of a sympathetic response to the Haemophilia Society:

“It could lead to an open-ended commitment of huge dimensions and

“give rise to court action against the Government because of the implication of negligence”.

He asked Tony Newton to “consider the points” made by the society, but

“with no implication that the Government will take action.”

Here we are, nearly 30 years on, in almost exactly the same situation.

As has frequently been mentioned, this is the biggest treatment disaster in the NHS, and it happened because we were importing American coagulation products and American blood—blood taken from prisoners, or units of blood that were sold. Who sells their blood for donation? People living on the streets; people who are drug addicts. The main reason haemophiliacs and others are suffering is that making factor VIII meant using the blood products of multiple donors, which meant an increase in the risk of a positive result. Moreover, the haemophiliacs received those products over and over again.

Here we are, all these years on. When I graduated in 1982, and when I worked as a young surgeon throughout the 1980s, this was just beginning to emerge and be discovered. It certainly left me, as a surgeon, with an absolute fear of transfusing blood. I used to go to great lengths to use electrocautery and other techniques to avoid shedding blood in elective cases, because we did not know what other problems were there.

Some of my colleagues have drawn attention to the exact terms of the Scottish settlement, but the first three can be summarised thus. People who are suffering from hepatitis C, HIV or co-infection will receive more money, allowing them to receive at least the equivalent of an average income of £27,000. People with stage 1 hepatitis C will receive £50,000 instead of £20,000, and those who have received compensation of £20,000 in the past will be eligible for £30,000 now. It is totally accepted by the Scottish Government that focusing solely on cirrhosis is a rather bizarre way of assessing people, and

they are entirely open to an evidence-based piece of work in the future looking into how people should really be assessed.

I think that one of the biggest differences in Scotland is the recognition of the bereaved families. They will receive the money for another year, and will then receive a lifelong pension of 75%. Our flexible fund will continue to be topped up to the point of £1 million a year. As has already been said, that will not give people back their lives, but it can allow them to live with dignity.

The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) and the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) suggested, with a degree of criticism, that Scotland had gone ahead rather than seeking a United Kingdom solution. How long should we wait? Scotland was criticised because although we were ready to screen blood in 1990, we waited until 1991 so that there would be UK screening of blood donations. We made that mistake then, and we cannot make it again now.

Norman Lamb: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Dr Whitford: I am sorry, but I do not have enough time.

I do not think that we would be debating this matter with the same urgency if there were not the contrast with what Scotland is doing. This is not just about financial support and recognition. All patients in Scotland with hepatitis C for whom Sofosbuvir is appropriate can receive it. I find it shocking that people in England who have been infected with contaminated blood should have to use any of their funding to buy a drug that can increase their quality of life and reduce the risk of giving the condition to their family. We are doing this not just for those patients but as a public health measure. If we reduce the burden of virus in the community, we will reduce the number of new cases.

A year ago, the Prime Minister and our First Minister responded to the Penrose inquiry. That inquiry was carried out in Scotland; the UK has never had a public inquiry on this matter. Both of them apologised, and our First Minister has used this first year to set up a group to look into changing support, and ensuring that people can access treatment and that families are recognised. I call on the Prime Minister to honour his apology and to ensure that patients in the rest of the UK receive the same treatment.

6.25 pm

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): I start by paying tribute to the 21 hon. and right hon. Members who have today provided a strong voice for the victims of contaminated blood. In particular, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), who has been tireless in her pursuit of justice. I remember her forceful arguments when she asked an urgent question on the subject about a year ago, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) responded on the Opposition's behalf, and when she asked her urgent question in December, to which I responded for the Opposition. She does real credit to the cause of those who are suffering as a result of this scandal. We must never ever forget the personal tragedies behind scandals such as

[Andrew Gwynne]

this one, and I want to pay tribute to the families who have travelled down here today to listen to the debate. They deserve their day in Parliament, and I hope that the Minister will carefully consider the points that have been raised by all Members and by the families of the victims.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I apologise for not being here throughout the debate; I was chairing a Committee elsewhere in the building. Would my hon. Friend accept that one of the defining characteristics of the modern world is that we have an expectation that an individual, a company or a Government will accept responsibility when things go wrong, and that they will accept the consequences of taking that responsibility? Does he agree that it is high time the Government accepted responsibility in this case?

Andrew Gwynne: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I will come on to that point later. We owe it to the victims and their families to find some kind of justice for them.

I am not frequently on the same side as the editorial line taken by the *Sunday Express*, but I congratulate that newspaper on its tireless campaign for justice. This scandal has seen families torn apart through death and illness caused by the negligence of public bodies. I am willing to accept that, over the years, the response of Governments of all colours has just not been good enough. When the consultation was published in January, I was clear that while no amount of money could ever make up for the impact that this tragedy has had on people's lives, the victims deserved some form of justice. We have three days until the consultation closes and I want to use my remarks to push the Minister on four points relating to the current proposals.

First, in the 1970s and 1980s, around 7,500 people were infected with hepatitis C or HIV as a result of this scandal. Many of those people were being treated for haemophilia. The viruses have had a devastating impact on their lives and those of their families, not least through loss of earnings and the cost of treatment. The failure of successive Governments to accept liability for this issue means that many of the victims have lost financial security through no fault of their own.

Mims Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Gwynne: I am afraid that I will not; I do not have enough time now.

The current system of support is only partial; it does not offer the full and final settlement that those affected and their families need in order to live with dignity. Indeed, it falls well below the level of support available in the Republic of Ireland.

We must be honest that the development of support, financial or otherwise, for the victims has been haphazard over the years, and support is always delivered too slowly. However, I remain concerned about aspects of the Government's proposals. A number of those affected have made it clear to me that removing discretionary payments will make them worse off, potentially by thousands of pounds a year. It makes little sense to announce more funding for a reformed scheme only to

remove the critical day-to-day support that so many people rely on. I wrote to the Minister a few weeks ago on that point, so she will know that this is a basic issue of fairness and openness. The victims of the contaminated blood scandal deserve better than this, so I will be grateful if the Minister confirms what is intended for the future of the payments.

Secondly, I welcome the introduction of support for people at stage 1, as so far they have been denied the annual payments to which they should be entitled, but I want to ensure that the impact that a person's illness has had on other areas of their lives, such as employment or educational opportunities, will be taken into account. Many people have had their professional lives cut short or have missed out on higher education, so I hope that the impact on quality of life will be considered as a fundamental part of the settlement. Furthermore, an assessment every three years strikes me as excessive given that, generally speaking, these conditions will not improve. Many beneficiaries will be receiving either employment and support allowance or personal independence payments and will be regularly assessed for them, so it is unnecessary and punitive to impose a further layer of assessment on the victims. Why not have some form of joined-up approach with the Department for Work and Pensions to make life easier?

Thirdly, I am concerned about the plans to freeze the existing annual payments. Many victims of the scandal had promising careers cut short or were not given the chance to embark on one after being infected. They had that taken away from them in the most damaging of circumstances, and it is just plain wrong of the Government to fail to recognise the loss of standard of living, as well as the effects on health and longevity.

Finally, I want to mention the discrepancies between the responses of the Scottish and UK Governments. As we have heard, the Scottish Government will increase annual payments for those with HIV or the hepatitis C virus, increasing the initial lump sum from £20,000 to £50,000. Will the Minister elaborate on what alignment there might be with the English system?

I do not doubt the sincerity of the Prime Minister when he made a pre-election pledge to do more after the publication of the Penrose report, nor that of the public health Minister, who is doing her best with a constrained spending envelope, but I am sure that she will understand the real disappointment that people have been feeling. This drawn-out process has only exacerbated the despondency in the community. Will the Minister tell me when any new scheme will be implemented? The community of people affected need assurances that any improvements to the system will be introduced as soon as possible and sustained long beyond that. Will she commit to a debate in Government time to allow for appropriate scrutiny of the package? We should have a full day of discussions on the matter once the Government have responded to the consultation.

I am sure that the public health Minister appreciates that the longer this goes on, the longer we leave in place a system that does not work and leaves victims without adequate support. No amount of money will ever fully make up for what happened, but we owe to those still living with the consequences the dignity of a decent lasting settlement. It is time to act.

6.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): I thank the shadow Minister and the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), the SNP spokeswoman, for granting me a little of their time to respond to many of the points made during this excellent debate. I congratulate members of the all-party parliamentary group on haemophilia and contaminated blood, in particular the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson), on securing the debate and on their campaigning work, to which tributes have rightly been paid. I also wish to thank those who have taken considerable time and trouble, and made considerable efforts, to travel down to London today to express their feelings to their Members of Parliament; some have been able to stay to listen to the debate. I am going to spend as much of my time as possible responding to as many of the factual questions I have been asked as I can, so let me move swiftly on to that.

The consultation on infected blood scheme reform seeks views on what a reformed scheme should look like. This is the first public consultation on this matter by a Government, although there have been other consultations led by parliamentarians. Obviously, it has attracted a lot of interest from Members, as indicated by the presence of those contributing today. I know that many Members, myself included, have had personal frustrations and concerns expressed to them over many years by constituents.

Members will appreciate that, as the consultation is still open, I am not in a position to give any commitments or guarantees on the shape of scheme reform today. Indeed, I want to reassure the House that no decisions on scheme reform will be made until the consultation has closed and all the responses have been carefully analysed. I have listened with keen interest to the various points that have been made and I will carefully consider the contents of this debate, alongside the responses to the consultation.

None the less, I am aware that there are some concerns—they have been expressed today—about the consultation and some of the proposals, and I will try to address those today. First, let me deal with any lack of clarity on the additional funding committed. To be clear, when I launched the consultation I announced £100 million of new funding for the scheme. That is in addition to the current spend of about £22 million per year and the £25 million announced by the Prime Minister in March 2015, so it will more than double our annual spend on the scheme in England over the next five years.

To date, we have spent more than £390 million on support for those affected, and the additional funds I have announced bring the budget for the next five years to £237 million. That means that, over the lifetime of the schemes, we project that more than £1 billion will be spent on support for those affected. The money comes from the Department of Health budget—I hear the points that have been made about where people think the money should come from, but that is where it is coming from and that is the funding we have been able to identify. We are more than doubling the budget for the next five years. This financial assistance is voluntarily provided by Government to help those infected and their dependants. I wish to ensure, and the key aim of the scheme is to ensure, that the money is distributed in a fair and equitable way within that

budget envelope and within the legal framework within which I am working, in a way that is also sustainable for the future.

With that in mind, I want to emphasise to Members and to the House that this is a truly open consultation; I genuinely want to hear from all those who have been affected. It has been very useful for me to hear the points made in this debate. I want to hear what support would be most beneficial within the parameters I have set out.

To give some idea of how widely we reached to try to get responses to the consultation, I should say that letters have been sent to all 3,482 registrants of the existing schemes to make them aware of the consultation and provide them with details of how to access it. Letters were also sent to almost 180 Members who have at various times, by various means, contacted us on behalf of constituents over the past year or so, and they have been urged to respond, too. We have already received more than 1,200 responses to the consultation, and I hope that reassures some Members, including the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), who were worried that people might have found the consultation difficult to respond to. That is a very good level of response and it is enormously helpful. I am very pleased that so many people have taken the time to feed their views into the process. It might be helpful and, I hope, reassuring for Members to know that a specific team in the Department has been established to ensure that every response is read in full and captured in the analysis, and given that respectful hearing to which one Member referred.

It has been very valuable in the contributions to the consultation we have already received to hear from the quieter voices in the affected community that I have spoken of before. Indeed, I have been struck—in some ways shocked—by the number of affected individuals who were not aware of some of the support potentially available to them, such as the discretionary financial support and non-financial support provided by the three charitable scheme bodies. That has reinforced my sense, which I think is shared across the House—I say that especially in the light of today's debate—that scheme reform is necessary, especially with a view to simplification and transparency. That point was put very ably by the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes). There are still a few days left in which to submit responses, and I encourage anyone who has not responded but would like to do so to respond before midnight on 15 April.

Let me turn to some of the proposals in the consultation. I know that some of the charitable scheme bodies wrote to their beneficiaries to help clarify the consultation proposals, but some of the nuances were lost in the letters. A number of speakers, including my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray), have reinforced that point. Let me confirm that the crux of the consultation is the proposal that every chronically infected individual would, for the first time, receive an annual payment under a reformed scheme. At the moment, those who are registered with the Skipton Fund at hepatitis C stage 1—that is 2,424 people, which is more than 70% of the total number of infected registrants—are not eligible for annual financial support. We are proposing a new annual payment for everyone in that group, reflective of the level of ill health they experience.

[Jane Ellison]

Should the proposal be taken forward, we anticipate that a large proportion of the additional money committed will be used to provide these new payments.

The proposed reforms would continue annual payments to those who currently receive them, which is, approximately 840 people. Those who are currently registered with the Skipton Fund at hepatitis C stage 2, and those with HIV registered with MFET Ltd would have their payments increased to a rate of £15,000 annually, and those co-infected with HIV and hep C would benefit from an uplift to £30,000. That means that, over the next 10 years, someone with hepatitis C stage 2 would receive £150,000 in addition to any payments they have received to date. Someone co-infected would receive £300,000 in addition to the support they have already received. None of those payments is taxable, nor does it affect a person's entitlement to any state benefits.

There has been mention of the link to the consumer prices index. I know that there is some concern about the proposal to remove the linkage to CPI. CPI linkage can result in an annual increase or, in theory at least, a decrease in payments. This year, CPI was negative, but we decided to freeze payments to ensure that support for infected individuals did not decrease as a result. Fixing the payments at a set rate would provide more financial certainty over this spending review period for those receiving annual payments. However, I will take very careful account of the concerns that have been raised in response to the consultation when making my final decision on this matter.

Norman Lamb *rose*—

Jane Ellison: I will give way if the right hon. Gentleman is really brief.

Norman Lamb: The Minister has explained that many people will benefit, but will there also be losers? If there are, will she write to confirm how much they will lose by and how many people will be involved?

Jane Ellison: I cannot give the right hon. Gentleman that clarity today, and there is a specific reason for that.

I will move on to discretionary support for infected individuals. Obviously, I have heard the concerns—I have had a number of letters and held a number of meetings. Some people came to the surgery that I organised. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North was not able to make it, but other Members came and talked about this point. In the consultation, we did propose providing discretionary payments only for travel and accommodation costs. We addressed this issue because, prior to launching the consultation, one of the main criticisms of the current system raised by different groups of beneficiaries and their MPs and by the all-party group was that discretionary grants and the process of applying for them was “demeaning”.

However, I am aware that, through the consultation responses, a number of beneficiaries are troubled by the consultation question on discretionary payment, and those voices have been heard today. In principle, discretionary support should be means-tested, which means that it will vary with circumstances over time. However, it has become clear that, through the independent charitable schemes, a relatively small number of individuals

are receiving regular and significant levels of discretionary—as opposed to regular—support. I encourage anyone who feels that they are in this position, or would lose out as a result of the consultation proposals on discretionary support, to reply to the consultation explaining that. No decisions have been made about some of the other discretionary elements on which Members have touched. I hope that clarifies the distinction between our assessment of the impact of annual payments and the impact of discretionary payments, some of which could not be known to us because they were put out through independent charitable schemes.

I welcome any suggestions that respondents may have in relation to the proposals and what would be of benefit to them. This, along with the rest of the consultation responses, will help us to decide what we might be able to do within the budget. We are well aware that some of the non-financial elements of support, which are currently provided by the charitable schemes, are valued. I want to reassure colleagues that we are entirely open-minded about this provision. As I have emphasised previously, it is up to people to tell us through the consultation what they most value in that non-financial support.

Let me touch on the Scottish reforms. Clearly, that has been quite a key theme today. I have been asked to consider matching the recent reforms. The Scottish Government established a financial review group, as we heard, and they announced their plans on 18 March. The package announced by the Scottish Government differs from the proposals on which the Department is consulting. One major difference is in relation to annual payments provided to infected individuals. The Department of Health proposals for England are intended to ensure long-term stability and security to all infected individuals. The hon. Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) made a point about long-term security and sustainability. To reiterate, in England, there are about 2,400 individuals with hepatitis C stage 1 who do not receive any annual payment. Our proposal is to provide a new ongoing payment to all those individuals that reflects the level of ill health that they experience. The Scottish Government have chosen to provide a lump sum payment.

Sir Gerald Kaufman *rose*—

Jane Ellison: I am really sorry—I will barely get through the points that I have to make.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: Is the hon. Lady going to answer the questions that I put to her?

Jane Ellison: I am sorry. I have made a note in the margin of my speech to respond directly to the point made by the right hon. Gentleman, if I can get to it. I will try to deal with all the points that were made, and if I do not, I will write to Members after the debate.

The Scottish Government have chosen to provide a lump sum payment, and they currently have no proposals for annual payments to the hepatitis C stage 1 group. To give an idea of the difference, in England, over a five-year period, a stage 1 hep C sufferer who currently gets nothing but is awarded the highest proposed annual payment of £15,000 would receive £75,000. Officials from the Department of Health and the Scottish Government continue to exchange views on scheme reform, and we will reflect on the points that have been made today.

Let me touch briefly on the point about Wales and Northern Ireland. It is a matter for the Welsh and Northern Irish Governments to decide how support is provided for those infected in their areas, but they could opt to make the same reforms as the Department of Health and, indeed, participate in some administration arrangements following scheme reform. My officials hosted a meeting on 24 March with officials from each of the devolved Administrations to discuss scheme reform, and they will continue to work with their counterparts from the DAs on that.

Let me touch on treatment. I understand the points that have been made. Since I launched the consultation in January, the NHS has committed to doubling the number of patients treated with new therapies to 10,000 in 2016-17. NHS England has allocated £190 million from its budgets for 2016-17 for rolling out treatment with these new therapies. I will take into account this significant recent development, along with the responses to the consultation, when making decisions on treatment and payment for it from the scheme's allocated fund when the consultation has closed. I have noted the clear steers Members have given me about treatment being taken forward by the NHS. I emphasise, however, that legally, the NHS cannot prioritise patients according to route of infection, and can only do so according to clinical need, as Members will understand.

Turning to where we go next, the outcome of the consultation will be crucial in informing our final decisions on how to proceed. We will analyse and reflect on all the responses, and although the scheduling of a debate is not in my gift I will seek to provide an opportunity for colleagues to discuss the proposals with me before any final decisions are made. I will continue to keep Opposition Front-Bench teams closely informed, as I have sought to do throughout. I give the House, and those affected, my commitment that we will proceed as rapidly as possible to implementation. However, I recognise that any reforms must be implemented in a measured way, to give those affected time to adjust, and at the same time ensure that there is no disruption to the provision of ongoing support.

I said when announcing the consultation that my intention was that the new annual payments for the current stage 1 cohort should be backdated to April—this month—regardless of when an individual's assessment took place. I stress that we are very keen that any assessment is simple and light touch. We do not anticipate any interaction with the benefits system, but I will raise with the Department for Work and Pensions the points made by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne) in his thoughtful contribution. We are aiming for simple, light-touch assessments every few years, and if someone's health deteriorates we want to be able to respond appropriately.

I have tried to address some of the concerns, but I am conscious that I have not covered all of them. After the debate I will review them and respond if I can. I hope the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) will appreciate that I am not able to answer the points that he raised before the end of the debate.

The consultation will be genuinely open and I urge everyone with an interest to respond. I hope to take matters forward in a constructive and open way.

Diana Johnson *rose*—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady will have two minutes because I am here and I will insist on it.

Diana Johnson: I am grateful, Mr Speaker. We have had an excellent debate. We had more than 23 speakers in the three hours that we were allocated. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for giving us that time. I also thank the many people who travelled from all around the country for the debate to listen to what another Member referred to as the striking unanimity across the Chamber about the problems with the consultation proposals that have been put forward. My hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) phrased it well when he said, "Don't tell us you're sorry. Show us you're sorry." That was an excellent phrase.

Finally, let me quote Rudyard Kipling to the Minister. He said:

"Nothing is ever settled until it is settled right."

Mr Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady, who was commendably succinct.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House recognises that the contaminated blood scandal was one of the biggest treatment disasters in the history of the NHS, which devastated thousands of lives; notes that for those affected this tragedy continues to have a profound effect on their lives which has rarely been properly recognised; welcomes the Government's decision to conduct a consultation to reform support arrangements and to commit extra resources to support those affected; further notes, however, that the current Government proposals will leave some people worse off and continue the situation where some of those affected receive no ongoing support; and calls on the Government to take note of all the responses to the consultation and to heed the recommendations of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Haemophilia and Contaminated Blood's Inquiry into the current support arrangements so as to ensure that no-one is worse off, left destitute or applying for individual payments as a result of the proposed changes and that everyone affected by the tragedy, including widows and dependents, receives support commensurate with the decades of suffering and loss of amenity they have experienced.

Transport for London Bill [Lords]

Bill, as amended, considered.

New Clause 1

TfL ASSETS (CONSTRAINTS ON DEVELOPMENT)

(1) TfL, or any subsidiary of TfL, shall not lease land to third parties which:

- (a) has been used in the preceding 10 years,
 - (b) has been considered by TfL in the preceding 10 years as suitable, or
 - (c) is adjacent to land in use or in use in the preceding 10 years, for the provision or maintenance of transport services for passengers.
- (2) Before TfL, or any subsidiary of TfL, enters into a contract involving the development of land for other than the provision or maintenance of transport services for passengers, it must carry out a public consultation seeking views on the impact of so doing.
- (3) Any consultation under subsection (2) must include consultation with:

- (a) local communities likely to be affected,
- (b) the Greater London Authority,
- (c) London boroughs,
- (d) the City of London,
- (e) relevant trade unions'.—(*Andy Slaughter.*)

Brought up, and read the First time.

6.51 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): With this it will be convenient to consider the following:

Amendment 1(P), page 1, (Recitals) leave out lines 6 and 7.

Amendment 9, in clause 1, page 2, line 4, leave out “two” and insert “three”.

Amendment 10, page 2, line 5, at end insert “save as provided for in subsection (3).”

Amendment 11, page 2, line 6, at end insert “save as provided for in subsection (3).”

Amendment 12, page 2, line 6, at end insert—

“(3) Sections 4, 5 and 6 of this Act shall not come into force until the Secretary of State has arranged for, and published the report of, a review of the—

(a) potential risks to the assets of Transport for London arising from the exercise of the relevant powers to be conferred thereby, and

(b) likely effectiveness of measures put in place by Transport for London in mitigation.”

Amendment 13, in clause 3, page 2, line 17, after “TfL”, insert

“following consultation with the Greater London Assembly, and the publication of a report of such, and”.

Amendment 14, page 2, line 19, leave out “two” and insert “three”.

Amendment 15, page 2, line 25, leave out “two” and insert “three”.

Amendment 16, in clause 4, page 2, line 37, at end insert—

“(1A) The consent of the Mayor under subsection (1) may only be granted after the Mayor has consulted, and published a report of such consultation:

- (a) the Greater London Assembly,
- (b) the London boroughs,
- (c) the City of London,
- (d) passenger representative bodies, and
- (e) relevant trades unions.”

Amendment 17, page 2, line 38, leave out “all or any” and insert “no more than 25%”.

Amendment 7, page 2, line 38, leave out from “borrows” to end.

Amendment 8, page 3, line 4, leave out from “borrowed” to “indemnity”.

Amendment 18, page 3, line 13, leave out

“Except for the property identified in the Schedule to this Act”.

Amendment 19, page 3, line 15, at end insert—

“(6A) Any consent of the Secretary of State given under subsection (6) above shall be given in an order made by the Secretary of State.

(6B) A statutory instrument containing (whether alone or with other provisions) an order under subsection (6A) above shall not be made unless a draft of the instrument has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.

(6C) An order under subsection (6A) above shall in each case include-

(a) the land registry title number or numbers of any property or properties to be charged, and

(b) a specification of the proprietor or proprietors of the charge.

(6D) The proprietor or proprietors of the charge under subsection (6C)(b) may not be a joint venture partner of Transport for London or one of its subsidiaries.”

Amendment 2(P), page 3, line 24, leave out clause 5.

Amendment 3(P), in clause 6, page 4, line 19, leave out “or a limited partnership”.

Amendment 4(P), page 4, leave out line 21 and insert “a member; or”.

Amendment 5(P), page 4, leave out lines 37 and 38.

Amendment 6(P), page 4, line 39, leave out “(c)” and insert “(b)”.

Amendment 20, in the schedule, page 6, paragraph 1, sub-paragraph (c), at end add

“subject to the Secretary of State’s satisfaction that TfL has undertaken, or caused to be undertaken, an effective risk assessment in respect of the impact on public health of such use.”

Amendment 21, page 6, paragraph 1, leave out sub-paragraph (d).

Amendment 22, page 6, paragraph 1, sub-paragraph (i), at end add

“provided such property is not located within the curtilage of a bus, rail or underground station.”

Amendment 23, page 6, paragraph 1, sub-paragraph (o), at end add

“provided such property is not located within the curtilage of a bus, rail or underground station.”

Amendment 24, page 6, line 19, paragraph 1(k), after “machines”, insert

“and other property which is exploited for commercial purposes other than within stations.”

Amendment 25, page 6, line 19, paragraph 1(k), leave out from the first “stations” to the end of the sub-paragraph.

Amendment 26, page 6, paragraph 1, leave out subparagraph (k).

Amendment 27, page 6, paragraph 1, leave out subparagraph (m).

Amendment 28, page 6, paragraph 1, leave out subparagraph (n).

Andy Slaughter: We have a single grouping of amendments to deal with in what might be the last outing of this interesting and important Bill, after some five and a half years of its progress through both Houses. I shall speak to the large number of amendments in my name. The remainder stand in the name of the promoters of the Bill, and no doubt the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) will address his reason for tabling them. I welcome the concessions that are marked by the promoters' amendments, which may shorten considerably the length of the debate today.

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend will recall from our discussion in November that one of my particular concerns about the way in which Transport for London has engaged on this Bill and other property development matters related to the future of Harrow-on-the-Hill station and the access issues pertaining to it. My hon. Friend may not be aware that I have had the opportunity to meet Graeme Craig, property director of TfL. It was a helpful meeting, but it left me worrying that although TfL has plans to improve the access arrangements at Harrow-on-the-Hill station, it does not plan to put any resource into them. Is there anything in my hon. Friend's amendments or in the remaining parts of the Bill that might help to deal with that concern, which my constituents are likely to be very worried about?

Andy Slaughter: That is a complex question—perhaps even more complex than my hon. Friend divines, despite his huge knowledge and intellect. It goes to the heart of the Bill and the fact that TfL has got itself into a sort of spiral with property developers and, as a result, does not know where it is going or where its best interests and those of its customers lie. Is its primary objective to uphold and improve its infrastructure, stock and services? Is it to compensate for the billions of pounds being withdrawn very cynically by the Chancellor, or is it going into a whole new area of operation where it will become some kind of poor man's property developer?

I think that my hon. Friend will get the answer if he stays for the whole debate—if not, he may have to look at *Hansard*. My short answer to him now is that no one, not even the strongest opponents of the Bill—I include myself, the petitioners and the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers in that bracket—would not wish TfL to maximise its income and its opportunities for development and to be able to develop on its operational and non-operational land and, in the process, improve its facilities. I hope that we have made substantial progress—although, it has been like drawing teeth over these five-plus years—but I am not sure that I can give him a full assurance that that will be the case as a consequence of this Bill.

However, I can give my hon. Friend a full assurance that from 5 May, when our right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan) will be installed as Mayor of London, the importance of stations such as

Harrow-on-the-Hill will be foremost in his mind. I have visited Harrow-on-the-Hill and know that it could do with a great deal of improvement. I know that my hon. Friend will continue to fight strongly for that.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Surely the purpose of TfL is to provide the best, most efficient and most cost-efficient transport services for this great city of London. Is it not therefore right that it uses its assets in the best way to achieve that aim? Does my hon. Friend think that this Bill will achieve that objective in such a way that we can have confidence that TfL can use its resources to best effect to achieve its core aim?

Andy Slaughter: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Certainly, my amendments—I will go through them one by one—are designed to improve the Bill in the way she suggests. I will add a slight rider to what she says, however, because I think that TfL, as a public authority, has a slighter wider duty. We see that in the way it has disposed of assets in a cavalier fashion, entered into inappropriate deals with property developers and—perhaps most worrying of all in the context of the Bill—set out at this stage to say that its future priority, perhaps understandably, given the amount of money it is losing to the Treasury, will be to maximise the commercial opportunity of the land it holds. That sounds fine, if the money is going to subsidise fare payers. However, if it produces the type of development that is harmful to the London economy as a whole, and to Londoners—for example, by excluding affordable housing from its prime sites—then I think it needs to be brought up short. The problem is that TfL is trying to do several things at once. Yes, I am sure that it is trying to do as much as it can to subsidise its operations, but at the same time it is taking very risky steps in the deals it is doing with property developers. Part of that will be cured by the withdrawal of clause 5, but not all of it.

Mr Gareth Thomas: I take my hon. Friend back to Harrow-on-the-Hill station, because it is clear that TfL will have to go higher in any housing development, potentially reducing the amount of affordable housing, in order to pay for the access works required. Does he not think that it would be better if TfL, using the funding it currently has for making stations accessible, matched the funding that Harrow Council is willing to put into those access requirements, rather than just building ever higher blocks of housing to pay for it?

Andy Slaughter: I am always pleased to be taken back to Harrow-on-the-Hill station, although my hon. Friend normally cons me into going there for canvassing sessions that tend to go on for four or five hours. He is absolutely right that there has to be a balancing act between the needs of the travelling public and whatever development TfL is doing, and I think TfL has abdicated its wider responsibility in trying to get that balance right.

7 pm

I do understand the problems TfL has, which have become very clear since the comprehensive spending review and the last Budget. There has been a massive withdrawal of funds, so there will be no revenue subsidy whatever, which puts TfL in an invidious position. However, it cannot simply abdicate any responsibility and say, "We will build as high as we can. We will build

the sort of accommodation that is least useful to ordinary Londoners, because that is the way the land lies.” That is not the way a public authority should behave. I hope that the sort of innovative proposals my hon. Friend is putting forward are exactly what the new Mayor will put pressure on TfL to adopt.

Let me start to look at the proposals in more detail. I have some more general comments to make about the Bill, but assuming that we get through Report, which I think we will, we have Third Reading, so I will reserve those more general critical comments until then.

Mr Thomas: Moving on from Harrow-on-the-Hill station, will my hon. Friend deal with the concern that he and many others of us alluded to last November regarding the so-called tax-efficient limited liability partnership model that TfL wanted to use for its property developments? Can he shed any light on how TfL’s plans have changed in relation to that vehicle in the light of the obviously devastating disclosures in the Panama papers?

Andy Slaughter: A lot of the credit must go to Lord Dubs, who obtained a substantial concession in the other place when clause 5 was withdrawn. The chronology is that that preceded the Panama papers, but I suspect that TfL is breathing a sigh of relief, given that its proposals may have come under even more scrutiny had the clause remained in the Bill. I wait with interest to hear what the promoters say about the reasons for the withdrawal of clause 5. Personally, I am just glad that it is has been withdrawn, although I am puzzled they appeared prepared to die in a ditch for it over a period of years and then, following the debate in the main Chamber and the revival motions in the other place, decided to give in gracefully. What their reasoning was for doing that, I am still not quite sure, but I am grateful that it happened.

To that extent, the issue, which was of concern to the large number of Members who attended the last debate here, has gone away, but not entirely, as my hon. Friend will see when I talk about clause 4, which still tempts TfL—if I can put it that way—to enter into relationships with companies that may have a dubious past, present or future. Amendment 7 and consequential amendment 8 are designed to remove that temptation.

Mr Thomas: Before my hon. Friend turns to his proposed amendments, may I take him back again to our debate last November? There was substantial concern among Labour Members about the lack of commitment shown by the TfL management to building a significant amount of affordable housing in any large housing development. I understand that TfL is seeking to move on from that position—I am thinking of a particular site that my hon. Friend knows very well. Has he received confirmation that TfL is now more committed to affordable housing?

Andy Slaughter: Like my hon. Friend, I recently had a lengthy meeting with Graeme Craig and other TfL lawyers and senior managers. The reasonable assurance that I was given was that no firm decisions would be taken on any of the London sites—save for one, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Clive Efford)—until after the mayoral election, which I think is right.

London Members in particular were concerned that TfL was being disingenuous. It was saying in the free pages it gets in the *Metro* paper that part of its development strategy was to build affordable housing, but the reality was that it planned to build no affordable housing whatsoever on its prime sites in zones 1 and 2. It said that there might be elements in zones 3, 4, 5 and 6, but that was simply not satisfactory. Let us consider the issue after the mayoral election. It is clearly a matter for each individual planning application, but I would hope that Labour councillors in London would look askance at any proposal that did not include affordable housing.

One of the first three sites proposed was in Parsons Green, which is not quite in my constituency, but it is in my borough. That application has been withdrawn and is being rethought, because the proposals were either not sufficient or not the right type of affordable housing. We know that “affordable housing” is now a term of art and that, when used by this Government, it usually means housing that is affordable to nobody who is not on a seven-figure income.

Let me turn to the amendments standing in my name. I am very grateful for the substantial support I have received from a number of people at the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers in preparing the amendments and, indeed, throughout the whole Bill process. They have been extremely assiduous in providing their expertise, obtaining counsel’s opinion and providing briefings on the Bill. The three public petitioners—Richard Osband, Jos Bell and Anabela Hardwick—not only contributed to that important part of the process, but have been stalwarts in scrutinising the Bill and providing briefings on it. Many Members, not just members of the RMT and London MPs, have also shown an interest; when we last debated the Bill, there were 20 to 30 Members present. I am grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Harrow West (Mr Thomas) and for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), who will get a special TfL Bill badge for being here tonight.

Mr Thomas: A further concern that was aired when we last debated the Bill in November was that the advisory board that TfL had set up to help it with its property development contained no significant social housing providers. Does my hon. Friend sense that TfL has now changed its position and that it is now balancing out the interests of those hard and fast traditional developers with the need for proper social housing to be part of the mix on the sites overseen by the Mayor and TfL?

Andy Slaughter: I am not aware that that has happened. To give TfL the benefit of the doubt, it, like many in London, awaits the outcome of the mayoral election and will take its lead from that. Although I strongly anticipate that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting will be the Mayor—so, I believe, do the bookmakers, who have started paying out on him—I do not think, whoever wins the mayoral election, that we could be worse off than we are at the moment with a Mayor who has set his face against affordable housing. He, and the people he has appointed to be his agents in the matter, have cynically allowed the term “affordable housing” to become more abused than used.

Mr Thomas: I intervene again on my hon. Friend to suggest that he might want to use at least a portion of his speech on the amendments to encourage the promoter of the Bill to take back from the debate the concern that TfL has no social housing providers in its property development group. That needs to change. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Sadiq Khan) is elected, we might be able to go directly to him. Perhaps we can encourage the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) to use the influence he has on TfL in the drafting of the Bill in that regard now.

Andy Slaughter: I entirely agree. My hon. Friend has made the point very well, and I cannot add anything to it. I intended to say one or two things about housing, but I think I will say them on Third Reading. They relate more to the general principles of the Bill and TfL's approach to the Bill than to the amendments that we are dealing with.

Mr Thomas: My hon. Friend has a modest style, but may I encourage him to say two further things on the question of whether social housing providers are invited to sit on TfL's property board? First, will he urge my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) to encourage TfL to listen to our concerns about the absence of a social housing provider? Secondly, will he encourage the Minister to use his influence with TfL to persuade it to put social housing providers at the top of its property development work and on to its property development advisory group?

Andy Slaughter: I absolutely concur with that. I suspect that, like me, my hon. Friend finds housing to be the single biggest issue in his constituency at the moment. We have reached a ludicrous stage in London whereby in many constituencies, including his and mine, it is simply impossible and unaffordable for anybody—not just those who have low incomes or average means, but those who are earning good wages—to access property of any kind. That applies to private rented, owner occupied and even what is cynically called affordable housing. That position has been exacerbated by Government policy and by some local authorities in London over a number of years.

It will take a long time to turn the situation around. It is possible, but it is difficult, and one of the quickest ways to do it is by the use of public land. TfL, as it constantly tells us, is one of the major public landowners in London. There are many others. I have the Old Oak and Park Royal Development Corporation in my constituency, and 70% of that land—the largest regeneration site in the UK—is owned by Network Rail. It will shortly be owned by the OPDC. It is not just TfL that owns land; Government Departments also do so. That is the most immediate and instant solution to the problem, which I suspect Members from all parts of the House would admit of. Even Members who represent constituencies outside London probably have experience of the London property market and know that the situation cannot be allowed to continue.

Even with its current budget constraints, it is wrong for TfL to say, “Nothing to do with us, gov; we are just a railway company.” Of course it is primarily a railway company, and of course its job is primarily to make sure that we have a safe, secure and efficient railway that has capacity. That is a difficult enough task, but TfL cannot

abdicate its responsibility, and it certainly should not be making the situation worse by engaging in development that involves no affordable housing.

Mr Thomas: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Andy Slaughter: I will give way one more time, but then I must get on.

7.15 pm

Mr Thomas: My hon. Friend is right to say that housing is a huge issue in my constituency, as it clearly is in many constituencies across London. Like him, I want the public land that TfL has available to be used to create more affordable housing in particular, as well as housing units more generally. Does he accept that TfL needs to take into account a further consideration, which is the character and conservation needs of the space in which such public land will be available? In that context, I think of Harrow on the Hill—not Harrow-on-the-Hill station, but the area in my constituency. Any large TfL blocks of flats will still need to allow local people to see the iconic views of Harrow on the Hill. It is crucial to preserve the character of such areas.

Andy Slaughter: That is right. I am afraid that almost every planning application for residential development I now see ignores all the basic principles and tenets of building on a human scale, with sufficient amenity space and in such a way that impossible constraints are not imposed on existing neighbourhoods in terms of congestion, overlooking and environmental pollution, while also almost entirely excluding social infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools.

This is not the way London was built. Ironically, in the Victorian era—when the railways were built, and the suburbs expanded along those routes—we had far less town planning than we do now, but they somehow managed to build liveable communities, with all such factors. The combination of greed on the part of the developers and desperation on the part of much of the public sector means that we are now building monstrosities that nobody will want to live in.

Ruth Cadbury: To make another observation, if I may, about liveable communities, TfL owns a lot of shopfronts and high street properties. Is it not beholden on TfL, when it develops properties, to give some consideration to the kind of uses that such retail frontages are put to so that we ensure that they provide a usable range of businesses and services for the communities living in the new flats, which will of course include a significant proportion of affordable units?

Andy Slaughter: That is another very good point. I am afraid that it is another one on which TfL does not have a terribly good record. In Brixton market or Shepherd's Bush market, which I am very familiar with, there are many historical amenities, including retail areas—they have been there for decades, if not, in some cases, for centuries—of which TfL has been the custodian, that are now under threat. Again, that is simply because the bottom line always has to take precedence.

Such an approach is often self-defeating, because we end up building a white elephant. The best example I can give is the Hammersmith Broadway. TfL pressed ahead with that development some 30 years ago. Nobody wanted it, and it ruined the town centre, as we thought,

[*Andy Slaughter*]

for the foreseeable future. However, we have now found out that there are plans to pull the whole thing down and start again. Even within its own rather limited and pedestrian view, which is to make the maximum capital out of it, such an approach often does not work. We must have schemes that actually work—work with existing communities, and work in terms of long-term commercial prospects—rather than something that looks as though it will provide a quick subsidy for the sort of works at Harrow on the Hill that were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West.

Let me press on. I am almost the last man standing in this debate—not quite, because I have had the assistance of my hon. Friend and of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth, who have a particular interest in this matter—but it has had a glorious number of supporters so far. I see that the shadow Chancellor has joined us on the Front Bench. I will spare his blushes, but I was just about to pay tribute to what he and the Leader of the Opposition have done. They have really cracked the whip on the Bill. If he has looked at the amendment paper, he will have spotted that I have filched quite a large number of his amendments to propose myself. I would not have done that if they were not excellent in their own right. I will not speak to them at great length.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): Would my hon. Friend like to comment on the drafting quality of the amendments?

Andy Slaughter: They are much better than I could have done. They could not be improved upon by the Clerks, so they get 10 out of 10, not just for their eloquence and presentation but for their content.

If I may, I will deal with the consolidated amendments in three parts, and will come to the promoter's amendments last of all. In a moment, I will look at two amendments in particular, amendment 7 and amendment 8, which is consequential on amendment 7. I will be looking for a response from the promoter on those. They contain a serious and, to some extent, new point. To show my hand at this stage, amendment 7 is the one amendment I am thinking of pressing to a vote. I am only thinking of doing so, however—it will depend on what the Front-Bench spokesperson and the promoter say. I will explain my logic in a moment.

I will go through the rest of the amendments at some speed. A few might be probing, but they are mainly what we might call improving amendments. They try to make sure that the Bill's deficiencies—it is rather hasty and secretive, and tries to provoke unwise decisions that have not had proper consideration—can be mitigated in some way. I ask the promoter and the Government to look at them in the spirit in which they have been tabled. I am not very hopeful, because when that same point was made in the first part of Report, in March 2015—my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) was proposing the amendments at that stage—the promoter said he was not going to accept any of them, which I thought was a little churlish. They are genuinely intended to be improving. Let me explain what I mean by that.

I will start with new clause 1. That measure is slightly different. It flushes out one of the problems that we thought we had got rid of with TfL, but I am now not sure that we have. In its enthusiasm to sell off its assets to the highest bidder and to maximise commercial return, TfL sometimes ends up selling off land that it needs now or might need in future. That is slightly counterproductive, because with London property, when it is gone, it is gone. Any public authority that tries to buy back land that has been used from a commercial developer—even if, as in this case, that might be a joint partner—will find the price very high. The developer knows that the railway will absolutely need that piece of land so it will be treated as a ransom strip.

New clause 1 says:

“TfL, or any subsidiary of TfL, shall not lease land to third parties which...has been used in the preceding 10 years...has been considered by TfL in the preceding 10 years as suitable, or...is adjacent to land in use or in use in the preceding 10 years, for the provision or maintenance of transport services for passengers.”

Let me give one example, a very big one and probably the one that the promoter thinks I am going to give: Lillie Bridge depot.

Lillie Bridge depot is one third of the Earls Court and West Kensington opportunity development. As is the case for many others, much of my interest in the Bill has been engendered by that very development, which, until Old Oak and Park Royal comes onstream, is the biggest in London. It is a multibillion pound scheme. It consists of three parts, two of which are, or were, owned in their entirety by TfL. I will not talk about this now; I will talk about it on Third Reading. The way that part one of the scheme has been handled—admittedly under the existing rules, because the Bill has not been passed into law—has been so disastrous and cataclysmic for my constituents and the wider London economy that it bodes very badly for what may come forward.

It could be even worse from TfL's point of view, because Lillie Bridge depot, the second part of the site—the two or three parts are roughly the same size, between 20 and 25 acres each—is a working depot for TfL. It employs about 550 people. It has stabling for District line trains, and major manufacturing and workshop areas. To all intents and purposes, it is an essential part of the operation of TfL. Unfortunately, the view put forward by TfL's property division is that it can all go. I have a letter here from Graeme Craig, whom I referred to earlier, from 26 March 2014. It says:

“TfL is committed to bringing forward the development of LBD”—
Lillie Bridge depot—

“in accordance with the approved masterplan or such updated planning permissions as may be approved by the Council. TfL is not able to commit at this stage to how and with whom the development of LBD is to be delivered if it is proved feasible to do so. However, given the establishment of JVCo to develop Earls Court Village and ECP's control of other interests, it would make commercial sense in due course for both parties to fully explore the potential benefits which could arise should we combine our respective remaining land interests.”

That was a scandalous letter to write and I am pleased to say that Mr Craig gave me an assurance that no deal has been, or would be, entered into with Capco for the development of the Lillie Bridge depot before the mayoral election. What has happened in that area is on the basis of no ownership of that portion of land and on the basis of a masterplan devised by Capco itself. TfL, in a

very craven way, just decided to give up the land and develop it with Capco without looking at any other possibilities.

Obviously, there is now a delay. Even TfL has to admit that a fully operational depot of that kind, with all the facilities in situ that I have talked about, cannot be closed down overnight. It is talking about not developing it for about another five years, but it is certainly looking to sign agreements to do so in advance. That is exactly the type of mischief that new clause 1 is designed to prevent.

It is not only because of the points made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West that we need to worry about what type of development is going to go on TfL land; we need to worry about what is going to happen with current usage, either in the case of Lillie Bridge where there is current transport usage, or if there is a potential transport usage. This is absolutely recognised in the HS2 Bill, where HS2 is able to compulsorily purchase, acquire and protect land ancillary to the line, stations or other essential infrastructure that is being developed—for good reason.

Whatever we think of HS2, we cannot allow major infrastructure projects and essential lifelines of the transport system to be put at risk by private development in this way. I therefore ask, without a great deal of hope or expectation, for support for new clause 1. Even if there is not to be support in that way, I still ask for a clear statement of policy from the sponsor on behalf of TfL as to how it intends to protect the operational benefits of TfL. This is not a pious or notional idea. TfL is going into the property development game big time. It is looking at thousands of acres of land across London with transport or ancillary transport uses—by definition, most of its non-operational land is adjacent to its operational land—in a way that I do not believe it is prepared for and that would be a quantum leap in how it operates. All we are saying is that there needs to be safeguards. We need to ensure that it does not shoot itself, or the travelling public, in the foot by giving away, tying up or otherwise compromising land in that way, which, I am afraid, is exactly what has happened in the past.

7.30 pm

Ruth Cadbury: My hon. Friend makes a strong point about the risk of taking land out of operational use or losing land that could be put into operational use should transport demands change. Would it not therefore be appropriate to undertake a fully transparent assessment of all TfL's land prior to any deals being done by the private sector that might take land out of operational use?

Andy Slaughter: I am grateful for that intervention, because transparency is very important here. We have asked several times for a terrier of TfL property so we can know exactly what sites are owned and where they are. I certainly think that all London MPs should be entitled to know what sites reside in their own constituencies. That is the first point: we need to know what we are dealing with here. I agree entirely.

Subsections (2) and (3) of new clause 1 would introduce what is a theme in other amendments: the need to consult. We need to consult the public, who fund TfL through their taxes and fares, and the responsible elected

bodies—the GLA and the London boroughs—before these decisions are taken. It is absolutely the case that TfL, in the past, certainly before it came under the Mayor's control, behaved like a medieval baron. It was extraordinarily unaccountable. There is nothing as unaccountable as a public body with no democratic accountability. At least one can sit down with private sector organisations, talk to them and reach a deal. When dealing with organisations such as TfL, as was, or the NHS, as is, one often finds oneself intruding on the privacy of these organisations. Despite their being fully funded by the taxpayer, they have no mechanism for such engagement, which takes us back to the point made by my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Harrow West about ensuring that the boards of these organisations have proper representation of the public and other interests. I therefore say in new clause 1 that the public, as well as the London boroughs and the GLA, should be consulted before contracts for development are entered into.

Part of the role of the Mayor should be to ensure that that democratic element is put in train. I have to say I have not seen any sign of that under the current Mayor. I have found that TfL's decision making has been just as opaque, and I am hoping we will see a sea change in that. I believe that all public bodies, irrespective of their primary function, have a wider public duty. With local authorities, that is generally accepted. Indeed, there is now legislation saying that they have a community role and function to look after the general interest of their communities, as well as specific individual functions. We have moved a long way from the Nicholas Ridley days of their meeting once a year and handing out contracts. Similarly, other public bodies have a wider role. At the end of the day, such public bodies are taxpayer funded and have a responsibility to the communities in which they reside. We require private developers, through the community infrastructure levy and section 106 agreements, to make a contribution in that way, and I believe that public bodies should equally make a contribution. That is what I am asking for.

That theme is continued in my amendments 9 to 16, which I will deal with more briefly. I feel that this is rather a pinched Bill that wants to do things in a hurry. Whenever steps are to be taken, they are taken within two months, but I think three months would be the normal and more appropriate period of time. I am not sure where the two-month period has come from.

So far as amendments 9, 10, 11 and 12 are concerned, the Bill grants TfL substantial new powers. It is right to say that the two major operative clauses have now been dropped. The first, dropped at a relatively early stage in the House of Lords, was a scandalous attempt to get land sales done without any oversight by the Secretary of State or anyone else. The other is the clause being dropped today, which would have allowed these rather dubious property ventures to be entered into. However, there is still quite a lot of substance here, and we are right to look critically at what the Bill says in those respects.

Clause 1 states that the powers given in clause 4 will come into force at the end of the period of two months, while clause 3 states that the appointed day is at the end of that same two-month period. I see nothing wrong with three months. I am sure that the promoter will enlighten me if there is a particularly good reason for

[*Andy Slaughter*]

having two rather than the more common three months. I also say—this is provided for in amendment 12—that none of these provisions should come into force until there has been

“a review of the...potential risks to the assets of Transport for London arising from the exercise of the relevant powers...and...likely effectiveness of measures put in place by Transport for London in mitigation.”

Some may say that this is rather belt and braces, but I tabled this amendment because of experience. My experience is that TfL has not always behaved with the degree of probity or reserve that is necessary, and has got itself into a mess; later I shall quote the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers, who put it in slightly less polite language than that. It is a case of once bitten, twice shy. Where a public body does not have a good track record on consulting and making the right decisions on matters outside its core remit, and where it proposes a massive expansion in the work it does, we are entitled to ask first for a longer pause for proper assessments and reviews, and for consultation. Amendment 16 is relevant here. I am not asking for consultation not with every Tom, Dick and Harry, but with those who have a legitimate interest as the elected representatives of the people of London.

I shall say no more on that. I shall not dwell on those amendments any further. They are improving amendments. They do nothing more than that, and I say the same about amendment 19, which adds to clause 4. It simply sets out in more detail what should happen when consent is given by the Secretary of State under the clause. It says that there should be a proper process, and that it should be dealt with through a statutory instrument.

Amendments 7 and 8 relate to what I shall call my major residual concern; most of my concerns about the Bill have been dealt with. Let me be clear that nobody—no Labour Member in the hall of fame of those who have worked on the Bill—doubts the need for TfL to be as solvent as possible, or to subsidise fares as far as possible. In proposing amendments to clause 4(2), we are not suggesting that it should not be open to TfL—this is a major change in the Bill—to use its property as security for money that it borrows. The idea is essentially to enable TfL to borrow cheaply. It has the power to borrow at present, but it does not have the power to secure that borrowing against its substantial assets, and I see no reason why it should not be able to do so. However, I do think that the phrase

“Those things are the charging by a TfL subsidiary of all or any of its property as security for money which it borrows”

goes a little bit too far, although it may be simply a term of art. That is why, in amendment 17, I have proposed the substitution of the words “no more than 25%” for the words “all or any”. That is still a substantial proportion of TfL’s property, and I should have thought that such sums would be at least sufficient to fund anything that it could be required to do. The Minister may say that the Government do not intend to allow TfL to mortgage its entire estate, but I think that a little clarity would be advisable.

The main purpose of amendments 7 and 8 is to ensure that, while TfL is permitted to borrow against its own property for the purpose of legitimate investment opportunities, it is not allowed to borrow for the purpose

of providing guarantees or indemnities for third parties. The reason for that is, I should have thought, pretty obvious. While debating this Bill, we have engaged in long discussions about TfL’s conduct in the context of its new-found policy of joint venture with its private sector partners. I do not, in principle, oppose that new policy. The logic of it is that, rather than disposing of assets, TfL will acquire a capital sum that could be invested to give a return. It will embark on a joint venture with a development partner of some kind, and will then have both a retained stake in the land and a revenue stream from its development. I see nothing wrong with that, and it seems to fit better into the picture in which TfL needs such a revenue stream more than ever before. Our objection is to the type of partner and the type of deal with which TfL has been involved.

However, the same logic could be applied to TfL’s borrowing. Borrowing for its own purposes and its own uses against its assets is one thing, but borrowing in order to guarantee or indemnify a third party strikes me as completely different. I should like reassurance from the Bill’s sponsor before deciding whether the issue should be put to a vote. In explaining why I say that, I must return to the experience of Earls Court. Not only is it the experience that is most familiar to me, but it is a massive project.

A deal was done whereby a piece of land wholly owned, freehold, by TfL, with some leasehold interests—in some cases quite short leasehold interests—is held by its development partner, Capco. That has been converted into a joint venture. TfL is the minority stakeholder, with 37%, and therefore does not have a controlling interest in what happens to the land. The joint venture company’s purchase price of the TfL land, with the Capco leasehold interest, appears to be substantially below the market price—perhaps by as much as a factor of three, if we compare the price paid, £335 million, with the current valuation of the asset by Capco, which is in excess of £1 billion. Moreover, it is being paid for by the interest-free loan from TfL. Where is the risk, and where is the cost to the private sector partner?

Let us remember that the private sector partner is not the international property company Capco; it is, in that hallowed phrase so often used by the petitioners, and particularly by Mr Osband, a £2 company based in Jersey with no other assets, and which could disappear off the face of the earth, leaving TfL to pick up any liabilities at the end of the day. I and many others were worried that that was the type of property deal that TfL was entering into, and we hope that that worry will now be removed, certainly for any new ventures, by the withdrawal of clause 5. However, such arrangements remain a possibility in relation to how the secured borrowing by TfL would be put to work.

7.45 pm

What is the rationale behind allowing TfL to indemnify or guarantee third parties by borrowing against its own assets in that way? What do the fare payer and taxpayer get out of that? TfL owns the asset, which it is putting up as security. It is borrowing the money and using it for the guarantee or the indemnity. I can see how that will benefit the party that is being offered the guarantee or being indemnified, but I cannot see how it will sufficiently or safely benefit TfL. I need an answer on this point.

I also need to deal with amendment 18 and amendments 21 and beyond. I do not intend to press these amendments to a vote; I am simply looking for explanations. Clause 4(6) states:

“Except for the property identified in the Schedule to this Act, a TfL subsidiary may not charge any property for any of the purposes mentioned in subsection (2) without the consent of the Secretary of State.”

I do not understand why such a division is being made, and I have therefore made some suggestions. I use the word “I” in the broadest sense here, because this was originally the conceit of the shadow Chancellor, who is much wiser on these matters than I am. However, I have adopted his logic and his argument here. I do not see why the consent of the Secretary of State should not be needed in all cases. That is why I propose in amendment 18 to leave out the words:

“Except for the property identified in the Schedule to this Act”.

Failing that, I have set out certain points in the schedule that could be changed. I shall not go into detail here.

I am assuming—perhaps “guessing” would be a better word—that there is some rationale behind this decision, and that a property that may be charged without the consent of the Secretary of State would be more remote from the ordinary operational duties of TfL. That is to say that the Secretary of State would have more of an interest in land that was being used for railway purposes than in land that was simply lying fallow or being put to some non-railway use. I am not quite sure of the logic behind that, however, because both types of land would still constitute a substantial public asset. This seems to be going back to the intention of the original clause, now withdrawn, which would have allowed anything to be sold off without the consent of the Secretary of State.

I have suggested that certain modifications be made to certain parts of the schedule, particularly in relation to land that might ostensibly be non-operational but might still be within the curtilage of, or adjacent to, operational land. However, I am still looking for an explanation as to why the consent of the Secretary of State should not be needed in all cases. A concession was made earlier by TfL, and I am not quite sure why, having made that concession, it has effectively gone back on it by listing substantial parts of its property in the schedule. That is all I have to say about that.

The withdrawal of clause 5 is welcome, although I do not understand the timing or the logic. We may get an explanation, but perhaps I should not look a gift a horse in the mouth, as it appeared to be at the heart of the Bill. After the old clause 4 was dropped early on over the Secretary of State’s consent, clause 5 appeared to be the heart of the Bill and TfL fought tooth and nail for it. TfL made some concessions in Committee under severe scrutiny from the public petitioners and following the sterling work of the Committee’s members, but it did not withdraw the clause entirely. We had long debate on it here, but it did not withdraw the clause. The time for the Bill elapsed, and the previous Parliament ended. The Bill then had to be revived, and that revival debate took place both here and in the other place, and the clause was suddenly dropped. That is welcome, but I ask why, and why at this stage.

I will not go through this again, because I covered it, in parentheses, earlier, but we know what the problem was. It was set out time and again to TfL in private

meetings, in this Chamber and elsewhere. It was set out by the RMT in negotiations, and by members of the public. We do not believe, either as a commercial matter or as a matter of public policy, that it should be open to TfL, or any other public authority, to go into the sort of deals that it was contemplating doing with limited partnerships, which allowed the sort of partners that Capco was setting up to do the deals over Earls Court. Although that is a big scheme, it would have paled into insignificance beside the many hundreds of schemes that TfL is preparing to run.

I say thank you, because the change is a positive step, but I wonder why it is has happened. We obviously do not oppose it, and are pleased that it will be made tonight, but let us shine a light on it, and get a bit of the transparency that my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth was talking about a few moments ago. TfL fought for more than five years to retain the clause, so why is it disappearing now?

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr Robert Goodwill): I reiterate that the Department supports TfL’s commercial programme. We want TfL to maximise its unique position to ensure that its assets generate revenues to their greatest potential. Giving TfL greater financial flexibility will provide it with the opportunity to run its business in a more efficient way, to the benefit of taxpayers and fare payers. For those reasons, the Government continue to support the Bill and do not support the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), which would generally have the effect of watering down the Bill.

Ruth Cadbury: That aim is creditable, but my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) gave a number of examples of where he has concerns about TfL’s ability to negotiate effectively and to make the best of its opportunities. The Opposition have some concerns about the private sector’s ability to pull the wool over the eyes of public sector bodies—even those as large and experienced as TfL.

Mr Goodwill: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. I may be a bit old-fashioned, but I quite like a principle called democracy. London has devolution of power, democratically elected Mayors and other democratically elected members around the city. Giving people the power to make decisions is something that we should do around the country. We should trust the people to elect the right individuals and then trust them to make the right decisions.

Andy Slaughter: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Goodwill: I will probably regret it, but I will.

Andy Slaughter: I take slight exception to the term “watered down”. I could have gone on longer, but I thought I had explained pretty fully that this is about not watering down but strengthening the Bill—putting in exactly those democratic elements that the Minister says he wants. I ask him to explain in detail why he objects to the majority of the amendments standing in my name, which simply do what he says: give a surer footing to the Bill.

[*Andy Slaughter*]

Separately, on my important amendment 7 and what the Minister says about that, I should say that watering down has been done already by TfL, which has withdrawn the two substantive clauses to the Bill.

Mr Goodwill: Her Majesty's Government believe that, rather than strengthening the Bill, the hon. Gentleman's amendments have the effect of watering down the Bill's provisions or making it more difficult for TfL to use them.

I also note the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) to remove clause 5. The clause would have enabled TfL to join with others in setting up limited partnerships. However, it had been amended, following scrutiny of the Bill by the Opposed Private Bill Committee, to provide that the Secretary of State must consent to the formation of the limited partnership by way of an order debated by both Houses. Given the burden that that would have placed on both Parliament and my Department, and the fact that it would have made it difficult in practice for TfL to enter into any limited partnerships, we support the principle of these amendments. I understand why they have been tabled and support them, perhaps slightly reluctantly.

We have already spent a lot of time talking about these amendments—indeed, we have spent a lot of time talking about this Bill altogether. I will therefore quickly conclude my remarks so that we can make progress.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I think it is fair to say that this Bill has had an arduous journey through both Houses; a petition to introduce it was presented to Parliament on 29 November 2010. Plenty of people have aged during its passing—some of us visibly. One who has not is my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter); I pay tribute to him as he has clearly improved the Bill during these lengthy discussions. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Harrow West (Mr Thomas) and for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) for their contributions tonight.

Let me take a little time to deal with the amendments that my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith has tabled, as they deserve detailed responses. New clause 1 would ensure that neither TfL nor any subsidiary of TfL would be able to

“lease land to third parties which:

- (a) has been used in the preceding 10 years,
- (b) has been considered by TfL in the preceding 10 years as suitable, or
- (c) is adjacent to land in use or in use in the preceding 10 years, for the provision or maintenance of transport services for passengers.”

That would safeguard significant, useful land from being leased to developers for private profit at the expense of public transport passengers—those who rely on London's transport system in their everyday lives. However, it would not prevent land from being sold; TfL already holds the power to do that.

The new clause would also compel TfL, or any subsidiary of TfL, to carry out “a public consultation” before entering into a contract involving the development of land for anything other than the provision or maintenance

of transport services for passengers. A process of consultation before using TfL's land for anything besides transport services is very important, to make sure that local communities have their views and voices heard. The development of land should come from the bottom up, rather than the top down, and with the backing of local people. One need only look at the Earls Court development, for which TfL leased out its assets, to see why my hon. Friend believes that prior consultation before lease and development is so important.

Let me turn to clauses 3 and 4. An insertion to subsection (1) of clause 4 that the consent of the Mayor may be granted to a subsidiary of TfL only after the Mayor has consulted, and published a report of such consultation with, a variety of bodies, including the London Assembly and the London boroughs, is surely welcome. Discussion and collaboration with a range of stakeholders will ensure that a balance between public and private interest is retained. Similarly, the insertion into clause 3 that TfL must consult the Greater London Assembly and publish the report provides greater accountability and transparency. That is important, although we must also beware that the measures imposed on TfL do not become draconian.

A balance must be struck between scrutiny and freedom, and while TfL must act in the public interest, it should also not be restricted more unfairly than other public and private sector bodies. We are sympathetic to the aims of my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith. He, along with other Members, has campaigned tirelessly to ensure that this Bill provides the best outcome for Londoners. We are grateful that these amendments will give Ministers and the Bill promoter the opportunity to discuss further provisions in the Bill and to alleviate any remaining concerns, and I welcome their thoughts on that.

Let me turn now to the vexed question of the removal of clause 5, which I understand will happen and which we advocated. Undoubtedly, it was the most controversial element in the Bill, which in our view would have risked TfL entering into opaque limited partnerships. It is quite understandable that, although the clause has been withdrawn, some of my hon. Friends still have reservations about certain elements of this Bill, which is why they have a continuing desire to tweak its text—not least because of the bitter experience of the Earls Court development, to which frequent reference has been made tonight.

With TfL potentially morphing into the role of property developer, I quite understand why my hon. Friends remain concerned and seek reassurance on how new powers will be used. Even without clause 5, these are still significant changes, with significant implications for local councils and communities as TfL comes to exercise these new powers. However, we are pleased that, following the strong objections from Labour Members expressed in previous debates, clause 5 is to be withdrawn.

I must also mention the context against which this Bill has come to fruition. Transport for London recently said that, from 2019, its objective is to cover all of the operational costs of running the tube and bus networks in London through non-Department for Transport grant sources of income. It says:

“We have planned for some time to achieve operational breakeven by running our business more effectively and efficiently.”

That operational independence—for want of a better word—is happening far sooner than anticipated. TfL says that its overall income is being reduced by £2.8 billion over the period to 2020-21. Its resource grant from central Government, worth around £700 million annually, will be completely wiped out by the end of the decade. I would like to stop momentarily and point out, as I have done previously, that this means that London will be the only major European city transport network that will operate without an operational subsidy from Government. The Campaign for Better Transport put it succinctly:

“Almost nobody anywhere in the world runs a sizable public transport network without” subsidies.

It could well be said that this Conservative Government are cold-shouldering our capital’s transport system. TfL is keen to limit the damage.

8 pm

Mr Goodwill: The hon. Gentleman is talking about subsidies from the Government. Does he not agree that these are subsidies from taxpayers? They are paying for the subsidies.

Daniel Zeichner: That is a fine distinction. Most of us understand that the reason we pay our taxes is for exactly the kind of high quality transport system that a capital city such as London needs, and it is a huge risk that this Government are taking. The Government are forcing TfL to limit the damage, and they are using ingenious means and utilising existing assets to do so. The Budget indicates that there will be a move towards the full retention of business rates by local authorities, and we welcome the ability of local councils to have control over funding, but this is uncharted territory and we should be in no doubt about the risks to our transport system in London—risks that are a direct consequence of the political choices of this Government.

We want TfL to be modernised and to become a highly efficient public sector organisation. TfL has been making savings, some very difficult and controversial, but in its annual budget in 2014, TfL said that it is

“becoming progressively more difficult to achieve this without compromising our core services.”

This pattern of cuts is visible not just in the capital, but across the country. Cuts to local authority budgets have been extreme, leading the Local Government Association to point out that even if councils stopped filling in potholes, maintaining parks, closed all children’s centres, libraries, museums, leisure centres and turned off every street light they would not have saved enough money to plug the financial black hole they face by 2020. Department for Transport resource funding has been cut by 37%, from £2.6 billion in 2015-16 to £1.8 billion in 2019-20, representing a real terms decline of 71% since 2009-10.

Let us consider the fact that last year a record 8.6 million people were living in London. By 2030, that figure is predicted to reach 10 million. That is the pressure under which TfL finds itself. We are not ideologically opposed to TfL’s maximising the value of its assets to increase the revenue seized by the Treasury. They do what they have to do, and using resources efficiently is important to keep our capital city running.

On Second Reading, my hon. Friends and I expressed concern about certain measures in the Bill, including clause 5, which we have discussed. We are happy with the principle and understand the necessity of TfL’s having greater commercial freedoms, but the implications of those so-called freedoms were problematic. The controversial Earls Court development, a joint venture between TfL and the private developer Capital & Counties, set a worrying precedent for further public-private partnerships. Clause 5 would allow TfL to enter into limited partnerships with private property developers. Those partnerships are vague in legality and opaque in accountability.

I said on Second Reading that we must consider carefully the long-term impact of introducing powers to enter into those partnerships. We are reassured both by the fact that TfL has noted those concerns and by its decision to table amendments to remove clause 5 and references to limited partnerships from the Bill. It is encouraging that our opposition to that problematic part of the Bill was taken into account, and we are pleased with the outcome.

I also spoke on Second Reading about the importance of putting public needs above private profit. Property development to increase TfL’s revenue must not happen without the backing of local communities—those who are affected most directly. Those who bankroll projects should not subsequently be able to steamroller over local people. TfL is obliged to obtain the consent of the Mayor to dispose of an interest in land by sale or by granting a long-term lease. If that land is operational or has been in the previous five years, the Secretary of State for Transport must give his or her consent. It must be noted, however, that that did not prevent the unhappy saga around the developments at Earls Court from unfolding. The balance between the provision of affordable homes on the one hand, and maximising revenue to reinvest in transport, is an extremely significant and fine political judgment. We will be watching closely to ensure that proper balance is secured.

In conclusion, as clause 5 has been shelved, I think we are all hopeful that TfL can now move forward. We are keen to see how TfL uses its commercial freedoms to develop and improve the transport network that keeps our great capital city moving, but we will be watching closely to ensure that profit is used to benefit the public, and not the other way round.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I support amendment 1, and consequential amendments 2 to 6, which I tabled on behalf of the promoter.

This is a private Bill promoted by Transport for London, as has been said. It was submitted to the House of Lords in November 2010, and reached this House on 4 March 2014. It took rather a long time to get through the other place. The Commons gave the Bill a Second Reading on 9 September 2014, and it was considered by an Opposed Private Bill Committee on 13 January 2015, where clause 5 was substantially amended. I shall come on to discuss that briefly.

A debate on the consideration stage took place in the last Parliament on Monday 16 March, and those of us who were Members then remember that as an epic occurrence. Many amendments were tabled, and the time allocated for debate expired before proceedings

[*Bob Blackman*]

could be brought to a conclusion. Following the agreement of both Houses to the revival of the Bill in this Parliament, consideration was first proposed on 22 February 2016, but there was an objection, resulting in the need for today's debate.

The promoter, TfL, has considered carefully the strength of feeling expressed in the previous debate in the House about clause 5. If the clause was introduced, it would allow TfL to engage in limited partnerships. TfL recognised, notwithstanding the amendments to the clause made by the Opposed Private Bill Committee, that serious concerns remained about the possible exercise of powers conferred by the clause and about the lack of transparency arrangements, which was raised by objectors. Accordingly, TfL took the decision not to press for clause 5 to stand part of the Bill. The amendment to which I am speaking would leave out that clause, and the further minor amendments grouped with it are consequential upon the removal of clause 5. I understand that that is accepted across the House.

Andy Slaughter: As I understand it, the hon. Gentleman is saying that TfL has listened to the democratic voice of this House and to the wishes of the elected representatives here. Is it as simple as that? If so, that is quite refreshing.

Bob Blackman: We have had substantial debates. The promoters listened to those debates, considered them carefully and decided that in order to ensure the passage of the Bill, rather than prolong the agony and the disputes, it would be better to withdraw the clause and demonstrate in good faith that they would not proceed with that element. That means, of course, that the Bill is substantially changed from its original form.

I shall touch on the amendments proposed by the objectors—in principle, the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter). If I miss one of the amendments that he is pushing, he will no doubt intervene to clarify that. New clause 1 is substantially that which was debated on 16 March 2015. We had a very long debate on consideration at that time and it was clear that that was not going to proceed.

The present new clause would impose restrictions on the disposal of land and on the development of the land. Prior to the disposal of any land, various tests would have to be satisfied. Prior to carrying out any development other than the development of the land for rail maintenance facilities, consultation would have to be undertaken with a range of consultees, including unnamed trade unions and the London boroughs.

TfL is subject to the normal legal requirements relating to the development of land. Accordingly, prior to carrying out development of land, including for rail maintenance facilities, TfL has to undertake consultation in accordance with the rules and procedures relevant to the consenting process in question. Adding a further layer of consultation there is unnecessary. Furthermore, the process for securing consents for disposal of land is well established under section 163 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999. I believe the hon. Member for Hammersmith was a member of the Government at the time. Section 163 provides the statutory regime for the disposal of former operational land, including requirements for the Secretary

of State's consent. The promoters therefore consider that a further consenting process is neither necessary nor desirable.

Amendments 9 to 12 would lengthen the period of consultation. No solid argument seems to have been put forward by the proposer of the amendments on why that should take place. There would be a severe impact on TfL were that to take place. It would delay TfL improving its financial affairs and managing its operational undertakings, which would be detrimental to the tax-paying public and the fare-paying public. It is not clear what the impact of amendment 12 would be. It refers to a report being produced. TfL's view is that the Bill, together with the existing processes and procedures under the 1999 Act, ensures that the exercise of the powers conferred by clause 4 will be properly exercised in discharge of statutory functions under the 1999 Act. That set of proposals is therefore unnecessary and unreasonable.

8.15 pm

Andy Slaughter: The hon. Gentleman asks what the point is. The point is bitter experience. I bet that he could give just as many examples from his constituency as I can from mine of projects that TfL has gone into without proper risk assessment or consideration, and which have invariably wasted millions of pounds. What we are looking for here, before steps are taken, is a proper process of review; of stepping back and thinking.

Bob Blackman: Requiring the Secretary of State to go through a process of producing risk assessments and so on is clearly extremely burdensome. It is quite clear that TfL will have to carry out those functions itself in order to justify what it is seeking to do.

Amendments 7 and 8, which the hon. Gentleman pressed in particular, are new and were not considered on 16 March 2015. The clear issue here is that exercising powers under clause 4 is subject to the consent of the Mayor, when he is granting security on borrowing or acquiring companies, and the consent of the Secretary of State, in respect of core assets and revenue. I could go into a long and detailed explanation of why that would be unnecessary. The point is that these amendments would create legal uncertainty over the whole question of what the requirements would be. They would also create uncertainty about TfL and its subsidiaries exercising the necessary flexibility around assets and revenue streams.

Since the Bill was deposited—this is a very important aspect—the operational funding from central Government has been reduced, as has been said during the debates. It will now be removed entirely, but much earlier than anticipated. The Bill, including clause 4, will assist TfL in its efforts to achieve further savings and efficiencies, while at the same time upgrading transport networks, which, I remind the House, support new jobs, new homes and economic growth in London and right across the UK. I therefore hope that the hon. Gentleman will not press those amendments to a vote, because they are completely unnecessary, would create tremendous uncertainty and, indeed, would impact on TfL's ability to generate the sorts of savings and to create the types of work that we all want to see.

Andy Slaughter *rose*—

Bob Blackman: I will give way very briefly.

Andy Slaughter: I think I want the long and detailed explanation to which the hon. Gentleman referred. What I want to know—this is not about the first part of clause 4(2), which I understand, about

“security for money which it borrows”—

is how

“the payment of which it guarantees, or in respect of which it gives an indemnity”,

first, improves TfL’s financial position, and secondly, does not create risks to TfL.

Bob Blackman: It is quite clear that the operation under clause 4(2) mirrors what TfL can do anyway under section 160 of the 1999 Act, and the scope of what a subsidiary can lawfully do by way of offering a guarantee or indemnity is not changed by this Bill whatsoever. From that perspective, the proposals to delete these references are almost irrelevant, given that the same powers exist under the 1999 Act. TfL is merely seeking to ensure that it has got this flexibility under those arrangements.

Andy Slaughter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bob Blackman: I have given way on a couple of occasions. If there is something else the hon. Gentleman wishes to raise, he will no doubt duly do so.

Most of the other proposals appear to have been put forward at consideration stage on 16 March 2015—they certainly formed a great part of the debate, but they clearly did not secure the agreement of the House. I therefore suggest that all the proposals put forward by the hon. Gentleman should be rejected and that we should end consideration stage and allow the Bill to proceed to Third Reading so that we can discuss its general merits.

Andy Slaughter: I appreciate the way the hon. Gentleman has approached the debate, but he will understand that I am a little disappointed by his response and by that of the Minister, who gave the proposals a cursory few moments. However, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), who is on the Opposition Front Bench, for at least making some thoughtful comments.

It is not my fault, or that of any of the other opponents of parts of the Bill, that it has dragged on for five and a half years, and we will perhaps look at that issue on Third Reading. As I said, most of the proposals were probing or, I hope, improving proposals, and I am disappointed that they have been dealt with in a fairly cursory manner. However, I also said that I would not press them to a vote.

Let me go back to amendment 7. As I said, the powers in clause 4(2) already exist, but there is no ability to secure borrowing, or an indemnity or guarantee, against property. I asked what I thought were quite reasonable questions about that. I said that, whereas I understand the advantage of securing borrowing against property, I do not understand the benefit to TfL, the fare payer or the taxpayer of an indemnity or guarantee. I have not really received an answer on that from the Minister or the sponsor. I do not really blame the hon. Gentleman, who drew what turned out to be the short straw in being the sponsor of the Bill. TfL has serried ranks of experts in these matters—consultants, lawyers

and property people—and the fact that we have not had an answer shows a certain amount of arrogance in the way this issue has been dealt with throughout.

I am not persuaded, but I am not going to push the proposals to a vote this evening. I hope, as I have said, that we have a new Mayor who will take a different view of how these matters are dealt with and how these powers are used. I agree that these issues are not at the centre of the Bill. As I have said several times, I appreciate the concessions that TfL has made. In that spirit, I am not minded to stop the Bill going forward now.

I simply think that it shows a lingering lack of candour and transparency and an attitude of “It’s none of your business how we run our railway” when those involved cannot give a simple explanation of a fairly simple, albeit technical point. However, there it is. I have made the points I want to make on the proposals, but I do not propose to put any of them to a vote tonight. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the clause.

Clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment made: 1, page 1, (Recitals) leave out lines 6 and 7.—(*Bob Blackman.*)

Clause 5

POWER FOR TfL TO FORM AND INVEST IN LIMITED PARTNERSHIPS

Amendment made: 2, page 3, line 24, leave out clause 5.—(*Bob Blackman.*)

Clause 6

SPECIFIED ACTIVITIES

Amendments made: 3, page 4, line 19, leave out “or a limited partnership”.

Amendment 4, page 4, leave out line 21 and insert “a member; or”.

Amendment 5, page 4, leave out lines 37 and 38.

Amendment 6, page 4, line 39, leave out “(c)” and insert “(b)”.—(*Bob Blackman.*)

Third Reading

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.—(*The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.*)

8.24 pm

Mr Goodwill: I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) on taking this Bill to Third Reading. I have listened with interest to the contributions of Members on both sides of the Chamber.

The outcome of the 2015 spending review means that TfL will need to find further savings and look to maximise its commercial income in the interests of both the taxpayer and the travelling public. That is why I welcome the principle behind the Bill. It will enable TfL to use financial practices and mechanisms to release greater value from its assets and financing arrangements. In short, it will maximise its unique position to ensure that assets generate revenues to their greatest potential. I understand from TfL that the Bill could realise in excess of £50 million in immediate benefits by improving its hedging power, enabling it to borrow money in a more cost-effective way and allowing it to make the most of its assets.

[Mr Goodwill]

For all those reasons, the Government support the Bill and I look forward to seeing it finally receive Royal Assent.

8.26 pm

Andy Slaughter: Well, here we are, after only five and a half years, with a Bill that is better than it was when the petition was first presented in the other place on 29 November 2010. It has had an interesting history. I suspect it will be reviewed in various civil service colleges and sixth forms in years to come—although I do not think it will give any pleasure to those who study it—as an example of how not to do a private Bill, because it really did not have to be like this.

There have been some highlights, or lowlights. There was a time when the Bill was considered by the other place to be uncontentious: it went through Committees unopposed and its Second Reading was a formality. Then, up popped an organisation called the West London Line Group, which I am pleased to say is stationed, if I can put it that way, in my constituency. It pointed out that TfL was seeking, under what was then clause 4 of the Bill, to dispose of any land it wanted without the consent of the Secretary of State. After important but cursory scrutiny, TfL backed off from that most contentious and controversial part of the Bill.

The Bill then went to sleep for a long time. There were periods of 18 months when nothing happened. I do not know why that was. I have never actually asked TfL and I am not sure it could tell me even if I did. When the Bill finally came to this House in 2014—four years into its life—things became a bit more lively, because a number of parties, which I mentioned earlier, identified that it still contained some controversial parts.

More importantly, we were beginning to see, or suspect, that there were other motives behind the Bill. I do not know what TfL knew in 2010 about how quickly its revenue stream was going to be withdrawn—I suspect that it must at least have thought that that would be the case—or whether it was contemplating some of its proposed large-scale property deals. To some extent, we owe a debt of gratitude to Capco for its aggressive exploitation of the West Kensington and Earls Court development, which has become a cause célèbre in many ways. Indeed, it will shortly be the subject of a complaint to the European Commission on state aid, because so bad was the deal that TfL got for the Earls Court exhibition centres that those who are making the complaint contend that it amounts to unlawful state aid. In other words, the subsidy and the help that TfL has given to Capco to allow it to boost its share price, boost its profits and boost its directors' bonuses may be unlawful under European law. We will see how well that complaint fares, but the fact that it has been contemplated suggests just how little confidence and faith many of the people who have scrutinised the Bill have in TfL's ability to get a good deal.

I said that I would mention what the RMT has said about the matter. In the press release that it put out today, it stated:

“The construction firms with which TfL plans to engage, are running rings around TfL, helping the hapless organisation offload its prime London assets at well below the market rate.

We have no confidence in TfL to be able to secure a fair price for its land—and our concerns are borne out by its dreadful governance failures in relation to the development of Earls Court” and:

“There is a fresh financial crisis brewing—meaning that there is an increased risk of corporate defaults—especially in the over-leveraged property sector.”

I pause to say that Capco is now discounting its luxury properties by about 20%, according to press reports last week. The press release continued:

“TfL is entering the property development game at precisely the wrong moment and in precisely the wrong way”.

That is how RMT put it. I might have chosen different words, but I cannot disagree with those sentiments. Those were real fears about the way in which TfL was, in a completely new way but across the board in relation to its assets, turning 5,700 acres of land into development sites.

As we found out, the whole thing was about money, specifically the Chancellor's decision to withdraw £2.8 billion of Revenue funding from TfL over the next five years. That has led TfL, as I described in the earlier debate, to indulge in what I believe are risky, dubious and foolish interventions in the property market, which have allowed developers to use whatever vehicles they like with the support of a public sector organisation. It really stuck in the craw that the House was going to pass legislation that would have enabled those sorts of deals and developments to be done. It is good that the clause that contained those provisions was withdrawn in the other place and clause 5 has been withdrawn today.

If anybody does not believe me, I am happy to take any hon. Members to the Earls Court site, where they will be able to see the huge disruption that has been caused to a whole neighbourhood of London by dust, noise, the removal of asbestos, the threat to the security of residents and property, and the way in which the interests of small business, whole estates of people and small streets are being overridden. TfL has no control over that any longer, because it is just a sleeping partner. It is now a minority stakeholder in the land that it used to own, which it sold off at an undervalue, with loans that it guaranteed at nil interest rate. That cannot give us any confidence that if TfL had been allowed the powers that clause 5 would have given it, it would have used them in any proper way.

I am pleased that we have reached this stage, and I was pleased to hear the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) say that TfL has, belatedly, properly responded to the concerns that have been expressed not only in this House but in the other place. I am glad, therefore, that the Bill, as the hon. Gentleman candidly admitted, bears no resemblance to the one that was introduced five and a half years ago. Not only have five and a half years and a lot of debating time elapsed, but we have ended up with something that is a mere shadow of what it was before.

There is a remaining concern that I do not feel has been addressed. I did not press it to a vote. I do not think I would have won the vote if I had—I say that rather churlishly—judging by what happened on a previous occasion, when the payroll vote all came in to vote. I am sorry if I have again kept them away from their dinner tonight. As I said a few moments ago, I worry that there is still that continuing arrogance. Those at TfL say, “We know best”, but they do not know best. They do not

have a track record of doing this. In some ways, I would not expect them to have that. They are mainly transport people and they are running a railway—and quite a lot of the time, they do a good job of running a railway—but they are now getting into bed with some of the biggest property sharks and some of the least appropriate people to develop London. I am afraid that the way in which they are doing so really is a case of the lamb trying to lie down with the wolves.

I am worried about that for the future. I suspect that it will not worry me so much once we know the outcome of the mayoral election. Nevertheless, the Bill still indicates things—including in clause 4, which we have just debated in relation to amendment 7, that will still allow TfL to guarantee and indemnify third parties, and to secure those guarantees and indemnities against their own assets—that TfL should not be in the business of doing.

When we started to debate the Bill a couple hours ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas) raised some very important points, which I said I would address on Third Reading, in relation to the sort of developments we can expect on TfL land. What is the purpose of the Bill? We now know—we did not know it, although TfL may have done, back in 2010—that it is mainly about making up for lost revenue. It is mainly about TfL being deprived of billions of pounds of revenue by the Chancellor. However, it is also about the type of city we will live in in London, because TfL is one of the largest public sector landowners and it is seeking to develop many of its sites. I have mentioned some in my own constituency or borough, such as in Parsons Green and Earls Court, and others may well be brought forward in the future. We do not know the list of developments, even though several hundred major sites are on it. One of the first things that the new Mayor could do is to publish that list and make sure that all MPs take an interest in it. I suspect that there would be substantial interest among London MPs from all parties when the list becomes available.

TfL has a wider responsibility. It should not just keep fares as low as possible, although that is important, and run an efficient railway, but ensure, as custodian of the largest part of the public realm in London, that it deals with that properly. It has a fantastic history: some TfL stations are among the best architectural buildings in London. The pride that ran all through the Victorian era and into the inter-war period—in the 1930s, there were developments of lines and stations out to the suburbs—is a fantastic credit to London and this country. It would be a terrible shame if, in the 21st century, TfL decided to build, through the variety of investment vehicles that we are tonight giving it permission to use, not just hideous overdevelopments and monstrosities, but non-functional buildings that do us no credit whatsoever either architecturally or in terms of use.

Increasingly, that is we are seeing with the sort of development partnerships into which TfL is going. When I looked at the short list of development partners that TfL has brought out I shuddered because they are exactly the same companies that are ruining the borough I live in with their riverside developments, their tall, faceless towers and the things from their pattern books that show no architectural merit whatsoever. Such developments minimise the proportion of affordable housing and the amount of amenity space, and they do not provide any social benefit at all. Unfortunately,

hard-pressed local authorities—as the planning authorities, this falls back on them—which are cutting their budgets by up to 50%, are in no position to deal with that.

This is a David and Goliath battle. It is not City Hall or the town hall that holds all the cards—the bureaucrat and Big Brother. The developers hold all the cards. They can afford the people who can make the viability assessments that they want, as well as the surveyors, architects, lawyers, consultants and accountants to run rings around TfL and the boroughs to get the developments that they want.

Ruth Cadbury: I thank my hon. Friend for his work on the Bill and what he has achieved—in particular, the removal of one specific clause. He rightly raises concerns about the planning system and how TfL's potential private sector partners could run rings around local authorities. Is it not true that the situation will be even worse if the Housing and Planning Bill is passed, as the Government are, in effect, removing and reducing the power of local authorities to intervene actively in planning applications and decisions?

Andy Slaughter: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend. She makes two very good points about the Housing and Planning Bill. One is its anti-localist feel, as it takes planning authority away from the boroughs. The other is what that Bill is doing to housing. It is not just the case that the Government, and the coalition Government before them, have been negligent. They have been actively supporting unaffordable housing and diminishing the role of affordable housing in London.

That is very clear in the Housing and Planning Bill, in which we have not just the sale of housing association properties, but the subsidising of those sales by the sale of council properties. I have had direct experience of this problem. My borough is the only one in which, under Conservative control, the quantum of social housing actually decreased over a period of years. It did not go up at all; it went down, through demolitions, sales and other matters of that kind. That is exactly what we are seeing. The situation is getting worse. The point that I made earlier—I hope my hon. Friend agrees with it—is that we have to build more affordable housing, social housing and shared ownership housing, and more private rented housing that is affordable, especially for young people. We also need genuine low-cost home ownership.

That should be being delivered through a Bill such as this one, because TfL has that responsibility as a major public landholder in London. But it is not being delivered. The type of investment vehicles promoted through the Bill and the type of partners that will be selected will simply mean we see more of what we call safe deposit flats being built.

TfL may ask what it can do, given that its money is being taken away by the Government and it has to pull as much money as it possibly can from commercial developments. I have already explained why I think that is a short-sighted view, which may not achieve even its short-term objective of making TfL a lot of money. The luxury property market may also be in trouble.

We need sustainable development, in town centres and around stations in particular. We need car-free development, for people of all income levels and from all backgrounds. Those are the people who make our city work. Of course, if those people are able to live in

[*Andy Slaughter*]

zones 1, 2 and 3, they will not be clogging up the tubes and buses, as they will be nearer to where they work. TfL already has major capacity problems, and is making a rod for its own back by helping with the process of social cleansing and pushing people out of London.

This Bill should be about Londoners' housing and environment; it should promote air quality and alternative means of travel to the car. It should also be about having an efficient and effective transport system. It is not about any of those things, but about promoting dodgy investment vehicles with dodgy investment partners to maximise the gain for private sector development companies without their taking any risk, as that risk will instead be loaded on to the public sector, in the person of TfL. That is why we have opposed the Bill so strongly, over the past two years in particular, but also before then.

I am glad that TfL, the sponsor and possibly even the Government have listened. I suspect we have succeeded in modifying 90% of what we wanted to modify. It just did not have to be like this. When I met TfL two or three weeks ago, I said "Do you really want to go through another long debate like this in Parliament? Why don't you hold this back until the new Mayor gets elected? I bet you could agree something that we could all agree on within half an hour." I am afraid it did not take that in the spirit in which it was intended and it wished to press ahead. Well, it has got its Bill now. I suspect it wasted a very large sum of fare payers' money on all its experts to get it through, which it did not need to do. I suspect it is not at all happy with the result. I hope it has had an object lesson in how Parliament works. We will not put up with the pig in a poke that the Bill was in its original form.

There are some good provisions in the Bill, but almost by definition we have not discussed them because they are unexceptional and have general support. There are still one or two bad things in the Bill. The Bill has had an unhappy history. I hope that at the very least TfL will learn two lessons: how to approach bringing Private Bills to this House and to the other place; and that we will continue to scrutinise how it does deals and how it tries to develop its property portfolio. TfL has to do this not only in its own interests as an organisation, but in the interests of the fare payer and the taxpayer, and in the interests of Londoners as a whole.

8.46 pm

Bob Blackman: It is a pleasure to rise at what I hope will be the end of a very long journey. The purpose of the Bill is to provide TfL with additional powers, so it can meet its business needs more flexibly and take advantage of more efficient arrangements for the stewardship of its financial affairs. TfL has identified various opportunities for maximising the value of its assets. They can only be realised if TfL acquires the new statutory powers or if the restrictions on the exercise of its current powers are removed.

This has been mentioned before, but let me put it on the record: TfL is one of the biggest landowners in London, with 5,700 acres of land. Clearly, there is a pipeline of some 300 sites, with 50,000 new homes to be provided in London. We know above all else that in

London, the capital city of this country and one of the major cities of the world—if not the major city in the world—we need to provide more new homes and to keep people moving to create investment for the opportunities for jobs and for a better quality of life for everyone. The Bill enables TfL to play its part. It is clear that from October 2015 we already have 75 sites that will generate 10,000 new homes over the next two years. Two thirds of them, contrary to what the hon. Member for Hammersmith (*Andy Slaughter*) said, will be in zones 1 and 2. It is not true to say that sites are not being provided for new homes for Londoners and for people who want to make London their home.

Andy Slaughter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bob Blackman: I will make a bit of progress and then maybe give way. The hon. Gentleman has had plenty of opportunities to put his own perspective and spin. I want to set the record straight.

Four sites in particular have been invested in recently by TfL: 360 homes at Nine Elms tube station, with 25% affordable; 55 homes in the Fenwick Estate near Clapham North tube station, of which 100% are affordable; the development at Northwood is only 20% affordable housing, but TfL has respected local demand to invest in a brand new tube station with step-free access; and at Parsons Green TfL has submitted a scheme with 40% affordable homes, which it has now withdrawn to allow further time for consultation with local businesses and residents. It is clear that TfL is responding to the request and demand for additional housing to be provided in the capital.

The Bill contains only three substantive clauses but is of great importance to TfL because it will enable it to deliver much better value for money for the fare payer and taxpaying public. The growth in London is relentless and driving up demand for services. The tube has record ridership year on year and our roads are also under great pressure. To keep London working and growing, TfL has to invest just to keep the assets in good repair, modernise the rail and road networks and improve reliability. The reality is that all its revenue is reinvested in TfL projects, be it on the roads or rail. Clearly, the issue that will be debated in the run-up to 5 May is how we keep that revenue stream increasing and ensure a fair balance between the taxpayer and the fare payer.

TfL's £11 billion capital funding settlement from the Government runs from 2015-16 to 2020-21—the life of the Parliament—and includes a total of £5.8 billion in investment grant, £1.4 billion in general grant from the Department for Transport and, crucially, £3.8 billion in borrowing powers. That allows TfL to invest £1.7 billion a year to modernise the road and rail networks. The Circle, District, Hammersmith and City and Metropolitan lines will be the next four tube lines to be upgraded. I would have thought the hon. Member for Hammersmith would welcome that, seeing as his constituents use those lines, as do mine—I think, in particular, of the Metropolitan line.

Andy Slaughter *rose*—

Bob Blackman: No, the hon. Gentleman has had plenty of time to put his point of view.

From 2019, TfL's objective will be to cover all the operational costs of running the tube and bus networks through non-DfT grant sources of income. It plans to do this over an extended period by running the business more effectively and efficiently. The continuous savings programme has generated a 15% reduction in costs. Following the November spending review, TfL has had to accelerate and build upon that because, as has been alluded to, its overall income is set to reduce by £2.8 billion over the period to 2020-21. The Bill will provide TfL with additional powers to run its business more flexibly and take advantage of more efficient and economic financial arrangements. This will allow TfL to maximise the value of assets, bear down on fares and deliver significantly better value for money to the public.

The first of the substantive clauses, clause 4, will allow TfL's subsidiaries to borrow and grant security over assets and revenue streams. We have had a long debate about this issue in relation to the amendments. The powers will allow TfL to access cheaper finance for projects and to structure security so that a creditor has recourse only against subsidiary borrowing. TfL will be able to purchase subsidiary companies that already have secured debt without having to engage in costly loan restructures. Very importantly, the Secretary of State's consent is required if core assets are to be offered as security, and the Mayor must consent to all other arrangements.

Where TfL owns more than 50% of a joint venture, clause 4 will enable TfL's subsidiary to incur debt using the assets of the subsidiary as security. That does not advantage or disadvantage a private partner involved in the joint venture, as the increased value of the assets will be brought about with the greater flexibility in clause 4 and will be shared by TfL and the private sector partner, in accordance with the terms agreed between the parties.

Clause 5 has now been removed. Clause 6 seeks to expand the type of entities through which TfL's commercial activities must be undertaken. TfL is currently required to undertake its profit-making activities through a company limited by shares that is either a subsidiary or a joint venture. The clause amends this restriction to give TfL the option of using any type of entities that TfL has the power to form, in addition to a company limited by shares. TfL would be able to use a company limited by guarantee or a limited liability partnership. Importantly, clause 6 preserves the policy that TfL must undertake commercial activities through a taxable entity by requiring that the subsidiary be a member of a limited liability partnership. Clause 6 will enable TfL to conduct its affairs more flexibly and net the maximum value from the assets.

Clause 7 amends TfL's hedging power, responding to changes in the way that financial institutions hedge risk away from specific commodity trading to trading by indices—as, for example, in the use of an oil price index, as opposed to a barrel of Brent crude oil. It also gives TfL the capacity to enter into a derivative investment when TfL is exposed to a risk by virtue of contractual arrangements for the provision by others of public passenger transport services—for example, if there were movements in fuel prices, it would allow TfL to hedge the costs. Clause 7 also clarifies that TfL may use its hedging powers in respect of its liability to any pension fund. It is not proposed that TfL enter into any derivative

investments on behalf of the TfL pension funds, but TfL will be able to hedge its contribution risk to the fund.

Given the benefit to TfL pension fund members, some of whom will be members of RMT, the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), who is no longer in his place, acknowledged the merits of clause 7 on Second Reading. Once again, I find it hard to see the logic of the hon. Member for Hammersmith's continuing to block the Bill. It seems that my hon. Friends and hon. Gentlemen have misconceptions about the scope of the Bill, contrary to assertions made on Second Reading and elsewhere, the Bill does not give TfL any new powers to sell or develop its land. TfL has had those powers since it was created in 2000, and it is not seeking to enlarge them in any way. Neither can TfL act autonomously when it wishes to dispose of its interests in its land, including when granting a long-term lease. TfL must obtain the consent of the Mayor to sell surplus land, and if that land is operational land or has been operational land in the last five years, the Secretary of State must give his or her consent.

Some colleagues suggested on Second Reading that TfL's track record shows that it is not competent enough to be given greater powers and that it should focus on its core function of providing transport services rather than delving into joint venture projects with developers. It cannot be disputed that TfL serves more customers more efficiently and more reliably than at any point in its history. Providing public passenger transport will always be TfL's main focus. The powers it seeks in the Bill will not detract from its discharge of those functions, and the discrete scope of the Bill should be taken as indicative of a change in TfL's priorities.

The Bill will, however, give TfL greater opportunity to secure sustainable income from its assets, rather than a one-off capital receipt from their disposal. Very importantly, that is to adopt a long-term strategy to the management of its property estate, which will allow TfL to maximise the value of its assets and deliver better value for money to the public.

I am somewhat confused because it would appear that the hon. Member for Hammersmith is so lacking in confidence in his candidate for the mayoralty that he would seek to block this Bill in order to get him there. I am looking forward to my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) assuming his place as Mayor of London on 6 May, and we can look forward to this Bill helping him to deliver more homes, more jobs and better and safer transport for the people of London.

8.58 pm

Daniel Zeichner: You will be pleased to hear, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I do not intend to repeat the substantial points I made in my earlier contribution—*[Interruption.]* That is no doubt the biggest cheer of the night. There is always a but, however, and I shall reiterate one or two minor points. Let me first put on record the thanks of Labour Members for the sterling efforts of our hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter), who has staged a heroic fight over many months and years on this issue. As a consequence, we end up with a better Bill.

[Daniel Zeichner]

Let me return to my earlier point: the pressure on TfL is clearly a consequence of the substantial cut in support from the Government in the recent Budget. That has caused a significant shift in the way in which TfL operates. I hear what others have said about its capacity to use resources well and make the best possible use of its assets, and we hope that their confidence is justified, but we also share the misgivings expressed by my hon. Friends about some of the potential bedfellows whom TfL may seek out. This becomes a much wider and more complicated debate about the role of public authorities such as TfL at a time when so many people in our city are experiencing such acute housing problems. Labour Members, certainly, feel that TfL's most important role is to keep our capital working and moving successfully.

Nevertheless, we have a better Bill, not least because of the withdrawal of clause 5, which, in our view, would have led us down a dangerous route. On the basis that we have secured some improvements, let us end the evening on a positive note. We hope that TfL will be able to take the opportunities that some Members have described, although we ourselves still have some reservations.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed, with amendments.

Road and Rail Links: Sheffield and Manchester

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Stephen Barclay.*)

9.1 pm

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): The debate has been slightly delayed. At least three colleagues who share my concern about trans-Pennine links would have joined me in the Chamber tonight, but the late start has prevented them from doing so. I wanted to put that on the record.

The economic case for new transport infrastructure between Sheffield and Manchester is very strong. The National Infrastructure Commission has reported that the north in general

“needs immediate and very significant investment for action now and a plan for longer-term transformation to reduce journey times, increase capacity and improve reliability.”

It admits that

“Sheffield’s economy...is small compared to that of Leeds and Manchester, with lower productivity and skills levels”,

and that—this is the important point—

“the city is less well linked to the surrounding region, in particular with the Pennines limiting connectivity to the west.”

It also points out that

“the lack of a good transport link between the two means that their economies are largely separate from each other.”

That is a big problem for the northern powerhouse project, and a real obstacle to the delivery of progress.

Only 10,000 vehicles a day travel between Greater Manchester and south Yorkshire, whereas 55,000 a day travel between west Yorkshire and Greater Manchester. There may be slight differences in population, but the only real explanation for the disparity must be the poor transport links between the former two regions. The implication is that the vast majority of potential travel between them simply does not take place, because the infrastructure needed to accommodate it does not exist.

Andrew Bingham (High Peak) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on initiating a debate on a matter that she will know is close to my heart, because my constituency is just on the other side of the Pennines. Does she agree that the problems on the two principal roads between her constituency and Greater Manchester, which go through my constituency—the A628 and the A57—are preventing people from travelling, and preventing them from creating a link between two big economies that need to dovetail as part of the northern powerhouse?

Angela Smith: I entirely agree with my constituency neighbour. As I shall go on to explain in detail, the key problem is that those two roads are effectively mountain passes—or what pass for mountain routes in England—and they run through a national park. The fact that two of our major northern cities are divided by the huge obstacle presented by those two very difficult roads lies at the heart of the problem.

I want to illustrate the economic impact with a concrete example before I move on to describe the two roads that the hon. Gentleman referred to. Tata Speciality Steels has a dedicated service centre in Bolton, which is obviously on the other side of the Pennines from the factory, and

the company experiences real logistical difficulties precisely because of the poor links between the two areas. There are three road routes across the Pennines. We have the A57, part of which is known as the Snake pass. Incidentally, it was not given that name because of its winding nature; it was named after a feature on the Duke of Devonshire's coat of arms. It is nevertheless incredibly difficult to use. Heavy goods vehicles find it impossible; indeed, they are advised not to use it. Even cars can find it difficult in bad conditions. It is, after all, a mountain pass.

The A628 is therefore the major road across the Pennines between Sheffield and Manchester, but the height and exposure of the road often create problems during poor weather in winter, and it is sometimes closed due to snowfall or high winds. However, road closures on the Woodhead pass are more often the result of road traffic accidents than of bad weather. In 2011, four of the eight closures on the Woodhead pass were due to road traffic accidents, and four were due to bad weather. In 2012 there were 14 closures, eight of which were the result of road traffic accidents. The other six were due to bad weather. There were 12 closures in 2013; eight were due to road traffic accidents and four to bad weather. So, in the latest year for which we have statistics, the major road crossing between two of our biggest cities was closed on average once a month. That is a huge obstacle for people and, in particular, for businesses trying to make logistical transport plans in order to do their work.

We also have the M62, but using it to go from Sheffield to Manchester involves making a massive detour. I used the AA route planner this evening and worked out that if you use the M62 to go up from Sheffield, across the Pennines and down to Manchester, the distance is 72.5 miles and the journey takes one hour and 42 minutes. If you use the A628, the distance is only 37.8 miles, but the journey is only 20 minutes shorter. Using the motorway involves travelling twice the distance but takes only 20 minutes longer. That is if you are lucky—we all know that the M62 can be hugely congested. It is therefore not a realistic option, and we need to do something about the trans-Pennine link.

As for rail, the average speed of rail travel across the Pennines between the major cities is below 50 mph. This has led to the contained nature of travel in the northern regions. An analysis of travel patterns between northern cities by Transport for the North suggests that levels of commuting are below what might be expected given the size and relative proximity of the cities in question, bearing in mind that Leeds, Sheffield and Manchester are equidistant from each other. Commuting between Sheffield and Manchester, for example, is 38% lower than could be expected. As an example of the slow speeds that we experience, the trains from Manchester to Sheffield travel at less than half the average speed of those travelling between London and Milton Keynes.

Trains are also running at capacity on the Hope Valley line. The hon. Member for High Peak (Andrew Bingham) will know that line, as will the Minister. The trains run at capacity during the rush hour, with an average of 7,224 passengers coming into Sheffield from Manchester each morning during peak hours, which is 2.3% in excess of capacity. This results in 7.8% of passengers having to stand during those morning journeys.

As the Minister knows, I would be the first to acknowledge that progress is being made. Proposals are on the table for a new road tunnel and a new rail tunnel involving a high-speed route across the Pennines. I welcome those proposals; I am not playing politics. I know that work is being undertaken to establish the feasibility of at least three of the original five potential corridors for a road link across the Pennines. The feasibility work needs to include the impacts on nearby land use and economic growth, and there are the environmental concerns relating to a long road tunnel. I am hopeful that if the proposed new road tunnel is feasible and if the economic case can be made, the Government will press ahead with this important project.

Andrew Bingham: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Angela Smith: I cannot, as I have only a few minutes left.

As for the new rail project, the National Infrastructure Commission has made it clear that it recommends kick-starting High Speed 3, and that its integration with HS2 would be the best way of planning the new rail development in the area. Important route decisions for HS2 need to be made over forthcoming months, and I put it on the parliamentary record—I have already done so locally—that Meadowhall is the best option for an HS2 station in South Yorkshire on the way to Leeds at end of the eastern branch of HS2.

We have heard that the Government plan an HS3 route from Manchester to Leeds, and I need to make it clear and put it on the record that any such project cannot be allowed to miss out South Yorkshire. It is absolutely critical to the economic resilience and redevelopment of the north of England that the new rail route serves South Yorkshire and potentially the south bank of the Humber as much as it serves Leeds and the north bank of the Humber. A new tunnelled rail link could come out in the Penistone area, probably in my constituency, and spur not only up to Leeds and over to Hull, but down into South Yorkshire, Sheffield, Rotherham and potentially beyond. The developments on the table are exciting, but we are absolutely adamant in South Yorkshire that we want to be included in the Government's options for both rail and road.

Some of us have been campaigning for years for a new rail route across the Pennines. We initially focused on reopening the old Woodhead route, but we lost that campaign and electric cables have now been established in the old 1953 tunnel by National Grid. It is clear that we did not lose the argument about the need for new rail infrastructure; however, the connections suggested so far are not to Sheffield, which is what the campaign for a new Woodhead route was always about, or to South Yorkshire, but to Leeds, so we need to deal with that. We need a commitment to a route that crosses the Pennines and then serves all the major urban communities of the north. Why do we need to do all that? All the Government's arguments about the northern powerhouse and the rebalancing of the economy are brought into focus by the need to do something about the trans-Pennine transport links, which is what the NIC has driven home in the conclusion of its report. The NIC's argument that poor connectivity is holding back economic development in South Yorkshire underpins the case.

[Angela Smith]

I want to finish by mentioning the achievements of our Victorian forebears. I mentioned the Woodhead line earlier, so let us look at the facts. It was built by the Victorians, and when the first railway tunnel was completed in 1845, it was one of the longest in the world. The second tunnel was completed in 1853. Both those tunnels would potentially be usable even now, but for their being no longer in maintenance. That is a great testament to the foresight and engineering skills of our Victorian ancestors. As far as I am concerned, they managed it, and so can we. They saw the economic potential of linking two rapidly growing northern cities—a steel city and Manchester—and so should we. They also invested for the long term, and so should we.

A 30-year appraisal in the cost-benefit analysis of the need for these links—the road link and the rail link—is not adequate; we need an analysis and an economic case that understands that we are building for the long term. We need to look at a 100-year case for building this new infrastructure. We would never have built the Woodhead line or many of our railway lines across the country if we had not taken a long-term view of the interests of the economy in areas such as Sheffield, Manchester and London. Would we have even built the tube in London had we not taken such an approach? That is what we need to understand.

On that basis, there is a great deal of support among Opposition Members for what the Government are trying to achieve. As I said, more of my colleagues would have been here to support this debate had it not been postponed for so long because of other very urgent business. I look forward to the Minister's remarks. I hope that he will concede the case for the Sheffield link to HS3, and that he will give us some optimistic updates on the progress on both the road link and the rail link that we are all looking forward to seeing.

9.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): I congratulate the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) on securing this debate on road and rail links connecting Sheffield and Manchester. She has been making some valuable points about the need for improved transport links, and I agree with her comments about the debt we owe to our Victorian forefathers and the long-term approach they took to their planning. There are indeed lessons we can take from that. One thing I did learn during her speech was how Snake pass got its name—I did not know that until a few moments ago.

On 7 March, the Department for Transport and Transport for the North jointly published the first annual update report on the northern transport strategy. The report is the culmination of 12 months of collaborative work with Transport for the North and other transport agencies, and it sets out the significant progress that has been made in laying the foundation for transformative infrastructure projects across the north of England, connecting key cities and areas across the region, enabling the north to become more than the sum of its parts. The report sets out the next steps, including major improvements to the north's road networks, connecting the north's regions better by rail, and enhancing the passenger experience of travelling across the north by using smart and integrated ticketing technologies.

Improving east-west connectivity is at the heart of the northern transport strategy report. Our work to date has shown that the north of England has a number of cities that perform well individually but lack the transport connectivity needed to drive improved output and employment. Boosting that connectivity is essential to creating that single and well-connected economy of the north, which is our objective in the northern powerhouse.

The hon. Lady's debate specifically focuses on the city regions of Sheffield and Greater Manchester, both of which are key economic centres for the north; they are certainly at the forefront of all of our thinking on northern transport strategies. The cities and their wider regions are key to the success of the northern powerhouse, and there is significant potential for enhanced growth if we can link the two cities much more closely together. The economic case that she made was important, highlighting the lack of economic integration between two large cities that are only 40 miles apart compared with other neighbours, where the read-across is absolutely correct.

Both city regions have strengths in advanced manufacturing, nuclear energy, health technologies and IT. We need to make it quicker and easier for companies in those sectors and all others—we are talking about very diverse economies—to do business with each other. We also need to make it easier and quicker for skilled and experienced employees to work and develop careers across both city regions.

On road connectivity, we are committed to ensuring that strategic road travel is both free flowing and reliable. In announcing the road investment strategy in 2014, we delivered a step change in how road investment in this country is delivered.

Before 2020, we will commence improvements to a number of roads, greatly improving transport links and connectivity across the country. The north of England is obviously an important part of our road investment strategy. However, any conversation about links between Sheffield and Manchester must give due regard to ensuring that the spectacular natural beauty of the Pennines is preserved. That is why we are considering the case for a new high performance road tunnel between these two great cities.

A Government-commissioned study into that endeavour has already determined that there is a clear strategic case for a road tunnel. In addition to bringing potentially significant economic benefits to the region, this tunnel could also deliver environmental benefits to the Peak District national park. It does no service to the national park, with all of its beauty, that it should have back-to-back HGVs ploughing through difficult road conditions, causing all of the problems that come with that in terms of congestion and air quality.

I cannot at this stage provide concrete details about the project, such as the exact scale of the economic benefits, the cost or indeed the most important matter of a preferred route for a potential tunnel, but I will certainly be back to give the House a thorough update on those issues and on the study findings as soon as we have them. It is an important long-term project. It has been talked about in the north for very many years. We are taking it forward and are determined to make it a reality should all the criteria work for us.

This study, alongside studies considering the case for the significant improvements to the M60 and the north Pennines connectivity, the A66 and the A69, will publish its final report by the end of the year. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has already allocated £75 million from the £300 million transport development fund to ensure that, if these studies indicate that there is a strong case for developing these schemes, we can get shovels in the ground on these transformational projects as soon as possible.

Andrew Bingham: The improvements to the A628 and the A57, the Mottram relief road and the Glossop Spur, are very welcome. The Minister will know from his visit to High Peak not long ago that we need to extend that work. I really must stress that, although this is welcome, speed is the key. I do not mean the speed of the traffic as it trundles through Glossop at 5 mph, but the speed of delivering these projects, because we are experiencing huge problems in my constituency.

Andrew Jones: I very much enjoyed the visit to my hon. Friend's constituency, and the point he makes was brought home by that visit and by talking to residents and to neighbouring colleagues from this House who also joined us on that visit. I will come on to talk a bit more about that very shortly, but his point is fair, and I agree with the urgency of the case.

The tunnel and these long-term studies are examples of the kind of forward-thinking, long-term planning that has been a characteristic in transport planning in our country and is something that we are trying very hard to recover. We have made a good start on that, and it is a key part of our approach to transport. We are also committed to putting in place improvements to transport corridors between Sheffield and Manchester in the more imminent future. That builds on the points mentioned by my hon. Friend.

We have already announced a number of measures that will seek to alleviate pressure on the transport network in the short to medium term. This includes improvements to the A628 in the Peak District national park, with the introduction of two overtaking lanes. There are also additional upgrades on both sides of the national park, with schemes due to improve both the Mottram Moor link road and the A61, improving journeys between Manchester and all of south Yorkshire. There are also other smaller measures in place to address accident blackspots.

On timing, it is expected that construction of the schemes set out in the first roads investment strategy will commence by March 2020. I know that my hon. Friend and other colleagues across the House are impatient for progress, so I will do all that I can to look at ways in which we can advance that date through the design and delivery process. Nevertheless, I must also stress that we will work closely with the National Park Authority to ensure that these improvements are in keeping with the Peak District national park's protected landscape.

Angela Smith: The Minister will be aware of the controversial history of any attempt to deal with congestion, particularly around Mottram and Tintwistle. May I ask him to work effectively with groups such as the Campaign to Protect Rural England and the Friends of the Peak District to ensure that we keep not just the national park onside but the environmentalists, who have a passionate concern about our wonderful national park?

Andrew Jones: I happily give that commitment to make sure that we work as widely as possible. Our objective is not just to solve a transport issue and improve quality of life for residents as a result of the economic benefits that come from transport investment, but to improve the protection of a wonderful national park and people's experience of that park. We will happily consult widely with communities and stakeholders on all these measures.

Turning to rail services, upgrading our rail network will make journeys faster, easier and less crowded. Businesses will be able to recruit from a wider labour pool, and people will be able to travel to a wider range of jobs without having their horizons limited by the distance from their home and the challenges of travelling time. As the hon. Lady will be aware, the new Northern and TransPennine franchises began on the first of this month, and she has welcomed the benefits, which are significant for rail passengers across the north. The new franchises will deliver more than 500 brand new carriages, space for 40,000 extra passengers at the busiest times and thousands of extra services, plus investment to improve stations. The line between the key northern cities will have more trains, with new trains and services, which is a significant change. Alongside that, the north of England rail infrastructure upgrade programme includes a substantial electrification programme and other track, station, depot and signalling improvements to enhance the capability of the northern rail network.

As part of the proposed northern hub programme of capacity enhancements—the northern hub is something for which the hon. Lady campaigned for a considerable time, and I was happy to join that campaign—Network Rail proposes to carry out works at the eastern end of the Hope Valley line, which has been a key connection between Sheffield and Manchester since it was completed at the end of the 19th century. A passing loop is to be provided east of Bamford station, and the line is to be redoubled at Dore and Topley station. The purpose of the scheme is to enable an increase in passenger services between Manchester and Sheffield and to improve access, with a sustainable means of transport, to the Peak District national park.

A public inquiry on Network Rail's application for legal powers and planning permission for the scheme will open in Dore on 10 May. The independent inquiry inspector will submit a report and recommendation to the Department for Transport. In view of the Department's role in deciding the application, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the merits of the scheme at the moment.

We are working to establish better rail connections across the whole of the north of England. In March 2015, the Government and Transport for the North set out the vision for the northern powerhouse rail network—HS3, as it is sometimes called. South Yorkshire is certainly part of those plans; there is no question about that. It is an ambition for radically faster, more frequent links between the six city regions of the north: Sheffield, Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Newcastle, and Hull, along with Manchester airport. That ambition includes, for example, six trains an hour with 30-minute journey times between Sheffield city centre and Manchester, and better connectivity for passengers from south Yorkshire to Manchester airport. Initial findings, published in the spring 2016 report on the northern transport strategy,

[*Andrew Jones*]

indicate that that is likely to include a mixture of upgrades to existing lines, the construction of new lines, and the use of northern sections of HS2.

At the same time, the National Infrastructure Commission agreed that the north needs a high speed, high frequency network between its six city regions. Working with TfN, we are continuing to develop options, and by the end of this year we will have a more detailed view of the physical work required to deliver each option within a corridor. This includes analysis of the indicative costs and benefits, in order to move towards proposing a preferred option on each corridor.

It is clear that we are working hard to establish much better links between the cities of the north, particularly Sheffield and Manchester. They are great cities and an important part of the northern powerhouse. Connectivity is at the heart of progress. We are taking action now and planning for the long term to ensure better futures for both cities. I look forward to reporting to colleagues in the House the progress that we are making as the reports and development work take place.

Question put and agreed to.

9.30 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 12 April 2016

[GRAHAM STRINGER *in the Chair*]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Order. Before I call Jim Shannon to move the motion, I must explain that we are having technical difficulties. The debate is hugely over-subscribed—many people want to speak—so it is likely that after Jim Shannon has spoken I will impose a time limit. However, there is no connection between my clock and the clock on the wall, which is going to be a difficulty for speakers. When Jim Shannon has spoken, I will explain what we are going to do.

9.30 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

I thank all Members who have very energetically turned out in large numbers to support this debate. I am going to keep my speech to 15 minutes to give everybody else a chance to participate. I thank the shadow Minister for being here, and it is good to see the Minister in her place. We always get a good response from her, so I look forward to that.

Yesterday, we had a digital debate in preparation for this debate, and I have got some stats to give hon. Members an idea of how it went. It was organised by Lucinda Blaser and the staff of my office. We reached almost 3 million Twitter accounts, and a total of 1,100 tweets were sent throughout the day. There was an enormous amount of interest outside this House in yesterday's debate, and the same is true of today's debate.

I want to speak about the issues that concern me. It is hard to find someone whose life has not been touched in some way by Alzheimer's or dementia. People up and down the country—unfortunately including many in my constituency—are affected by those indiscriminate diseases. Alzheimer's and dementia know no class, colour, creed or gender; they can affect any of us. It is extremely important that we have this opportunity in Westminster to discuss advances in ways of tackling the disease. This debate raises awareness and puts the issue of dementia and Alzheimer's on the agenda for the whole of the United Kingdom. All Members will bring their own knowledge of this subject to the House. We will hear contributions from Members from across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

According to the Alzheimer's Society, our ageing population will increase the trends. In 2015, 720,000 of the 856,000 people known to have dementia were in England, 45,000 were in Wales, 70,000 were in Scotland and 21,000 were in my home nation of Northern Ireland. In my trust area, which includes Lisburn, North Down, Down and Ards, the level of dementia is 25% higher

than that of England after age standardisations. We have a higher level of dementia and Alzheimer's in my constituency than anywhere else in Northern Ireland.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this absolutely vital debate. This is not just about the total number of cases of dementia that are now being registered; it is about the increase down the line. In my constituency, we are looking at an estimated increase of 30% over the next five years in reported dementia cases. Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on the increasing incidence of dementia?

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely on the button on this issue. Very quickly on the figures, because stats can sometimes overawe us, it is estimated that by 2025 1.1 million people will have dementia and Alzheimer's, and by 2051 2.1 million people will have the diseases. The numbers are enormous.

Nick Thomas-Symonds (Torfaen) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate on such an important topic. On the increase in numbers, does he agree that some vital work is being done on mitigating the symptoms of Alzheimer's, not least in many care homes and residential homes in my constituency? Equally, we have to focus on palliative care for people with Alzheimer's at the end of their life.

Jim Shannon: I was going to come to that issue. I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. It is not just about the diagnosis of dementia and Alzheimer's, but about the follow-up, the path of care and how we help the whole way through. I will touch on some of those things later in my speech.

We must not abandon or diminish our efforts to find a cure. We have to take into account the reality we face and carefully plan for the future, so that all those with dementia and Alzheimer's can get the care and support they so desperately need. As the hon. Gentleman said, that is the issue we have to address.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): We are talking about end-of-life support, but we have to take a practical approach. One of the charities in my constituency—Community Concern Erewash—has a project to dementia-proof houses in Erewash to help people in the early stages of dementia stay in their houses for longer. They are doing things such as labelling drawers and rooms, so that people know exactly where they are and can navigate their house for longer. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that such practical measures will make a difference?

Jim Shannon: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. The simplest things can make a difference. It is about improving quality of life and letting people with dementia and Alzheimer's have a life with their families.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. He makes a very important point, which is that we are concerned not only about those with the condition, but about their carers, of whom there are now 750,000. Does the hon. Gentleman agree—I have been talking to my local Alzheimer's Society about this—that we have to

[*Mr Mark Prisk*]

ensure that we have information and provide access to support and networks so that carers do not feel isolated, as they often do?

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that contribution. In the digital debate yesterday, there was mention of the clusters for those caring for people with dementia. There are 82 across the UK mainland, including some in our area and in Scotland and Wales. Lots of things are happening, and we need to see them develop.

To be fair—I know the Minister will say this in her response—the Prime Minister made very good comments about the 2020 challenge on dementia, which contains some marvellous things that can pave the way forward. The simple things can really make a difference and change people's lives easily.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I applaud the hon. Gentleman for securing this very important debate. He is talking about getting the simple things right. In the Medway towns, we have dementia cafés—one is located in Medway—where families and sufferers can be brought together to share their experiences and get the support they need in their local area, which is absolutely vital at that time.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): This is such an important debate, and it is really important that we air all of these issues. It is about the simple things in many cases, but it spreads across a wide network. One of the respite centre residents of Dementia Care—an excellent charity in my constituency—was recently admitted to hospital for a routine procedure but was not released from hospital until 3 am, which threw their entire programme for the next day. More carers were needed to get them back into a routine. Simple things make a huge difference to such people and those who care for them.

Jim Shannon: The hon. Lady speaks with knowledge. I thank her for that contribution.

There are ten key indicators of the quality of life of people with dementia: communication difficulties; relationships; environment and surroundings; physical health; a sense of humour; independence; a sense of personal identity; the ability to engage in activities and the opportunity to do so; difficulties with eating, drinking and swallowing; and, of course, their experience of stigma. All of those things are important.

Mr John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. As he draws these strands together, there is one problem that we should focus on. Local authorities have many statutory responsibilities, but as a result of the significant cuts to their budgets, these areas—they are not statutory responsibilities but, as a number of colleagues identified, they play a huge role in enabling people to manage their condition, stay active for longer and provide respite for their carers—are being cut back, which will ultimately have a long-term cost for the health service.

Jim Shannon: Obviously, the right hon. Gentleman has a focus on the issue. We will throw that ball in the Minister's direction and perhaps she will answer that as well.

Dignity and quality of life are far too easily taken for granted, but simple things are so often lost when someone is diagnosed with Alzheimer's or dementia. To do what we can to facilitate a better quality of life for those who through no fault of their own are so diagnosed is what I hope we came to this House to do—to make a difference. Yesterday, it was deeply encouraging to see from the digital debate how many bodies are active in the field of dementia and Alzheimer's.

There are many issues to consider as part of dementia awareness, although one that is often overlooked is sight. I met an optician from Newtownards last week, and what I learned prompted me to mention the subject now. All too often, it is assumed that someone with dementia will gain no benefit from a sight test and vision correction, simply because they have a cognitive impairment or might not work, drive or read. Good eye health and good vision, however, can play an important role in supporting the wellbeing of a person living with dementia. Again, I ask the Minister for a better strategy. I know that opticians' organisations would be happy to assist. Good vision can greatly increase a person with dementia's sense of independence, allowing them to continue to participate in daily tasks and activities and in obtaining a good quality of life.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman intend to cover why there is an increase in dementia? Many of us are dementia friends, but why is there an increase in this awful illness? Do we know?

Jim Shannon: I would need to the wisdom of Solomon to answer that question. Personally, I do not know; perhaps it is society or how we live. People are living longer and, by the very nature of living longer, we have such problems. There are probably a number of issues involved and reasons for that. However, early diagnosis, follow-on care and end-of-life care are fundamental.

There is a need to raise awareness among people with dementia and their carers about the disruptions to vision and eye health that might be concurrent with or arise from dementia. We therefore need to emphasise the importance of regular sight tests and eye examinations.

The Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation has done some interesting and outside-the-box things for people living with dementia. Along with partners, they have delivered a dementia-friendly swimming initiative, which is steadily expanding across the country. That is an absolutely fantastic way to help improve quality of life. It is amazing how not-for-profits are putting in the hard graft to make heart-warming things such as that happen, often with no funding. It is amazing what a group of dedicated, selfless individuals can do, as has been mentioned.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and I apologise for missing his opening remarks. Will he take the opportunity to commend the many local communities that have sought dementia-friendly status, meaning that a visit to the shop is not too embarrassing or a stigmatising event for sufferers or their carers?

Jim Shannon: The hon. Gentleman has clearly hit on a very salient point.

In relation to the science and medical sectors, I ask the Minister about the significant spend on and moneys set aside for the investigation into how dementia happens, which the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) asked about in his intervention. That money will help to find a cure—and we need to find a cure, because we have to give hope. To give hope, we have to have medical interventions and the investigations leading to them.

Maggie Throup: The hon. Gentleman is talking about a cure. Recently, I visited the department of human genetics at the University of Nottingham, which is working hard on a genomics project to identify the change in the genes that might cause dementia and Alzheimer's, so there is light at the end of the tunnel, although it is a long way off. Great work is being carried out, however, not only in Nottingham, but in many places in the UK and throughout the world.

Jim Shannon: We have to encourage all medical advances.

The number of people living with the condition in the UK is revealed as more startling when we take into account the unsung heroes—the carers.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on obtaining this debate. He made an important point about the unsung heroes, the carers. Does he agree that often the people who provide the care in the home rely on outside visits, but those are short-term visits, which are not really the answer to support the carer or the person suffering from Alzheimer's disease or dementia? More work on policy development and resources needs to be invested in by Government in the vital area of caring.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Lady for a valuable intervention.

Carers UK estimates that, of the 6.5 million carers in the UK, 670,000 people care for friends or relatives with dementia. It is estimated that the NHS saves some £11.6 billion each year because of those unsung heroes; their contribution as volunteer carers is very valuable. Carers may end up providing more than 100 hours of care per week, and all too often the outside world is completely oblivious to their efforts—even those who know the carers might be oblivious, because they do not know what is happening. Anyone who has lived with someone with dementia or Alzheimer's, or knows a person who does, knows the problems. People with dementia can often unknowingly become agitated, even violent, and night-time wandering and shouting can have a serious impact on carers' sleep patterns, let alone sufferers'.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. Talking about awareness and carers, does he agree with me that a large number of carers might not even be aware of, but need to be taught, how to help and look after? We need an awareness campaign.

Jim Shannon: We do need an awareness campaign—perhaps it starts with this debate today, working its way through to our constituencies and the people we represent.

Too often, carers are left to suffer in silence. The existing services on offer are not publicised enough and are not up to standard. The main social security benefit available to carers is the carer's allowance. Those providing more than 35 hours of care a week are entitled to only £62.10. Further to that, carers may incur sanctions on how much they can earn on top of the allowance. Dementia carers save the NHS more than £11 billion every year, but they get only £62.10 per week for giving up their lives for someone less fortunate. I know the Minister's Department is not responsible for that but, with respect, it is not a good reflection on Government given the hours spent by carers. Times are tough for the public finances, but it must be highly insulting to carers for them to see some of the things happening in the news when they are getting only £62.10 a week.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): Familiarity has been mentioned, and that is an important role for carers to play. My own grandmother deteriorated every time she was in hospital, because of the lack of familiarity. Does my hon. Friend support John's Campaign, which encourages the provision of more time and greater support for carers in the hospital setting, as well as greater flexibility about the hours they can be there with their loved ones?

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend makes a salient point. He always hits on the issues that we should all be aware of.

I welcome the fact that the Government are developing a new carers strategy. I can only hope that this debate will raise awareness of the need for urgent and large-scale reform of the way in which the Government treat carers. I welcome the dementia-friendly communities strategy and the clusters of dementia groups. In my constituency we have a number of homes where patients with dementia and Alzheimer's are looked after directly. I also have a dementia friends group who come together in the Church of Ireland church in Newtownards. They bring together all the people of Ards and North Down who want to participate. They give them art, they give them music and they give them a chance to interact, and it is marvellous what happens.

Briefly, I want to mention some of the things that happen in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland dementia strategy has a list of achievements to its credit in recent times, which I bring before the House to help the debate: £6.25 million in the Dementia Together Northern Ireland project; the appointment of dementia champions—perhaps the Minister will give us some thoughts about dementia champions in the whole of the United Kingdom, because things are happening, but I would like to hear about them.

Nick Thomas-Symonds: On dementia champions and dementia friends, will the hon. Gentleman join me in praising the wonderful work that is done by them, especially in providing sufferers with familiarity—the point made by the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson)? One of the ideas is to provide sufferers with things such as memory boxes to trigger the memory, which helps terrifically with this dreadful disease.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I commend the hon. Gentleman for securing the debate. On Northern Ireland, he may be aware that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation supports the Dementia without Walls programme, and one place in which it has done something is in a city with walls—the Derry Engaging and Empowering Dementia project has included: work at the level of schools and everywhere to ensure that everyone is more aware of dementia; and Derry having the first dementia-friendly pantomime in Ireland last December, in the Millennium Forum.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and for giving an example of some of the good things happening throughout the whole country.

I tabled an early-day motion some time ago to highlight what can happen in people's homes, and I suggested issues such as smoking, drinking, diet, excessive weight, healthy weight and social interaction, which is so important. Many may enjoy a tippie or an alcoholic beverage, but for too long alcohol has been overlooked as a cause of dementia. The hon. Member for Beckenham asked what some of the causes are, and that is one of them. No one is saying to people to go cold turkey or to hang up their dancing shoes, but the facts are there and they need to be heard.

We have alcohol-related dementia, which is formally attributed to alcoholism, and conclusive evidence now shows that heavy drinking over a long period increases the chance not only of dementia in the long term but of early onset dementia. To illustrate that, Alcohol Concern has provided comparative data showing that the brains of men who drank more than four units of alcohol a day—approximately two or three drinks a day—over 10 years age at a higher rate than those of light or non-alcohol drinkers. The brains of men who regularly drank alcohol appeared between 1.5 and 5.7 years older than their healthier counterparts. Those are just some of the things we have got to address.

One other thing we have done in Northern Ireland is provide funding for dementia-specific nurses, new studies into treating dementia—seven studies are taking place in Northern Ireland—and we have clinical leads for research. That is what we need to do. I thank the Minister, the shadow Minister and right hon. and hon. Members for coming to participate in the debate. I hope that my comments and the interventions have helped to focus attention and that we can do a lot more in advancing the race against dementia and Alzheimer's, supporting the carers better and furthering awareness of the potential causes.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Order. Given the technical difficulties, the number of people who wish to speak and the fact that I intend to call the Front-Bench spokespeople at around 10.30 am, if my arithmetic is right, we are due to go over that time. I will put on a time limit of four minutes and not add time for interventions, because that gets too technically complicated. I hope that is clear. That will probably take us just over 10.30 am. The Clerk tells me that, to aid right hon. and hon. Members, a bell will be rung one minute before the end of their speech time limit.

9.52 am

Wendy Morton (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): I cannot wait to hear the bell! I congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing this important debate. We know that there are more than 800,000 people with dementia in the UK today and that by 2040 that number is expected to double. I did a bit more digging into my constituency and found that Aldridge-Brownhills is ranked 220th by age standard prevalence.

My constituents are concerned about this subject—they have written to me about it—and probably most of us in the Chamber have been affected through knowing someone who has or who has had it. We often wrongly associate it with age, but the reality is that more than 40,000 younger people—people under 65—currently live with the condition, so I hope that one result of this debate will be a recognition that it does not just come with age.

Research also shows that dementia costs the UK a staggering £23 billion a year, which is more than the cost of cancer, heart disease or stroke. It is equally concerning that the diagnosis rate has been historically low. That is why I welcome the Government's objective and the work they are doing to be a world leader in fighting dementia and their commitment to improve diagnosis, care support and research. That must be welcomed. However, it is worth recognising that as vital research goes on, the condition does not go away. We must recognise dementia's impact on families. It can be very difficult to look after someone who has dementia and, especially in the early stages before they are diagnosed, trying to understand what the problem is and how to help them.

As has been touched on, we also need to recognise that it can be difficult and distressing for those with dementia when they go into hospital. To be in a different environment, away from familiar surroundings, is hard at the best of times, but it is even more so for those with dementia. Time in hospital can have a negative effect on the health and wellbeing of people with dementia and, as has been highlighted, delays in discharge can also exacerbate problems.

We have talked about the role of carers—not just the paid carers, but the unpaid carers who are there 24/7, looking after their loved ones. They do not get any respite and they often have a hard time of it. *[Interruption.]* Thanks for the bell. A couple of years ago, I had the opportunity to do the “dementia friends” training session with the Alzheimer's Society and to help to organise some training sessions. The one thing I took from those sessions is that all of us—even those who are not carers or do not know much about nursing and the care profession—can do some small, practical things that can make a big difference to people with dementia. In my constituency, we have a dementia-friendly café, and I am looking to set up a dementia friends session, so that we can pass on the word and encourage more people to get involved. I hope that others will do the same.

9.56 am

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on his excellent speech and on securing the debate.

In the north-east, there are an estimated 25,841 people living with dementia. In coastal constituencies such as mine, South Shields, the figures are higher than average due to large elderly populations. Over the coming years the figure is projected to rise locally and nationally, with more than a million people forecast to be living with dementia in the UK by 2021. I am sure the absence of any mention of the NHS or social care in the recent Budget was of little comfort to those who have loved ones living with dementia.

As the numbers of people in need of care and support rise, real action from the Government is lacking. Yes, we have the Prime Minister's commitment to making England "the best country in the World for dementia care,"

and we are told that research investment has doubled and policies for improving diagnosis rates are in place, and that there are a million dementia friends, but commitment, research and reliance on charities are no substitutes for the care and support that thousands of people with dementia need right now.

Anyone who has ever had to make the heart-wrenching, emotional decision to have a member of their family placed in a residential or care home, even for a short while, will know that good care, dignity and respect are the cornerstones of providing loved ones with the safety and security they once enjoyed in their own homes. I know about that from my own gran, who was one of the strongest and bravest people I ever knew. As she got older, this strong woman became physically frail and, worse still, her mental health deteriorated too. Gran had dementia and, after many stays in hospital and some painful discussions, our family decided that she needed to be admitted into a care home. She escaped from the first home and was found alone, shivering in a field. At the second home she seemed happy enough, but she suffered an injury through carelessness of staff. If my gran had had carers at home, she would probably have had only one or two visits a day, with all of her getting up, getting dressed, meal times and bed times dictated by the times her care company could come, not when was best for her.

The thing is, though, gran's story is not unusual; because in an age of increased need and reducing budgets, respect, dignity and choice are always the first to go. They cost nothing on the balance sheet in the first place, yet they mean so much to the people receiving care. This view is supported by the Alzheimer's Society, which has reported that more than half of carers felt that their loved ones were not treated with understanding and dignity in hospital.

At present, we have a crisis in adult social care and in the NHS. Local authorities predict a £4.3 billion gap in adult social care by 2020, and NHS England and the Nuffield Trust estimate that by 2021 the NHS funding gap could have grown to £30 billion a year. Residential and care home providers and organizations that provide home care say openly that they do not know how much longer they will manage, because they have realized what we all know: there is no real profit to be made in good quality care.

The average cost of a year's dementia care is £32,250 per person. I have always known that if we are really going to care for people living with dementia and support their families, we need to formulate policy starting with them and their needs. That is the approach that I took

when I was a local councillor, and I am proud today that building has actually begun on South Shields's £9 million centre of excellence for older people, an integrated care services hub with a focus on dementia, which I worked tirelessly on before coming to this place. I know that I do not have all the answers, but I know that the Government need to be more inventive and creative, and to address the crisis right now.

10 am

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I realise that Members often curl their lip when Conservative Members stand up to tell the Prime Minister how brilliant he is; but since he put dementia on the global agenda in 2012 the horizon has changed remarkably. Between 2012 and 2015 something like £60 million was pumped into research, and there are incredibly ambitious targets for the doubling by 2020 of dementia and Alzheimer's research. That includes all sources—Government, private and charity.

The issue is all about capacity building; £300 million is now being pumped in, of which £150 million is earmarked for a dementia research institute and an international discovery fund of 130 million quid. However, we must face the fact that the field of dementia research is still very small in comparison with others, particularly bearing in mind the fact that the £26 billion annual cost is more than the combined cost to the country of cancer and heart disease. Despite that, only three new drugs have been discovered in the past 15 years.

Something has to change, and that is why the Government's announcement of a dementia research institute is so important. It is important for three reasons, the first of which is security for researchers. I do not know how many hon. Members know any scientific researchers, but they are as interested as anyone else in having a career. When they pick a specialism to devote their lives to, they need to know that there is a future in it, and the likelihood of funding to sustain them throughout their career. At the moment, dementia does not provide that. A dementia research institute will do it. At the moment about 70% of PhD graduates in dementia research leave academic research within four years of starting. That is not good enough if we are to find a cure.

Secondly, in the search for a cure, a single molecular target is highly unlikely. There is not a silver bullet to cure dementia. There are many different types of dementia and different underlying influences. If we are to find therapies and cures, and things that will assuage dementia and allow people to live with it, we will need a huge amount of collaboration. In the past 20 or 30 years, the private sector has spent about £30 billion researching dementia across the piece, but that has been happening in different silos, often with researchers working on the same dead ends, and wasting the money three or four times. It is critical that we should collaborate, particularly internationally, in the search for a cure.

Finally, given that there will be no single molecular target, it is unlikely that there will be significant advances on a cure in the next 10 or 15 years. One of the Cinderella research areas, which does not get much funding or concentration, is care, therapy and management. One of my key wishes with respect to the new dementia research institute is that it should become a soup-to-nuts

[*Kit Malthouse*]

research institute, looking at diagnosis, care, therapy, psychology and support for families, as well as a cure. The Government announced about 18 months ago that the institute would be up and running within five years. That means there are only three and a half years left, and I would be pleased if the Minister updated us on progress, with respect to announcing a location, funding, and who will host the institute. Only once we have that centre of global excellence will we be in a proper position to tackle what is likely to be one of the top five public health challenges of the next century.

10.4 am

Brendan O'Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): I congratulate my ever-industrious friend who secured this important debate, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

Regardless of where any of us live in these islands, I am sure we agree that, from the point of diagnosis until the end of life, every person living with dementia deserves nothing less than the best care society can provide. In Scotland approximately 90,000 people are living with dementia, about 2,000 of whom live in my constituency. There is barely a family who have not been affected by that awful disease. Indeed, there is probably not a person in the Chamber who has not been affected by the illness. Yet all too often those who suffer from dementia are stigmatised and discriminated against, because their symptoms are sometimes difficult to handle, so they are sometimes treated with less respect and dignity than other members of society. That is unacceptable and must change.

I am delighted that the Scottish Government have made tackling dementia a national priority and that since 2008 they have funded the Scottish dementia clinical research network, which has brought together academics, clinicians, carers and people living with dementia, with the aim of turning scientific discoveries into safe and effective treatments. That collaborative approach is to be commended. Since coming to power, the SNP Government in Holyrood have put those living with dementia, and those who care for them, at the heart of their policy making. In 2011 they published the standards of care for dementia in Scotland, which gave people suffering from dementia guaranteed rights—the right to a diagnosis; the right to access to a range of treatments, care and support; the right to be regarded as a unique individual and treated with dignity and respect; the right to be as independent as possible and to be included in the community; the right to have carers who are well supported and educated about dementia; and the right to end-of-life care that respects the wishes of the person concerned.

I applaud the Scottish Government for the great work they are doing, but it is important to recognise that it would not all be possible without an army of people committed to caring, and to making and implementing policies. Scotland is blessed with a volunteer corps and carers who make that possible. In Argyll and Bute 2,000 people are living with dementia. A couple of months ago I was privileged to be invited to open, in my home town of Helensburgh, the brand new Alzheimer Scotland dementia resource centre, which has taken dementia care—figuratively and literally—from the back and side streets on to our high street. Our community

now has a central hub, where people trained to provide support and education are constantly available. There is a drop-in centre, a performance area and a café, as well as space for individual and group therapy. It is a wonderful resource and I congratulate Alzheimer Scotland and its staff on achieving so much and making that happen—particularly Susan Russell, the service manager, and Jean Armitage, the policy and engagement manager. We know that dementia is a growing problem and that we have to tackle it; but let us not forget that there are already wonderful people making things happen in the community.

10.8 am

Edward Argar (Charnwood) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for securing this important debate and for his long-standing focus on the issue. Last September when I was able to secure a debate on this subject I was very grateful to him for attending, and for his eloquent words, and I want to reciprocate today.

The subject is one of great significance—a significance that grows every day as our population ages and our life expectancy grows. It is an issue that is personally hugely important to me. I have supported the Alzheimer's Society for many years, and recently in the House I co-hosted with the hon. Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams) a dementia friends session for Members and staff. I am very grateful for all the work that she does on this issue.

Dementia is incredibly cruel. It can take a person away from us, even while they are still with us. As the hon. Member for Strangford and my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton) set out, the basic facts are stark. My hon. Friend in particular drew attention to the challenge of early-onset dementia, which can often be forgotten, and we must remember the specialist services and support that people with early-onset dementia need and cater for them.

This is not a party political point. The Labour party should be very proud of its record in government on this subject, and I believe that this Government and this Prime Minister can rightly be proud of ours. We have heard a lot about the importance of awareness and understanding, care and treatment and research. My hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) was characteristically modest in talking about the Dementia Research Institute. The one thing he omitted to say was that it was his idea, and he should be rightly proud of what he has set in motion.

The aspect of this important issue that I want to focus on is the organisations and individuals who do so much to care for and support those with dementia. Setting aside for a moment the human impact of dementia, the estimated cost of dementia is £23 billion per year, with a large proportion of that effectively met by families and voluntary carers. We must remember the army of 670,000 all too often unsung heroes who help and care for people with dementia, as well as organisations such as Age UK and the Alzheimer's Society, of which I am a member, and local councils and CCGs.

Last year, I had the pleasure of visiting the Poppies Memory Café in Syston, and later this month I will visit the Thrummy Drummer dementia support group in Thurmaston. Both do vital work in supporting those

with dementia in Charnwood and providing respite to carers. Alongside the excellent support services in my constituency that play such a vital role for those with dementia and those who care for them, there is another service that is sadly under threat as we speak today. The CCG recently took the decision to cease funding the service based in the Birstall resource centre in School Lane in my constituency, which Age UK has run for many years. It provides a vital lifeline for 19 people with severe dementia and respite for their families and carers, with a further eight people waiting for referrals. The service is not only much valued but extremely well used in Birstall. The removal of CCG funding will cause the service to close, which will have a devastating impact. A glance at the CCG board papers suggests that the decision is not financial; its budget has actually increased.

It is deeply disappointing that the CCG has taken that decision. While I am grateful to the CCG for the time it has taken to set out its views to me, I remain unconvinced of their logic. The reality is that that service is of huge importance to everyone. I suggest that its closure would be a tragedy for those who use it and that the CCG is taking a short-term view in closing it; costs to the NHS will go up in the long term. I would like to take this opportunity to say that it is time for the CCG to pause, think again, accept that it has got this wrong and reverse the decision.

10.13 am

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): I had not intended to speak; I thought my name had been withdrawn from the list. None the less, having sat and listened to this debate, I would like to take advantage of the opportunity to do so. I will not take even the four minutes that you suggest, Mr Stringer.

This is an immensely personal issue for many families across the country. I reflect on a couple I know very well. The lady of the household started to forget things. She started to repeatedly cook the same menu for her husband, who got rather tired of shepherd's pie day after day. Those warning signs led to her being referred to a memory clinic, which did indeed diagnose the early stages of dementia. Where that will lead, the family does not know. I emphasise what a harrowing experience it has been for that family. Support services are available in west Wales, where they live, but there is a concern and fear that as this terrible disease goes on, the terrible decision to which the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) alluded with her family might have to be made and the lady of that household will have to go into some form of residential care.

I want to highlight some of the challenges we have in rural Wales. There is a spectre of couples having to be parted, sometimes over very large distances, which causes agony for other members of the family who want to give support. Of course, the support that is available—often for too short periods—is invaluable to those families, but the lack of residential care in close proximity to where the families reside is a very real problem.

I reiterate the point I made in an intervention to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon); I congratulate him on securing this debate because awareness of this devastating disease is so important. We must praise the wider community, including the community councils and district councils that have sought dementia-friendly

status so that the everyday pursuits we all enjoy can still be enjoyed by everybody in society, including those with dementia and Alzheimer's.

10.15 am

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I reiterate my congratulations to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing this crucial debate. The attendance is a great testament to the importance of this issue.

I mentioned in my intervention that we were facing a tidal wave in the United Kingdom, and unfortunately my constituency of Solihull is at the crest of that wave. The latest figures I have, produced by the Birmingham and Solihull dementia strategy forum, show that the estimated number of people with dementia is 13,819 in Birmingham and 2,798 in Solihull. That number is predicted to grow by 31% to 3,800 in Solihull and by 18% to 16,300 within Birmingham. My constituency has an acute problem because it has an older population—clearly an older one than Birmingham. In fact, in the ward of Silhill, from which Solihull gets its name, 40% of people are over 65.

This is a hot topic nationwide and an acute one within Solihull. That is one reason why I decided to become a dementia friend in 2014. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Wendy Morton), I took part in a sponsored session. One of the most telling things I remember from that session in Solihull was the discussion about how memory is like two bookcases full of books. If we shake those bookcases, books from different levels fall out. They are never really interconnected; they simply lose their place, and over time more books are lost.

People's progress down the road of dementia can be fast or slow. Something that was talked about at that session was the idea of "living well" with dementia, which seemed an odd choice of words at the time. We, as a society, have to ensure that we enable people to live as well as possible with dementia. As part of that, we need tailored care packages. Solihull CCG, for example, is leading the way with its virtual wards and trying to help people through step-down facilities from the local hospital. We had a major campaign in Solihull to save ward 10, a specific step-down facility. That led to the creation of a new facility, Ardenlea, over the road, which looks after individuals who are coming out of hospital at the most vulnerable time, when they already have the mighty battle of dementia on their hands.

We need to stop providing care and services in silos, as my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse) said. We need to stop thinking that this is someone else's responsibility. Dementia care in our society is everyone's responsibility—that means Members of Parliament, GPs, nurses, healthcare professionals and wider society. We must consider how shops are designed, how we design support services and how we talk to people and interact with them. We need to get dementia-friendly and get on top of this issue, because it is going to be the issue of the 21st century.

10.19 am

Corri Wilson (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing this important debate.

[Corri Wilson]

I am not sure that there is a scarier disease out there. This is a disease where a person loses their mind, no longer remembers who they are or who their family and close friends are, and lives in a world of isolation where they are constantly trying to make sense of what is happening around them. My dad was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and dementia in 2006. From then on, we mourned the loss of him, piece by piece. We watched him deteriorate from a once handsome, articulate and thoughtful family man to an apparently empty shell, apart from small glimmers of recognition that are, in some ways, harder to bear.

With an ever-ageing population, this dreadful disease is becoming more prevalent. It puts pressure on families, services and communities. This cruel disease often means families can no longer care for their loved ones at home, leading to one of the most heart-wrenching decisions a family ever has to make. They may be able to remain at home, but that often puts a strain on the carer or carers looking after them, more often than not family members. Support must be put in place to allow carers to continue looking after their loved ones for as long as practically possible. They need respite and time away to recharge their batteries. They need aids and adaptations to make life a little easier. They need support from other carers and to be able to seek solace from those going through the same thing.

So what is the future? It is widely recognised that a number of risk factors affect a person's chance of developing dementia, including age, genetics, medical history, lifestyle and even environmental factors. As my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) said, the Scottish Government have made dementia a national priority. We believe that a rights-based approach to dementia care, treatment and support is vital and we will build on that with the upcoming third dementia strategy. The strategy for 2016 to 2019 will set out key priorities: to improve support in all areas of dementia care, particularly palliative care and end-of-life care; to prevent avoidable hospitalisation, because unfamiliar surroundings can cause untold distress to dementia sufferers and their families; to redesign dementia services; and to capitalise on community assets and grassroots initiatives, such as the excellent South Ayrshire Dementia Association in my constituency and many more like it. As the number of people with dementia in Scotland and the UK grows, it is of the utmost importance to have good care in place. The Scottish Government will continue to reduce the risk factors for dementia by encouraging and enabling healthy and social lifestyles.

None of us knows what is in front of us. I can only hope and pray that a cure is found one day and we can stop our loved ones being slowly taken away from us in such a cruel way.

10.21 am

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer, and to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for raising this important subject.

Sadly, there is no cure for dementia, but diagnosis is important for understanding and so that support can be provided. Many welcome supportive initiatives have

been developed in the community. For example, in my constituency, the local council has taken the lead in helping to make Burnley a dementia-friendly town and even offers free training to licensed taxi drivers. The initiative is part of a town-wide campaign to encourage residents and businesses to become more dementia-aware, helping Burnley to become a dementia-friendly town.

Raising awareness of dementia among transport services is vital. Some people living with dementia may lose the confidence to drive and become reliant on public transport. Taxi drivers may have friendly, familiar faces for people living with dementia and, if they have gone through a dementia information session, may be better equipped to understand their customers' needs.

Suffering from dementia is difficult, as is caring for someone with it. It is important to recognise the needs of carers and to give them maximum support. I have seen the problems close up. My grandmother suffered dementia caused by Alzheimer's disease. She moved from experiencing bouts of mild confusion to a total inability to cope unaided. As my family struggled to care for her, there was little if any specialist support or understanding, and eventually the family were forced to make the hard decision to admit her to residential care.

Things have improved since then: awareness has increased and more support is available. Projects such as the Butterfly project, which many hospitals have adopted and which helps to identify sufferers and to train hospital staff, are welcome developments. Sadly, however, carers are still too often undervalued and under-supported.

Last year, when doing research for my private Member's Bill in which I tried to introduce free hospital car parking for carers, I talked to many carers, including several who were caring for loved ones suffering from dementia. I was affected by many of the stories I heard. One lady told me she had given up her full-time job to care for her husband who had developed dementia. At home, she fed, dressed and comforted him. When he fell and broke his hip and had to be hospitalised, she continued to provide the same care. She visited him every day, staying long hours, helping with his basic care and bringing calm. If she had not been able and willing to take on that role, it would have fallen to NHS staff.

It is estimated that carers save the NHS billions of pounds every year. At the same time, because caring duties may necessitate them leaving paid employment, many carers suffer financial hardship. I am shocked that the Government chose not to support my Bill, which would have offered some small assistance to carers. It would have sent a strong message of support to carers up and down the country that we value them. The way forward must be to increase awareness and to properly resource support for dementia sufferers and their carers.

Mention has been made of the Prime Minister pumping money into research, which is welcome, but while there is no cure, I would like the Prime Minister to pump money into improving care. That is not only the decent thing to do; it makes sound economic sense.

10.25 am

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing this debate and pay tribute to him for his

excellent speech, which will have touched many hon. Members here, as evidenced by the turnout today, and our constituents.

My father's mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's years before I was born and my only memories of her, albeit fond, are of her diminished self. My father has told me about how kind, warm and generous his mum was, but Alzheimer's changed her personality and made her short-tempered, intolerant and at times aggressive. She was nothing like the big-hearted and loving wife and mother her family knew so well. In her final months, she was unable to recognise my dad, and that was heart breaking for him and the rest of the family. I remember that distinctly.

As a young boy, it was difficult for me to understand why she kept asking if she was a pest and required an answer every time. She seemed remote and at the time I did not know why. On one visit to us in Orkney, when my grandfather was admitted to hospital for an operation, she insisted on going to the shops to buy sweets for my brother and me, but would not hear of anyone taking her. In the end, my parents had to compromise, so I went with her: a four-year-old guiding and making sure a 71-year-old found her way and got home again.

I cannot imagine how difficult it must have been for my grandfather, my dad and my auntie to watch that slow decline in someone who was once central to the whole family—a war-time wife and mother, and a proud, capable and clever woman. The way my grandfather cared for her well into his 70s was phenomenal and incredibly touching. When she was hospitalised, he visited her twice a day, his own health suffering after years of devoted care and worry.

It is difficult not to speak about the negative impact of Alzheimer's because the results are real and devastating. It is also difficult to see beyond the illness, when for so many loved ones that is what dominates their daily lives for many years, but wonderful work going on to help people with different forms of dementia and their families. In my area, NHS Lanarkshire is working with Dementia Friends Scotland and Alzheimer Scotland to run a dementia friends programme at Wishaw general hospital that supports staff to recognise the signs of dementia and supports them in recognising that people with dementia can live fulfilling lives when given the care, support, respect and dignity they deserve.

It is important to put on the record the five key messages of the dementia friends programme: dementia is not a natural part of ageing; it is caused by brain disease; it is not just about losing your memory; it is possible to live well with dementia; and there is more to the person than dementia. It is important that we are all mindful of our language and actions. This debate is helpful in highlighting some of the issues that the dementia friends work so hard to bring to the fore. We all recognise the challenges faced by those with dementia and their families. We cannot hide away from them. They are faced from diagnosis through to end-of-life care.

If I had more time, I would have liked to touch on some of the Scottish Government's excellent work. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) mentioned it and I thank him. In February, they introduced the Carers (Scotland) Bill, which enshrines in law for the first time in Scotland the

rights of carers, coupled with a commitment, if re-elected, to raise the level of carer's allowance to match that of jobseeker's allowance.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak today and I thank the hon. Member for Strangford for raising the matter.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): I thank hon. Members for co-operating with the time limit on speeches, but if I am to get the last two speakers in, I must reduce it to three minutes.

10.29 am

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Stringer, for allowing me the opportunity to speak in this very important debate. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing the debate. I also congratulate the Bradford District Care NHS Foundation Trust on winning a national gold award for its work in the state-of-the-art dementia assessment unit at Lynfield Mount hospital.

The 850,000 people living with dementia today deserve to be properly supported to live dignified lives, but worryingly an Alzheimer's Society poll found that 90% of people suffering from dementia felt that the support they received after diagnosis was inadequate, and 73% of GPs—the medical practitioners who arguably are on the front line in managing dementia in our communities—believe that our health and social care system is confusing for people with dementia and, importantly, their carers. As a society, we need to support dementia sufferers soon after diagnosis, so that they are properly prepared to manage their symptoms, especially as the symptoms will worsen as the illness progresses. They are best placed to plan and prepare their affairs, but they must be helped to do that. At present, those suffering from dementia are not properly supported by the Government.

As a society, we should also be supporting the legion of selfless carers across the country, who contribute £11.6 billion to the UK economy each year through that unpaid caring. Often, carers feel unsupported and isolated. We must ask ourselves as a society whether it is fair that those carers, contributing £11.6 billion in unpaid service each year, are allowed to feel unsupported and isolated.

That prompts the question: what more should the Government be doing? We are fortunate that there is no need to reinvent the wheel. An initiative run by the Alzheimer's Society is already being piloted in communities. The carer information and support programme is aimed at family members and friends after a relative has been diagnosed with dementia. It involves attending information sessions in a group environment. The Prime Minister's commitment, as shown by the "Prime Minister's challenge on dementia 2020", is commendable, and I am happy to place on the record my support, but the target date of 2019-20 is simply not ambitious enough. I therefore call on the Minister to commit in her remarks to exploring what extra funding can be made available now, not in 2019-20, to support the roll-out of the carer information and support programme to communities across our country.

10.32 am

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on his exceptional speech and on securing the debate. It is a pleasure to speak, however briefly, in the debate as a co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on dementia, as the only MP—I think that is still the case—who is a dementia friends champion, and as a former carer for my mum, who had Alzheimer's disease. As we have heard today, if anyone's life has not already been touched by someone who has dementia, it soon will be.

I commend the Government for their commitment and, in particular, the Prime Minister's challenge and the investment in research funding that was announced last year at the World Health Organisation's first ministerial conference on global action against dementia. It needs global action; we cannot act in isolation. It is estimated that by 2018 the global cost of dementia will be \$1 trillion. I therefore ask the Minister to update us on the longer-term plans for building on that research investment and, specifically, what funding has been set aside to meet the challenges that make up the Prime Minister's challenge on dementia and whether we are on track.

In addition to research, we need to ensure that hospital services take into account the specific needs of people with dementia. We know from the recent Alzheimer's Society campaign, "Fix Dementia Care"—my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) mentioned some of the results—that 57% of carers, families and friends of people with dementia felt that the person they cared for was not treated with understanding or dignity in hospital; only 2% of hospital staff understood the specific needs of someone with dementia. We obviously need to address that. Could I put in a plug for the APPG report? Seven out of 10 of the people in hospital are not actually there for their dementia, but for something else. We have a report coming out next Wednesday on dementia and comorbidities, and I hope that people will be able to join us for that.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley) will mention this in her winding-up speech, but we cannot divorce the issues in relation to social care from dementia care. I called on someone, just in a regular door-knock, and she obviously had dementia. She was on her own. She greeted me with an empty medication bubble pack and just said, "I don't know what to do." Too many people are isolated in that way. So many demands are placed on family carers. I hope that the Minister can address some of those issues.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): We have gone slightly over time because of the unusual circumstances, so could the Front-Bench spokespeople bear that in mind? You have marginally over seven minutes, and that will leave just over a minute for Jim Shannon.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): Seven minutes?

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): Yes.

10.35 am

Stuart Blair Donaldson (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. I, too, congratulate the

hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing the debate. This subject is close to my heart, as I am sure it is for many people here in Westminster Hall, given the attendance today. I am sure that many hon. Members have a close friend or a family member who has suffered from dementia.

There is no doubt that dementia is a horrible disease that robs sufferers of their personality and their memories—everything that makes them them. The disease also puts severe strain on families and family relationships, as they try to understand and come to terms with it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) said, it is important to make the point that dementia is not a natural part of ageing.

Some 90,000 people in Scotland are living with dementia, and we have heard today about the different factors that come into play in treating dementia, whether that is research, caring for people with dementia or supporting people who are caring for them. A number of my hon. Friends have mentioned the Scottish Government's rights-based approach to dementia. Dementia is a disease and it can have a cure. It is great to have heard from many hon. Members about the work going on in their constituencies, whether it is universities or charities that are looking to research a cure.

There has been a lot of talk about carers as the unsung heroes of dementia care. An organisation in my constituency, the Forget Me Not Club, provides more than 500 hours of free care a week. I was amazed at the expertise that the people there had. Heather Morrison and her team do a fantastic job. They told me a couple of stories that I would like to share. They had one client who would continually stamp on the kitchen floor and the family could not work out why the person was doing that. It turned out that the kitchen floor had been designed in tiles of black and white and they thought that the black tiles were raised, so they were trying to stamp them with their feet. That was one part of their dementia. Another sufferer would not wash with soap when they went to the bathroom. It turned out that the soap was the same colour as the sink and bath. They could not see it, which was why they would not wash.

The expertise and experience of the people who work day in, day out with those suffering from dementia is so valuable, and it is so important that we praise the carers. That is why I welcome, as my hon. Friend did, the passing of a carers Bill in the Scottish Parliament earlier this year to enshrine in law for the first time the rights of carers. Furthermore, the Scottish Government's carers strategy recognises that carers must be seen as equal partners in the delivery of care, as their support enables people to live at home, in their own communities, safely, independently and with dignity. I also welcome the Scottish National party's pledge to raise carer's allowance to match jobseeker's allowance if re-elected. We have heard that familiarisation is a very important part of tackling dementia and caring for people who have dementia. Not going into hospital and not becoming institutionalised is so important for people with dementia, which is why the Scottish Government identified, in their proposal for the national dementia strategy for 2016 to 2019, a number of challenges to be dealt with, including tackling avoidable hospitalisation, which worsens outcomes for people with dementia every time.

The hon. Member for Strangford mentioned the risks of alcohol as well as other lifestyle factors in contributing to dementia. It is important that we tackle the public

health issues around that. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government are taking steps to encourage people to remain physically and socially active, to discourage isolation and to encourage behaviour that has been recommended by the Caerphilly study.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing the debate. Does the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Stuart Blair Donaldson) agree that the Torbay Dementia Action Alliance's memory café is exactly the sort of community initiative that can help to provide support to patients suffering from and living with dementia, and to their carers?

Stuart Blair Donaldson: I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. There are a number of strategies and community initiatives. In my constituency, another initiative is live music appreciation. Dementia sufferers and their carers can go along, listen to live music and join in if they want to. That was my first interaction with the Forget Me Not Club in my constituency, and it was a great thing to see.

Finally, the Scottish Government's national dementia strategy also incorporates Alzheimer Scotland's five pillars model of post-diagnostic support. Alzheimer Scotland does a fantastic job in providing advice, support and all manner of things for those suffering from dementia and for their carers. Its five pillars model includes:

"Planning for future decision-making... Supporting community connections... Understanding the illness and managing symptoms... Peer support... Planning for future care."

All the things that charities, local communities, communities and the Government do will help people to live well with dementia.

10.42 am

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate with you in the Chair, Mr Stringer. I congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing this important debate. I recognise the remarkable amount of work that he does on social care and carers, and I thank him for that. We have had some excellent contributions from 14 hon. Members—almost too many to mention, so I will not mention them all. We are making some progress but we have a long way to go to improve care for people with dementia and support for their carers.

The Labour Government launched the first ever national dementia strategy, appointed the first national clinical director for dementia, and commissioned the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence to develop the quality standard for dementia. Together, those began the process of establishing memory clinics, providing better training for GPs and improving the quality of dementia care for people in hospital. I thank the hon. Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) for mentioning that record. It is welcome that the Government are carrying on that work through the Prime Minister's important challenge on dementia 2020. I am sure that hon. Members here today agree with the aims of that challenge but we have to accept that there is a long way to go before they become a reality.

Dementia is a distressing condition. In the long term we should be aiming for a cure, but while working to find a cure we must put equal emphasis on the care

provided to people with dementia and the support provided to their families and carers. Carers UK reminds us that the symptoms of dementia can make providing care particularly difficult. People with dementia—we have heard about this in the debate—can grow agitated and violent, and night-time wandering and shouting can disrupt carers' sleep.

Families report challenges in finding services that have the expertise to provide the right care and support. Of course, that means that it is more difficult for carers to get practical help or to take essential respite breaks as they do not have, or they lose confidence in, the quality and appropriateness of the care available. I welcome the strong case made by my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) for better support for carers.

The care sector has a turnover rate of 25% so even when a care package at home is arranged, high staff turnover makes it harder to build familiarity and trust. For people with dementia, receiving care each day from someone they see as a stranger can be upsetting and confusing, and can make them more likely to refuse support, putting further pressure on their family carers. It is clear that improvement is needed, so can the Minister say whether the carers of people with dementia will be a key strand of the upcoming carers strategy?

I applaud the Alzheimer's Society "Fix Dementia Care" campaign, which wants to ensure that people with dementia receive the highest standards of care in hospital, in care homes and in the home. It is of great concern that a survey of carers of people with dementia found that only 2% believed that hospital staff understood the specific needs of people with dementia, more than half felt that the person they cared for was not treated with understanding and dignity in hospital, and nine out of 10 felt that the person with dementia became more confused while in hospital.

The Alzheimer's Society is calling for all hospitals to publish an annual statement of dementia care. In my area, it was pleasing that Salford Royal recorded information for patients with dementia and that the records showed that Salford Royal's performance on a number of elements of care was better than national averages. However, other local hospitals did not record that information so there is much to do to bring that up to standard.

As part of improving hospital care for dementia patients, listening to carers would be a step forward. Nicci Gerrard is leading John's Campaign for the right for family carers to stay with people with dementia in hospital, as we heard earlier. Nicci's father John suffered a significant decline when he was in hospital for five weeks. Although the family felt that individual nurses and doctors were kind, conscientious and respectful, restrictions on waiting times meant that the family could not sit and talk to John, read to him, make sure he ate or keep him attached to the world.

John's Campaign calls for the families and carers of people with dementia to have the same rights as the parents of sick children. They should be allowed to remain with them in hospital for as many hours as they are needed or are able to give. I understand that 272 hospitals across the UK have pledged their support to John's Campaign. Will the Minister outline what is being done to improve hospital care for dementia patients and whether she supports John's Campaign?

[Barbara Keeley]

As well as improving hospital care, there are real concerns about the state of social care. The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services reports that £4.6 billion has been cut from adult social care budgets and that 300,000 fewer people are receiving publicly funded services than in 2009-10. Social care has been an easy target for cuts. I am concerned now that the Chancellor's aim to find a further £3.5 billion in savings by 2019-20 will hit council and social care budgets even further.

The Government have stated that, by 2020, they want to see an increase in the number of people with dementia being able to live at home with more personalised support available to them and their families. That is a laudable aim, but the Channel 4 "Dispatches" programme last week showed just how poor home care can be, with time clipped from care visits, careworkers working very long days and not being paid for travel time, care needs neglected, and no time for the careworker to talk and listen to the person receiving care.

This year and next year are tough years for social care funding because home care and residential care providers bringing in the so-called national living wage have estimated they will face costs of £330 million in 2016-17 with no additional funding for this Government policy. The better care fund only provides £100 million extra next year, so this year is a problem. It is not surprising that careworkers say that issues with their pay and conditions prevent them from delivering good quality care. Unison found that three quarters of domiciliary careworkers do not have enough time to provide dignified care and that 84% of service users not getting enough time for care are people with dementia.

Caring for someone with dementia is not just about aspects of physical care. It is about conversations—knowing the person and knowing what is a comfort to them. Across hospitals, primary care and home care, we need to improve staff training and understanding of how to support people living with dementia and how to support and work with their family carers.

Carers UK reminds us that carers are the experts in the care needs of the person they care for, so it is heartening that today, Dr Julie Wray of the School of Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work and Social Sciences at the University of Salford is launching her book, "Supporting families and carers: a nursing perspective". I hope that her nurse colleagues use the book to develop their knowledge of how to work with carers of people with dementia. They are the people who make such a vital contribution to the care of all those people.

Graham Stringer (in the Chair): I call the Minister. Would you leave a couple of minutes for Jim Shannon to sum up?

10.49 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Jane Ellison): I will do my best, Mr Stringer. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. In the time available, and leaving a couple of minutes at the end, I will not be able to cover all the points raised in this excellent debate. I have never seen the Chamber this full at this time on a Tuesday morning, which is testimony to the importance of this subject.

I start by thanking the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who is a steadfast advocate for this vital cause. There is a great turnout on both sides of the Chamber, and it is clear—explicitly so in some speeches—that dementia and Alzheimer's are topics that touch many of us in the Chamber today. As others have said, dementia and Alzheimer's affect 850,000 people in the UK and impact widely on carers, families and wider society. I put on record at the outset my thanks to the wonderful national charities in this field. We value our close working relationship with them, and we value the way that they push us to be the best we can. From what has been said in this debate, it is clear that they have formed important local relationships.

Many hon. Members have made the point that dementia is a global problem that requires international collaboration to find global solutions, and the EU is helping to keep dementia on the international agenda, with the recent Italian and Luxembourg presidencies and the current presidency of the Netherlands prioritising dementia. It is an important issue and a shared agenda. Members on both sides of the House have been generous in supporting the Prime Minister's 2020 challenge implementation plan, and I echo the support expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar) for the previous work, because we are building on important work done by the previous Labour Government. This is not a partisan issue; it is a challenge to us all. That is true internationally, too. The UK's international leadership has been strong, and I hope that the UK's presence will put dementia at the EU's heart, building on the work that has already been done.

On working with Northern Ireland, as the hon. Member for Strangford knows, healthcare is a devolved matter, with each Administration responsible for its country's healthcare, but there are many key collaborations and joint initiatives across the UK, notably in research. For example, the Medical Research Council funds dementia research across the UK, including in Northern Ireland, and people in all parts of the UK can sign up to "Join dementia research." The subject of research has rightly been much touched on. In particular, the challenges were ably outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), who explained why there are particular challenges in this area.

I will reiterate some of the commitments that the Government have made. There will be: up to £150 million for the UK-wide Dementia Research Institute; £300 million to invest in dementia research by 2020; an increase in the total funding for dementia research from the National Institute for Health Research, research councils and charity partners; and more opportunities to participate in research. By 2018, 12% of people newly diagnosed each year will be registered on "Join dementia research," with 10% participating, but there is more to do. Understanding the causes of dementia will help us to drive the development of treatments and industry innovation. Through things such as the dementia discovery fund, we want to ensure that we have innovative international approaches to making the most of the opportunities that come in the search for a treatment or a disease-modifying therapy, on which we have set ambitious targets.

I also stress, because it has come up again in this debate, the importance of research that also helps us to know best how to support, how to care for and how to

improve the lives of people. We are funding things that will have immediate benefits within the next 12 months, as well as things that we hope will bring about a cure or a disease-modifying therapy. One example is that we have commissioned a £20 million research initiative on living well with dementia, funded by the NIHR and the Economic and Social Research Council, which focuses on issues that really matter to people in terms of the practical, day-to-day challenges. Again, there will be opportunities to talk about those in the House.

We have made big progress. Record numbers of people are joining dementia research. We have ambitious targets in that regard, and I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House can help us to meet them. Diagnosis is vital, as has been mentioned in the debate. Again, huge improvements have been made in the diagnosis rate, from 42% in 2010-11 to 67.4% at the end of February 2016, an increase of around 25 percentage points, but there is more to do, particularly to drive out variation. There is still considerable variation, but ongoing and regular effort is being put into that. I pay tribute to the considerable leadership being given by the NHS's national clinical director, Alistair Burns.

Meaningful care has rightly been highlighted by Members on both sides as one of the biggest challenges. I am supported by an excellent team of officials in this area, and they are well aware that this is a challenging area. In particular, post-diagnostic support is challenging for the person who is diagnosed, but it is especially challenging for their carers and family. The hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) was right to pay tribute to some of her local initiatives and to highlight how big this area is. The joint declaration on post-diagnostic dementia care and support was signed by leaders across the health, social care, local government and voluntary sectors, and it is the first time that we have had an unequivocal joint commitment to improving care and support for people with dementia and their carers following diagnosis. We want to see joined-up plans for health and care support in every area, with personalised care plans for every person with dementia. With NHS England and other partners, we have developed ways to drive that and to measure it within our implementation plan.

Members have rightly said that carers play a pivotal role. I am all too aware of the strain that a dementia diagnosis puts on other family members, which has been rightly highlighted in this debate. We recognise and pay tribute to the pivotal role that carers play. I have touched on progress in research, but I emphasise that we want to see people with dementia, their families and carers live well and have meaningful support.

Time does not allow me to talk in any detail about the carers strategy, but we have launched a call for evidence to inform the cross-Government national carers strategy on what more can be done, and there is clearly much to do in the field of dementia. I encourage all Members to contribute to that, and to encourage their local groups to do so. Carer's allowance has been touched on. We are rightly being challenged on the money being spent on care, but we are spending more than £2 billion a year on carers' benefits in Great Britain, supporting more than 750,000 carers. The rate of carer's allowance

has increased since 2010, but I am afraid that time does not permit me to go into detail. I am sure there will be occasions to do so in other debates.

We are further supporting the implementation of improved rights for carers—including carers for those with dementia—enshrined in the Care Act 2014. That is backed by £104 million of funding in 2015-16. The better care fund brings the great promise of more important work on integration, and there are some exciting examples of local initiatives, particularly coming out of Greater Manchester. Again, there will be other opportunities to talk about how the better care fund and those integrated vanguard models can lead the way to more improved care and support for people with dementia.

The role that charities and communities play in enabling people with dementia and their carers to live well through initiatives such as sport, music and dementia cafés has rightly been mentioned. There are some wonderful initiatives, including the Sporting Memories Network, and I pay tribute to all the local initiatives mentioned by hon. Members. I was recently privileged to visit an initiative led by the Manchester Camerata and its music therapist—wonderful work is being done there. There are some 1.5 million dementia friends in England and Northern Ireland doing wonderful work, and a public awareness campaign is under way in Northern Ireland.

There is little I can say in the time available on risk reduction other than that it is vital. Dementia is not an inevitable part of ageing, and up to 20% of those diagnosed with dementia have vascular dementia, the effects of which can be minimised or prevented altogether by a healthy lifestyle. Members are right to draw attention to work on factors such as alcohol, exercise and weight—I hope there will be a chance to say more about that in a future debate. I ask Members to encourage their constituents to take up their free NHS health check. We are piloting initiatives on early-onset dementia awareness.

Let me end by congratulating all hon. Members on their contributions. I refer them to our implementation plan, which was launched last month and has much detail about how we are responding to the Prime Minister's 2020 challenge. As I close and leave a few seconds for the hon. Member for Strangford to respond, I reiterate that the Government's commitment to this subject is absolutely undimmed, and it is clear from the contributions this morning that Parliament's commitment to this important cause also burns brightly.

10.59 am

Jim Shannon: In the very short time that I have, I thank the Minister, the shadow Minister and hon. and right hon. Members for their significant contributions. All political parties have participated, and all regions have taken part. We all want the same things: advances to find a cure to a global problem; more money to be spent on medical research; thanks to the carers, paid and unpaid; and diagnosis, follow-up care and end-of-life care. Make the simple changes. I thank everyone for their personal stories, too.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

National Defence Medal

11 am

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

That this House has considered the National Defence Medal.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Stringer. This is a short debate covering a vast subject, and I hope to chart a way forward to a more substantial debate in the near future. I know that a number of hon. Members will want to contribute, and I am keen to allow that, because the topic is worthy of considerable discussion. However, if time runs short, I hope that Members will excuse me if I fail to take as many interventions as they or I would like.

When I began exploring the subject and took on the task of leading this debate, I was concerned about having time to do the research necessary to do justice to the subject, but as it turned out, I need not have worried. Many people have been generous in sharing their knowledge, for which I thank them sincerely, and copying me in on their correspondence with the Government. I appreciate the many people who have taken the time to get in touch with me, both before and since I secured this debate. However, any errors in my speech are mine alone.

In the time allotted, I cannot hope to cover all the anomalies thrown up by the current policy, but there is one that I cannot let pass. Today is the 51st anniversary of the death of Warrant Officer John F. Lonergan of 131 Parachute Engineer Regiment and Sergeant Cyril Atfield of the Royal Army Pay Corps, both of whom were killed at Al Milah, 60 miles from Aden, South Arabia, in what is now the Republic of Yemen.

The deployment of 131 Para Regiment to South Arabia was the first time a Territorial Army regiment had been sent into conflict since 1945. In the engagement that led to the deaths of those men, five others were wounded and one officer was awarded an MBE for gallantry. It is surely undeniable that all the men were in a dangerous situation as a result of their service, but because of tight medal rules, none of the others involved in the engagement would receive a medal to acknowledge their service, unless they happened to be around long enough to receive one for long service.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I am not sure that that is accurate. They would qualify for the General Service Medal, Arabian Peninsula, even though they were killed within the 28 days, if their commanding officer put them forward for one.

Kirsten Oswald: I thank the hon. Gentleman sincerely for that contribution. I will speak about that particular medal, so his intervention is useful.

Much is said about the British medal policy being based on risk and rigour, but as Al Milah demonstrated, anyone who steps forward as a member of the armed forces may find themselves sent into a foreign land, sometimes to be woken at night by the sound of incoming fire. To me, that is self-evidently a dangerous proposition, and it certainly strikes me as enough risk to demand that we recognise it. However, this debate is not about

an action or actions that took place a long time ago. It must be about what is right here and now, and that is what I hope that we can address.

One piece of correspondence shared with me relates to the action in Al Milah. It is yet another Ministry of Defence rejection of recognition for the service of Warrant Officer Lonergan, Sergeant Atfield and other members of the armed forces who placed themselves in harm's way in Yemen at that time. The request was not for bravery medals; it was simply that they be awarded the General Service Medal with clasp South Arabia, which was awarded to other members of the armed forces in Yemen at that time. I am aware that my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) has been pursuing the case.

The letter from the MOD quotes Winston Churchill in 1944, in a debate about the medals to be issued at the end of the second world war. I have curtailed it for brevity, but I hope that *Hansard* will display the citation for Members' benefit. He said that

"a distinction is something which everybody does not possess. If all have it, it is of less value...A medal glitters, but it also casts a shadow. The task of drawing up regulations for such awards is one which does not admit of a perfect solution...All that is possible is to give the greatest satisfaction to the greatest number and to hurt the feelings of the fewest."—[*Official Report*, 22 March 1944; Vol. 398, c. 872.]

I argue that those points are as valid now as they were then.

Christina Rees (Neath) (Lab): I have a constituent called Glen who has been campaigning on this issue for many years. He was drafted through national service to serve as a non-commissioned officer in the Suez emergency in the 1950s, yet he feels that he has never received adequate recognition for the years that he dedicated to service and the sacrifice that he made. Surely we should do all that we can to honour those drafted to protect our country.

Kirsten Oswald: The hon. Lady makes a valuable point. There are many people in a similar position. They feel that they are being missed out, and that people do not understand or recognise what they have done.

The difference between my position and that of the MOD is that I believe we must take account of changes in context. As John Maynard Keynes said:

"If the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, sir?"

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this issue to Westminster Hall for consideration. She will be aware that there are many ex-service personnel who did not receive an operational medal during their service with the armed forces. Some of them were not on the front line: submariners on nuclear deterrent duty, for instance, or those in the Royal Observer Corps. May I make a plug for those in the Ulster Defence Regiment who served in Northern Ireland? Some of them also do not meet the criteria. There are a number of people I feel should be considered. Does she feel that the Minister should refer to them in his review?

Kirsten Oswald: I agree. I have been contacted by people who have served in many and various ways but are not entitled to a medal. It is an issue of concern, and I hope that we will hear more about it from the Minister.

It does not matter how many independent reviews, staffed largely by people embedded in the status quo, take place; the changing facts provide the challenge facing the Government. The facts have changed. It is time that British medal policy changed to reflect them, and that it followed the example set by Commonwealth and other countries.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. She is absolutely right to say that many people are concerned about having their contribution recognised, particularly people who served in Northern Ireland and feel that they were not recognised for their contribution in the same way as people who served in more recent battles. I wrote to the Prime Minister on behalf of Robert Scollick, my constituent, and the Cabinet Office response said:

“I have to tell you there are no plans for further work on this issue, nor can I offer you a time scale when it might be sensible to return to this issue.”

I wish the hon. Lady luck in bringing to the Government the idea that the time to discuss it is now.

Kirsten Oswald: I agree that it is time to re-examine the issue. Things have changed. We must remember that our armed services are now made up entirely of those who have joined up voluntarily. They do so entirely of their own volition, and they clearly understand the potential peril that they face.

One of the other ways in which the context, and therefore the facts on which to base a decision, have changed involves the adoption of the armed forces covenant in 2010. On page 4, we find the commitment that performing any form of service in the armed forces deserves recognition and gratitude. Indeed it does, but unfortunately, for too many of those serving in our armed forces at present, we do not always deliver them. The armed forces covenant is mentioned often in this place, but such lofty words do not always translate into real and proper consideration of how we ought to support our service personnel and veterans.

Consider the recent poor outcomes of the armed forces continuous attitude survey, or the lengthy struggle to extract fair compensation for service personnel suffering from mesothelioma. The UK Government do not always do enough or act at an appropriate speed. A tangible recognition of service undertaken by means of a national defence medal would be only one way to continue to improve how we deal with our service personnel. We should surely be considering all our obligations.

Significantly, the most recent medals review, led by Sir John Holmes, recognised that the case for a National Defence Medal was worthy of consideration. I agree with him that such a decision would be significant and that it requires a broad political consensus; I am pleased to see a range of Members here. At the time of the review, the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals advised specifically that the issue might usefully be reconsidered in the future, going so far as to consider how criteria might be applied for such an award. I do not propose to do so here, but I agree that the matter would have to be examined properly so that a clear award framework could be set out.

I am interested in the principle of a medal being awarded and that is what we should consider today. In the meantime, Ministers have agreed that the eligibility

requirements for the Long Service and Good Conduct Medal, which is currently awarded only to other ranks and not to officers, should be harmonised in the future, and I hope that today's discussion will be a way to further that debate.

Having examined the argument against a UK national defence medal, I found it to be thin and inconsistent. Medals are already awarded for service, or sometimes just for being somewhere at the right time. While some people with just 10 years of service may have two Jubilee Medals, I have been contacted by a former member of the RAF who served for 20 years but received no medal at all. It is impossible to argue that that is a coherent position. Many people leave the service with no medal while some people who joined in 2000 and left in 2012 have received two medals without seeing any operational postings. How does that policy address Churchill's plea that recognition should

“give the greatest satisfaction to the greatest number and...hurt the feelings of the fewest”?—[*Official Report*, 22 March 1944; Vol. 398, c. 872.]

Jason McCartney (Colne Valley) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart), I am aware of the General Service Medal; in fact, I received one with a clasp for air operations in Iraq. However, I have a constituent who, as the hon. Lady just said, served in the Royal Air Force for 26 years in RAF Germany, during the cold war, which we could argue was a series of operations, without receiving a medal. So the hon. Lady has lots of support as she considers how we can recognise that type of commitment to our nation and our security with a national defence medal.

Kirsten Oswald: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that interjection; that story about his constituent is illustrative of the stories of members and former members of the armed services who have contacted me. There are people in so many different situations who fall down gaps that we perhaps did not realise were there.

How can this situation possibly be justified? If, as Churchill said, we want

“to give pride and pleasure to those who have deserved”

medals, is it any wonder that some people might consider that they are not being recognised equally? And is it any wonder if some former members of our armed forces consequently shun Remembrance Day events and other commemorative events? That concern has been raised with me and it is a great shame that some of those who have served, sometimes in very difficult situations, are not entitled to a medal, which causes them to be anxious about remembrance ceremonies. That is very unfortunate and entirely avoidable.

In the same 1944 debate that Churchill spoke in and that I have quoted, Leslie Hore-Belisha MP commented on exactly that kind of discrepancy in recognition. He said:

“The fact that such anomalies exist is no excuse for deliberately adding to them. It is the function of good legislation and administration to remove them and, if not to remove them, at any rate to diminish them.” —[*Official Report*, 22 March 1944; Vol. 398, c. 908]

That is what we should consider. The British Veterans National Defence Medal Campaign advances the simple and logical proposition that one way of diminishing

[Kirsten Oswald]

such anomalies is to ensure that all members of the armed forces get the recognition they deserve for stepping into that role.

Other Governments have recognised this issue and acted to recognise the contribution made by their service personnel. The UK Government should now do the same, and acknowledge in this tangible way the work and the willingness to face peril that is common to everyone who signs up as a member of our armed forces.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate. I am sure she will agree that when people sign up for the military, they sign up to put life and limb on the line for this nation, and for them not to have a medal that recognises that contribution is part of the insult, given that—depending on which operation they were involved in and what medals were awarded—they have made that core decision to put their life and limb on the line for the nation, which would be recognised by this medal we are discussing.

Kirsten Oswald: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. That intervention absolutely gets to the crux of this issue. The Australian Government have recognised that point with their new defence medal, which was instituted in 2006, and they describe the purpose of that medal as being to recognise

“the outstanding contribution to our proud military history made by Australian men and women in uniform.”

That is all of them. Similarly, when New Zealand instituted its defence medal in 2011, the country's Defence Minister, Wayne Mapp, described the basis for issuing the medal as follows:

“Many thousands of New Zealanders have met the demanding requirements of military service. They have served their country and community loyally and well...Up to now, there has been no recognition of this service, on which the Government places high value. This medal remedies that.”

That is exactly the type of recognition that I am looking for.

Here, however, the Ministry of Defence seems to place great store on the argument that a national defence medal would devalue other awards, which is an absurd proposition. When I asked a question about this topic at business questions recently, the Leader of the House of the Commons said he did not think that medals should be handed out in this way, and that the value of medals for particular examples of valour and service would perhaps be devalued by the issuing of a national defence medal. I could not disagree more. People who join our armed forces do so knowing that they are putting themselves into peril, and it is high time that we recognised that.

I believe that those who have been awarded medals for bravery do not feel that their awards are devalued because other colleagues receive the same campaign medal as they do, and nor would they feel that their awards were devalued by the receipt of a national defence medal. Those who were awarded a General Service Medal do not feel that it was devalued because others were awarded it, too. Arguments such as that made by the Leader of the House of Commons are simply camouflage for an unwillingness to listen.

Having already quoted Churchill, I will close my remarks today by doing so again, and this time I hope that the Government will pay particular attention to his advice. Writing on the conduct of negotiations between states, he advised:

“In war and policy one should always try to put oneself in the position of what Bismarck called ‘the Other Man’. The more fully and sympathetically a Minister can do this, the better are his chances of being right.”

I commend those sentiments to the Minister and I look forward to hearing how the Government intend to take forward the recognition by Sir John Holmes that the case for a national defence medal deserves proper consideration.

11.15 am

The Minister for Civil Society (Mr Rob Wilson): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Mr Stringer.

I congratulate the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Kirsten Oswald) on securing this debate. I am aware of the early-day motion on this issue that she has previously tabled, and I know, both from that and her comments today, how strongly she feels about it.

Her Majesty's armed forces are the best in the world. Our service personnel have served Britain with honour, and are serving with honour at this very moment in many parts of the world. Their history is an inspiring story of courage, heroism and sacrifice, and it is because of our brave armed forces that we are protected. It is because of their inspirational work that our country stands safe, or at least as safe as any other country in the world. I take this opportunity to thank all those, both past and present—and, indeed, their families—who have served in our armed forces. This Government truly value their service. It was this Government who finally enshrined the principles of the armed forces covenant in law, to ensure that those who serve or have served, and their families, are treated fairly. The Government continue to work with businesses, local authorities, charities and community organisations to support our forces through services, policy and projects.

I am proud, for example, that we have committed to spend 2% of our national income on our military every year until 2020. We have also given over £450 million from LIBOR funds to military-related charities and schemes, and we are taking seriously the mental health of our veterans, launching a survey to try to understand their needs. We are providing mentoring, training and advice to our ex-servicemen and women through the veterans employment transition support programme, and we have invested £15 million to improve prosthetic services. We have given £20 million to eight projects to improve accommodation for veterans.

Let me now address the main point of today's debate. Military honours and medals are one way, but only one way, that we can recognise the exceptional service of those brave men and women who go beyond even the high expectations of their comrades, commanders and country. It is vital for all who receive one that we do not devalue its importance.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Last year the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), then a Defence Minister, said that British military tradition dictates that

“medals are not awarded as a record of service but in recognition of specific campaigns or operations, acts of gallantry or outstanding service.”—[*Official Report*, 12 January 2015; Vol. 590, c. 587.]

I recognise that, but we already have a long service and good conduct medal, so would it not be in the best of British tradition to incorporate a national defence medal, in recognition of the service that good men and women of this country give to protect all of us?

Mr Wilson: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. It is true that we have a long service and good conduct medal, which was introduced as far back as 1830. It rewards other ranks who have completed 15 years of regular service, but not officers—I think it started at 21 years, and over time has come down to recognise those levels of service.

I will directly address the hon. Lady’s concerns later in my comments, but first I want to go back to something I have already referred to. Medals are one way, but not the only way, of addressing the concerns that some veterans have. Another method is memorials. Memorials are lasting public reminders and are places of pilgrimage for veterans and their families, the latest example of which is the memorial to Bomber Command, which was opened on 28 June 2012 by the Queen. There was a huge campaign for a memorial of that type. We also have the world war two memorial, the National Memorial Arboretum near Tamworth, which contains a number of other memorials, so we should not treat this issue in isolation. There are other ways of recognising the massive contribution that the military and their families have made to this country over many centuries.

Let me also say, however, that there is no simple way of doing that. It is impossible to satisfy all who have served their country. It is no easy task to set the limits or where the line falls for who receives a medal and who does not. There will also be disappointment on the borders of such decisions. The hon. Member for East Renfrewshire said that Churchill addressed the matter directly on the Floor of the House back in 1944, and she was good enough to put on the record part of what he said. I would like, however, to add the first part of what he said:

“The object of giving medals, stars and ribbons is to give pride and pleasure to those who have deserved them. At the same time a distinction is something which everybody does not possess. If all have it it is of less value. There must, therefore, be heartburnings and disappointments on the border line.”—[*Official Report*, 22 March 1944; Vol. 398, c. 872.]

Those words ring as true today as they did then, and in many ways the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire has today encapsulated the anguish involved in trying to make decisions that are fair to everyone. There will never be a perfect solution regarding the distinction between those who deserve medallic recognition and those who do not.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): The Minister talks about those who deserve, yet the litany of those whom many would argue are deserving—from nuclear testing and Northern Ireland to suffering through front-line service in the cold war—should not be dictated by a debate on the Floor of the House of Commons in 1944, but by the lived experience of personnel who have served their country and the Crown with distinction, based on how we perceive our community today, not in 1944.

Mr Wilson: Of course what has happened since 1944 should not necessarily be dictated by 1944, but in that quotation Churchill summarised the issues and the anguish involved. I was merely trying to reflect that in my comments, as the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire did in hers.

Kevin Foster: Does the Minister agree that the slight difference between today and 1944 is that in 1944 adult men and women of a particular age were conscripted, under threat of imprisonment, at a time of war? What sets the veterans of today apart is that they volunteered to serve our country.

Mr Wilson: Of course there is a clear difference between what happened in the second world war and what happens today, but Churchill’s comments summarised the issues that needed to be carefully weighed up when making the decision. There is a strong lobby in the military for not making the changes, as well as the one we are getting from veterans about the national defence medal. The Government’s job is to try to make decisions about where the line falls in a fair and honourable way, and that is not easy. We will upset one group of people whichever decision we come to.

Although the Ministry of Defence instituted the armed forces veterans lapel badge in 2014 as a way of identifying all those who had done military service, it has never been the tradition here in Britain to consider service in the armed forces as the sole justification for a medal. It was right, therefore, that in 2012 the Prime Minister gave medallic recognition its appropriate attention, by commissioning Sir John Holmes, a retired senior diplomat, to review the awarding of military medals. I can assure hon. Members that great thought has already been given to all the points raised this morning. Sir John’s review team received more than 200 submissions and spoke to more than 50 people, including representatives of various veterans’ groups. Sir John independently reviewed a number of cases as possible candidates for changed medallic recognition, one of which involved Arctic convoy personnel and led to the Arctic convoy medal being given.

The national defence medal was worthy, as the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire pointed out, of full consideration in the 2012 review. Its supporters seek recognition for all those who have served, irrespective of where they were called upon to do so. The review estimated the cost of the medal at £475 million, and although it went far beyond the narrow consideration of cost, there would be implications for other activities and choices if the Ministry of Defence had to take that burden.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: The Minister talks about the veterans badge. I am sure it must be clear—it has been mentioned in this very hall before—that the badge is not officially sanctioned and is therefore not a medal.

Mr Wilson: No, but as I made clear earlier, there are different ways of recognising the sacrifice that people have made for their country. Although the badge is not a medal, it is a recognition of service.

British campaign medals are not awarded as a record of service as in some other countries, but as a result of particularly difficult circumstances of service life—risk

[Mr Rob Wilson]

and rigour, as the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire said. Although some Commonwealth countries have their own equivalent of the national defence medal, namely Australia and New Zealand, the review felt that that did not present a strong enough case for us to do so. Sir John's proposals were considered by the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals, and the Committee could not see a strong reason for introducing such a medal at this time. Sir John published his final report in the summer of 2014.

The Government have taken unprecedented action to support our military, investing in areas from housing to social and medical care, and we will continue to do that. Unlike what happened under previous Governments, in recent years we have seen major investment in mental health, veterans' accommodation and veterans' hearing. We have seen multimillion pound investments in supporting our veterans, something done under no previous Government. We value all our military as brave heroes who keep, and have kept, our country safe, but following the most complete and far-reaching review of military medals for a generation, Sir John Holmes recommended not to introduce a national defence medal. That was no easy task, and I repeat what Churchill said: that there will be

"heartburnings and disappointments on the border line."

Sir John's review was published less than two years ago and, given that the circumstances remain exactly the same, we do not feel there is significant value in revisiting the matter. That position is not in any way intended to disparage those who have served their country. As I said at the outset, the Government have the highest regard for all those, past and present, who have served in the armed forces, and we will continue to do all that we can to support them.

Question put and agreed to.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.

HIV: Women and Girls

[Ms KAREN BUCK *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered tackling HIV in women and girls.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I start by thanking my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening), and her ministerial colleagues for their ongoing commitment to international development and the 0.7% spending target, despite the best efforts of the august *Daily Mail* and other media. It is good to see that our ministerial colleagues remain firm in their commitment to international development.

As chair of the all-party group on HIV and AIDS, I called for this debate to provide an opportunity to reflect on the progress made and the challenges ahead in the response to HIV and AIDS and, in particular, in ending the AIDS epidemic as part of the sustainable development goals. I want to use the debate as an opportunity to press my right hon. Friend the Minister on the Government's commitment to the SDGs, which were adopted in September 2015 by UN member states to galvanise efforts to meet the needs of the world's poorest by 2030.

The final framework outlined in the agreed text contains 17 goals and 169 targets—it is not a brief document. One of those targets is:

"By 2030, end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases".

If the aim of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 is to be achieved and if we are to bend the curve of the epidemic to manageable levels, the bulk of the progress must take place in the next five years. Without that, the epidemic could spiral out of control, and we can expect a spike in treatment resistance. Investment not made at this stage will lead to greater treatment costs at a later date. The joint United Nations programme on HIV—UNAIDS—agrees and has released fast-track targets. The 90-90-90 targets aim to ensure that by 2020, 90% of people living with HIV know their status, 90% of them are accessing treatment and 90% of those accessing treatment are virally suppressed. If we achieve that, the number of onward transmissions of HIV will be significantly reduced.

Meeting the targets is a stepping stone that will ultimately make it possible to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 and avoid an estimated 28 million HIV infections. The latest figures released by UNAIDS show that nearly 16 million people are now accessing antiretroviral therapy, or ARVs. That compares with the figure of 1 million 10 years ago. That is good progress. In 2014, there were 2 million new HIV infections, compared with 3.4 million in 2001. Those figures show that progress is being made, but they underline the need to do more.

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate. Does he agree that unfortunately, as a result of

stigma, prejudice and discrimination, many people with HIV and AIDS are driven underground and therefore do not seek treatment? We must do all we can to deal with that injustice and prejudice.

Mike Freer: My hon. Friend makes good points. We often think of stigma and prejudice as affecting poorer parts of the world and, unfortunately, many parts of the Commonwealth, but stigma remains an issue even in the UK. Even in the UK, people seeking treatment for HIV will often go to a sexual health clinic outside their local area because they are afraid of the stigma that can be attached to being seen as being HIV-positive. We have made significant progress, but a lot remains to be done in the UK and in particular the developing world. My hon. Friend makes an important point.

There are still around 20 million people living with HIV who are not accessing ARVs. Just half of those living with HIV are simply not aware of their status. I want to talk about some of the key issues facing the AIDS challenge and the HIV challenge. Since 2000, adolescent deaths have tripled. AIDS is the leading cause of death for adolescents in Africa and the second greatest cause of adolescent deaths globally. Some 60% of new HIV infections are among young women. Globally, HIV/AIDS remains the biggest killer for women of reproductive age. More than 5,000 young women and girls acquire HIV every week. In southern Africa, adolescent girls and young women acquire HIV seven years earlier than their male peers, which has a devastating impact on their life chances. HIV/AIDS is a major barrier to the ability of women and girls to participate in education and to become and remain economically active. If we want to achieve gender equality across education, health and economic participation, we have to tackle HIV/AIDS in women and girls.

We know what needs to be done to achieve the target to end the epidemic by 2030. We know that we need to challenge and end the stigma and discrimination faced by those living with HIV/AIDS. That stigma acts as a barrier to people being tested and accessing the services they need. We need to improve access to treatment for those who are diagnosed as having contracted the virus. With just 25% of girls having a full understanding of how HIV is transmitted and prevented, we need to improve education. We also need to tackle violence against women and girls. Adolescent girls and young women who have experienced sexual violence are 50% more likely to have acquired HIV.

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I commend the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate and on his chairing of the all-party group. Given that the highest incidences of HIV and AIDS among women and girls tend to be in countries with strong historical links to Britain, does he accept that we have a particular responsibility to show international leadership on the issue? Would this not be a good time for the Minister to announce that the Secretary of State will, as a result, be attending the 2016 UN General Assembly high-level meeting on ending AIDS in June this year?

Mike Freer: The hon. Gentleman makes a strong point. It is still a shame on the Commonwealth that so many of our Commonwealth partners continue to discriminate against people with HIV and against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. Later, I will go on

to mention some of the challenges with our withdrawal from many of the middle-income countries. It leaves many marginalised groups and many criminalised groups bereft of support, whether that is treatment or even just accessing healthcare in general.

On the Durban conference later this year, the hon. Gentleman will not have seen the answer to my written question that was published about 10 minutes ago, but the Department of Health will be sending ministerial colleagues to represent the UK and the Department for International Development is sending officials. The UK will be represented at the Durban conference—that is hot off the press.

Let me turn colleagues' attention to some of the other issues. This is not just about the wide range of complexities, whether it is access to treatment, violence, education or economic participation; it is about how we approach research and development, both in dealing with HIV/AIDS and, in the developed world, in accessing the medical tools most needed to meet public health needs. The UK has an important role to play in meeting those ambitious objectives.

Historically, DFID has been a leader in the global response to HIV and AIDS and was viewed as one of the most forward thinking and effective agencies. When he responds, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister will confirm how DFID's research and development is progressing, so that we can ensure that our standing as a world leader in that field will remain. At one time, the Department had a large dedicated policy team engaged in the AIDS response. It showed financial leadership through increased funding of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, but I am concerned that its AIDS and reproductive health and rights team has gradually reduced in capacity and was renamed the sexual and reproductive health and rights team, with HIV being theoretically mainstreamed across DFID's work.

There is increasingly a perception that DFID does not have the focus on HIV and AIDS that it once did. To be fair, every Minister I have spoken to in the DFID team, including the Secretary of State, has confirmed that HIV/AIDS remains a Government priority and an integral part of the Department's work; yet the newly published UK aid strategy makes no reference to HIV or AIDS and gives no indication of how the UK intends to contribute to meeting the SDG target to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030. I checked the DFID website, and as far as I can see it appears to be silent on eradicating HIV as a departmental goal. It used to be a specific target and there used to be specific mention of what the Department was doing to eradicate HIV, but the website currently appears to be silent on that issue. Will my right hon. Friend the Minister explain why HIV has not been explicitly included and commit to putting that right?

Mr Gareth Thomas: When the hon. Gentleman researched the DFID website, was he able to find any speech by the Secretary of State or one of her ministerial colleagues on Britain's contribution to HIV/AIDS that had not been provoked by a debate like this one, or by other House of Commons debates or questions?

Mike Freer: To be fair, I did not search through all the speeches given by colleagues in the Department. I did see that the most recent targets and policy statements

[Mike Freer]

ended in 2015, when the SDGs were agreed, and that some of the other policy documents dated back as far as 2013. To be fair to colleagues in the Department, I am sure that they have made speeches, but I did not search the database. I was searching the targets and policy pages. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister will be able to direct me to what I have missed, but it appears that the website is currently silent on specific targets and policies.

Can my right hon. Friend the Minister reassure me that he will ensure that the HIV response is given a clearer and explicit inclusion in the strategies to meet the needs of women and girls in order to support gender equality, as well as all the other related issues? Addressing HIV is a key component of the women and girls agenda, and I hope he will confirm that it will be made a specific target and policy of the Department and will be clearly and explicitly mentioned on its website. The lack of a clearly articulated HIV strategy sends out a signal that HIV is being deprioritised and absorbed into other areas.

Mrs Helen Grant: DFID has put a lot of money into the global fund—I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister will confirm the amount, but it is something like £1 billion—which has done some great work in tackling AIDS and HIV. Government support for that sort of multilateral aid is very important. Does my hon. Friend share my hope that, following the multilateral aid review, investment in funds such as the global fund will continue to be significant?

Mike Freer: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Our commitment to the global fund is outstanding—I believe we are its second-largest donor. My concern is that, because we are the second-largest donor, the global fund listens to the mood music from the UK Government. One issue that I have raised on many occasions is how our withdrawal of aid from middle-income countries, stopping much bilateral aid and moving through to multilateral aid, leaves many marginalised groups bereft. No transitional funding is put in place. We have started to see that kind of emphasis being reflected in the priorities of the global fund because it takes its lead from its major donors, which is understandable.

If the mood music coming from DFID is to deprioritise and, unintentionally, to leave marginal groups bereft, so the global fund will, perhaps by accident, also leave those marginal groups bereft, as it follows the UK lead in targeting non-MICs. I understand the strategy for MICs, but there is a significant risk that those groups that are most at risk in MICs are, through either cultural differences, stigma or criminalisation, left to fend for themselves. That cannot be a good outcome for the HIV/AIDS epidemic. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will be able to address that.

It would be a catastrophic mistake to lose the focus on HIV/AIDS because we are on the brink of finally being able to control the epidemic as a public health threat. Will my right hon. Friend tell us how his Department is planning to meet the SDG target to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030, particularly for women and girls? What assessment has been made of the Department's capacity to implement the target? The challenge of achieving universal access to ARV therapy remains

ahead of us. As I mentioned earlier, something in the region of 20 million people living with HIV are not accessing treatment.

Last year the all-party group on HIV and AIDS conducted an inquiry into access to medicines that revealed some of the challenges that many low and middle-income countries face in accessing medicines. Treatment prices remain prohibitive in many countries. The price of treatments is primarily driven by licensing costs and decisions about what the market will sustain. Intellectual property rights grant exclusive rights to manufacturers that can make drugs without competition, which leads to high prices.

Affordable first-line treatments are now available in low-income countries in the form of generic drugs. That has been a major step forward in increasing access to treatments. However, the cost of second and third-line treatments remains prohibitively expensive, as such products are largely protected by patents, which keep the price high. Many middle-income countries are excluded from licensing deals that allow generic production, forcing them to purchase drugs at inflated prices. That restricts access to treatment. If a large proportion of people with HIV are women and girls, they will be excluded, because the health system will simply not be available or the treatments are too unaffordable to be universal.

International donors, including the UK, have been scaling back bilateral overseas development for MICs, thereby expecting national Governments to increase domestic funding. As I have mentioned several times, that leaves marginalised groups bereft of access to treatments, and some treatments will simply stop being provided.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for securing this extremely important debate. Does he agree that the issue is not only access to treatments but access to technology? During the Easter recess I was interested to read about portable methods for monitoring and assessing HIV. It is clear not only that joined-up thinking is needed across Departments—including Health and DFID—but that we should look at STEM subjects and our contribution to technological advances to ensure that people in rural communities have access to treatment through advances in technology.

Mike Freer: The hon. Lady makes an important point. I visited South Africa and saw some of the work being done by Médecins sans Frontières in the townships there. What was interesting was that, despite the poverty, virtually everyone had a mobile phone. Many of the treatments, including the prompts to adhere to ARVs and other information, could be provided by harnessing technology. There is a huge gap that can be tackled, particularly in remote communities. Through the use of mobiles and other forms of remote technology, we have an opportunity to get information to people in remote areas and ensure that they have access to education and, if necessary, some form of treatment. Access to technology is a major challenge that colleagues in the Department for International Development can perhaps look at through the Global Fund.

We need to look the cost of new drugs. I hope that DFID can take a lead in looking at how the current research and development model prohibits access and

innovation. Let me give an example about paediatric treatment. In South Africa and elsewhere, there is an absence of paediatric antiretrovirals. In the clinics in many of the townships of South Africa, doctors and nurses have to crumble the tablets and, almost through guesstimates, come up with a dosage suitable for the child or baby because paediatric antiretrovirals are not financially viable for the drug companies. The existing models work against providing universal access to ARVs and containing and defeating the epidemic. I believe that DFID can take the lead in looking at a way of de-linking the cost of research and development from the demands of profitability.

A proposal is under discussion to create a global R and D fund that would operate through a combination of grants, milestone prizes and end-goal prizes. If it were based on an open innovation-type approach, it could reward all those who have taken part, entered the process and contributed to developing the new treatment. That idea is not pie in the sky; it has not been developed by those who seek to undermine the pharmaceutical industry. That kind of development is championed by none other than the Prime Minister. In fact, the Conservative party manifesto contained a pledge—my right hon. Friend the Minister looks puzzled—that this country will

“lead a major new global programme to accelerate the development of vaccines and drugs to eliminate the world’s deadliest infectious diseases”.

I challenge colleagues in DFID to take the lead in looking at different ways of funding R and D to reduce the cost of second and third-line antiretrovirals. The Government have been generous in maintaining the 0.7% funding and in the money allocated for the global fight against malaria and the Ross fund.

Tackling HIV and AIDS in women and girls is a task we cannot shirk. It cannot and must not be subsumed into the main work of the Department and mainstreamed. We need explicit targets and action that we can hold the Government and Ministers to account on. I thank colleagues for attending today, and I look forward to hearing my right hon. Friend the Minister’s response and other colleagues’ contributions.

2.54 pm

Mr Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Ms Buck, and to follow the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer), who gave a measured and constructive speech. I will try to continue that tone.

This debate is a timely opportunity to ask whether the Secretary of State and her ministerial colleagues have, perhaps inadvertently, downgraded the Department’s work on HIV and AIDS. Ministers rarely mention HIV and AIDS unless pushed. There is—granted, my exploration of DFID’s website was only cursory—no record of a serious ministerial speech on this issue unprompted by Parliament for a very long time. There is no sign of a push to signal Britain’s continued interest in the major international efforts to tackle the factors that still drive the spread of HIV and AIDS. Given the urgency of the investment that is needed if we are to achieve the 90-90-90 targets, which the hon. Gentleman spoke about, it is disappointing that the Secretary of State does not

appear—unless the Minister has news for us—to have a major plan to do the advocacy work that is needed at an international level.

The 10 countries that had the most people living with HIV in 2014—the last year for which figures are available—are South Africa, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, Malawi and Ethiopia. They are all countries in which DFID has a significant bilateral programme or with which our Government have a long history and good connections. Britain’s continued influence with the countries that have the most people living with HIV is unlike that of any other country in the G7 or globally. It is therefore all the more important that Britain continues to show leadership on this issue.

Similarly, the slightly different list of the countries with the highest incidence of HIV among adults, as opposed to the general population, comprises countries with which Britain has a close relationship at Government level or, with one exception, where DFID has significant programmes. Again, that highlights the importance of Britain’s role in galvanising further investment in antiretroviral programmes and in championing the legal and cultural changes that are necessary to improve the response to HIV and AIDS.

The Department’s work focusing on girls and women is important and very welcome, and it is strongly supported on both sides of the House and among the non-governmental organisation community. I commend the Secretary of State for that work. However, I continue to be surprised by the apparent lack of interest in the impact on women and girls of being HIV positive. HIV and AIDS continue to be the biggest single killer of women of reproductive age globally. Despite that fact, the impact of HIV on women as a priority group is not frequently discussed or reflected in ministerial policy.

Mrs Helen Grant: The hon. Gentleman is making very important points about women and girls, but does he agree that they should be included as decision makers, not simply as victims and recipients of aid?

Mr Thomas: Absolutely. Britain’s international leadership on this issue is important because one of the things that we, as a country, should be championing is the cultural change that is needed in countries so that, as the hon. Lady says, women and girls become more active decision makers. At the moment, in too many cases, they are not. I gently bring her back to the important point she made about the strong support given by Britain to the global fund. I welcome that investment, but it is not enough to outsource leadership on HIV and AIDS from ministerial offices to the global fund. Political change is needed in countries as much as investment in health services, with which the fund helps. I fear that that is the important missing link in Britain’s response at the moment.

On 16 March, at International Development questions, I asked the Secretary of State specifically whether her Department’s spending on HIV and AIDS would be rising or falling over the comprehensive spending review period. In her reply, she said that the Department was planning shortly to publish the results of its bilateral aid review. Will the Minister set out for us whether he expects bilateral HIV-specific programmes to be rising, when up to now they have been in decline?

[Mr Gareth Thomas]

I am told by some of the NGOs that follow the Department's work on HIV and AIDS closely that no mention of any such work seems to be in the aid strategy published by the Department last November. It would be good to hear from the Minister why that omission has happened. Furthermore, the sexual and reproductive health team, which has responsibility for HIV and AIDS work—certainly on the basis of ministerial answers to written questions—appears to be prioritising a series of other issues. They are very important issues, granted, but they are issues other than HIV and AIDS. Again, it would be good if the Minister explained that choice to downgrade the work on HIV and AIDS by the sexual and reproductive health team in DFID.

I come back to the first intervention that I made on the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green. He mentioned the Durban meeting, but I gently suggest that the UN General Assembly's high-level meeting on ending AIDS, which is to take place in New York in June, is equally important. That is surely the perfect opportunity for the Secretary of State to set out Britain's continuing commitment to and willingness to play a significant leadership role in tackling AIDS.

In addition, Britain could ask the new Commonwealth secretary-general to prioritise a discussion of the work needed in Commonwealth countries to tackle the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Foreign Office ambassadors and senior staff could perfectly reasonably be tasked to talk to senior figures about what more might be done in countries with particular challenges in tackling AIDS.

Mrs Helen Grant: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his generosity in giving way. At those various international meetings, global ministerial commitments to tackle issues such as forced marriage and early marriage are also key factors in fighting HIV and AIDS.

Mr Thomas: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. A series of factors drive the spread of HIV and AIDS. A health response is needed—we have rightly talked about the need to invest more in antiretroviral AIDS therapy and to improve health services more generally. A series of cultural practices need challenging and gender empowerment issues need addressing.

The only way that such things can happen is if political leaders are willing to step up to the mark. The challenge needs to come from a country such as Britain that has shown great leadership on the issue in the past; we will work with and support them, but we want things to change. I hope that the Minister will reassure me that the Secretary of State is willing to show that kind of leadership in future.

3.5 pm

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to speak in the debate and to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck.

We are discussing HIV, which curses the lives of people in all walks of life across the globe. Yet many of the women who are infected are unaware of the status of their condition and are unable to access the treatment that they rightly need to go on to live a long and sustained life. I thank the hon. Member for Finchley

and Golders Green (Mike Freer) for securing this debate on tackling HIV and AIDS specifically in women and girls.

Perhaps due to the lingering stigma attached to HIV since the time of the virus's discovery more than 30 years ago, its impact on women is often disregarded in policy. Recognising that the barriers, stigmas and issues of access to services and treatment all require further consideration, let us use today's debate to turn the trend on its head—we must recognise that, globally, HIV is the No. 1 killer of women of reproductive age.

We must also recognise the UNAIDS 90-90-90 target, which we heard about from the hon. Gentleman: the ambition by 2020 to have 90% of all people living with HIV knowing their HIV status; 90% of all people with diagnosed HIV infection receiving sustained antiretroviral therapy; and 90% of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy having viral suppression. That should be not only an ambition but a reality, and we must ensure that we do all that we can to make that the case.

There are, without doubt, issues of HIV infection among women in the UK, but the heaviest concentrations of HIV infection are in the developing world. In such places, women are most affected. In sub-Saharan Africa, the region with the highest burden of HIV, 57% of people living with HIV are women, and figures from 2014 show that, among women of all ages, there were 12,500 new HIV infections every week. Those figures are huge. The effect of infection on each life is devastating; the lives of young girls, future women, will be devastated unless we do more to act. We must ensure that the UK plays a prominent role in securing a future for them. It is vital to consider how aid programmes funded by the UK and the devolved Governments can help to change that deadly trend.

There is a correlation between disproportionate rates of HIV infection among women and gender inequality. Gender inequalities have far-reaching consequences for women living with, and at risk of, HIV. To name but a few, issues include domestic violence, the role of sexual violence and the lack of access to income and property. Only last month, with the Women and Equalities Committee, I visited the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which focuses primarily on women's economic empowerment. We must ensure that we unpick such gender issues and learn how best to tackle them. I ask the Minister how DFID intends to monitor and track the progress of sexually transmitted disease and to set targets for achieving those goals. The disease will not disappear by itself, and ultimately we must do all that we can to end the epidemic.

Advances have been made to improve access to antiretroviral treatment, but socioeconomic barriers for women to overcome remain. In particular, UNAIDS research identifies food insecurity as a barrier to adherence to antiretroviral therapy. Without adequate dietary intake, people undergoing antiretroviral therapy cannot experience the full benefits of treatment. That can create a vicious cycle. Women are usually those involved in producing, purchasing and preparing food. When a woman is HIV-positive, household food security is impacted as responsibilities shift to the younger women in that household, often raising additional issues of food insecurity for their families.

It is believed that 90% of HIV-positive children contract the virus from their mother during pregnancy, delivery or breastfeeding. Inadequate nutritional status may increase the risk of HIV transmission, and women therefore need access to information and replacement feeding options to minimise the risk of transmission during breastfeeding. It is unacceptable that the number of women and girls contracting HIV infections continues to be a growing trend, especially in developing countries. Young women aged between 15 and 24 are five times more likely to be affected than young men of the same age. The problem of HIV in Africa is complicated and there is no magic bullet. However, we must do more to educate men and boys about how they can prevent this disease, so that we prevent such harrowing statistics. Adolescents between 15 and 19 make up 74% of the new HIV infections that affect young girls and women.

The Scottish National party believes firmly that the empowerment of women is key to tackling and battling global poverty, and we are not alone. The First Minister is quoted as saying that the SNP sees the empowerment of women as the key in battling global poverty. Scotland's First Minister has said:

“For virtually every nation, fully empowering women is probably the single simplest way, in which they can sustainably increase their productive potential. Gender equality can help to transform the global economy.”

The World Bank has said:

“Putting resources into poor women's hands while promoting gender inequality in the household and in society results in large development payoffs.”

The UN General Secretary has said that

“removing the barriers that keep women and girls on the margins of economic, social, cultural and political life must be a top priority for us all—businesses, governments, the United Nations and civil society.”

The Scottish Government have taken action where possible to help the world's most vulnerable people through their small grants programme. This programme supports NGOs to make a big impact and reduce poverty worldwide. The grant also includes using community sport to educate young people about HIV and using technology for a mobile phone app to improve emergency care in Zambia.

The HIV crisis is impacting developing nations, but it can be stopped. In order to best contribute, UK aid must focus on education about HIV transmission and on empowering women who are at most risk of infection. I urge the Minister to consider the effects of HIV on women and girls. How does the Department intend to monitor and track its progress in achieving the sustainable development goals? It is the responsibility of all Governments wherever possible to provide leadership in this debate. I hope the Minister will be able to respond to my questions.

3.15 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) on securing it. Many of us have an interest in this issue. I suspect that many more would be here if it was not for other duties and debates elsewhere, because the issue certainly resonates with us. We are here today because we want to highlight the issue for those in other parts of the world.

We are taking steps here in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, but we need to encourage countries and Governments to take steps elsewhere.

Worldwide there are some 900 million adolescent girls and young women in the 15 to 24 age group. Despite being 12% of the entire population of the world, too often for cultural or political reasons those young women are left without a voice or any say or control over their own bodies. We are all aware of the issues across the world and the violence against women. Rape seems to be a method of violence and war that some soldiers inflict on women wherever they have the opportunity to do so. We have had many debates in Westminster Hall that have highlighted the rape of women and girls and the brutal, horrible violent acts that take place against them. We recently had a debate on Burma and the Rohingya people.

Across the Sahara and across Africa, rape seems to be a weapon of war and we must highlight this issue. I often say we have to be a voice for the voiceless, and so we do. In this House we have to be a voice for those who have no voice, who do not have anyone to speak up for them, and the debate today is an opportunity to do just that.

Women have limited access to healthcare in developing nations and little or no access to education. Systems and policies skewed against them in some of the more gender-oppressive nations combine to create obstacles that block adolescent girls and young women from knowing how to and being able to protect themselves against HIV. We need a loud awakening of some of the Governments across the world so that they understand what is going on.

Despite the fact that the world is becoming more global, there are still regions in the world where young women and adolescent girls remain at a much higher risk of HIV infection than their male counterparts. It is shocking that, despite this fact being known, there seems to be no real progress, and girls in the age group I referred to still account for a disproportionate number of new infections among the young people living with the infection. There are an estimated 340,000 to 440,000 new HIV infections among young women aged 15 to 24 each year. If that does not shock us, I do not know what does. Despite making up only 12% of the population, they accounted for 60% of all new infections.

Poverty plays a big role, but the elephant in the room, as so often, is that although it is a global issue, there are clear issues in particular regions that exacerbate the case. It is true that some cannot afford access to care, treatment and preventive measures, but more often than not it is the cultural or political treatment of women that means they are unable to access the treatment, care and preventive measures that they need. Fifteen per cent. of women living with HIV are aged 15 to 24, a shocking 80% of whom live in sub-Saharan Africa. We know that that is an extremely impoverished area of the world, but we also know that the culture and policy towards women there is a far cry from the relative gender equality we enjoy here in the west.

Indeed, up to 45% of adolescent girls in those poor regions reported their first sexual experience to be forced. That is another shocking statistic. It is estimated that around 120 million girls worldwide have experienced rape or other forced sexual acts at some point in their

[Jim Shannon]

life. The magnitude of those figures should shock us all. They remind each and every one of us exactly what the issues are and it is why this debate is so important. From a collection of more than 45 studies from sub-Saharan Africa, it was revealed that such relationships were common between younger women and older male partners, and relationships with large differences in age are associated with unsafe sexual behaviour and the low use of condoms.

Women who experienced violence from a partner were 50% more likely to have contracted HIV than women who had not experienced such violence. In fact, of all the age groups, even married girls and women in the 15 to 24 age group are most affected by spousal physical or sexual violence. Some of the Members who have spoken already, including the hon. Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley), who spoke just before me, mentioned DFID. Again, the background notes supplied for this debate are very helpful. I want to put this note on the record:

“DFID has committed to putting girls and women at the heart of its development assistance. As well as continuing a focus on women and girls in DFID’s bilateral HIV programmes, more work is required to capture, measure and maximise the HIV related benefits of DFID’s wider work with women and girls.”

Hon. Members who have spoken have expressed some disquiet over the DFID policy in relation to its ever being successful. The Minister always responds in an energetic and knowledgeable way, so I am sure he will be able to indicate and reaffirm DFID’s response. If there is a shortcoming—I perceive that there is—DFID must address that as well.

The note continues:

“Global progress on reducing new infections in women and girls remains a priority for DFID.”

I hope that that is the case. Negative gender stereotypes and harmful norms are equally damaging. Adolescent girls and young women face significant barriers in accessing health services or protecting their own health. Lack of access to comprehensive and accurate information on sexual and reproductive health means that adolescent girls and young women are not equipped to manage their sexual health or to reduce potential health risks. Furthermore, they are less able to negotiate condom use. They have limited access to HIV testing, modern contraception and family planning, and are less able to adhere to HIV treatment. Those facts cannot be ignored.

Queen Nana Adwoa Awindor of Ghana, who chairs the African Queens and Women Cultural Leaders Network, has underscored the important role that cultural and traditional leaders have to play in the fight against HIV and AIDS, saying:

“It is our responsibility to ensure that harmful traditional practices that promote the spread of HIV such as early marriages and female genital mutilation are eradicated”.

What she is saying is, “Change traditions and protect the people.” I hope that today’s debate will in some way do that.

In sub-Saharan Africa, only 26% of adolescent girls possess comprehensive and correct knowledge about HIV, compared with 36% of adolescent boys. In that context, according to UNICEF, among girls aged 15 to 19 who reported having multiple sexual partners in the previous 12 months, only 36% reported that they used a condom the last time they had sex. There are basic,

simple issues that must be addressed by DFID and through the Minister’s Department, but also by the Governments responsible for the countries where HIV and AIDS are epidemic. There is a need for relentless pressure to be exerted, using the international bodies at hand, such as the UN, on the Governments of the countries in question. The things I have talked about are not acceptable in the UK, and we are addressing them; they should not be tolerated anywhere else in the world.

3.21 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I congratulate the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) on securing what has been a considered and useful debate on tackling HIV and AIDS in women and girls. I congratulate him too on his work as chair of the all-party group on HIV and AIDS, of which I am a member. There were useful contributions from the hon. Member for Harrow West (Mr Thomas), who brings considerable experience to the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East (Angela Crawley)—I shall reflect in particular on some of what she said—and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who spoke of being a voice for the voiceless. I do not think there is any question of his voice not being heard. He spoke with his usual commitment and passion.

This debate is timely, as has been mentioned, taking place as it does in the context of the adoption of the sustainable development goals. Indeed, some of us will be back tomorrow for a debate on the implementation of those goals in the round. However, today’s debate is a useful opportunity to reflect on the particular issue of tackling HIV and AIDS, for all the reasons that we have heard, in particular the need to make rapid progress now that the goals are agreed. The number of people around the world living with HIV and AIDS continues to rise, despite the progress being made, and indeed partly as a result of it, given the enhanced longevity from treatment—an HIV infection need not be a death sentence per se. Nevertheless, transmission continues to increase and, as we have heard, in particular parts of the world that may affect women and girls disproportionately.

Three themes arise from what we have heard in the debate: general issues and challenges, such as those I have touched on; the steps and strategies needed to tackle those challenges; and the ways in which we fund and prioritise those steps. I will reflect briefly on those, making sure, of course, that the Minister has plenty of time to respond to all the questions that have been asked.

We have heard that HIV/AIDS is the No. 1 killer of women of reproductive age around the world. In our part of the world it is sometimes difficult to comprehend that, because it is not necessarily true in every individual country, or in developed countries such as ours. However, in developing parts of the world it is of particular concern. During the recess I was in Zambia with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. The overall prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the country is 12.4% of the population—some 500,000 women. Yesterday I welcomed Jacqueline Kouwenhoven, who is Dutch born but is a Member of the National Assembly of Malawi. She is

the Member of Parliament for the Rumphu West constituency. In Malawi the prevalence of HIV/AIDS among men is 8.1%, but among women it is 12.9%. That is a pretty stark demonstration of the disparity, and the disproportionate impact that HIV/AIDS has on women, which is reflected in other statistics we have heard in the debate. I think others have discussed how 74% of new HIV infections in 2014 among adolescents in Africa were among girls and women. That is 12,500 new infections every week, and it gives us a sense of the scale of the challenge.

There is a challenge in two respects. First, there is a challenge for the individuals, as HIV/AIDS limits their life chances and lowers their life expectancy, limiting their ability to work, contribute to society and live flourishing, dignified lives of their own. However, there is also a broader development challenge, in the form of a barrier to societal and economic development, starting at household level, because younger children may be taken out of school to provide care or take up income-generating activities. That has a knock-on effect on whole societies. My hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East quoted Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, on the importance of empowering women fully, as the simplest way for countries to increase their productive potential sustainably. Interestingly enough, the quotation came from a speech given to the Chinese Friendship Association in Beijing in July 2015. As we have come to expect, Nicola Sturgeon is not afraid to be a voice for the voiceless and to speak out, without fear or favour, around the world on issues of gender equality. That goes to the heart of the point made about the need for political leadership—both an holistic response to a holistic challenge, and political leadership to drive that response forward.

The steps needed to tackle the spread of HIV and AIDS among women and girls in particular fall into two key areas. The first is prevention, in its broadest sense. We have heard a lot in the debate about education, including education specifically for awareness—of status, safe practices and cultural barriers. All those things are important, and we have heard about some of the support that the Scottish Government are providing. A particularly interesting example came about through the small grants scheme, which allows the funding of small, innovative programmes. The Yes! Tanzania programme conducted a feasibility study on using its sports facilities to educate young people about the transmission of HIV and AIDS, and used the study to put the lessons into practice. It will deliver both sport and sexual health training to more than 60 community sports coaches, teachers and peer leaders, and through that method will reach more than 2,000 young people in Arusha in Tanzania. Hopefully it will go on to measure the impact of the work.

Using small grant funding can be a useful and innovative way to try out new techniques and to reach young women and men in particular, through forums where they might not traditionally have expected to receive such education. It would be useful to hear the Minister reflect on whether there any lessons he can learn from that kind of thing.

Jim Shannon: I would like to reiterate what the hon. Gentleman has said. The Elim Church in my constituency—to give just one example—does fantastic work in Swaziland with young boys and girls who have

HIV/AIDS. Some of the good work that the hon. Gentleman has been discussing, and that he asks DFID to do, is also being done by church groups throughout the United Kingdom. I mentioned the Elim Church, but the Presbyterian Church, the Church of Ireland, the Methodists, the Baptists and the Roman Catholic Church all do it as well. It is good to recognise some of the good work that other groups do.

Patrick Grady: I am sure we can all give examples from our constituencies or broader areas of interest of specific projects or programmes that have made a difference. An issue relating to some of the broader questions that have been asked about DFID is to do with its different priorities: the way in which it is leveraging the 0.7%, which we all welcome, and how that can be done as effectively and as holistically as possible. Having some flexibility to try to innovate in new areas and support small, dynamic projects is definitely one area for consideration.

There is the important question of education specifically about HIV/AIDS, which we have heard about, but there is a broader question of education as well. Although it is true that, as I have said a number of times—my hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East said it too—there is no silver bullet to global development, educating women and girls is about as close as we can get. Broader access to education—not just education on HIV/AIDS but, more broadly, education that trains and empowers women with the skills they need to take into society—can reverse the negative spiral that I spoke about at the beginning of my remarks. That economic empowerment is crucial.

Angela Crawley: I want to highlight again the need to educate men and boys on their role as community leaders, partners, fathers and brothers, because they also have a role to play in education.

Patrick Grady: Indeed. Speaking from my 36 years' experience as a man, I entirely agree about the need to tackle all these issues. Education, in a range of different forums and of both men and women, is important.

Access to treatment is also crucial. It has been interesting to read in some of the documents supplied in preparation for the debate about the progress made in terms of prophylactic and preventive treatment such as the dipivirine ring trials and various other medical advances, which are incredibly encouraging. It is important that they are invested in and supported. That is why the points made, especially by the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green, about intellectual property in the development of pharmaceuticals is key. That has come up in numerous Westminster Hall debates on international development, in particular on tackling preventable disease. It would be interesting to hear from the Minister how the Government intend to take forward those proposals—I was interested to hear that movement in that direction appeared in the Conservative manifesto.

Just as with education, where specific education and improvements in education across society as a whole is needed, the same is true in treatment. We need to be able to treat the specific symptoms, effects and infections and boost the overall level of wellbeing of society as a whole. That is where questions of food security and so on come in.

Dr Lisa Cameron: In addition to a medical model, does my hon. Friend agree that it is extremely important that couples counselling is also offered to help in coming to terms with HIV diagnosis, reducing stigma and the risk of violence and desertion by a partner, and ensuring that adaptive coping strategies are applied?

Patrick Grady: That is a useful point. My hon. Friend brings considerable experience of those issues to the debate, so it is useful to have her contribution.

That brings us to funding and prioritisation. I generally echo all the questions directed at the Minister so far. On the prioritisation that DFID is prepared to give to the sustainable development goals, every credit is due to the Government for the role they played in the negotiation and establishment of those goals, which are a hugely comprehensive framework for global development. We now have a road map that can take us to the kind of world that we know is possible, which will allow us to reach other targets such as the 90-90-90 target, which has been referred to. However, I do not think I am alone, even in the Chamber, in being slightly disappointed by the lack of emphasis given to the sustainable development goals in the Command Paper, for example, or the lack so far of a joined-up Government approach or even of information about that. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton East raised questions about monitoring.

Other mechanisms also need to be considered. The Global Fund is due for replenishment, so it would be interesting to hear a timetable from the Minister for the Government's commitment. They have said repeatedly that they are prepared to give up to £1 billion, so my question has repeatedly been: if they are prepared to give up to £1 billion, why not just give £1 billion? The Global Fund knows how much money it needs and the UK has an opportunity to show global leadership by committing as much as it can to that replenishment.

Finally, the point about middle-income countries is crucial. I spoke about Zambia earlier on, and the definition of a middle-income country stretches from a GDP per head of something like—I do not have the figure in front of me—\$1,500 to \$13,000. In that vast range, a country can suddenly become a middle-income country and find itself less able to access the resources and support that helped it to attain that status. It would be interesting to know how the Government intend to support countries as they transition to middle-income status to reduce the risk of back-sliding in so many areas, not least HIV/AIDS transmission.

HIV is a preventable and treatable disease and we have the knowledge and ability to reduce transmission and improve access to treatment, especially with regard to women and girls. If we do that, we boost development, help to build stable societies and grow economies. Everyone benefits, but we must have the political leadership and willingness to invest effectively.

3.36 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Let me first say what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. When we first met 30 years ago, giving out leaflets on the streets of Paddington, who would have guessed that I would be my party's spokesperson on development, but you would be a member of the august Panel of Chairs?

Let me congratulate the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) on securing this important debate. Let me say a word about the position of women and girls in the UK and remind the House that the part of the population with the most disproportionate incidence of HIV/AIDS is African women. The reason they have that level of infection is because if people think the level of stigma in the population as a whole against HIV and AIDS is bad, for men who have sex with men in the African community it is so much worse. It is all about stigma, so anything we can do in this Chamber to break down that stigma will save lives not just in the global south, but in communities in some of our constituencies.

As we have heard, the number of women and girls living with HIV continues to increase in every region of the world. As a group of politicians, we should pause and think about what that means to people's lives and hopes. This is not just abstraction and about position papers; it is actual people's lives. Last year I was privileged to visit Uganda on a wonderful trip, organised by the Aids Alliance and Stop Aids, to meet the men and women working on Uganda's HIV/AIDS response at Government level, at non-governmental organisation level and at grassroots level. It was an amazing trip.

I visited 10 different projects in all during my time in Uganda, but three stand out. One was a project involving the Lady Mermaid Bureau and Crested Crane Lighters. This was a project for female sex workers—actually, we could not consider those women victims. We went to the market where they plied their trade. They spoke to us about their fears, their experience of police harassment, their hopes, their efforts to get information and protection to younger sex workers, and their hopes for their children. This is the sort of grassroots project among a marginalised community that is so important to fund and support if we really are to roll back HIV/AIDS in those communities.

I also met the Uganda Youth Development Link, which is a genuinely young persons-led project—the chair was 28 years of age. It is a network of young people from 10 to 30 living with HIV/AIDS, and they pointed out that one of the problems with HIV response in the global south is that it does not reach young people: it is not reaching under-18s; the work is not being done in schools. In what are very young societies, if we are not focusing on under-18s or doing the work in schools, we are not doing what we need to do to reach the goal of eradicating HIV/AIDS.

I saw many projects in Uganda, and my trip brought it home to me that, in the end, it is not about what we say here in this House. It is not even about what the big NGOs and the UN can do. It is about communities and empowering people—particularly women and those in marginal communities—to offer leadership and to roll back this scourge.

We have made a great deal of progress on HIV/AIDS, but it is important that we do not roll back on that progress now that our goal of eradicating altogether is within sight. I hope the House will forgive me if I remind it of Labour's record on this issue. We have continued to be a champion in the AIDS response, leading the first global promise to deliver universal access to HIV treatment, care and support by 2010 at the 2007 Gleneagles G8 summit.

The Government are to be applauded for their contribution to the Global Fund, which has disbursed \$27 billion on programmes for HIV, TB and malaria,

and programmes supported by the Global Fund had saved 17 million lives by the end of 2014. However, there is a concern about bilateral spending and the absence in the Government's programmes and policy of a specific commitment on HIV/AIDS. Commendable as the Global Fund and the Government's support for it are, bilateral aid for HIV continues to be important to meet the gaps that the Global Fund cannot fill and to equip affected communities—whether it is the young people or the brave and vibrant sex workers I met in Uganda—with the skills, tools and information they need to help the Global Fund to meet its goals.

Sadly, it would appear—I am content to be put right by the Minister—that UK bilateral funding for HIV has been decreasing, and many are concerned that it may come to a complete end. I would stress to the Minister that we cannot end aid dependency or stop thousands of lives being lost to AIDS month by month in regions of the world if we do not equip communities, including marginalised ones, with the tools to tackle and treat HIV/AIDS.

We need to build the capacity of communities to demand their rights. Ending AIDS by 2030 requires investment in communities and support to demand their rights, and the evolution of the Global Fund clearly demonstrates the value of such investments. There are still challenges in ensuring that key populations—for example, LGBT populations or sex workers—have a voice, but the Global Fund has developed strong human rights principles and places a value on the inclusion of those populations in governance structures. That evolution is driven by the affected communities, but it needs strategic bilateral funding.

As colleagues have said, the sustainable development goals have committed to ensuring that no one is left behind. The UK Government, in their new aid strategy, have committed to leading those efforts. Delivering on that promise, however, will require ensuring that those who are most marginalised, vulnerable and excluded can benefit from efforts to deliver the SDGs, including the goal on ending AIDS. The Global Fund cannot achieve that alone.

We have to consider the practicalities. I saw in Uganda last year that condom use—which is not a high-tech medical intervention, but a vital one—in the global south has gone down. There has been an increase in new infections, and under-18s are not yet a target group. Forty per cent of the Ugandan population are under 30 years of age. That very high proportion of young people is true across the global south, and one challenge faced by groups seeking to work on HIV/AIDS is the rise of vicious anti-human rights legislation on homosexuality and the LGBT population. In Uganda, we found that that was a major obstacle in the communities that needed to be reached.

I will mention one more group that I met in Uganda. Icebreakers Uganda is a youth-led LGBTI organisation that we visited in Kampala. Think what it means to be an LGBTI organisation in a country that has passed legislation that could end up with people losing their lives for admitting to being LGBTI. Despite the challenges, the organisation offers services in 14 districts in Uganda, runs a 24-hour service and has a house and centre for men who have sex with men. Due to the punitive

legislation and criminalisation, the organisation has to be very careful about how it works, but it continues to work.

I commend the Government for their contribution to the Global Fund. It is unfortunate, as we have heard, that we have only promised 80%, not 100%, of what we should be providing. I stress the importance of making HIV/AIDS a specific goal and a specific issue in relation to women and girls. The Government cannot expect to be taken seriously in their concern for women and girls if the issue of HIV/AIDS is not only high up the agenda, but explicitly so in the speeches that are made, on the Department's website and in the availability of funding.

3.46 pm

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Desmond Swayne): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who spoke with infectious enthusiasm about her experiences in Uganda, the programmes she saw there and the genuine commitment to community empowerment.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) for focusing his forensic intellect and our attention on this vital life-and-death question, on the eve of the replenishment of the Global Fund, with the UN's high-level meeting on ending AIDS and this year's AIDS conference coming shortly thereafter. This is a year in which we must make a change in the trajectory of this disease with respect to women and girls.

I clearly have to reassure my hon. Friend. I do not believe that this is the best forum in which to take him through the Department's website, but I am confident that we can arrange a time to do so, perhaps when there is a screen in front of us. On the goal that he found absent, the high-level departmental goals will not specify every disease upon which we want to make an impact. I put it to Members this way: we put our money where our mouth is—follow the money. We are the second largest donor in the world in response to the AIDS epidemic.

In 2014-15, we spent some £374 million on our response to AIDS. In the current cycle, we have committed £1 billion, subject to the 10% burden share, to the Global Fund. We support UNAIDS, UNITAID, the Clinton Health Access Initiative and the Robert Carr network for outreach to civil society. All those things are vital, and they have had an impact. The response to the AIDS epidemic has seen in the past five years 15 million adults being treated for the disease, 1 million babies of infected mothers being able to avoid infection themselves and a two-thirds reduction in the number of new infections—and yet, as my hon. Friend pointed out, in sub-Saharan Africa 50% of the people who are infected do not know it, and among young women, only 15% know they are infected. Clearly, this has to be our main effort if there is any prospect of us getting to zero: to zero new infections, zero—

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr Swayne: I am sorry. The hon. Lady has rather thrown me—I give way to her, if she must.

Catherine McKinnell: I apologise for interrupting the Minister's flow, because he is making a very important speech. I have listened carefully to the debate, which I commend the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) for securing. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), the shadow Secretary of State, that because of what the Minister is saying, the Government should be very clear that that is their aim. I still do not understand why they have not explicitly stated it in their information. I hope he is coming to that point.

Mr Swayne: I hope that I will be given the chance to get there, and that my statement today will be regarded as something of an explicit statement in lieu of what Members have not been able to find on the website, but that is a question we might come back to.

As I was saying, this has to be our main effort if we are going to have any prospect of getting to zero: to zero new cases, zero deaths and, as the hon. Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington and my hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant) pointed out so importantly, to zero stigma and discrimination—a vital part of the equation.

How are we going to achieve that? I believe that the proper principle is to deploy our resources where the need is greatest, where the burden is greatest and where the resources are fewest. I have to reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green in respect of his perfectly proper concern about middle-income status countries. The reality is that the Global Fund deploys half its resources in middle-income countries and specifically has programmes to deal with neglected, vulnerable populations in high middle-income countries. We have given £9 million to the Robert Carr fund specifically to address some of those issues.

I put it to hon. Members that as countries develop and become wealthier—I accept entirely that, as the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) pointed out, there is a question of what defines a middle-income country, and there is a wide spread—there has to be an expectation and a challenge to them to start deploying more of their resources to deal with the problems of healthcare and AIDS in particular. It is very much part of the Addis agenda that countries deploy their own resources, and part of the challenge to us and to the Global Fund is to hold them to account for doing so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green was right to challenge me on the issue of research and development. I do have concerns, but we are the leading investor in product development partnerships, which delink the market incentives for research and development and replace them with the prioritisation of public health objectives. Some 11 new products are now on the market in low-income countries as a consequence of the partnerships that we have developed. In addition, we have invested. We are the fifth largest funder of UNITAID and have put €60 million into its programme for developing diagnostics and treatments. Indeed, there is also its groundbreaking development in the treatment of paediatrics, with some 750,000 treatment regimes for children.

Ms Abbott: I agree with the Minister that as countries get wealthier, in principle they should take responsibility for their own HIV/AIDS programmes. However, when

there are allegedly middle-income countries that are members of the Commonwealth but which, to all intents and purposes, are going backwards on LGBT rights, does Her Majesty's Government not have a responsibility to intervene with the type of projects that would make it easier to access marginalised communities?

Mr Swayne: I accept entirely that there is a challenge to all the developed world and all right-thinking countries to hold those regimes to account for their treatment of human rights and respect for human rights. Nobody should be left behind—that is the principle that we have to abide by—and we must find programmes and measures to deal with that. I accept that the hon. Lady is right on this issue.

On the issue of research and development, we are alive to this problem, but let us consider it a work in progress. I accept entirely that there are still problems, but I am glad that the World Health Organisation is now implementing what it calls an observatory on research and development, and that a working group will be set up to drive the matter forward.

The issue of condoms was raised by the hon. Lady and by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). I am very much in favour of the distribution of high-quality male and female condoms. What is more, I want to see much wider distribution of the benefits of microbicides, which were raised by the hon. Member for Glasgow North with respect to the rings and gels that are being used and in which we have invested some £20 million. I believe that that is essential.

The hon. Member for Strangford raised a key point—I think his words were that AIDS is being used as “a weapon of war.” He is right about that, and I want to see reproductive and sexual health as a key part of our response to any humanitarian emergency.

Of course, I want to see a successful replenishment of the Global Fund. That is essential—[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Glasgow North is signalling that he wants a commitment to be made now, but I am going to have to disappoint hon. Members over a figure and commitment now. That has to be left to the Secretary of State and it can only be done once the bilateral aid review and the multilateral aid review have been published. However, I am impressed by the way in which the Global Fund has attempted to address our preoccupation with women and girls and to make its response to women and girls central to its strategy. We now want to see how that changes things on the ground, because women's needs are highly complex and our response has to be correspondingly comprehensive.

My hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green asked me on a number of occasions how we were going to address the needs of women and girls, and it is a response that goes well beyond what we can do specifically to address the issue of AIDS. It is a question of changing culture and of changing law. It is a question of changing the perception of human rights. It is a question of changing economic development and of giving women the power to protect themselves. It is about empowering women and giving them information and access to family planning services. It is about giving them an education and a livelihood. All these things will empower women to ensure that they are enabled to negotiate the terms under which sexual intercourse takes place. However, I tell my hon. Friend this: a world

free of AIDS—one in which absolutely no one is left behind—is one in which the rights of a girl are promoted and protected from the minute she is born.

3.59 pm

Mike Freer: We have had a very good debate. I reiterate the point that if the Department's commitment to women and girls is comprehensive, it has to include and specify dealing with HIV and AIDS. I thank colleagues and the Minister for taking part today.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered tackling HIV in women and girls.

Worcester University Arena: Disabled People and Sport

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Worcester University Arena: supporting disabled people into work through sport.

It is a great pleasure, Mr Hollobone, to hold this debate under your chairmanship on my birthday and in the week after Worcester's first successful Disability Confident jobs event in our magnificent Guildhall. I thank the University of Worcester and Leonard Cheshire Disability for the valuable briefings they provided ahead of today's debate. In particular, I pay tribute to the people of Worcester with the vision to create a leading centre for disability sport in the heart of my constituency. I am delighted to do so with a Minister who, as a local lad, not only knows Worcestershire well but is a dedicated sports fan and passionate about improving the life chances and opportunities for work for disabled people.

My hon. Friend knows well how impressive the facilities at Worcester University Arena already are because he visited them with me last year and was able to meet some of the phenomenal and inspiring athletes who use them. He will recall meeting Sophie Carigill, captain of the GB women's wheelchair basketball team, David Green, the Vice Chancellor, and Mick Donovan, head of sport at the university, who launched his vision for an international centre for inclusive sport there.

The Minister needs no explanation that the Worcester University Arena was the first purpose-built wholly accessible basketball venue where not only the viewing facilities and playing facilities but the changing rooms, accommodation and media facilities are entirely accessible to wheelchair users. He does not need to be told about the transformational part this can play for wheelchair athletes because he has seen it and heard about it himself. With him, I heard Sophie give the moving and important feedback that coming to play in the arena was the first time she had felt normal since her tragic car accident, and that she was not being specially catered for. She just felt that the venue allowed her to perform on an equal footing. With the Minister, I met other athletes with disabilities ranging from sight loss through to deafness and learning difficulties, who were inspired by the idea of a new international centre for accessible sport at the university.

Newly acquired land to the west of Worcester and around the existing arena for expansion, and plans to extend its reach further into blind cricket, football and tennis, as well as more wheelchair sports, has the potential to transform not only Worcester's facilities for accessible sport, but those of the UK. Such a centre can play a crucial role in supporting more disabled people to achieve their ambitions, including accessing work. I want to set out today some of the evidence for that, some of the reasoning behind it and some of the reasons why I believe this venture deserves the Government's support.

We know that too few disabled people have access to sport and I am glad that the new sports strategy set out by our hon. Friend the Sports Minister has made increasing disabled participation and the experience of watching

[*Mr Robin Walker*]

sport key priorities, as well as increasing diversity in sports leadership and administration. Research from Leonard Cheshire Disability ahead of the Paralympic games highlighted the necessity of this and found that over half—57%—of disabled people surveyed said they had completed no moderate-intensity physical activity in the previous seven days, compared with just 24% of non-disabled adults. Of those surveyed, 41% identified lack of suitable activities and exercise provision as the main barrier, with inaccessible facilities and fear of injury also being identified as significant barriers.

Leonard Cheshire Disability said that the employment rate for disabled people is currently around 46.7% compared with a record rate of around 80% in the rest of the population. In Worcester, the employment rate is even higher, but a recent report from the city council's scrutiny committee, which I support, has pointed out that it is still a concern that disability unemployment remains stubbornly high. The disability employment gap nationally stands at around 33% and, like Leonard Cheshire Disability, I warmly welcome the Government's worthwhile and progressive goal of halving that gap. That is the right thing to do not just for disabled people but for the whole economy.

Social Market Foundation research suggests that if the disability gap was halved and those who fell out of work as a result of disability were reinstated, we could see another 600,000 people in work and the economy would be boosted by an estimated £13 billion. I welcome the progress that has been made with 293,000 more disabled people working over the last two years, but I share the Minister's conviction that there is much further to go.

The Minister and I spoke about these issues at the last Conservative party conference and competed with each other in our enthusiasm for the employment goal, but I admit that I have learned a great deal from him in his determination to achieve it. I have shamelessly plagiarised his approach to reverse jobs fairs under the Disability Confident banner and it is greatly to his credit that the event in Worcester last week has been widely heralded as a success. It was supported by a number of local businesses, including Sanctuary Housing, Malvern Instruments, Dolphin Computer Access, Wits End Wizardry and Waitrose, whose first store in Worcester is due to open in June. It was attended by a wide range of local disability charities, including the wonderful Headway, Sight Concern, ASPIE, the Aspire Academy and the Royal British Legion, as well as the Access to Work and Disability Confident teams at the Department for Work and Pensions. I thank all those who took part, especially local businesses, the Chamber of Commerce and the Worcestershire local enterprise partnership who came along and made pledges.

The most impressive team at the Disability Confident event was the team from the University of Worcester, comprising two wheelchair athletes, Alex Giles and Tom Horrocks, and the England and GB blind football star and University of Worcester communications manager, Will Norman. Each of these athletes spoke about the vital importance of the facilities the arena provides, the huge potential of its future development and the employability benefits, such as communication skills and teamwork, that accessible sport has given them.

Will Norman is not only a brilliant role model in his sporting achievements, but a wonderful ambassador for the university and its wider support for job opportunities for people with disabilities. He is a highly successful communications professional, as well as a national athlete and footballer, who has written passionately about the benefits of supporting disability sport and real inclusion that treats those with disabilities not as other, but as part of the whole.

We were joined at the event by a former student of the university whose testimony is worth bearing in mind because it exemplifies both the challenges that disabled people may face and the huge success they can achieve when those challenges are overcome. Jordan Powell, aged 24, a graduate in history and politics at the University of Worcester, said he spent two years not even getting interviews for hundreds of jobs until he deliberately neglected to tell recruiters he was disabled. Within one week of not declaring it on job forms he was offered interviews at four different companies, and now works in telesales for London estate agent, Ludlowthompson. He said:

"In two years I applied for jobs every day, I went for hundreds of them and couldn't get anything."

He continued:

"So I decided not to tell people and within a week I'd got four interviews—I'm now a telesales executive and I've smashed sales records for my company."

Jordan came to see me some months ago in my surgery in Worcester to share his story and his concerns about the prejudice and fear that too many employers still feel towards disabled people. He explained that he felt that much of the prejudice was based on unfounded fears that they would not be able to support someone with a disability, and said that he wanted to help address those fears. He told me how Ludlowthompson had gone out of its way to make him welcome and even offered to tear its offices apart if it would help him, but that other companies had invited him to interviews that were upstairs and then failed to make allowances or adjustments when he turned up in a wheelchair. Within months of getting the job with Ludlowthompson in Worcester, he was setting new records for the company, and he told me that it was having to rewrite its remuneration policy to take account of the level of sales he has recently been achieving.

I was delighted when Jordan, who has also run as a council candidate for the Labour party in Worcester, agreed to work with me on a cross-party basis to deliver the recent Disability Confident event. His testimony was a powerful addition to it. The head of human resources at Sanctuary Housing, the largest residential social landlord in the country, said she had been convinced by his testimony and that he has changed some of Sanctuary's policies and made it a more disability-confident employer.

Jordan also told me how playing accessible football at the university helped to build his confidence and enabled him to recognise that being in a wheelchair need be no impediment to achievement. Jordan's story is by no means unique. The facilities that the university arena offers have already impacted thousands of people both with and without disabilities. In its first 12 months of operation it welcomed over 500,000 people, including

150,000 children, and staged 70 major national and international sporting events, 40% of which had a disability focus.

A direct impact of inclusion by design has been that Worcester has welcomed thousands of disabled and non-disabled athletes. Activities range from beginner classes for youngsters who have never engaged in sport to international junior wheelchair basketball championships. Student coaches currently deliver outreach wheelchair sports and inclusive sports sessions in more than 50 partner schools in the region and present inclusive coach education programmes and workshops in the arena to more than 60 disability organisations each year.

The economic impact of the arena for the local community has been estimated as at least £9.4 million.

The university's unique disability sport coaching degree is developing the next generation of inclusive coaches who have an impact on hundreds of local schoolchildren who will go on to have an impact at local, national and international level. Significantly, more than 300 students on other degree courses at the university have selected specialist modules on inclusion and disability sport coaching. One of the most impressive things to see on a visit to the arena is not only the many students with and without disabilities training to teach disability sports, but the number of disabled athletes and students training to coach sports in mainstream settings. What a wonderful example it would set to have in mainstream schools more sports and PE teachers who themselves have overcome the challenge of a disability and can demonstrate to students of all abilities their passion for and achievement in sport.

It is no wonder that Sir Philip Craven MBE, president of the International Paralympic Committee, who officially opened the venue, said:

"I'm blown away by the University Arena. It goes to show what can happen when you have the right people with the right attitudes—they've created a wonderful place. This facility has clearly come from a passion for sport—a passion for everybody being involved in sport."

The arena now forms the heartbeat of the university's recently launched international centre for inclusive sport, which has attracted partners from around the world in all forms of sport, including universities in Europe, the US and China and international disability sport governing bodies from around the world, which will be invited to conferences and workshops to share good practice for the benefit of youngsters on their programmes.

The European wheelchair basketball championships of 2015 attracted 400 athletes and officials and were viewed in person or online by more than 200,000 spectators. That was the single most successful inclusive Paralympic sporting event since the London 2012 Paralympics, which did so much to inspire a generation about the potential of disabled athletes and increase the media following of accessible sport.

Subsequently, there has been a surge in interest from universities and sporting clubs wishing to visit Worcester and look at ways of replicating the design and inclusive agenda of our arena. For Worcester as a city, the spectacle of hundreds of athletes in national team colours arriving in their wheelchairs has already done wonders for local people's appreciation of disability confidence and disability sport in general. I am delighted that the city continues to build on that legacy and that later this year the Worcester Warriors, my local rugby team, will

host the county's first international mixed ability rugby tournament, in conjunction with charities including Combat Stress. I am proud that our local premiership rugby team are the first in that league to be supporting mixed ability sport.

The arena has also delivered direct benefits in terms of employment for people with and without disabilities. In recent years, thousands of University of Worcester students have actively engaged in work placements with a focus on disability sport. It is significant that a vast number of graduates have secured posts throughout the UK that specialise in disability and disability sport-related activities. Many of them have disabilities themselves. Just a short round-up of recent examples would include a wheelchair user in a sports media post, a visually impaired student who is now in a media post, wheelchair users and power wheelchair users who have secured coaching roles, a double amputee who is a sports development officer in the south of England, a deaf student who is now a teacher in a special school for pupils with behavioural problems, a blind footballer working for a leading telecommunications company, a power wheelchair user who is now a community power wheelchair coach, a wheelchair user doing performance analysis for the GB wheelchair basketball team, a blind student who is now working for a national company as a provider of disability equality training and another blind student who is now working for a national foundation supporting disabled and disadvantaged people.

Many current University of Worcester disabled students are also employed as ambassadors for the university in outreach work throughout the UK to inspire others. The list of non-disabled students who have entered careers as strategic leaders, coaches, teachers or support workers for those with disabilities is too extensive to include in this speech. Beyond that are hundreds more—

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this extremely important debate to Westminster Hall. I am heartened by the work that he is describing. Will he do the all-party parliamentary group on disability the honour of linking us to the university arena and also coming to speak in that forum in order that we can look at continuing that work elsewhere?

Mr Walker: I would be delighted to do that and I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. I would also be delighted to extend an invitation to the all-party group to come and visit the Worcester arena, because I think it is a genuinely unique national asset and something that we should draw to the attention of that group, so I am very grateful for the intervention.

Beyond that are hundreds more people who will be inspired to believe in themselves and develop their skills at both competitive and participatory level by the arena and the access to sport that it provides. Crucially, it is not just a venue for international level or even university level sport, but a key facility for encouraging and supporting basic participation and inclusion for groups ranging from schools to hospices to the elderly. Charities such as Whizz-Kidz nationally and Acorns Children's Hospice locally have already benefited from its facilities, and I expect many more to do so as the international centre for inclusive sport widens its scope and reach.

[Mr Robin Walker]

The arena received some of its initial funding from the national lottery's Iconic Facilities Fund and later received the *Guardian* award for a building that inspires. I suggest that its contribution, both present and future, to disability confidence and disability employment is one more reason why it should continue to inspire and be an icon.

I know that the Minister shares my enthusiasm for this inspirational Worcester landmark. I urge him to ensure that colleagues across Government share the knowledge of what it does and can do for disabled people. I ask for his continuing support as we seek to create in Worcester a genuine gold standard for disability confidence, with a gold-clad heart in our international centre for inclusive sport. I hope that he will continue to work with me to ensure that Worcester can become a beacon for disability confidence and to improve the lives, the life chances and the working opportunities for disabled people.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): I am sure that there will be general rejoicing on the streets of Worcester today, but let me add my congratulations to my hon. Friend on the occasion of his birthday.

4.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Disabled People (Justin Tomlinson): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I, too, wish my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker) a very happy birthday. He highlighted the fact that I was a local Worcestershire lad. I remember, on my 18th birthday, on that Saturday afternoon, purchasing a record from Pure Records—happy memories.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who is a real local champion. The majority of my response will be on sport, but first I want to comment on his hosting of the Disability Confident event and the success of his own reverse jobs fair in engaging with the local business community to create crucial opportunities for disabled people to get into work, as part of our commitment to halve the disability employment gap. All too often, businesses lack the confidence to make what are often very small changes. In introducing such employers to the vast wealth of support groups, charities and organisations that will help disabled people to find work, my hon. Friend can be very proud of what a great success he made of that event. There are people who will now get an opportunity that, had he not made that effort, they would never have had.

I am delighted to talk about sport. Clearly, it is crucial to healthy, active lifestyles—disabled people are twice as likely to be inactive as non-disabled people. Sport can directly create job opportunities, as has been highlighted throughout this debate, and we also saw, in the case of Jordan Powell, how it helped to build his confidence to go on to find work. Sport creates role models to inspire people, in particular young people, and also, all too often forgotten, there is the actual enjoyment in sport. Certainly my visit to Worcester arena was really enjoyable. There were inspirational people delivering transformational opportunities. There is a track record of success where it has genuinely made a difference. The irony was that before I arrived to see

all those healthy, active people, I had a McDonald's breakfast, as I had arrived early, so there is still some way to go for me.

The facilities at Worcester arena are fantastic. It caters for disability by design—it is not an exception, but a given. The arena was specifically designed to be accessible to all. This is not just about the physical structure; it is also about the need to allow assistance dogs—they are welcome throughout. There is an induction loop system throughout the building. There is also the extensive training for staff and the awareness. It is just a case of disability being a given, not the exception. The people who designed the arena did not just think about the obvious, such as where the sport would take place. This goes right across the board. It includes the changing rooms and the accommodation. The student halls were built at the same time, and people were working on the assumption that outside term time, when the competition events took place, they would become accommodation for the athletes. As a given, they were 100% fully accessible, as were the media facilities. Therefore, unsurprisingly, the facility was busy. That seems like a silly, obvious thing to say, but actually too often we go to iconic buildings and they are amazing but hardly anybody is using them. That is not the case with the arena, which is permanently in use and therefore able to attract major sporting events, which is brilliant for creating role models. That was not an accident; inspirational people realised that they had to work in partnership.

The arena was created in conjunction with organisations such as Sport England, through its Iconic Facilities Olympic Legacy Fund—a catchy title—as well as with the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, Basketball England, Badminton England, many other sporting groups, the local authority, local businesses and the local community. It is not just the students who benefit, although it is great that they do; people come from far and wide to benefit from the fantastic facilities. By listening to and engaging with them at the concept, we got a facility that would always be a success.

Underlying all that was the aim to ensure that the facility was commercially viable. Too often, a ribbon is cut and the great and the good turn up to celebrate the opening. Without a good business plan behind that, there would be savings on the maintenance, opening times, programmes and activities. Right from the beginning, it was understood that the facility should never lie dormant for long periods of time and should maximise commercial opportunities—students, local sports clubs and the community, as well as the elite and professional athletes.

I was interested to see that Worcestershire County Cricket Club, Worcester Wolves, Aston Villa Football Club, Birmingham City Football Club, West Bromwich Albion Football Club and many other groups were taking part. Those are household names and they provided support, including enjoyment, performance analysis—that would have been a pretty painful thing for me during my sporting career—and fitness and nutrition advice. That was my McDonald's breakfast; they knew I was coming. The arena has become the home ground for sporting clubs such as the Worcester Wolves basketball team and the GB men's wheelchair basketball team. That is a fantastic legacy.

It does not stop there. The ambition is to continue to expand to create further partnerships. Worcestershire County Cricket Club is looking to do a lot more with its

Chance to Shine programme and new inclusive cricket centre. As a cricket fan, I would be delighted to make a return visit. The arena really has helped with Sport England's narrative of saying that where it is providing funding, major capital investments are required to make its facilities accessible.

Sport England goes further by publishing free online tools and guidance to support designers, building owners and operators to create accessible facilities. Having such a success story makes it an easier sell, as it can say, "Look, this isn't an inconvenience for you. By making those changes at the beginning, you will benefit commercially and with usage. This is a win-win for everybody."

We want to ensure that not just the people who go along to Worcester Arena benefit but that, right across the board, accessible sporting opportunities are given. Part of that is ensuring that the topic is part of the education of the next generation of PE teachers. The University of Worcester has led on that, because it is a given that it is part of its education process. It is integral, as it is part of modules.

I know how important educating PE teachers on the subject is because, randomly, I was selected to open a PE conference on behalf of the Government—I think somebody misread somebody else's bio and attached it to me, so I had to do a keynote speech on the topic. I had to be very creative that morning. One thing that came back to me was the number of PE teachers who wanted to offer more accessible sporting opportunities but feared that perhaps they would get it wrong, end up doing something where they might be sued, that there would be an accident or that things would not go right. As a given, the next generation will have that confidence. I give credit to the English Federation of Disability Sport and to Sainsbury's for their successful course to upskill existing PE teachers to ensure that PE staff have that confidence. I pay tribute to the PE teachers I met, and there were hundreds. There is a genuine appetite to do this.

I do millions of visits. One of the most fun visits I ever did was to see the Swindon Vixens disability netball team—young adults who had never ever had an opportunity to enjoy sport. They were put through a weekly one-hour session with professional coach. The session was enjoyable but structured, and they were gaining genuinely good skills. The enjoyment levels of those young adults was such that I genuinely thought they might explode! The serious side of it was that one of the girls lost 3 stone in the first few months of doing netball because it was the first and only time that she had ever had a sporting opportunity.

Dr Lisa Cameron: The Minister's information shows very clearly—I hope he would agree—that sport is not just about physical activity and physical health, but about mental wellbeing, mental health, self-esteem and self-confidence.

Justin Tomlinson: I could not agree more. I am delighted that the hon. Lady has extended an invitation to my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester to speak at her all-party parliamentary group. I spoke there previously and I know what an engaged group it is. That is a great opportunity to highlight the topic further.

The Government are bringing forward the sport strategy. Part of that will be how Sport England spends its £170 million to make sport a practical and attractive lifestyle choice for disabled people. That is vital because currently only 4% of elite coaches are disabled. Jordan Powell was a great example of how sport gives young people the skills and behaviours that are linked to school attainment and employment opportunities. Across sport, there is a lack of disabled employees, but there are lots of examples of how we are creating more opportunities.

Sports bodies and groups are currently not capitalising on the talent, skills and diversity of the entire population. I am forever highlighting the fact that one in six people in this country have a disability. Their combined spending power is £212 billion. It is called the purple pound. It is not Nigel Farage's utopian dream; it is something that has been highlighted by sporting groups making those changes and I have heard, time and again, just how they have benefited from doing so.

We are not resting; we are not waiting for this all to happen by accident. I set up a round table, which included the Sport and Recreation Alliance, Sport England, the English Federation of Disability Sport, the Youth Sport Trust, the Amateur Swimming Association, the Tennis Foundation, the Royal Yachting Association, Boccia England, British Wheelchair Basketball and Disability Rights UK. The aim was to look at how we can further shape the sport strategy. I have regular meetings with many other sporting organisations, including the Premier League and the Football League, about making facilities more accessible for disabled supporters, as well as with the Rugby Football Union and the British Paralympic Association. Some fantastic work is going on and, at the heart of that, Worcester arena is held up as a shining, beaming example.

I pay tribute to Channel 4, because there are also employment opportunities in the media. It has been successful in securing the rights to cover the Rio Paralympics and made a genuine commitment that half its presenters for that event will be those with a disability. It is not just doing that to tick a box—that would do a disservice to potential disabled presenters. The channel wants people who have a talent to take advantage of the opportunity to further their careers and to have further opportunities, whether with Channel 4 or other media organisations. It has gone right back to the training colleges and the performing arts people, saying, "Look, we wish to recruit. You find people who have the enthusiasm and the talent. You train them." There are genuine job opportunities coming from there, which is a real credit to those organisations.

I went on a brilliant visit, championed by a fantastic constituency MP who is held in such high regard. I saw that as we visited all those people. There were so many inspirational people who have made Worcester arena such a success. I am excited that it does not stop there and that there will be further opportunities. My hon. Friend made it very clear that he felt that Worcester arena was gold standard. I think it is platinum standard. In material terms, that is even higher rated.

I hope that many other organisations can look and learn, and create the same sorts of enjoyment and opportunities that Worcester Arena does. It is a real tribute to my hon. Friend that he has highlighted that

[Justin Tomlinson]

today. He will have a further opportunity to showcase all the fantastic work that is going on right at the heart of his community with the all-party parliamentary group. Once again—what a way to celebrate my hon. Friend's birthday.

Question put and agreed to.

Supported Housing

4.29 pm

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future funding of supported housing.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. The House was told by the new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on 21 March 2016 that the Government

“have no further plans to make welfare savings beyond the very substantial savings legislated for by Parliament two weeks ago, which we will now focus on implementing.”—[*Official Report*, 21 March 2016; Vol. 607, c. 1268.]

That assurance to the whole House was repeated the following day by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The purpose of this debate is to remind the Government of the consequences of imposing the local housing allowance on supported housing. The proposals will definitely be a further cut in welfare provision. The local housing allowance was introduced in order to cap the housing benefit given to private landlords. The cap is locally set, and it limits the amount of housing benefit to a figure based on the lowest 30% of the rental market in each local authority. In Newcastle upon Tyne, the city that I have the honour and privilege of representing in this place, it would mean a cap of £90 a week on housing benefit for a one-bedroom flat or £60 a week for a room in shared accommodation—£60 a week is the benefit offered to anyone under 35 years old who is single and has no dependants. It is a quirk of the system that supported housing in more prosperous boroughs is less badly hit by the measure because private sector rental levels, on which the calculation is based, are higher.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): My right hon. Friend mentions prosperous boroughs, and the London Borough of Ealing would, on paper, count as one of them. Does he agree that it is a scandal that, even in my constituency, groups such as YMCA West London are being hit? One of my very early engagements as an MP was with my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound). We went to look at YMCA West London's refurbished hostel in south Ealing. After the summer Budget and the 1% cut in social rents, YMCA West London wrote to me and said that, because it had used all its cash reserves to refurbish the hostel on a business plan that assumed future rental levels, it was looking at staff cuts, service reductions or possible closure. Is that not a scandal?

Mr Brown: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. Perhaps I should have said “relatively prosperous.” The distinction will be clear to people in the north-east of England, but perhaps less so to her constituents. She raises another important point, which is the uncertainty hanging over the arrangements, and I will have more to say about that later.

Returning to the Government's intention, the changes introduced in the autumn statement extended the cap into the social sector, in line with the provisions that already pertained in the private rented sector, which means that the rate paid to private renters on housing

benefit will apply to the social sector, too. The measure will apply to new tenancy agreements signed after 1 April 2016, with the rate changing on 1 April 2018.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman will know that, during the Report stage of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, Members on both sides of the House encouraged Ministers to introduce the moratorium—the 12-month review—on these specific housing developments, which gives us, on a bipartisan basis, an opportunity to consider the work being undertaken by specialist housing providers and to try to find consensus to offset what were originally envisaged to be quite draconian changes.

Mr Brown: I would like to find a consensual way through this, but maybe the Government should have thought about these matters before applying the measure to social housing. If they propose reform, they should think about what the reform should be and then introduce it, rather than introducing it in such a heavy-handed way and then saying, “Maybe we’ve gone too far. We had better have a review.” Like the hon. Gentleman, I would be fascinated to know what the review has come up with, because it is due about now. In fact, I think the Minister said it was due in March 2016.

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): My right hon. Friend is being generous with his time. Does he agree that the Government should have given due consideration to those people who suffer from mental illness and who will be affected by these “draconian” cuts, as the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) put it, to their housing benefit?

Mr Brown: I certainly agree, and I intend to go through a range of people who are affected by the measure. When I was researching for this debate, I found that the list was far more extensive than I originally thought. The measure is projected to save the Exchequer £120 million in 2018-19, rising to £225 million by 2020-21. The Government have said that they will delay the imposition of the cap on supported housing for one year, and they are currently reviewing the application of the cut to such housing. They have said that the review will

“provide a foundation to support further decisions on protections for the supported housing sector in the long term.”

Perhaps the Minister will explain what that means and tell us when the review will report, because we are all interested.

The uncertainty is damaging enough. Supported housing is a type of social housing that includes a care element. It allows those who cannot live by themselves without care to live independently with a support worker and with dignity in a place to call their own. Due to the very nature of supported housing—including a care element—it is more expensive, and thus a cap limiting weekly rent to as little as £60 will mean that much of it is unaffordable. In essence, the most vulnerable, those who need care in order to live, will have their housing benefit cut. Supported housing for vulnerable adults and young people who need help to live independently can include housing for people with learning difficulties, social problems or mental health issues; vulnerable older people; women fleeing violence; people with physical disabilities; and

servicemen and women. Surely if anyone is especially entitled to our consideration, support and affection, it must be those groups, and particularly ex-service personnel.

The Byker Community Trust in my constituency runs supported housing for veterans of the armed forces. The trust has low rents because it is a relatively young stock transfer organisation. Comparatively, it is one of the cheapest in Newcastle upon Tyne. However, the rents for veterans will significantly exceed the local housing allowance cap. Veterans in supported housing in the Byker Community Trust will have a shortfall of £32.50 a week if they are over 35 years old. If they are under 35 years old, they will need to find an extra £63.48 a week to cover the cost. The Army values the provision, and indeed it has supported its introduction. One veteran told me that

“the army does everything for you when you are service personnel, adjusting to civilian life was difficult.”

He did not know what he would do without the project.

Supported housing includes housing for young single people who are at risk of sleeping rough, begging in the streets and spending what little money they have on legal highs. Uncared for, they need the constructive intervention of adults. Supported housing is an appropriate and proportionate way of responding to those problems, which are covered by a range of Government agencies.

Tyne Housing in my constituency has a site in Newcastle East at St Silas’s church. It provides supported housing and day services for vulnerable and isolated people. The housing is provided mainly through single-person flats and supportive workshops to help people lead a full and fulfilling life. That specialist housing project is exactly the type of provision that will be hit by the cap. The project’s leaders tell me that as a result of the Government’s changes, the project will have to close; it is as straightforward as that. Those affected are vulnerable and need our help, but if the Government proceed with the cap as proposed, they will fail those people. The local cap on funding for supported housing could have huge repercussions. The National Housing Federation has released figures estimating that 82,000 specialist homes will be threatened with closure, just under half of all supported housing in England. That will leave an estimated 50,000 vulnerable tenants who are unable to work without support.

The uncertainty is having an immediate impact. Services coming up for re-tender are at risk of closure, irrespective of the outcome of the review, simply because the providers cannot make a potentially unfunded commitment in respect of what might happen beyond 2018. The National Housing Federation has said that 2,400 planned new homes have already been scrapped as a result of the cap, and almost a quarter of supported housing providers, 24%, told the NHF that all their supported and sheltered units are at risk of becoming unviable and closing if the cap is implemented.

The cut will cause serious problems for providers in Newcastle and the north-east. Changing Lives Housing Trust is a national registered charity based in Newcastle that provides specialist support services throughout England to thousands of vulnerable people and their families. It provides support to homeless people, recovering addicts and ex-offenders, as well as providing specialist women’s and family services. The charity has estimated that the cap will lead to an annual shortfall of £2 million in funding for its services.

[Mr Nicholas Brown]

Isos Housing, which manages more than 17,000 homes across the north-east, calculates that 700 of its 900 supported housing tenants will be affected by the cut, losing an average of £80 a week. Home Group, another major provider in the north-east, estimates that 223 services covering some 3,945 beds will become unviable if the proposals are implemented.

The Government seem to be aware of the problem, hence the review, but I hope that this debate will prove a useful chance and platform for the Minister to tell us where the policy is going. The Government policy, as announced, will have a number of unintended consequences. The most obvious question is where will those vulnerable people go when supported housing is no longer affordable? What alternatives do they face? The likelihood of suffering and exploitation is obvious. The immediate concern is a rise in homelessness and its consequences. Some people may end up with the police or in national health service emergency provision, such as accident and emergency; others may find themselves exploited without housing support or accommodated in unsuitable housing.

Home Group's average accommodation costs for someone with learning disabilities are £13,500 per bed space per year, or £260 a week. In its challenging behaviour and learning disabilities costing statement the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence estimates that NHS inpatient care for people with learning disabilities costs between £96,000 and £197,000 per person per year. The average hospital day bed costs about £300. By comparison, a night in a prison cell costs £418, and an ambulance call-out averages about £250. The difference in cost between supported housing and NHS care is huge. Ultimately, the taxpayer is better off with supported housing.

Home Group estimates from the Department of Work and Pensions' own figures that the cost implications of losing supported housing could be as much as £2.5 billion. I ask the House to consider that—a cost of £2.5 billion in unintended consequences, spread across different Departments but falling pretty heavily on the Department of Health, for an attempted saving of £225 million. We ought to pause and rethink. Supported housing is money well spent and proportionate to the range of problems that it addresses. It is a relatively small expense that, if cut, could cause great misery to the most vulnerable and great cost to the taxpayer. The answer is to exempt supported housing from the proposed cuts.

I have two extra points to raise with the Minister. The Government should say what their proposals are for the future of supported housing under universal credit. I hope that the answer is something better than, "We are giving local authorities a small grant to try to do what they can for themselves, but they'll have the power to do it themselves"—not the money, of course; just the responsibility. I hope that he can say something more comforting than that. Perhaps he will be able to tell us what funding structures will exist to fund supported housing when housing benefit is abolished under the universal credit structures proposed for 2018. Can he update us on that?

If the Minister cannot give us the full policy, can he at least update us on the findings from the review, which we are all expecting and which he promised in March? The promise has now mulched into "in the spring", but

in any event the review is imminent. Perhaps now would be a good time for him to tell us how he intends to avoid the hardship that I have outlined, and how he feels he can best give assurance to an important sector desperately in need of it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): This debate is to finish at 5.30, and it is clearly well supported. The recommended time limits for Front-Bench speeches are five minutes for the Scottish National party, five minutes for the Labour party and 10 minutes for the Minister, and then Mr Nicholas Brown will have a couple of minutes at the end to sum up. Eight people are standing, and there are 18 minutes until I call the SNP Front-Bench spokesman, so I am afraid you must limit yourselves to two and a half minutes each so that everyone can get in. If people intervene on speeches, I will not be able to accommodate everybody. I will impose a time limit of two and a half minutes. I know it is not very long, but I hope everyone can get in.

4.48 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I will do my best, Mr Hollobone. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) for securing this debate, which comes at an opportune time, given that the Government's review is taking place. I urge the Government, in carrying out the review, to start with a clean piece of paper. As we heard from the right hon. Gentleman, a lot of vulnerable people will be affected by the changes. I will not go through them in detail, but the feedback that I am receiving in Suffolk is that the recent changes to and restrictions on rental income for social housing providers and the changes in capital funding for adult social care are having a direct negative effect on capital investment available for supported housing schemes, leading to fewer and less innovative projects.

In moving forward with the review, my plea to the Government would be to break out of departmental silos. This is not just an issue for the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions; it is not just about housing and benefits. It is an issue for the Department of Health, as it concerns physical and mental healthcare, and it is a job for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, as it concerns preparing vulnerable people for the workplace.

It is also necessary to involve councils, which deliver these policies at the coalface, whether as housing authorities or social care providers. It is important to listen to housing associations and charities that are carrying out innovative projects that change people's lives and that in the long term are sustainable financially. These include Give Us A Chance and the Papworth Trust, and—more locally in Suffolk—Saffron Housing Trust, Orwell Housing Association, Stonham Housing Association, and Access Community Trust, which has done great work in Lowestoft for many years.

As supported housing involves more than just housing and has wider benefits outside the walls of DWP and DCLG, we need to consider a wider range of funding sources from other Departments. Perhaps devolution provides a means of securing these funds. Also, councils

should be encouraged to pursue an open-book approach to negotiations rather than fixed-price tendering. That way, tailored, bespoke and long-term solutions can be provided to meet specific local challenges and needs. In summary, let us start with a clean piece of paper, work collaboratively and think long-term.

4.51 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): Welcome as the delay in introducing the housing benefit cuts for those in supported accommodation is, it is simply not enough merely to delay them. In my opinion, the UK Government must exempt supported housing tenants altogether from these devastating changes or find an alternative funding model. That is because change to housing benefit can undermine the ability of such tenants to pay their rent, thereby putting their home at risk and threatening both their physical and mental wellbeing, as well as posing a genuine threat to the financial sustainability of housing associations.

Such changes could have a devastating impact on the future provision of refuge accommodation in Scotland, where all refuge accommodation is in the ownership of either housing associations or local authorities. The Scottish Federation of Housing Associations has identified that associations in Scotland could lose between £5 million and £14 million per year, which would be completely unsustainable.

From within the industry, we have already had a range of apocalyptic warnings from informed and knowledgeable service providers. A survey conducted by Scottish Women's Aid found that,

“in a rural area, introducing a cap linked to the LHA rate”—

that is, the local housing allowance rate—

“would result in an annual loss of £5,800 for a 2 bedroom refuge flat. In an urban area, the annual loss for a 1 bedroom refuge flat would be £7,100, and in another semi-urban area the loss on a 3 bedroom refuge would be £11,600 per year.”

David Orr, the chief executive of the National Housing Federation, said in December:

“The impact of the LHA cap on the amount of Housing Benefit payable for supported housing will be stark and make it extremely difficult for any housing associations to develop new supported housing. Without existing levels of benefit being available, providers across the country will be forced to close schemes.”

That is echoed by Andrew Redfern, chief executive of Framework, a specialist housing association, who has said:

“It would mean the end of supported housing. All our schemes would close, and I think all others would as well.”

Also, an *Inside Housing* article from 21 January laid bare the impact of capping housing benefit, identifying that only 5% of schemes could survive, which is a shocking figure.

In conclusion, the LHA bears no resemblance to the actual costs incurred by supported accommodation providers and if, as a result, such housing options became financially unviable, vulnerable tenants might be forced into potentially costlier alternatives, such as institutional care, funding increased hospital stays, the higher cost of private landlord housing and—in the worst case—the higher costs of imprisonment. This move must surely be the very definition of fiscal irresponsibility.

4.53 pm

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): I am indebted to the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) for bringing this debate to Westminster Hall.

I was first alerted to this issue not when I had the honour to serve on the Housing and Planning Bill Committee but via one of my local housing associations. Alan Lewin, the chief executive of Axiom Housing Association, talked about the viability of supported housing schemes in low-cost areas and how the reduction in rent was very likely to reduce their viability permanently, not only in places such as Fenland and around Peterborough but throughout the country.

I will briefly make a plea to the Minister by reiterating the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) that this is a cross-departmental issue and it goes to the heart of the Treasury. If the Treasury really wants to restrict and reduce housing benefit payments and the cost of acute district hospital care, it has to think long-term and holistically, and put in place legal and financial inducements to providers across the piece to provide extra care and supported housing. So it is not only the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions that are involved, but the Treasury. As I say, we have to think holistically.

I will also make the plea that this is a regional issue. Sometimes with our housing policy, we have been inclined to be very London-centric. There is a regional issue here, in terms of the affordability not only of general needs housing but of specific supported housing.

The mark of a civilised society is how it treats people who are voiceless, who do not have representatives and who are vulnerable, and it is important that we bear that in mind. All Governments make mistakes and all Governments are subject to the law of unintended consequences; that is very important to consider.

In this moratorium review, we must also take it into account that the costs of support for the particular individuals who we are discussing today are significantly higher than the costs of general needs housing. That is also a very important point.

Let us take in all the evidence from across the country, and let us have a proper regional and holistic approach, which must include a cost-benefit analysis of the costs that fall on things such as the criminal justice system and the NHS. Let us have a proper review and let us try to work together across party divides, so that at the end of the review we can have a consensus on looking after the needs of the people who really need our help—the most vulnerable.

4.56 pm

Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) for securing this debate. I am only sorry that we do not have more time for it. Lots of Opposition Members, particularly Labour Members, feel very strongly about this situation and there are some very important issues involved.

I will also raise a local issue. I thank the North Star Housing Group and its chief executive, Angela Lockwood. That organisation provides specialist housing, including

[Grahame M. Morris]

specialist supported housing, within my constituency and across the north-east region. I wanted to highlight a number of examples, but I also want to point out the nature of the problem.

A recent survey by *Inside Housing* revealed that 95% of supported housing providers have stated they would have to close at least some of their schemes, and a quarter of those providers said they would have to close all their supported housing. That is particularly worrying for County Durham. There are 6,450 supported and specialist units across the county that support a range of people. As my right hon. Friend has already outlined, these people are very vulnerable, including people with mental, physical and learning disabilities; the elderly; people recovering from substance abuse; people trying to rebuild their lives; and women fleeing domestic violence, for whom supported accommodation could save their lives.

The very short-term financial savings that the Government hope to achieve will quickly evaporate, because supported and specialist housing helps to reduce crime and eases pressure on already overstretched health and social care services. If the Minister thinks that this measure will save money, he needs to reflect on the findings of the Homes and Communities Agency, which found that investing in supported housing saves the taxpayer £640 million annually. As other Members have pointed out, if there was a little forethought and cross-departmental co-operation between various Departments, the value of supported housing could be better appreciated.

We will not address the housing crisis by penalising the vulnerable or by cutting funding for supported and specialist housing. The best way out of the crisis is to build more properties of all types and tenures, not just starter homes at costs that are out of reach for many people, and to exempt specialist supported housing from the terms of this cap.

4.58 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) for securing this debate.

I will briefly talk about a specific issue regarding York. We have got a double jeopardy, because the broad market rental area is not specific enough and covers a much broader area than York. Consequently, we are already at a disadvantage with regard to the value of the local housing allowance. These changes that we are discussing today will make things even harder for the housing associations in York. So I ask the Minister to look specifically at the issues regarding York and the impact that they will have.

I have met with York Housing Association to talk about the impact the changes will have, not just, as we have heard, on the social benefit that investment in supported housing brings but on the hard figures—the economics. York Housing Association has 364 tenants and a rental income of £2.7 million, but with the local housing allowance cap its income is estimated to drop to between £670,000 and £880,000. The association supports really successful projects, which are held in high regard across the nation. The Arc Light Centre and its homelessness project has a more than 70%

success rate of people going on to live independent lives and not returning to the streets. With such excellence within the housing schemes we do not want the cut, which will put masses of pressure and costs on to things such as the emergency services and accident and emergency, and put people back on our streets, which is the last thing we want.

I have also visited Seventh Avenue, where we have a supported housing scheme for people with severe physical and learning difficulties. If the changes go ahead, the scheme will not be able to run. It will see an annual shortfall of £18,830, which will mean losing a support worker who is absolutely vital to providing its services for people who are incredibly vulnerable and need the support of the state for their survival, let alone for providing quality of life. I have to assure the Minister that the scheme provides excellent quality for the people who live there.

In my remaining seconds, I urge the Minister to look at the evidence and listen again to the housing associations. They are the experts in the field and we need evidence-based policy in taking the situation forward.

5.1 pm

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): The reduction of social housing rents by 1% and the cap on housing benefit on social housing tenancies will have a profound impact on providers, reducing their revenue stream. The housing associations have stressed to the Government that the consequences of the changes could be dramatic. They are likely not only to be forced to shelve developments currently under way but to close existing schemes, at a time when the need for supported housing for the elderly is growing sharply. We are seeing a reduction in both the revenue of the housing associations that provide social housing and the funds being made available to the vulnerable people who need to live in supported housing. One has to ask whether the Government want the state to continue to provide support for social housing or not. Based on the proposals thus far, I suspect not.

Magenta Living, which operates in my constituency, has said that tenants on benefits will have to find an extra £25 per week out of their other benefits. In future, vulnerable prospective tenants and homeless singles are likely to be unable to afford social housing. Where does the Minister think those people should live? Magenta also points out that the problem is particularly difficult in the case of acute care, where there is a need for significant communal space for assisted bathing, treatment rooms and so forth. Magenta has told me that the Government are undermining their own drive to increase the volume and scope of older persons' housing at a time when social care is at crisis point.

Specialist housing schemes are really important for the most vulnerable people in our society, and it is on that provision that we should judge the civilised nature of our society. I ask the Government to think again, to find their point of compassion and to show support for supported housing.

5.3 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) on securing this important debate.

There is an enormous breadth of supported housing. In my constituency we have a brilliant foyer, which supports young people, sheltered accommodation for blind and partially sighted residents, care homes for people with physical disabilities and sensory impairment, homes for people with learning disabilities, refuges for victims of domestic abuse, accommodation that supports young and vulnerable new mothers and their babies, many sheltered schemes and care homes for older residents, and supported housing for people with mental health needs. I have visited many of those facilities and have never failed to be moved by the difference to individual lives that is made by providing appropriate care and compassionate support, enabling people who have a wide range of needs to live the best, most independent and most fulfilled lives possible and, in the case of refuges for victims and survivors of domestic abuse, enabling women and their children to move on and rebuild their lives in a safe place, away from the horrors they have escaped. Supported housing is a positive investment that saves the public sector money in the long term.

Yet the National Housing Federation estimates that across the country there is already a shortfall of more than 15,600 supported housing places. It is absolutely no exaggeration to say that the Government have entirely avoidably thrown the sector into turmoil by proposing to cap the local housing allowance and introducing an annual rent reduction of 1%.

Over the past two months, I have met with five housing associations that are active in my constituency and provide supported housing, and have been struck by how strong an impact the Government's policies are having. All the associations said that they were planning to reduce their current provision, all of them had put new schemes on hold for the time being, and one of them was exiting supported housing provision altogether. Those are not isolated examples. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East said, *Inside Housing* magazine recently reported that 95% of providers would be forced to wind up some schemes if the LHA cap were introduced. There is a particular risk to smaller providers, which often deliver the most specialist and innovative supported housing but are not able to cross-subsidise that with mainstream housing.

There is an urgent need for the Government to bring the uncertainty and turmoil to an end, confirm the removal of both the LHA cap and the reduction in rents for the supported housing sector, and work with the sector on a viable, sustainable plan to deliver the supported housing we need to meet the current shortfall and the future growth in demand. Supported housing is vital for equality, for quality of life and for the development of compassionate communities where everyone can live life to the full.

5.5 pm

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): Much has been said about the importance of supported housing to our communities. St Mungo's provides a number of supported housing schemes in Brent, especially for people with mental health and substance abuse difficulties. It also supplies supported housing for people who come out of prison and are in the in-between stage—the one-stop stage. Although I welcome the Government's rethink, it is a shame that we have come to this point because many of those who were supplying supported housing

services had already flagged up the issue. Undue stress has been put on the organisations, and worrying about whether they would be able to stay in their supported accommodation has done nothing to help people's mental wellbeing. Gandhi once said that we would be judged by how we treat the weak and vulnerable in society.

If the LHA cap is applied to St Mungo's tenants, it is estimated that the organisation will quickly face an annual shortfall across its supported housing services of about £8.8 million. It would not be able to sustain such a dramatic shortfall and, like many of the other organisations we have heard about today, it would cease to provide housing. The cap would be such short-termism—penny-wise, pound-foolish, as the saying goes. Therefore, although we welcome the Government's decision to rethink, it is a shame that we have come to this point and I hope that the Minister will listen to what Members on both sides of the House have to say.

5.7 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) for introducing the debate, the importance of which is demonstrated, I think, by the attendance. It is unfortunate that Members' speeches have been limited to two and a half minutes. There have been some excellent contributions—too many for me to list.

I start my comments by setting the wider context, using an holistic approach—a phrase that has been used. The Government's entire housing strategy must be considered a mess, unless we assume that they want to dismantle the concept of social housing. The much trumpeted right-to-buy scheme and its extension to the properties of social landlords will reduce overall stock, and will be compounded by the forced council house sell-off to fund replacement housing. It is clear that the replacement houses will not be like for like, and they may be located in areas where there is less demand. All those factors combined will have an effect on housing associations' finances. The ironic reality will be an increase in the overall housing benefit bill, as private rents increase and more properties end up on the buy-to-let market.

Another issue for the social rented sector is the 1% rent reduction, which, according to the Government's figures, will take £10 billion out of the social housing market by 2021. That £10 billion loss will obviously reduce the chances of some supported accommodation being affordable within a wider model. It is incredible that the Government have proposed a cap on social sector housing benefit rates without thinking about the impact on supported accommodation. The measure is expected to save only half a billion pounds over this parliamentary term. When compared with the £8.5 billion cut in corporation tax and the £5.5 billion of capital gains and inheritance tax giveaways in the Budget, that half a billion pounds is a drop in the ocean. The Government have admitted that they do not have statistics on those who access supported housing and have belatedly agreed to an impact assessment, which shows real flaws in their sign-off process.

The one-year delay in implementation can only be cautiously welcomed, because such accommodation may still be at risk. To use the fall-back answer that discretionary

[Alan Brown]

housing payments can be used misses the point completely. It is the argument used in relation to the bedroom tax, and it is the argument that the Government lost in court. I repeat that the term “discretionary” means that the funding is uncertain. It is impossible to believe that DHP will plug all the gaps. My local authority has confirmed that the overall DHP budget will need to be increased, so there will not be any real savings if that is the way the Government go.

We have heard that lifeline services are at stake. Let us be clear about that. Supported housing can end years of hell for those suffering from domestic abuse. It can save lives, prevent rough sleeping, support people with mental health issues and allow older people to live independently in a safe environment. That in itself can lead to offset savings in the NHS or reduce the need for people to be in a more intense and expensive residential home. It can help prevent bed blocking in the NHS. The polar opposite of supported housing provision does not bear thinking about. We have heard that there could be increased health costs, increased crime and increased costs associated with imprisonment.

As a councillor, I was pleased to see the construction of a new development in Kilmarnock called Lily Hill Gardens. It provides supported accommodation for people with special needs, allowing independent living within the complex, subject to a 24-hour telecare package. That project was truly transformational for the tenants. I shudder to think what will happen if future projects cannot go ahead.

One of the caseworkers in my office previously worked for Women’s Aid. The circumstances in which some people live are frightening, and I pay tribute to the dedication of the support staff and acknowledge the risks that they face. How undervalued must they feel at this moment? Kilmarnock Women’s Aid was able to confirm that it provides information, support and temporary refuge accommodation to women, children and young people experiencing domestic abuse. The impact of benefit sanctions and reforms are already having a disproportionate effect on women and lone parents. Universal credit, which will be paid monthly to one householder, further increases the possibility of financial abuse.

If refuge services are not exempted from housing benefit, a vital lifeline for women and children who need to find safety from domestic abuse could be lost. We have heard about the financial impact estimated by Scottish Women’s Aid and the fact that the *Inside Housing* article estimates that 95% of services could be lost. The Government do not need an impact assessment. Those points prove that an extended exemption for supported accommodation is required.

5.13 pm

Teresa Pearce (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): It is a pleasure to have this debate under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) for securing this debate. There does seem to be cross-party support for and interest in this issue, because it affects every constituency. My right hon. Friend mentioned how it affects the north-east, as did my hon. Friend the Member

for Easington (Grahame M. Morris). I was very interested in what the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) said about how different the situation is outside London. Local housing allowance in London is at a completely different level from what it is in some rural areas. That important point must not be forgotten.

Supported housing means that no one is left behind. It is what makes a civilised society. We have heard passionate speeches today about how in all areas, people will be affected in different ways. The majority of supported housing tenants depend on housing benefit to cover the cost of their housing. The proposed application of the local housing allowance rate in social housing would have a significant impact on the most vulnerable residents in all our communities. The decision is already having a devastating effect before it even comes into force: the building of thousands of vital supported homes has been delayed or scrapped altogether because of uncertainty over future funding.

The National Housing Federation estimates that 82,000 specialist homes will be forced to close. That is 41% of all specialist housing. Last Friday I visited Emmaus Greenwich along with my hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Matthew Pennycook). It does a fantastic job. It does not just house people; it rebuilds lives. The introduction of the local housing allowance cap would mean a reduction of 40% of its housing benefit income, leading to a local shortfall of an estimated £86,000 a year. Nationally, Emmaus would lose around £3 million a year.

We have heard many passionate speeches today, and I would like to set out some questions for the Minister. We have the Housing Minister in front of us, but I understand that the decision is pretty much led by the Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions, so he may not be able to answer the questions today. If he cannot, I ask him to commit to writing with the answers. Will he commit to working with the sector to try to understand the impact of the decision? Has he had conversations about that? There is some uncertainty. It has been mooted that only new tenancies will be affected. Does that mean new claimants, or does that mean new tenancies? If an existing claimant has to move from one property to another, does that mean that they then lose out? That clarification would be welcome.

Why is the evidence review into the decision not completed yet? It started in December 2014, I think, and should have been completed last year. It is still not complete. Is there a reason for that delay? When will the review be finished? Will the Minister announce a full exemption from the LHA cap for all tenants in supported housing? Has a cost-benefit analysis of the decision and the delay taken place? The impact of the decision has one cost and the impact of the delay has another.

Has anyone looked not only at demand now, but future demand? For instance, has there been any review of how many women applied for housing because of domestic violence, whether nationally or locally? Does the Minister know what the figure is for his constituency? We need to look at future demand. We are making decisions now when demand is growing.

Yesterday, a written response came back to a parliamentary question. The question was:

“To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what estimate he has made of the number of disabled people living in social housing who will be affected by the cap to local housing allowance.”

The response was:

“The information requested is not available. As such it is not possible to accurately estimate the number of disabled people living in social housing that will be affected by this policy”.

How can we have a policy that is costed when we do not know how many people it affects?

The hon. Members for Waveney (Peter Aldous) and for Peterborough said that this is a cross-party and cross-agency issue. It will affect the NHS, the courts and the probation service, so it needs an in-depth look. David Orr, the chief executive of the National Housing Federation, is a man I do not agree with on everything, but he has said:

“This decision must be made and it must be made quickly.”

I agree, and I look forward to the Minister’s answers.

5.18 pm

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Brandon Lewis): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, in an important debate, which I have listened to with great interest. The hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Teresa Pearce) outlined the level of interest in this issue, which I have been impressed by not just here today, but in previous debates in the main Chamber, where Members from all parts of the House have spoken. This debate has shown that Members care passionately about this issue. They have shown that here today and have spoken about it in conversations and debates previously. That is a good sign. I welcome the comments in support of some of the excellent work across the sector. We all share an enthusiasm and a commitment to sort out this important part of the housing market and to protect vulnerable people in the wider sense.

I want to outline for hon. Members some of the things that we are looking to do, so that we have the context. In our welfare reforms we are determined to ensure that we deliver a system that rewards hard work, that is fair to taxpayers as well as to claimants, and that always protects the most vulnerable. Yes, the welfare reforms we are introducing are wide-ranging. They need to look at all aspects of welfare spending, including housing benefit costs on supported housing, which are currently estimated to be running at more than £4 billion annually, and we need to be aware of that. Nevertheless, protecting the most vulnerable in society and supporting their housing needs is just as much a priority as driving down the deficit, and there need not be a contradiction between those two aims. In fact, as my hon. Friends the Members for Waveney (Peter Aldous) and for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) rightly pointed out, we should be looking to make a clean start and to get an holistic response.

Grahame M. Morris: On that point, with all respect to the Minister, may I point out that in Peterlee in my constituency the shelter for victims of domestic violence will close? That centre is full and over-subscribed. The figures suggest that every week two women are murdered by their partner or former partner. That must be a cause for concern when not only the Peterlee shelter but eight others across the north-east are apparently about to close.

Brandon Lewis: I suggest that if the hon. Gentleman reads what was said when we had a longer debate on this subject in the main Chamber just a couple of months ago, he will see that we were very clear that we will make sure that the most vulnerable are protected. He is presupposing something that nobody has suggested is going to happen.

Look at our track record on supporting the most vulnerable. We have set aside more than £500 million to create a safety net against homelessness. We have increased funding for central programmes to reduce homelessness even further over the next four years. That funding will include a new national programme of millions of pounds to support and scale-up work on rough sleeping. On the specific subject that was just raised, we have pledged £40 million for domestic abuse services, ensuring that no victim is turned away from the support they need. At the autumn statement we announced £400 million to deliver thousands more specialist affordable homes for the vulnerable, the elderly and those with disabilities. The Department of Health has committed to fund up to 7,500 further specialised homes for disabled and older people.

We have spent around £50 billion every year on benefits to support people with disabilities or health conditions, and that spending will be higher than it was in 2010 in every year until 2020. Funding for supported housing is also part of the Government’s wider financial settlement to councils, which includes £5.3 billion in the better care fund, and will result in councils being better able to work together, across agencies, and to invest in early action to help people to live safely in their homes for longer, which, ultimately, is what most people want to be able to do.

We understand how vital it is that those living in supported accommodation and those who provide it receive appropriate protections. I pay tribute to the excellent providers, some of which have been mentioned this afternoon and many of which I have met in my travels around the country. Indeed, I was a trustee of a foyer some years ago. We all know of examples from our constituencies and around the country of excellent providers doing excellent things to make a real difference to the lives of vulnerable people. That is to be applauded. These organisations do vital work that shows the very best ways of supporting and helping vulnerable people.

While looking after the most vulnerable in society, we must also ensure that funding for supported housing is efficient, workable, transparent and sustainable, in order to provide a secure, quality service that delivers for those who need it and makes the best use of the money available. As the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) outlined, my Department and the Department for Work and Pensions—this issue crosses Departments—have jointly commissioned an evidence review of the supported housing sector. That review will help us to shape the future based on the latest evidence of the current scope and scale of the supported housing sector. It has included extensive consultation with local authorities, supported housing commissioners and all types of supported housing providers, be they charities, housing associations or providers from the commercial sector.

The review will report shortly, and we will continue to work with and listen to the sector as part of developing a long-term, sustainable funding regime. In the past few

[Brandon Lewis]

weeks I have met David Orr and others and spoken to providers, and I will continue to do so because it is important that we develop a long-term, sustainable funding regime. It is really important that we get it right.

Richard Arkless (Dumfries and Galloway) (SNP): May I throw something else into the mix of the consultation? Because of the different statutory framework we have in Scotland for homeless accommodation, there is a greater need for private sector companies to fill supported accommodation roles in Scotland. The cuts directly impinge on such providers being able to fulfil Scotland's statutory obligations. Will the Minister take that back as part of his consultation and consider making private accommodation specified accommodation, so that those who need to can claim discretionary housing benefit?

Brandon Lewis: I will come back to the hon. Gentleman on that but, as I outlined, the report will be published shortly and we will then respond to it.

I want to put on the record how grateful I am, as are colleagues from across Government, for all the constructive engagement we have had from providers, local authorities, charities and service user groups. We want to continue to work collaboratively with stakeholders as we develop the sustainable future for supported housing that we all want to see. Based on the findings of the evidence review, my Department will be working closely with others across Government, as well as with representatives of service users, supported housing providers and partners, to develop options. The ambition remains to develop a system that is flexible, meets the needs of tenants and stimulates investment in the sector by creating certainty and clarity on future funding.

The sector has welcomed our decision to have the year-long deferral to ensure that the report can complete and we can feed back on it to give that certainty and confidence as we go forward with the final outline. As we made clear when we announced the deferral, the policy review will ensure appropriate protections for vulnerable people. We have done that, as is evidenced in our actions. The latest Homes and Communities Agency figures openly report that there have been 16,813 older people's and supported housing completions under our affordable housing, and more than 2,000 starts and almost 1,000 completions have already been recorded under phase 1 of the Department of Health-funded care and support specialised housing programme.

We will always protect the most vulnerable in society and provide them with the support they need and a safe home to live in. We must also ensure that that is sustainable and that they have certainty for the future, which is why it is right that we let the report complete and be published. We will then respond to it as efficiently and quickly as we can to ensure certainty and confidence going forward.

5.26 pm

Mr Nicholas Brown: Mr Hollobone, you have presided over a very disciplined debate with a clear purpose: to question the effectiveness of the policies the Government are pursuing and alert the Minister to what I hope are the unintended consequences of the policy as we understand it.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Easington (Grahame M. Morris), for York Central (Rachael Maskell), for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood), for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) and for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) for expressing the Labour party's point of view. I also thank the two Scottish National party Members who have taken part in this short debate, the hon. Members for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown), the latter of whom spoke from the Front Bench. We all had essentially the same point to make: what is proposed is cruel, stupid and expensive.

Even the two Conservative Members who spoke, the hon. Members for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) and for Waveney (Peter Aldous), made the point—correctly—that this is a cross-departmental issue and it is wrong to try to tackle it by focusing only on the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Communities and Local Government. If things go wrong, the consequences will be far more broadly felt than at just those two Departments, with effects on the budgets of all sorts of other Departments—certainly including the Home Office and the Department of Health on top of the two I just mentioned.

The Minister gave us a partial answer on when the all-important report is expected: “March” and “spring” have now become “shortly”. I welcome that. I think we will be returning to this matter again when the report is in the public domain. There is still a question mark over what is to happen when universal credit is introduced. The Minister was not able to deal with that today, and I accept that he is a Minister at DCLG rather than DWP, but nevertheless it is a vital question, not only for those who rely on the provision but for those who are bidding for the contracts to make the provision. It is very difficult for the latter to bid for a contract without knowing what the funding arrangements will be post 2018.

Finally, I do not recognise the £4 billion figure that the Minister used at the start of his address. Perhaps I misheard him, but it sounded to me as though he said that supported housing costs £4 billion. I think a number of us will want to pursue that further. I thank everyone who participated in the debate, including the Minister. I can confidently say that we will be returning to this matter again.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the future funding of supported housing.

5.29 pm

Sitting adjourned.

ORAL ANSWERS

Tuesday 12 April 2016

	<i>Col. No.</i>		<i>Col. No.</i>
FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE.....	161	FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE—	
Chagos Islands.....	171	<i>continued</i>	
Daesh.....	165	Middle East	170
EU Referendum	161	Middle East: Refugees.....	172
EU Referendum	167	Migration (Western Balkans)	163
EU Referendum	173	Topical Questions	176
Honour-based Violence.....	169	Yemen	175

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the Bound Volume should be clearly marked on a copy of the daily Hansard - not telephoned, and *must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,*

**not later than
Tuesday 19 April 2016**

STRICT ADHERENCE TO THIS ARRANGEMENT GREATLY FACILITATES THE
PROMPT PUBLICATION OF BOUND VOLUMES

Members may obtain excerpts of their speeches from the Official Report (within one month from the date of publication), by applying to the Editor of the Official Report, House of Commons.

CONTENTS

Tuesday 12 April 2016

Oral Answers to Questions [Col. 161] [see index inside back page]
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Events and Festivals (Control of Flares, Fireworks and Smoke Bombs Etc) [Col. 185]
*Motion for leave to bring in Bill—(Nigel Adams)—agreed to
Bill presented, and read the First time*

UK Steel Industry [Col. 188]
Motion—(Ms Angela Eagle)—agreed to

Backbench Business
Contaminated Blood [Col. 240]
Motion—(Diana Johnson)—agreed to

Transport for London Bill [Lords] [Col. 291]
As amended, considered; read the Third time and passed

Road and Rail Links: Sheffield and Manchester [Col. 324]
Debate on motion for Adjournment

Westminster Hall
Dementia and Alzheimer's Disease [Col. 1WH]
National Defence Medal [Col. 27WH]
HIV: Women and Girls [Col. 36WH]
Worcester University Arena: Disabled People and Sport [Col. 58WH]
Supported Housing [Col. 68WH]
General Debates

Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]
