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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 27 April 2016

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister for the Cabinet Office was asked—

Democratic Participation

1. **Martin Docherty-Hughes** (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): What steps he is taking to increase democratic participation. [904712]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): Some elements of participation, such as polling day turnout, lie far beyond the powers of mere Government and depend on the importance of the poll and the brilliance or otherwise of the campaigns. However, Governments can help things such as voter registration, where we are about to begin canvassing pilots to make the registration process quicker, cheaper, and more digital. We are also working with groups such as the British Youth Council, Operation Black Vote and Universities UK to encourage under-registered groups to sign up, and partnering with our embassies abroad and the Electoral Commission to run registration drives in the run-up to the polls on 5 May and 23 June.

Martin Docherty-Hughes: I am grateful for the Minister's answer. Nevertheless, in the week before the Scottish Parliament elections and the elections to the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly, this Government have overseen the disenfranchisement of over 770,000 people by the introduction of self-assessment in terms of the registration process. How can this Government hold their head up and say that they are increasing participation?

John Penrose: The registers are being reduced by the entries of people who have moved house or who have died and are not therefore likely to turn up and vote. There is, however, a parallel problem of the missing millions of people who have never been on the register and need to be found. We cannot cross them off because they are not on it, but we all collectively, on a cross-party basis, need to get out there and sign these people up. If the hon. Gentleman wants to join in a cross-party deputation to do so, I would be only too delighted to help.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that equally important as ensuring that those who are entitled to vote are able to vote is making sure that genuine candidates are not disenfranchised by people who get on to the electoral register who ought not to be on there because they are there through fraud?

John Penrose: Absolutely. It is crucial that we have a register that is both complete and accurate. I therefore look forward with great anticipation to the report on electoral fraud by my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles), where I am sure he will cover this, among other things.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): What specific work are the Government doing with students and young people to ensure that they are registered to vote?

John Penrose: We are taking a number of different approaches. First, we are working with Universities UK and the Association of Colleges. A great deal of work is being done in universities themselves. We are also examining very closely the work that is being done in places such as Sheffield University to sign up students when they first arrive and enrol. We are doing a great deal, but there is probably more as well.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I congratulate the Government on driving up democratic participation in the EU referendum by publishing their leaflet, which I understand is up for the Pulitzer prize for the best work of fiction. Does the Minister agree that that is driving more people to take part in the EU referendum because they are so cross and want to leave?

John Penrose: I am glad that my hon. Friend enjoyed the read. I point out to him that some 85% of the population say that they want to hear more about the issues from the Government. If that serves to drive up participation among either remainers or leavers, then I am sure that both he and I will be pleased.

Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): There is much concern about the Government's new proposals for public appointments in that they might decrease social mobility. Sir David Normington has gone so far as to say:

"Grimstone's proposals would enable ministers to set their own rules; override those rules whenever they want; appoint their own selection panels; get preferential treatment for favoured candidates; ignore the panel's advice if they don't like it; and appoint someone considered by the panel as not up to the job."

Would the Minister like to answer that?

Mr Speaker: Before the Minister does so, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is concerned about the appointment process in the context of the drive to increase democratic participation.

Mr Watson: Indeed, Mr Speaker—yes. Social mobility in public appointments is very important for democratic participation.

John Penrose: I am not sure how I link any kind of answer to democratic participation, but I none the less point out that we adhere consistently to the Nolan principles in everything that we do in this area.

Mr Watson: I appreciate the Minister's answer to my creative question. I do not believe everything that I read in the papers, but this week it was revealed that the

Culture Secretary had recommended five candidates for the position of trustee at the National Portrait Gallery. Three were Tory donors and one was a former Tory Minister. Is that a way of improving democratic participation for Tory cronies?

John Penrose: I suspect that the hon. Gentleman is trying to raise a serious point, but this is an example of the principle of if you are in a hole, you should stop digging.

National Citizen Service

2. **Rebecca Pow** (Taunton Deane) (Con): What plans the Government have to increase the number of young people participating in the National Citizen Service. [904713]

The Minister for Civil Society (Mr Rob Wilson): We have ambitious plans to make NCS a rite of passage for young people. We have committed more than £1 billion to grow the programme to reach the majority of 16-year-olds by 2021 and we would like NCS to benefit every young person, regardless of where they live in the United Kingdom. It is therefore extremely disappointing that there is currently no NCS programme in Scotland or Wales, despite the generous funding made available through the autumn spending review.

Rebecca Pow: Last summer, I was invited to a highly successful lunch event for veterans and others organised by a group of young people through the NCS scheme. This year, those on that scheme are running a social action project, which involves creating a sensory garden for young adults with learning difficulties. Does the Minister agree that the skills learnt through the programme—confidence building and teamwork—are making a real difference to young people in getting them into work and closing our skills gap?

Mr Wilson: Indeed. It is absolutely true that NCS is creating a generation of more responsible and engaged young people. The skills that NCS participants in Taunton are developing are echoed widely around England and Northern Ireland. Indeed, 90% of participants say that NCS helps them develop key skills for the future. UCAS now recognises NCS, and taking part is becoming a sought-after addition to any young person's CV.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister will know that I am a great supporter of NCS, but is it not underfunded? At the moment, we must be honest and admit that it reaches mostly into more affluent communities and not those with kids from poorer backgrounds. That is the truth and the Minister should do something about it.

Mr Wilson: Two hundred thousand young people have been through the NCS programme so far and we are aiming to increase that number significantly by 2020. We have made £1 billion available to do that. We are doing extremely well on diversity: 21% of NCS participants are eligible for free school meals compared with the national average of 8%, and 27% of participants are from non-white backgrounds, compared with 19% throughout the country. We are therefore doing better than the national average.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Government should have grouped this question with Question 4. For some reason, they did not do so, but I will take that question now.

4. [904717] **Michael Tomlinson** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I am very grateful. The Minister is right that NCS is proving invaluable for young people across the country. In Dorset, there was recently a successful scheme called "From yard to garden" about replanting trees. I would be grateful if the Minister gave advice and guidance to Members of all parties about how they can get more involved in that excellent programme.

Mr Wilson: I know that my hon. Friend is doing all he can to support the NCS in his constituency. Every Member can help by visiting a local NCS programme to raise awareness and ensuring that local schools and colleges encourage students to participate. The Secretary of State for Education and I will shortly write to all Members to highlight how everyone can make a contribution to NCS.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): Last summer, I visited an NCS scheme in Dukinfield in my constituency and I was hugely impressed by the work with young people, but many of those young people raised with me the wider cuts to youth services. Has the Minister conducted an impact assessment on how those cuts have affected the aims, ambitions and objectives of the NCS programme?

Mr Wilson: That question gives me the opportunity to say how disappointed I am that local authorities choose to make cuts in their service provision. We are investing more than £1 billion in NCS in this Parliament and the overwhelming majority of that funding will flow through delivery organisations, most of which are public or VCSE—voluntary, community and social enterprise—organisations. Beyond that, we are also investing more widely in the youth sector through programmes such as Step Up To Serve and the British Youth Council, and supporting local authorities to reshape their youth provision.

10. [904723] **Jeremy Quin** (Horsham) (Con): The Minister gave a statistic in response to the question asked by the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman), but what steps is he taking to encourage NCS participation by young people from a black and minority ethnic background?

Mr Wilson: I thank my hon. Friend for asking about the participation targets. It is really important that every young person—every 16-year-old—gets the opportunity to take part in NCS, because the programme not only creates a more cohesive society and adds to social mobility and social engagement, but delivers value for money. The statistics that I cited earlier show that it is a programme of which we, the Government and the whole country can be very proud.

Government Grant Agreements

3. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of an anti-lobbying clause in Government grant agreements on the ability of charities to scrutinise Government policy. [904716]

6. **Paul Flynn** (Newport West) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the compatibility of the proposed anti-lobbying clause in Government funding agreements with the terms of the Government's compact with civil society organisations relating to campaigning. [904719]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock): As set out earlier this month, we are continuing to work on this issue with charities, universities and others. The principle is clear: taxpayers' money should not be wasted on Government lobbying Government.

Patrick Grady: Will the Minister not admit that this policy is a mess? The Government have been forced into a U-turn by research scientists, so the clause will not apply to them. Will he undertake urgently to review the operation of the entire clause and, at the very least, commit to an ongoing review so that we can be sure that the freedom of speech of charities and other organisations is not undermined?

Matthew Hancock: As we have said, we are reviewing representations and we will take a decision on the form of the clause. We are pausing on implementation, but we are committed to ensuring that taxpayers' money is used for the good causes for which it is intended and not wasted on Government lobbying Government.

Paul Flynn: Six years after the Government promised to crack down on lobbyists, the big corporate lobbyists are free to lobby, in secret and anonymously, but the worthy charities are having their lives made a misery by new bureaucracy. Why do the Government consistently dabble in the shallows, worrying the minnows, while the big, fat salmon swim by unhindered?

Matthew Hancock: I am an enormous supporter of the work of charities, but I find it extraordinary that the hon. Gentleman seems to be a supporter of lobbyists using money only when it comes from taxpayers. I think that taxpayers' money should be put to better use.

Mr David Nuttall (Bury North) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that when our constituents give money to charity, they expect it to be used directly to help those disadvantaged people whom the charity claims to help, and that if they wanted it to be used for political lobbying, they would have made a donation to a political party?

Matthew Hancock: I could not have put it better myself.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that when people donate money, they want that money to be spent on the services provided by the charity, and that most people in this country would be shocked at the amount of money spent on administration and lobbying?

Matthew Hancock: My hon. Friend makes an important point, which is that charities play an enormous role in alleviating suffering, improving good causes and strengthening our communities. Let us make sure that when money is donated to a charity—as it is by many of

us, possibly everyone, in this House and many people around the country—it is spent on the good causes for which it is intended.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): The Government have succeeded in uniting the entire British voluntary sector against them, including household names such as the girl guides, Mencap and Oxfam. Indeed, their actions in trying to suppress debate and discussion are reminiscent of a totalitarian political culture. If voluntary organisations come across systemic child abuse or practices such as female genital mutilation, are you really saying that they should remain silent and not seek to influence Government, when a change in the law could outlaw such practices?

Mr Speaker: I am not saying anything of the kind, but I will leave it to the Minister.

Matthew Hancock: And nor are we. It is an absurd suggestion. The principle that taxpayers' money should not be used to lobby Government is perfectly reasonable and one that most people support.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): A leading board member of the Charity Commission has written an essay calling for the UK to leave the EU. That comes after the Charity Commission tried to clamp down on charities engaging in the EU debate. Is the Minister able to explain why the Charity Commission rule on campaigning appears to be, "Do as I say, not as I do"? I welcomed his clarification that charity voices should and could be heard on the issues that affect them, but it flies in the face of the Charity Commission's recent gagging clauses. Will the Minister confirm that charities are now allowed to speak out, but only if they agree with him?

Matthew Hancock: No.

Electoral Reform

5. **Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): What recent assessment the Government have made of the case for electoral reform. [904718]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): My hon. Friend will remember that in the last Parliament we held the alternative vote referendum, in which this country resoundingly rejected a proposal to abandon our tried and tested first-past-the-post system in favour of an alternative. I believe that we should respect that result and the clear democratic decision that it represents, and therefore we have no plans to change the voting system.

Alec Shelbrooke: Given that the British people voted overwhelmingly for first past the post, does my hon. Friend agree that, as with all referendums, the vote is final and settled, and that the Government are absolutely right to push ahead with delivering their vital manifesto commitments?

John Penrose: As in many things, I could not have put it better myself.

Danny Kinahan (South Antrim) (UUP): When it comes to electoral reform, in Northern Ireland we are closing all our electoral offices. Surely, part of electoral reform is trying to get more people involved, and closing electoral offices is the wrong way to do it.

John Penrose: I will not trample on the purviews of the devolved Administrations and the Northern Ireland Office, but if the hon. Gentleman would like to write to me with more details, I would be happy to respond.

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con): Are the Government looking seriously at how the understandable security challenges of online voting might be overcome so that future generations of young people can vote online in this country safely and securely, thereby increasing voter registration and participation?

John Penrose: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that online activity is an increasing part of our everyday lives, whether it be shopping or anything else. As technology improves and online voting becomes steadily more secure, it is something that we will need to continue to revisit. At the moment, the prospect of potentially stealing the Government of a country is too grave to allow online voting to happen.

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that we must do everything possible to bring power closer to people in every part of the country, and that a good start would be to make it easier for people to engage in politics?

John Penrose: I absolutely agree. As I said in response to an earlier set of questions, there is a great deal that Governments can do, but there is also a great deal that political parties and others need to do, to engage the interest of the voters.

Social Mobility

7. **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): What discussions he has had with industry leaders on increasing social mobility in the public and private sectors. [904720]

The Minister without Portfolio (Robert Halfon): I thank my hon. Friend for his question and for his work in the House on social mobility. In our mission to increase social mobility, we are working with a number of leading businesses and organisations on our plans to improve life chances across the nations. That includes the civil service pushing ahead with the delivery of more than 30,000 of the overall 3 million apprenticeship starts by 2020, introducing name-blind recruitment and leading the development of new national common measures of socioeconomic diversity for employers.

Jeremy Lefroy: As it is vital that the civil service reflects the society that it serves, will my right hon. Friend explain how the Government are acting on the recommendations made in the report of the Bridge group?

Robert Halfon: My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that we are accepting every part of the recommendations of the Bridge report. He will know that we are the party of the ladder, the party of social

mobility, the party of the living wage, the party of lower taxes for low earners and the party of millions of apprenticeships and millions of jobs.

Topical Questions

T1. [904702] **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock): The Cabinet Office is responsible for efficiency in reforming Government, transparency, civil society, digital technology, cyber-security and delivering the Government's agenda.

Bob Blackman: I commend my right hon. Friend for releasing vast amounts of Government data, which will improve transparency across Government. What further action can he take to ensure that performance improves, transparency is available to the general public and data are in a manageable form so that people can analyse them?

Matthew Hancock: My hon. Friend is right that this is not only about releasing more information, but about releasing it in a way that is usable. I can announce to the House that since 2010 the Government have released 27,000 open datasets—a new high—which goes to show that we are the most transparent Government ever.

T3. [904704] **Mr Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow) (Lab): British troops served fewer years in Iraq than during the first and second world wars, and the first and second world wars did not take as long as it has taken to publish the Chilcot report. Will the Minister make an apology to my constituent Pat Long, whose son was killed in the Iraq war, for these unforgivable delays, and also give a commitment to her and other families that they will see the embargoed report, rather than getting the news—inevitably there will be bad news—second hand?

Matthew Hancock: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern and the concern of his constituents. He will know that the timing of the publication is a matter for the independent inquiry, which has set out a timetable. Checking for national security issues is very important, and will take place appropriately. Thankfully, we will get to the conclusion of this process soon.

T2. [904703] **Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): The Government need to keep up with the digital revolution, and I applaud the Minister's efforts to ensure that that is being done. Does he agree that as more interaction between citizens and Government takes place online, cyber-security must keep pace with that increase?

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (Mr Oliver Letwin): I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. He is absolutely right that cyber-security is increasingly important not just for communications between citizen and Government, but in a wide range of businesses. That is why we have laid aside £1.9 billion to improve our cyber-security during this Parliament, and why we are creating a new national cyber-security centre.

T5. [904706] **Martyn Day** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): We heard earlier about the anti-lobbying clause that the Minister for the Cabinet Office is determined to introduce in a drive to clean up politics. The Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016 covers the lobbying of MSPs. Does he have any plans to expand the scope of the register of consultant lobbyists to cover the lobbying of MPs?

Matthew Hancock: We brought in the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 and made progress on this issue during the last Parliament. The crucial point about tackling lobbying through grants is that taxpayers' money should be spent on the things it is intended for, not on Government lobbying Government.

T4. [904705] **Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): The FIFA corruption scandal and other corruption scandals around the world have shown the need for a more integrated and international approach to tackling corruption. Will the Minister push for such an approach at the Government's anti-corruption summit next month?

Mr Letwin: In short, yes. That is of course part of the global development goals, which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister led the world in establishing. One of the targets within those goals is precisely to reduce that kind of corruption, and we will emphasise that in our work to fulfil our part of those targets.

T7. [904708] **Stuart C. McDonald** (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): What steps has the Minister taken to make Government colleagues aware of the disastrous impact that the Trade Union Bill will have on industrial relations with civil servants?

Matthew Hancock: The Trade Union Bill, which is currently before Parliament, takes important steps to modernise the relationship between trade unions and their members. Although trade unions play a very important part in our national life and represent the interests of many, they do not represent the interests of all, and we must make sure that that relationship is modern and appropriate. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. There is a lot of noise in the Chamber. The Minister must be very disappointed to have such an inattentive audience. Let us hear the words.

T6. [904707] **Caroline Ansell** (Eastbourne) (Con): To return to individual electoral registration and the question from the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes), will the Minister give further assurances that all steps are being taken to reach harder-to-reach groups, such as private renters, of which there are very many in my constituency of Eastbourne?

Mr Letwin: Yes, indeed. We are determined to reach out to a new set of potential electors who have failed to register, as the Minister for constitutional reform, my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose), made clear earlier in our proceedings. I should tell my hon. Friend that every single person whose name appeared in the old register but who has been discounted under individual electoral registration would have been approached at least nine times before their name was removed.

Mr Speaker: I appeal to Ministers to face the House because much of the right hon. Gentleman's answer was lost on the rest of us, which is to our grave disadvantage.

T9. [904710] **Jess Phillips** (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): When I used to work for a charity, I was often called by the Ministry of Justice, the Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government to give expert advice, on one occasion to a very anxious Minister just before a sitting of the Home Affairs Committee. Under the new anti-advocacy clause, will charity specialists continue to be able to help the Government, or will the new rule apply only when it suits the Government, rather than when it suits the public?

Matthew Hancock: Of course charities will be able to contribute to debate. They will be able to advise and researchers will be able to bring forward their world-beating ideas, but as for the idea, supported by the Labour party, that taxpayers' money should be used for paid lobbyists, we are going to put a stop to that.

T8. [904709] **Mr Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): I welcome the Government's commitment to improving social mobility in the civil service. Will the Minister join me in encouraging more private sector employers to do the same—for example, through schemes such as Inspiring the Future?

Matthew Hancock: I strongly endorse that approach, Mr Speaker. If you or any other Member have not already got involved in an Inspiring the Future event, I would encourage you to do so. Not only is it good for the country but it is an incredibly enjoyable way to spend some time.

Margaret Ferrier (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (SNP): From Cabinet Office figures, 67% of people in the senior civil service were based in London last year, the highest proportion in the past five years. Given that, and the decision to close the office of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in Sheffield, does the Minister not accept that his policy of moving civil servants out of London and into the regions is failing?

Matthew Hancock: We are introducing regional hubs for the civil service. Of course, many UK civil servants work in Scotland, supporting the people in Scotland. Inevitably there are a large number of civil servants in London because this is the capital of the United Kingdom, but we have to make sure that they represent the country that they serve.

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): We know that special advisers are required to submit their emails and telephone texts to public view under freedom of information legislation. What is the Government's policy on the use of WhatsApp, which special advisers are using to conceal Government business from public view?

Mr Letwin: I hesitate to admit to my hon. Friend that I have never personally used WhatsApp in my life. I am happy to reassure him that all aspects of Government business are properly recorded and minuted, and are subject to FOI requests as normal, despite the rumours that he has heard.

Mr Speaker: That probably makes two of us, then.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [904687] **Mims Davies** (Eastleigh) (Con): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 27 April.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): Yesterday marked a momentous day for the family and friends of the 96 victims of the Hillsborough disaster. Over the last 27 years their search for justice has been met with obfuscation and hostility instead of sympathy and answers. As I said to the House in 2012 about the Hillsborough independent panel's report, it is wrong that the families had to wait for so long, and to fight so hard, just to get to the truth. I know that the whole House will want to join me in praising their courage, patience and resolve. They have never faltered in the pursuit of the truth and we all owe them a great debt of gratitude.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, and, in addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Mims Davies: I would very much like to associate myself with the Prime Minister's important comments on the Hillsborough tragedy, along with Members on all sides of the House, and pay tribute to the victims and their families, and to the resilience of the campaigners who continue to strive for the truth in the pursuit of justice.

In my constituency of Eastleigh, the service that GPs provide is crucial to people's daily lives, including at St Luke's surgery in Botley—I have met the people at that surgery to highlight its important local value. Does the Prime Minister agree that the recent key announcement of £2.4 billion of funding for GPs is only possible because of a strong Conservative majority Government?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We made a choice to put £12 billion into the NHS in the last Parliament and £19 billion into the NHS in this Parliament. We want to see strengthened primary care. Our vision is of GPs coming together and having physiotherapists, mental health practitioners and other clinics in their surgeries, so that people can get the healthcare they need and we take the pressure off hospitals. That will only happen with a Government who keep investing in our NHS.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): Yesterday, after 27 years, the 96 people who tragically lost their lives at Hillsborough, and their families, finally received the justice they were entitled to. I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister has apologised for the actions of previous Governments, and I join him in paying tribute to all those families who have campaigned with such dignity, steadfastness and determination, to get to the truth of what happened to their loved ones on that dreadful afternoon. I also pay a warm tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), for Halton (Derek Twigg) and for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) and other MPs who have relentlessly campaigned with great difficulty

over many years. I hope that the whole House will be united in demanding that all those involved in the lies, smears and cover-ups that have so bedevilled this whole inquiry will now be held to account.

Last week the Prime Minister told the House that he was going to put rocket boosters on his forced academisation proposals. This weekend, in the light of widespread unease—including among his own MPs—it seems that the wheels are falling off the rocket boosters, and that the Government are considering a U-turn. Will the Prime Minister confirm whether that U-turn is being prepared for or not?

The Prime Minister: Let me join the right hon. Gentleman in praising those who campaigned so hard and for so long to get justice for the victims of Hillsborough. This whole process took far too long, and it is right that we had the Jones report—I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham)—and responded to it. I also want to mention the former Attorney General, who took the case to the High Court for the Government himself, to argue for that vital second inquest.

On academies, I have not yet met a rocket booster with a wheel on it, but rocket science is not really my subject, and apparently it is not the right hon. Gentleman's. I repeat: academies are raising standards in our schools, and I want a system where heads and teachers run schools, not bureaucrats.

Jeremy Corbyn: Well, there wasn't much of an answer there. Will the Prime Minister tell the House—*[Interruption.]* If Conservative Members would be patient, they might hear the simple question that I am putting to the Prime Minister. Will he tell the House whether he will bring forward legislation to force good and outstanding schools to become academies against their wishes in the upcoming Queen's Speech? Yes or no?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, I cannot really pre-empt what is in the Queen's Speech, but on this one example I can help out the right hon. Gentleman. We are going to have academies for all, and it will be in the Queen's Speech.

Jeremy Corbyn: We look forward to that, but there is still time for the U-turn that I am sure is at the back of the Prime Minister's mind. It has been reported that the Government are considering allowing good local authorities to form multi-academy trusts. Ironically, that would give local authorities more responsibility for running schools than they have now, although the Prime Minister has previously suggested that local authorities are holding schools back. Why is this costly reorganisation necessary for schools that are already good or outstanding? Why is he forcing it on them?

The Prime Minister: As I said last week—this is good; I like repeats on television, and I am very happy to have them in the House as well—outstanding schools have nothing to fear from becoming academies, and indeed they have a lot to gain. Just because a school is outstanding or good does not mean that it cannot have further improvement. We want outstanding schools to help other schools in their area, often by being part of an academy trust. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned

local authorities—[*Interruption.*] He has asked two questions so far, with two very clear answers. Third question, and third clear answer coming—[*Interruption.*] Simmer down. Perhaps if he could deal with the anti-Semites in his party, we would all be prepared to listen to him a bit more—perhaps we will come on to that.

Of course, there are lots of ways in which schools can become academies: they can convert and become academies; they can be sponsored by an outside organisation; they can work with other schools in the area; they can look at working with the local authority. Those schools that want to go on using local authority services are free to do so. I am very clear: academies are great and academies for all is a good policy. What we are now seeing from Labour, I sense, is that it is moving in favour of academy schools. Perhaps when the right hon. Gentleman gets to his feet, he can say: does he favour academies or not?

Jeremy Corbyn: The Prime Minister will be aware that repeats on television sometimes get more viewers than they did the first time round.

The chief executive of the largest academy chain in London, the Harris Academy, has warned that a far more fundamental thing that the Prime Minister should be worrying about, rather than whether schools should become academies or not, is teacher shortages. The academies do not want this; parents do not want it; teachers do not want it; governors do not want it; Conservative councils and MPs do not want it. Who actually does want this top-down reorganisation that he is imposing on our education system?

The Prime Minister: Okay. Question 4, answer 4: here it comes. The right hon. Gentleman asks who wants this. Let us start with Michael Wilshaw, the chief inspector of schools. I think he is someone worth listening to. He said that

“academisation can lead to rapid improvements...I”

firmly

“believe it is right to give more autonomy to the front line”.

The OECD has been in the news today, so let us try that. This should not be too controversial. The OECD states:

“I view the trend towards academies as a very promising development in the UK, which used to have a rather prescriptive education system”.

So it supports it. What about the endless academy trusts who support it?

The right hon. Gentleman asked another question, and, very keen for full answers—[*Interruption.*] If you shout, you will not hear the answer. He asked about teacher shortages, but the fact is that there are more school places and more teachers under this Government than there were under Labour. Why? Because we have got a successful economy, and we are putting it into our schools and our children’s future.

Jeremy Corbyn: There are, of course, still record numbers of children in over-sized and super-sized classes, and that is getting worse. If the Prime Minister is looking for support for his academisation proposal, he might care to phone his friends, the leaders of Hampshire, West Sussex and his own Oxfordshire county council, who are deeply concerned and opposed to it. He might

care to listen to Councillor Carter, the Conservative chair of the County Councils Network, who said that “the change will lead to a poorer education system”.

Why, then, is the Prime Minister pushing this through with so much opposition and concern, and when it is such a waste of money, when we should be investing in teachers and schools, not top-down reorganisation?

The Prime Minister: I am glad the right hon. Gentleman is quoting Conservative council leaders, and because they keep the council tax down and provide good services, I hope we will see more of them in 10 days’ time. To be clear on teacher supply, there are 13,000 more teachers than there were in 2010.

To give a wholly accurate answer to his fourth question, the right hon. Gentleman asked who else supports academies. Let me quote Helena Mills of the Burnt Mill Academy Trust. She said:

“I used to be very sceptical about, and resistant to, academy status. But during the process of developing the...Academy...I have been increasingly convinced that”

this

“is the way forward.”

That is what more and more people are saying. That is why 1.3 million more children are in good and outstanding schools. That is why almost nine out of 10 converter academies are good or outstanding schools. On this side of the House we are very clear: we back aspiration; we back opportunity; we back investment in our schools; we want every child to get the best. It is Labour that wants to hold back opportunity and have one-size-fits-all.

Jeremy Corbyn: A pattern seems to be developing. [*Interruption.*] It is quite simply this: the Prime Minister has a Health Secretary who is imposing a contract on junior doctors, against the wishes of patients, the public and the rest of the medical profession; and he has an Education Secretary who is imposing yet another Tory top-down reorganisation that nobody wants. When will his Government show some respect and listen to the public, parents and patients, and indeed to professionals who have given their lives to public service in education and health? When will he change his ways, listen to them and trust other people to run services, rather than imposing things from above?

The Prime Minister: I tell right hon. Gentleman the pattern that is developing: we can see 1.9 million more people being treated in our health service; and we can see 1.3 million more children in “good” or “outstanding” schools. That is the pattern that is developing: a strong economy, investing into our public services. The other pattern that I have noticed, standing at this Dispatch Box, is that I am on my fifth Labour leader—and if he carries on like this, I will soon be on my sixth.

Q2. [904688] **Byron Davies** (Gower) (Con): The Government package to help potential buyers of the Tata Steel site in Port Talbot is substantial and befits the tremendous bipartisan endeavours this Government have undertaken to save the industry, and it stands in stark contrast with the distasteful, disrespectful comments of Labour’s policy adviser, who said that the steel crisis had been “good for Labour”. Is there any indication that the package could help expedite the sale of the site, which could provide the long-term viable future for

Welsh steel, which we all hope for, and for the workers who live in my constituency of Gower?

The Prime Minister: I want to thank my hon. Friend for welcoming me to the Gower yesterday. Before coming to his constituency I visited Port Talbot, where I met the management and trade unions, and had a very constructive discussion. *[Interruption.]* I did actually meet the Conservative leader, Andrew R. T. Davies, who does an excellent job in the Welsh Assembly. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) wants to be Speaker, he had better stop interrupting everybody, as it is not going to get him any votes—a little tip for him there. But the serious point is about the areas where we could help. We could help on power, on procurement and on the issue of pensions. There is a very constructive conversation going on, but I say again from this Dispatch Box that although I want to do everything we can to secure the future for not only Port Talbot but for Scunthorpe and for steelmaking in Britain we are coping with a massive oversupply from China and a collapse in prices. We must therefore do all we can. There is no guarantee of success, but if we work hard and get a proper sales process and get behind it on a bipartisan basis we can see success here.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): Following the Hillsborough inquiry, we join in all the comments made so far in relation to the families and in paying tribute to all the campaigners for justice.

Last night, the Government were defeated for the second time in the House of Lords on the issue of refugee children being given refuge in the United Kingdom. Many Members of that House, like many Members of this one, in all parties, including on the Prime Minister's own side, would wish us to do much, much more in helping provide refuge for unaccompanied children in Europe. Will the Prime Minister please reconsider his opposition and stop walking by on the other side?

The Prime Minister: I do not think anyone can accuse this country of walking on by in this refugee crisis. Let us be very clear about what we have done: first, we are taking the 20,000 refugees from outside Europe, which I think has all-party support; secondly, last week we announced the further 3,000—principally unaccompanied children and children at risk from outside Europe—whom we will be taking; and, thirdly, under our normal refugee procedures, last year we took more than 3,000 unaccompanied children. But where I disagree, respectfully, with their lordships' House is that those people who are in European countries are in safe European countries. To compare—somehow—children or adults who are in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal or Greece with children stuck in Nazi Germany is deeply wrong, and we will continue our approach, which includes being the second largest donor country anywhere in the world in those refugee camps.

Angus Robertson: As in the 1930s, there are thousands—*[Interruption.]* Apparently, there is “no comparison” between thousands of children needing refuge in the 1930s and thousands of children in Europe at the present time—*[Interruption.]* Yes! Yes!

Mr Speaker: Order. I am not interested in someone yelling out their opinion of the right hon. Gentleman's

question. This is the home of free speech. The right hon. Gentleman, and every other Member, will be heard, however long this session takes. That is very clear.

Angus Robertson: Europol estimates that 10,000 unaccompanied children in Europe have disappeared. This is an existential question about the safety of vulnerable children. The Prime Minister thinks that it is not the responsibility of the United Kingdom to help unaccompanied children in Europe, so I ask him: who has the moral responsibility for feeding them, clothing them, educating them and giving them refuge, if not us, and everyone in Europe?

The Prime Minister: Let me answer that very directly. First, any unaccompanied child who has direct family in Britain, on claiming asylum under the Dublin regulations, can come to Britain—and quite right too. But the right hon. Gentleman asked who was responsible for refugees. The answer to that question is the country the refugees are in. I want Britain to play our part, but we have to ask ourselves whether we do better by taking a child from a refugee camp, or taking a child from Lebanon, or taking a child from Jordan, than by taking a child from France, Italy or Germany. As I have said, to compare this with the 1930s is, frankly, to insult those countries, which are our neighbours and partners.

Q3. [904689] **Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con):** ATP Industries Group, which is based in Cannock Wood, is one of Europe's largest independent remanufacturers of automated transmission and vehicle electronics. Last week, it was given a Queen's Award for innovation. It exports goods across the globe, and its international trade increased by more than 50% last year. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating ATP, and will he tell us what the Government are doing to help exporters to reach new markets?

The Prime Minister: I certainly join my hon. Friend in congratulating ATP. It is very difficult to win a Queen's Award for exports, so it does deserve praise. What we want to see in our country is this. We currently have one in five small and medium-sized enterprises that export, and if we could make it one in four, we would wipe out our trade deficit. We are encouraging that through the work of UK Trade & Investment, but, as I saw yesterday in south Wales, we are also encouraging it by encouraging reshoring: by encouraging the supply and components industries—including those that supply the automotive industry—to come back onshore and invest in Britain.

Q6. [904692] **Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP):** In my constituency, the Zielsdorfs have lived and raised their family in the small village of Laggan for many years. Despite their full co-operation, they face an uphill and fruitless battle with the Home Office. They have had their driving licences revoked, and they are being forced out of the community that they have served, and in which they have invested, by a technicality involving their business—the local shop. Will the Prime Minister look into this grossly unfair situation, and work with me to achieve justice for the family?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly have a look at that case. If the hon. Gentleman lets me know the names involved and the nature of the issues, I will make sure that the Home Office looks into it urgently.

Q4. [904690] **Ben Howlett** (Bath) (Con): As the Prime Minister will know from getting stuck on his way into Bath just before the general election last year, my constituency is plagued by high air pollution levels and by congestion. Given the Government's commitment to investing billions of pounds in infrastructure—something that the Labour Government failed to do in 13 years—will he consider committing himself to looking at the construction of the long overdue and much-needed missing A36/A46 link road to the east of my constituency?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Some people think that if we care about air quality there is no room for any road building, but, of course, stationary traffic pollutes much more than moving traffic. We must make sure that the arteries that serve all our constituencies are open, and I will look carefully at what my hon. Friend has said. However, we should also recognise that air quality is improving. Nitrogen oxide levels have fallen by 17% over the last four years, and we want to do more by introducing the clean air programme.

Q11. [904697] **Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): With the United Kingdom facing its most momentous decision for a generation in eight weeks' time, does the Prime Minister think it makes more sense to listen to all our closest friends and allies around the world, or to a combination of French fascists, Nigel Farage and Vladimir Putin?

The Prime Minister: I am glad the right hon. Gentleman takes the English pronunciation of Farage, rather than the poncey, foreign-sounding one that he seems to prefer—a thoroughly good thing. I think we should listen to our friends and our allies. Looking around the world, it is hard to find the leader of a country who wishes us well who wants us to do other than stay inside a reformed European Union.

Q5. [904691] **Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): The new ISAs announced in this year's Budget are very welcome. They will help people to save for homes and for retirement. As my right hon. Friend will have seen in this morning's *City AM*, hidden fees can strip as much as a third off the gains a pension could make over a lifetime. What are the Government doing to ensure that firms investing people's hard-earned savings reveal all the fees they charge, so that people know exactly what they will pay and can choose the investment that is best for them?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has fought a long campaign on this—and rightly so. One of the things that sap people's enthusiasm for investing in savings products is a sense that they do not understand the fees and charges, and do not know how much they will get. Since last April, we have ensured that trustees of defined contribution pension schemes report charges levied on members. The Financial Conduct Authority is committed to making regulations with us during this Parliament to require the publication of more costs and

charges. We have given ourselves the legal duty to do so, but I am sure he will push us all the way to make sure it happens.

Q12. [904699] **Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): The Prime Minister and his Government did next to nothing to save the Scottish steel industry; it was left to the Scottish Government to do that. The UK Government are now breaking the promises made by Tories and Labour to protect the Scottish shipbuilding industry. Why does the Prime Minister think that Scottish jobs are so expendable?

The Prime Minister: Frankly, the Scottish Government and the UK Government should work together. One thing we should work together on is procurement. It is worth asking how much Scottish steel was in the Forth road bridge—zero! None! Absolutely nothing! Yes. What a contrast with the warships we are building, which of course we would not be building if we had an independent Scotland. We back the steel industry with actions as well as words. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The House is excitable, but it must simmer down. We must hear the hon. Lady.

Q7. [904693] **Suella Fernandes** (Fareham) (Con): Hatred and ignorance lie at the heart of anti-Semitism. When those in public life express such views they denigrate not only themselves but the institutions to which they belong. Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House of his commitment to fighting this vicious form of prejudice?

The Prime Minister: It is very simple: anti-Semitism is effectively racism, and we should call it out and fight it wherever we see it. Frankly, the fact that a Labour Member of Parliament, with the Labour Whip, made remarks about the “transportation” of people from Israel to America, talked about a “solution” and is still in receipt of the Labour Whip is quite extraordinary. The shadow Chancellor said about these people:

“Out, out, out. If people express these views: full stop they're out. People might be able to reform their views and the rest of it. On this? I can't see it...I'm not having it. People might say 'I've changed my views' – well, do something in another organisation.”

Frankly, there will be too many hours in the day before that happens to the MP in question.

Q13. [904700] **Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): My constituent Joseph Brown-Lartey was killed at the age of 25 by an 18-year-old driving a hire car without a licence at 80 mph in a 30-mph zone. The 18-year-old was convicted of causing death by dangerous driving and received a sentence of just six years, of which he will probably serve three. Two weeks ago, I, along with Joseph's family, delivered a 20,000 signature petition calling for tougher sentences for causing death by dangerous driving. Does the Prime Minister agree that sentences for these crimes are too lenient? When can we expect to get a response to our petition and get justice for Joseph?

The Prime Minister: I have every sympathy with the family in question. I had an almost identical case in my constituency where a young girl was killed by a dangerous driver. The maximum sentence is 14 years, so the courts

do have the ability to sentence longer, but I know what this means to the families. I am making sure that the roads Minister is looking again at all these issues relating to dangerous driving, and I will ensure that the case that the hon. Lady mentions is taken into account as well.

Q8. [904694] **Mike Wood** (Dudley South) (Con): As the birthplace of the industrial revolution, Dudley is proud of its heritage, but we need economic stability to deliver a prosperous future. Will the Prime Minister come to launch the new enterprise zone in Brierley Hill and look at how we can attract more investment, create new jobs and develop the highly skilled workforce that our community needs?

The Prime Minister: I will look very carefully at whether I am able to do that, because we support the industrial regeneration of the black country. The truth is that enterprise zones have been a success. They have created nearly 25,000 jobs, attracted over 630 companies and secured £2.4 billion of private sector investment. The delivery of enterprise zones has involved a lot of hard work by local authorities. I pay tribute to them, and I wish my hon. Friend well in the black country.

Q14. [904701] **Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): Given the strategic and economic importance of the M62 corridor to the northern powerhouse, will the Prime Minister give me and the people of Bradford his commitment to the electrification of the Calder Valley line and lend his support to the great city of Bradford being a fundamental part of the proposed northern powerhouse rail network?

The Prime Minister: We have made commitments on the electrification of north-south lines and east-west lines. I will have to look very carefully at the hon. Lady's proposal, but we want everywhere—Bradford included—to benefit from the northern powerhouse.

Q9. [904695] **John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): In Cumbria, nuclear matters. We have the nuclear legacy at Sellafield, defence work at Barrow and the prospect of serious investment in a new nuclear plant at Moorside. Given the apparent opposition to nuclear from the Opposition, will the Prime Minister confirm that the long-term decisions for nuclear power and defence will be made in a timely manner?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that Cumbria depends to a large extent on jobs from the industries he mentions. We continue to invest in reprocessing procedures at Sellafield. As he knows, we are also looking at redeveloping our commercial nuclear industry, starting with the vital decisions at Hinkley Point, which could then have great benefits for other areas that want nuclear power stations. Barrow is home to the development of our nuclear submarines and we will hold a vote in this House to make sure that we renew Trident in full.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Prime Minister has just suggested that child refugees who are alone in Europe are safe. Children's homes are full in Italy and Greece, and more than 1,000 children will sleep rough alone tonight in Greece. How are they safe? Ten thousand children have disappeared

in Europe. How are they safe? The agencies say that children are committing survival sex and that they are being abused and subjected to prostitution and rape. It is not insulting to other European countries to offer to help: they want us to help. So will he reconsider his position on Alf Dubs's amendment before it comes back for a vote, and will he stop, through his attitude to lone child refugees, putting this House and this country to shame?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Lady asks whether we are helping other European countries, and we are, not least with the £10 million we recently announced. The crucial point is this: how do we in Britain best help child refugees? We think that we help them by taking them from the refugee camps, taking them from Lebanon, taking them from Jordan and taking them when they come to this country. That is what we are doing. We have a proud record and nothing to be ashamed of.

Q10. [904696] **Nigel Adams** (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): Several small businesses that I met in Tadcaster last week are being treated appallingly by insurance companies. Four months after the floods, claims have not been settled and renewal premiums are being hiked to astronomical levels. The Government have rightly helped to introduce the Flood Re scheme to help homeowners after flooding, but does my right hon. Friend agree that the same protection should be given to small business owners too?

The Prime Minister: I recognise the problem that my hon. Friend lays out. When my constituency was badly flooded, some insurance companies paid out quickly, but others were not so fast. When we look at what happened during the winter, we see that 82% of claims have been paid out, but if colleagues have specific examples the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will be interested to see them so that we can get on top of the insurance industry. We are looking specifically at whether we need a Flood Re-style approach for small businesses to ensure that they can get the insurance they need.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Three years ago, my mother fell seriously ill while on holiday in France. Thanks to the French health service, she received excellent treatment and was unfortunately diagnosed with cancer, but she is doing well today thanks to our NHS. Millions of Brits travel to other EU countries every year and benefit, like my mum, from the European health insurance card. What would happen to the card should we vote to leave on 23 June?

The Prime Minister: May I, on behalf of the whole House, wish the hon. Lady's mother well in her treatment from the NHS? The hon. Lady raises the important point that this is one of the benefits we now have. Many of us will have used it ourselves or with our own children, and think we can make the system even better as we are. It is for those who want to leave the European Union to explain whether, if we were to leave, we would still be able to access this and other such systems, which are very handy for people when going about their holidays.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Whatever the outcome of the EU referendum, does the Prime Minister agree that one thing that will never diminish is the mutual affection and admiration between Britain and our great ally, France? Given that connection, will he pay tribute to the people who fought and won the Normandy campaign, such as the late Captain Paul Cash, the father of my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Sir William Cash), who was killed fighting in Normandy at the age of 26 having won the Military Cross, and Sergeant Peter Carne, who, at 93, is at Westminster today, and who built the Bailey bridges that enabled the breakout from the Normandy beachhead and will receive the Légion d'honneur in a typically generous gesture from our French allies?

The Prime Minister: I certainly join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to all those who served, particularly those who fell in that heroic campaign. One of the things I have been able to do as Prime Minister of which I am proudest was to go to the vigil on the 70th anniversary of our gliders preparing for the landings and to go to Gold beach to see the incredible work that was done. We should remember what they did and what it was that they gave their lives for, which was to achieve peace on our continent.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): My constituent Debra has HIV, which she contracted via a partner who had received a contaminated blood transfusion. My constituent Neil has hepatitis, again from a contaminated transfusion, and he now needs a second liver transplant. Neither of them can hold down a full-time job because of their conditions' catastrophic effects on their health, so they both absolutely rely on the support from the state that the Government now plan to slash in half. I simply ask the Prime Minister why the Government are so willing to attack people whose only mistake was to be unlucky.

The Prime Minister: What we said before the election was that we had set aside £25 million to help those who were infected with HIV because of contaminated blood. We have actually raised that since the election to over £100 million, and we are currently consulting all the groups about how best to use that money. We will actually be doing more than we said at the time of the election, which is necessary because these people have suffered through no fault of their own.

Hillsborough

12.39 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on the Hillsborough stadium disaster, the determinations and findings of the fresh inquests presided over by Sir John Goldring, and the steps that will now take place.

Twenty-seven years ago, the terrible events of Saturday 15 April 1989 shocked this country and devastated a community. That afternoon, as thousands of fans were preparing to watch the FA cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest, a crush developed in the central pens of the Leppings Lane terrace. Ninety-six men, women and children lost their lives as a result. Hundreds more were injured, and many were left traumatised.

It was this country's worst disaster at a sporting event. For the families and survivors, the search to get to the truth of what happened on that day has been long and arduous. They observed the judicial inquiry led by Lord Justice Taylor. They gave evidence to the original inquests, which recorded a verdict of accidental death. They have seen further scrutiny, reviews and a private prosecution. They suffered the injustice of hearing the victims—their loved ones and fellow supporters—being blamed. They have heard the shocking conclusions of the Hillsborough Independent Panel, and they have now once again given evidence to the fresh inquests presided over by Sir John Goldring.

I have met members of the Hillsborough families on a number of occasions and, in their search for truth and justice, I have never failed to be struck by their extraordinary dignity and determination. I do not think it is possible for any of us truly to understand what they have been through—not only in losing their loved ones in such horrific circumstances that day, but in hearing finding after finding over 27 years telling them something that they believed to be fundamentally untrue. Quite simply, they have never given up.

I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who has campaigned so tirelessly over the years on the families' behalf, and also to the hon. Members for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), for Halton (Derek Twigg), for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) and for Wirral South (Alison McGovern).

Yesterday, the fresh inquest into the deaths at Hillsborough gave its determinations and findings. Its establishment followed the report of the Hillsborough Independent Panel, chaired by Bishop James Jones. The contents of that report were so significant that it led to the new inquests and to two major new criminal investigations: one by the Independent Police Complaints Commission, which examined the actions of the police in the aftermath of Hillsborough, and a second criminal investigation, Operation Resolve, led by Jon Stoddart, the former chief constable of Durham.

Since the fresh inquests opened in Warrington on 31 March 2014, the jury has heard 296 days of evidence. They ran for more than two years and were part of the longest running inquest process in British legal history.

I am sure that the whole House will want to join me in thanking the jury for the important task it has undertaken and the significant civic duty the jurors have performed.

I will turn now to the jury's determinations and findings. In its deliberations, the jury was asked to answer 14 general questions covering the role of South Yorkshire police, the South Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service, Sheffield Wednesday football club and Hillsborough stadium's engineers, Eastwood and Partners. In addition, the jury was also required to answer two questions specific to each of the individual deceased relating to the time and medical cause of their death. I would like to put on the record the jury's determinations in full. They are as follows.

Question 1: do you agree with the following statement, which is intended to summarise the basic facts of the disaster?

"Ninety-six people died as a result of the Disaster at Hillsborough Stadium on 15 April 1989 due to crushing in the central pens of the Leppings Lane Terrace, following the admission of a large number of supporters to the Stadium through exit gates."

Yes.

Question 2: was there any error or omission in police planning and preparation for the semi-final match on 15 April 1989 which caused or contributed to the dangerous situation that developed on the day of the match?

Yes.

Question 3: was there any error or omission in policing on the day of the match which caused or contributed to a dangerous situation developing at the Leppings Lane turnstiles?

Yes.

Question 4: was there any error or omission by commanding officers which caused or contributed to the crush on the terrace?

Yes.

Question 5: when the order was given to open the exit gates at the Leppings Lane end of the stadium, was there any error or omission by the commanding officers in the control box which caused or contributed to the crush on the terrace?

Yes.

Question 6: are you satisfied, so that you are sure, that those who died in the disaster were unlawfully killed?

Yes.

Question 7: was there any behaviour on the part of football supporters which caused or contributed to the dangerous situation at the Leppings Lane turnstiles?

No.

Further to question 7: was there any behaviour on the part of football supporters which may have caused or contributed to the dangerous situation at the Leppings Lane turnstiles?

No.

Question 8: were there any features of the design, construction and layout of the stadium which you consider were dangerous or defective and which caused or contributed to the disaster?

Yes.

Question 9: was there any error or omission in the safety certification and oversight of Hillsborough stadium that caused or contributed to the disaster?

Yes.

Question 10: was there any error or omission by Sheffield Wednesday Football Club and its staff in the management of the stadium and/or preparation for the semi-final match on 15 April 1989 which caused or contributed to the dangerous situation that developed on the day of the match?

Yes.

Question 11: was there any error or omission by Sheffield Wednesday Football Club and its staff on 15 April 1989 which caused or contributed to the dangerous situation that developed at the Leppings Lane turnstiles and in the west terrace?

No.

Further to question 11: was there any error or omission by Sheffield Wednesday Football Club and its staff on 15 April 1989 which may have caused or contributed to the dangerous situation that developed at the Leppings Lane turnstiles and in the west terrace?

Yes.

Question 12: should Eastwood and Partners have done more to detect and advise on any unsafe or unsatisfactory features of Hillsborough stadium which caused or contributed to the disaster?

Yes.

Question 13: after the crush in the west terrace had begun to develop, was there any error or omission by the police which caused or contributed to the loss of lives in the disaster?

Yes.

Question 14: after the crush in the west terrace had begun to develop, was there any error or omission by the ambulance service, SYMAS, which caused or contributed to the loss of lives in the disaster?

Yes.

Finally, the jury also recorded the cause and time of death for each of the 96 men, women and children who died at Hillsborough. In all but one case, the jury recorded a time bracket running beyond the 3.15 pm cut-off point adopted by the coroner at the original inquests. These determinations were published yesterday by the coroner, and I would urge the reading of each and every part in order to understand fully the outcome of the inquests.

The jury also heard evidence about the valiant efforts made by many of the fans to rescue those caught up in the crush. Their public spiritedness is to be commended and I am sure that the House will want to take this opportunity to recognise what they did in those terrible circumstances. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]

Clearly, the jury's determination that those who died were unlawfully killed is of great public importance. It overturns in the starkest way possible the verdict of accidental death returned at the original inquests. However, the jury's findings do not, of course, amount to a finding of criminal liability, and no one should impute criminal liability to anyone while the ongoing investigations are still pending.

Elsewhere, the jury noted that commanding officers should have ordered the closure of the central tunnel before the opening of gate C was requested, as pens 3

and 4 were full. They should have established the number of fans still to enter the stadium after 2.30 pm, and they failed to recognise that pens 3 and 4 were at capacity before gate C was opened.

Although the inquests have concluded, this is not the end of the process. The decision about whether any criminal prosecution or prosecutions can be brought forward will be made by the Crown Prosecution Service on the basis of evidence gathered as part of the two ongoing investigations. That decision is not constrained in any way by the jury's conclusions.

The House will understand that I cannot comment in detail on matters that may lead to a criminal investigation. I can, however, say that the offences under investigation include gross negligence manslaughter, misconduct in public office, perverting the course of justice and perjury, as well as offences under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act 1975 and the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

I know that those responsible for the police and Independent Police Complaints Commission investigations anticipate that they will conclude the criminal investigations by the turn of the year. We must allow them to complete their work in a timely and thorough manner, and we must be mindful not to prejudice the outcome in any way.

I have always been clear that the Government will support the families in their quest for justice, so throughout the ongoing investigations we will ensure that support remains in place in three ways.

First, the family forums, which have provided the families with a regular and structured means of engaging with the investigative teams and the CPS, will continue. They will remain under Bishop James Jones's chairmanship, in a similar format, but will reflect the fact that they will be operating after the inquests. The CPS, the IPCC and Operation Resolve will remain part of the forums.

Secondly, now that the inquests have concluded, it is the intention to reconstitute the Hillsborough article 2 reference group, whose work has been in abeyance during the course of the inquests, under revised terms of reference. The group has two members: Sir Stephen Sedley, a retired lord justice of appeal, and Dr Silvia Casale, an independent criminologist.

Thirdly, we want to ensure that the legal representation scheme for the bereaved families continues. This was put in place, with funding from the Government, following the original inquests' verdicts being quashed. Discussions are currently taking place with the families' legal representatives to see how best the scheme can be continued.

In addition, I am keen that we understand and learn from the families' experiences. I have therefore asked Bishop James, who is my adviser on Hillsborough, to write a report which draws on these experiences. This report will be published in due course to ensure that the full perspective of those most affected by the Hillsborough disaster is not lost.

I would like to express my thanks to Bishop James again for his invaluable advice over the years. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] There is further work to be done, so I have asked Bishop James to remain as my adviser, and I am pleased to say that he has agreed to do so.

The conclusion of the inquests brings to an end an important step since the publication of the Hillsborough Independent Panel's report. Thanks to that report and now the determinations of the inquests, we know the

[Mrs Theresa May]

truth of what happened on that day at Hillsborough. Naturally, the families will want to reflect on yesterday's historic outcome, which is of national significance.

I am clear that this raises significant issues for the way that the state and its agencies deal with disasters. Once the formal investigations are concluded, we should step back, reflect and act, if necessary, so that we can better respond to disasters and ensure that the suffering of families is taken into account.

But I want to end by saying this. For 27 years, the families and survivors of Hillsborough have fought for justice. They have faced hostility, opposition and obfuscation, and the authorities, which should have been trusted, have laid blame and tried to protect themselves, instead of acting in the public interest.

But the families have never faltered in their pursuit of the truth. Thanks to their actions, they have brought about a proper reinvestigation and a thorough re-evaluation of what happened at Hillsborough. That they have done so is extraordinary. I am sure the whole House will want to join me in paying tribute to their courage, determination and resolve. We should also remember those who have, sadly, passed away while still waiting for justice. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]

No one should have to endure what the families and survivors have been through. No one should have to suffer the loss of their loved ones through such appalling circumstances, and no one should have to fight year after year, decade after decade, in search of the truth.

I hope that, for the families and survivors, who have been through such difficult times, yesterday's determinations will bring them closer towards the peace they have been so long denied. I commend this statement to the House. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"]

12.55 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for her powerful statement and her kind words. At long last, justice—for the 96, for their families, for all Liverpool supporters, for an entire city. But it took too long in coming, and the struggle for it took too great a toll on too many. Now, those responsible must be held to account for 96 unlawful deaths and a 27-year cover-up.

Thankfully, the jury saw through the lies. I am sure—to repeat what the Home Secretary said—that the House will join me in thanking the jury for their devotion to this task and for giving two years of their lives to this important public duty.

When it came, their verdict was simple, clear, powerful and emphatic, but it begged the question: how could something so obvious have taken so long? There are three reasons: first, a police force that has consistently put protecting itself over and above protecting people harmed by Hillsborough; secondly, collusion between that force and a complicit print media; and thirdly, a flawed judicial system that gives the upper hand to those in authority, over and above ordinary people. Let me take each of those issues in turn, starting with South Yorkshire police.

Can the Home Secretary assure me that there will be no holding back in pursuing prosecutions? The CPS has said that files will be submitted by December. While we understand the complexity, can she urge it to do whatever it can to bring that date forward?

Of course, the behaviour of some officers, while reprehensible, was not necessarily chargeable, but, through retirement, police officers can still escape misconduct proceedings. In her Policing and Crime Bill, the Home Secretary proposes a 12-month period after retirement where proceedings can be initiated, but one of the lessons of Hillsborough is that there can be no arbitrary time limits on justice and accountability. Will the Home Secretary work with me to insert a Hillsborough clause into her Bill, ending the scandal of retirement as an escape route and of wrongdoers claiming full pensions? Will she join me in making sure that that applies retrospectively?

The much bigger question for South Yorkshire police to answer today is this: why, at this inquest, did they go back on their 2012 public apology? When the Lord Chief Justice quashed the original inquest, he requested that the new one not degenerate into an "adversarial battle". Sadly, that is exactly what happened. Shamefully, the cover-up continued in that Warrington courtroom. Millions of pounds of public money was spent retelling discredited lies against Liverpool supporters. Lawyers for retired officers threw disgusting slurs around; those for today's force tried to establish that others were responsible for the opening of the gate. If the police had chosen to maintain their apology, this inquest would have been much shorter. But they did not, and they put the families through hell once again. It pains me to say it, but the NHS, through the Yorkshire ambulance service, was guilty of the same.

Does the Home Secretary agree that, because of his handling of this inquest, the position of the South Yorkshire chief constable is now untenable? Does she further agree that the problems go deeper? I promised the families the full truth about Hillsborough. I do not believe they will have it until we know the truth about Orgreave. This force used the same underhand tactics against its own people in the aftermath of the miners' strike that it would later use to more deadly effect against the people of Liverpool. There has been an IPCC report on Orgreave, but parts of it are redacted. It has been put to me that those parts contain evidence of direct links between Orgreave and Hillsborough.

This is a time for transparency, not secrecy—time for the people of South Yorkshire to know the full truth about their police force. So will the Home Secretary accept the legal submission from the Orgreave Truth and Justice Campaign and set up a disclosure process? This force has not learned and has not changed. Let me be clear. I do not blame the ordinary police officers—the men and women who did their very best on that day and who today are out there keeping our streets safe—but I do blame their leadership and culture, which seems rotten to the core. Orgreave, Hillsborough, Rotherham: how much more evidence do we need before we act? So will the Home Secretary now order the fundamental reform of this force and consider all potential options?

Let me turn to collusion between police and the media. The malicious briefings given in the aftermath were devastatingly efficient. They created a false version of events which lingered until yesterday. No one in the police or media has ever been held to account for the incalculable harm they caused in smearing a whole city in its moment of greatest grief. Imagine how it felt to be my constituent Lee Walls, who came through gate C just before 3 pm with his friend Carl Brown. Carl died

but Lee survived, but days later he had to read that he was to blame. Given the weakness of the press regulatory system back then, the survivors of this tragedy had no ability to correct the lies. But is it any different today? If a tragedy like Hillsborough were to happen now, victims would not be able quickly to undo the damage of a misleading front page. Leveson recommended a second-stage inquiry to look at the sometimes unhealthy relationship between police and press. I know the Hillsborough families feel strongly that this should be taken forward. So will the Government end the delay and honour the Prime Minister's promises to the victims of press intrusion?

I turn to the judicial system. I attended this inquest on many occasions. I saw how hard it was on the families: trapped for two years in a temporary courtroom; told to show no emotion as police lawyers smeared the dead and those who survived—beyond cruel. I welcome Bishop James's new role in explaining just how cruel this was to the House and to the country. The original inquest was similarly brutal, but that did not even get to the truth. Just as the first inquest muddied the waters after the clarity of the Taylor report, so this inquest, at moments, lost sight of the Hillsborough Independent Panel report. One of the reasons why it produced a different outcome, though, is that this time the families had the best lawyers in the land. If they could have afforded them back in 1990, history might have been very different. At many inquests today there is often a mismatch between the legal representation of public bodies and those of the bereaved. Why should the authorities be able to spend public money like water to protect themselves when families have no such help? So will the Government consider further reforms to the coronial system, including giving the bereaved at least equal legal funding as public bodies? This, the longest case in English legal history, must mark a watershed in how victims are treated.

The last question is for us in this House. What kind of country leaves people who did no more than wave off their loved ones to a football match still sitting in a courtroom 27 years later begging for the reputations of their sons, daughters, brothers, sisters and fathers? The answer is one that needs now to do some deep soul-searching. This cover-up went right to the top. It was advanced in the Committee Rooms of this House and in the press rooms of 10 Downing Street. It persisted because of collusion between elites in politics—on both sides—police and the media. But this Home Secretary stood outside of that. Today I express my sincere admiration and gratitude to her for the stance she has consistently taken in righting this wrong.

But my final words go to the Hillsborough families. I think of those who did not live to see this day: of the courageous Anne Williams; of my constituent Stephen Whittle, the "97th victim", who gave his own ticket to a friend on the morning of the match and later took his own life. I think of people like Phil Hammond, who sacrificed his own health to this struggle. I think of the many people who died from outside Merseyside, recognising that this was not just Liverpool's but the country's tragedy. I think of Leigh lad Carl Brown and his devoted mum Delia who still visits his grave most days. I think of Trevor and Jenni Hicks and their heart-breaking testimony to the new inquest. But I think most of my friend Margaret Aspinall. She did not just sacrifice

everything for her own son James: she took on the heavy burden of fighting for everyone else's loved ones—and, by God, didn't she do them proud? It has been the privilege of my life to work with them all. They have prevailed against all the odds. They have kept their dignity in the face of terrible adversity. They could not have shown a more profound love for those they lost on that day. They truly represent the best of what our country is all about. Now it must reflect on how it came to let them down for so long. [*Applause.*]

Mrs May: May I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his words, and particularly for his kind words about myself? May I, as I said in my opening statement, once again commend him for the way in which he has stood by the families for so long and carried their cause in this House, and indeed in government when he was in government?

I will respond to some of the right hon. Gentleman's specific points, but first to the final point that he made. It is absolutely right, as was reflected in the statement that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made after the independent panel's report came out, that what the families faced was a combination of the state in all its various forms not believing them, all the various attempts, as the right hon. Gentleman said, to cover up what had really happened, together with other agencies—the media and others—and indeed, dare I say it, most of the general public believing the stories that they read about the fans. To have stood against that for so long shows steel and determination but also an affection for their lost loved ones and a passionate desire for justice for those who died that is, as I said, extraordinary. I think we will rarely see the like again.

On the right hon. Gentleman's individual questions, he asked me about the time for the files to be prepared by the two investigations. Both Operation Resolve and the IPCC say that they expect to have those case files prepared by the end of the year—I recognise that for the families this is a further wait—and there will be then be a period of time for the Crown Prosecution Service to consider them. I think everybody recognises—including those bodies, because they do of course interact with the families through the family forums—the importance of doing this in a timely fashion, but it is also important that it is done properly and thoroughly. I do not want to see anything in the way of this being done in the right way.

On the retirement of police officers, I have always felt that it is wrong that police officers should be able to avoid misconduct or gross misconduct proceedings by being able to retire or resign. That is why we have already changed the disciplinary arrangements; and, as the right hon. Gentleman said, we have a clause in the Policing and Crime Bill. I, or the Policing Minister, will be very happy to meet him or the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) to discuss the various issues in relation to that matter.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned Orgreave. Together with the hon. Members for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) and for Wansbeck (Ian Lavery), I met representatives from Orgreave last year. I then received a submission from Michael Mansfield QC on behalf of the relevant group, and that is being considered.

[Mrs May]

We have always said that a decision on Leveson 2 will be made when all the investigations have been completed. Some cases are still being considered, so that point has not arrived.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about the availability of funding for families at inquests. That is precisely the sort of issue that can be encompassed in the work that Bishop James Jones will do in hearing from the families about their direct experience and reflecting that to Government. As I said, it is right and appropriate that we then take a clear look at what further action we need to take.

Nobody should be in any doubt about the experience that the families had to go through at the inquests in not being able to show any emotion. The right hon. Gentleman referred to that. Also, for 27 years, many people did not know what had actually happened to their loved ones. They did not know how or at what time they died. Those details have come out only through the inquest. It must have been particularly difficult to sit through that, but I hope that the families have now found some peace through the truth coming out.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): I am very pleased that the efforts of the families and of the independent review panel, which did such outstanding work, have contributed to the outcome that entirely vindicates the position that they both adopted. I am also pleased if the small Department that I led at the time played a role in bringing that about.

The key issue is not that people make mistakes, because in human society mistakes will always be made, sometimes with catastrophic consequences. The real issue that should concern the House is that, in a society that counts itself as civilised and subject to the rule of law, it appears that for such a long time it was impossible to get redress and a proper examination of the issues. I regret to say that this is not a unique event, as there have been other occasions in the House when we have had to consider the implications of similar events in other circumstances. Bloody Sunday springs to mind.

The lesson that the House needs to take away is that we must subject ourselves and our institutions to quite a lot of self-examination and maintain that if we are to ensure that we do not have a repetition of this deplorable episode. I am not sure about the best way to do that. I simply say to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary—she has done everything right in respect of this, and I commend her approach—that it is a question not just of the systems that we have in place but of some of the underlying attitudes. When uncomfortable truths float across the horizon, there is a temptation to try to brush them away because they confront us with difficulties that make us uncomfortable. If we tackle that, we can ensure not only that we do justice to the families in this matter, but that, in so far as is humanly possible, we do not repeat this.

Mrs May: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for his remarks and for the role that he played in ensuring that fresh inquests could take place. He is right: it is a question not just of systems but of attitudes. I have seen that in other areas, for example, in the work that we are doing on deaths in custody and in hearing

from families in those cases. As I said, often, the institutions that should be the ones that people can trust to get to the truth combine to protect themselves. They have a natural instinct to look inwards and protect themselves rather than doing what is right in the public interest. My right hon. and learned Friend is also right that we can change the systems all we like, but it is really about changing attitudes and saying that those institutions are there to serve the public and that they should always put the public interest first.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I thank the Home Secretary for her immensely dignified and thorough statement. I also welcome the jury's determination and findings.

On behalf of the Scottish National party, I would like to acknowledge the heroic struggle for justice of the friends and relatives of the 96 dead. I also acknowledge the heroic struggle for justice of the shadow Home Secretary and others on the official Opposition Benches.

Today, we must also remember the 96 dead: decent people from all walks of life who were failed by the police and the emergency services—the very ones who should have been there to help them in their hour of need. Yesterday's verdict follows 27 years of concealment of the truth and mudslinging at dead innocents. I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) that Hillsborough must rank alongside Bloody Sunday as one of the most disgraceful establishment cover-ups of our time.

The ruling confirms that some police officers behaved abominably and I note the shadow Home Secretary's words about their being from the same force that so brutally repressed the miners' strike. I was very pleased to hear what the Home Secretary said about that. Will she acknowledge the impact that the behaviour of some police officers has had on public confidence in the police and assure us that such actions can never happen again?

I am sure that elements of the media will also have learned a lesson, but, as the shadow Home Secretary said, will they ever be held to account? I think that the Conservative party has learned a lesson from this because, as has been said, the Home Secretary's actions have been exemplary when compared with the attitude of the Cabinet at the time. Will she assure us that such a miscarriage of justice will never be allowed to happen again?

Justice delayed is justice denied. Now we have the truth, but accountability must follow, so what happens next is crucial. Does the Home Secretary agree that, where there are strongly founded allegations that police officers may have perverted the course of justice, or given misleading information to the media, MPs and this Parliament, or perjured themselves, appropriate action and prosecutions must be seen to follow swiftly?

I also echo the shadow Home Secretary's comments about concerns that 30 police officers avoided disciplinary action by retiring to enjoy a full pension. Will the Home Secretary take steps to ensure that that cannot happen again?

I welcome the Home Secretary's intention to reconstitute the Hillsborough article 2 reference group—article 2 of the European convention on human rights. Without the Human Rights Act and the procedural obligation on

the state to investigate deaths properly under article 2 of the ECHR, the second inquest would never have happened, and the families might never have got justice. Will she and the Government please bear that in mind when they consider their attitude towards human rights and the ECHR in this Union of nations?

Mrs May: The hon and learned Lady mentioned public confidence in the police and it is correct to say that this shattered some people's confidence in the police. The representative from the IPPC made the point to the media yesterday that for some people in Liverpool, their trust in the police was severely damaged, if not destroyed, as a result of what they had seen. However, in talking about the actions of police officers at Hillsborough that day, we should recognise that some officers actively tried to help the fans and do the right thing.

On police responsibilities and attitudes, the College of Policing has introduced a code of ethics for police. We need to ensure that that is embedded throughout police forces, but it is an important step forward.

The hon. and learned Lady asked about ensuring that prosecutions take place where there is evidence of criminal activity. Of course, that is entirely a decision for the CPS. We must leave it to make that decision independently, as we must leave the police investigation and the IPPC investigation to prepare their cases independently.

On the hon. and learned Lady's final point, I simply observe that we have had the coronial process in the UK for a considerable time, and the right to request an inquest and to request fresh inquests long before the ECHR was put in place.

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): May I, too, pay tribute to all those who worked so hard to see that justice was done in this case, and to the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary for their very balanced approach?

Does the Home Secretary agree that it is important that we learn lessons? For example, although the court process is inevitably stressful for victims and witnesses, as I know, none the less in this case the coroner and the jury did their duty and have proved that the jury system can be capable of grappling with the most complex and distressing of cases. That is to the system's credit.

Will the Home Secretary also look at ensuring that there is proper equality of arms with regard to access to justice on such matters? That is fundamental to our rule of law? The Crown Prosecution Service must now consider and deal with a considerable volume of work and material. I note, for example, that some 238 police statements are said to have been altered in one way or another. Will the Home Secretary therefore discuss with the Treasury and my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General whether some blockbuster funding could be made available to deal with the pressures of resourcing the Crown Prosecution Service in this case, and whether the approach could be similar to that taken towards the Serious Fraud Office when it has to undertake major and unexpected inquiries?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend will have noted that the Attorney General is sitting on the Treasury Bench and has therefore heard what he said about funding this sort

of case. On my hon. Friend's first point, he is absolutely right about the importance of the jury system. This shows the value of our jury system, and I repeat what I said in my statement: for people on the jury to have been prepared to take two years to ensure that justice was done in this case is absolutely commendable. They have shown considerable civic duty and our thanks go to them.

Steve Rotheram (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): May I say first of all that the response by my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) to the statement will reverberate throughout Merseyside and all around the country? I also praise the Home Secretary for all she has done to bring about yesterday's momentous decision: thank you from the families.

On 15 April 1989, as fans walked away from an FA cup semi-final in Sheffield, we knew then that the disaster was not our fault. Almost immediately, however, lies and smears were being peddled, and within hours an orchestrated cover-up was in full swing. It took political intervention to force the judicial process of this country to take 27 years to recognise what we knew from day one—that Hillsborough was not an accident; that fans did not open a gate; that drunken and ticketless fans did not turn up late, hellbent on getting in; and that it was not caused by a drunken, "tanked-up mob". Instead, 96 people were unlawfully killed.

Those who doubted must now recognise the true story of the efforts of my fellow supporters and their acts of self-sacrifice and heroism as they battled to save the lives of their fellow fans, and consign to the dustbin of history the lurid tabloid headlines that vilified them.

Despite the inquest being adversarial, not inquisitorial, yesterday's verdict was unequivocal: Liverpool supporters were totally absolved of any blame and did not contribute to the disaster in any way. As someone once said:

"I cherish the hope that as time goes on you will recognise the truth of what I say."

Will the Home Secretary join me in paying tribute to the families, survivors, campaigners and supporters who fought for truth and justice; to the solidarity of those who stood shoulder to shoulder, whether red or blue, for nearly three decades; and to the men and women of a proud city who never gave up until they got justice for the 96?

Mrs May: I am very happy to join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute not only to the families and the way in which they kept the flame of hope for truth and justice alive over 27 years, but to the city and people of Liverpool, who have shown solidarity and will continue to do so over the coming days. As the hon. Gentleman has said, regardless of their footballing affiliations they recognised the injustice that had been done. They came together, they supported the families, and truth has now been found.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): What we can learn from the hon. Member for Eltham (Clive Efford) who raised the question of the Stephen Lawrence investigation is that people can come to Members of Parliament—either as families or as members of the professional services, including the ambulance service and the police—and if there is some kind of cover-up going on, we can hope that the leaders of any professions

[*Sir Peter Bottomley*]

involved, including the police and the NHS, will pay attention when an MP comes along with them to say that action needs to be taken.

There was a series of three mistakes at Hillsborough. The first was allowing the game to take place in a stadium when people knew it was not right. The second was the actions that happened then, which may have been mistakes, and worst of all was the cover-up. How can more than 230 statements by the police be changed, presumably in the police service, without people being able to say to Members of Parliament, “This is wrong: there is a cover-up and it needs turning over and investigating”? Such things need to be brought out into what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health calls intelligent transparency. I think that that is the lesson from now on.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Of course, as a Member of this House he has taken forward causes that others have stood against and tried to resist, and he has been successful in that work. He is absolutely right. What came out of the independent panel report was astonishing. People were truly shocked by the fact that they had heard that statements had been altered in order to show a different picture from what had actually happened. That is appalling and it should never happen again.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): May I put on the record my thanks to the Home Secretary for her statement, and praise the magnificent courage and steadfastness of the families of the 96 in their campaign?

After the publication of the 2012 independent panel report, I reread my match-day programme from 15 April 1989 and was struck by this comment by the chairman of Sheffield Wednesday football club:

“As you look around Hillsborough you will appreciate why it has been regarded for so long as the perfect venue for all kinds of important matches.”

Such statements underline the complacency and total disregard for the safety of football supporters.

I have two brief questions. My right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) mentioned the current chief constable of South Yorkshire police. Is the Home Secretary aware that the statement he made in 2012 apologising to fans is still on the website? He said:

“I am profoundly sorry for the way the force failed...and I am doubly sorry for the injustice that followed”,

and yet the fools representing the police at the inquest went over the same argument again, putting the families through torture.

Finally, of course we should focus on South Yorkshire police, but what about West Midlands police? It was responsible for the investigation and, as we have seen from yesterday’s result, it was a sham, complacent and a complete waste of time. What is the Home Secretary doing to make sure that it is held accountable for what it did?

Mrs May: As the hon. Gentleman says, the comment from the match-day programme shows the extraordinary complacency. As I indicated in my statement, there were several questions that related not just to Sheffield Wednesday

football club, but to the engineers who designed the stadium. The jury was very clear that there were problems with the design of the stadium and with the certification process. There are some very real questions for those in authority of various sorts who allowed a game to take place in a ground with those particular problems.

Obviously, the IPCC is looking at the aftermath of the event. Operation Resolve is looking at the lead-up to the deaths of the 96 men, women and children. In doing so, it will, of course, look across the board at the work of police officers. I assure the hon. Gentleman that my understanding is that the evidence taken will cover things done by West Midlands police as well as South Yorkshire police.

Seema Kennedy (South Ribble) (Con): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend and to the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), but particularly to the families of the 96 victims, for their herculean efforts to bring about the result that we saw yesterday. Does my right hon. Friend agree that slurs were made against the families; that those were an injustice; and that it is right that they are now recognised as smears?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Of course, those slurs were not just made at the time; they continued for far too long. The families and supporters had to endure not just the terrible tragedy itself, but the further injustice that, consistently, the Liverpool fans were blamed for something that was not their fault. The verdict that came out yesterday was absolutely clear: the fans did not contribute to this disaster.

Mrs Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): The inquest verdict proclaimed the truth and exposed the deceit, including the wicked lie that the fans were responsible for their own deaths. We should never, ever forget that the truth has been finally exposed only because of the commitment of the bereaved families, who were supported by the city of Liverpool—whatever the rest of the country might have thought—in their determined campaign for truth. I, too thank the Home Secretary and the former Attorney General for the decisive steps that they have taken to make sure that justice has now come out. Following the Home Secretary’s very supportive comments about the action she intends to take to support the bereaved families as we move from exposure of the truth to accountability, will the Home Secretary do all in her power to ensure that now that we have the truth, real accountability will follow?

Mrs May: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments, and she is absolutely right. The city of Liverpool stood by the families when the rest of the country took a different view about what had happened in that terrible tragedy. I am very clear that we need to ensure that the proper processes are followed for the investigations and for the Crown Prosecution Service decisions about whether criminal charges should be brought. The truth was there with the independent panel’s report, and I hope that people feel that justice has been seen with the verdicts that came out, but accountability is the next step, and that rests with the independent investigations and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Stephen McPartland (Stevenage) (Con): I welcome the Home Secretary’s statement, and I think that she and the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) have been beacons of hope during this tragic period.

The strength of the families makes me proud to be a Scouser. There is a lot of talk about justice, but I do not think it is justice that it has taken 27 years for the fans to be found not guilty of something that was not their fault. It is not justice that the city, the fans and families were kicked when they were on their knees and at their lowest point. It is not justice that there was an establishment cover-up. Does the Home Secretary agree that real justice starts when the individuals responsible are personally prosecuted?

Mrs May: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments, and he is right. It must be very difficult for the families, who have suffered over those 27 years but have kept true to their cause and their belief in the reality of what happened at the Hillsborough stadium in 1989. They must have felt terrible when they were, as my hon. Friend said, kicked constantly over those 27 years. This is not just about finding the truth; it is about accountability. As I just indicated in response to the previous question, that process of accountability is now in the hands of the two criminal investigations and the Crown Prosecution Service.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The inquest findings were very clear that on the day of the disaster, South Yorkshire police failed completely in a number of respects. Even more alarming, in some respects, were the attempts to cover up those failings afterwards. May I reflect on the comment of my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) that this is no reflection on the important work done by the ordinary community officers of South Yorkshire police on a day-to-day basis for the safety and security of my constituents and the residents of South Yorkshire? Will the Home Secretary therefore offer complete support to the PCC in South Yorkshire to take the force through a very difficult time, recognising that the complete command structure of the force will change, in one way or another, during the next year, and that it will need every bit of outside support it can get from the Home Secretary and others?

Mrs May: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. He is absolutely right to say that we should recognise the work that is done daily by South Yorkshire police officers to keep their communities safe and to cut crime. May I also take this opportunity to recognise the support that was given by people living in Sheffield to the fans and others who suffered from this tragedy on the day?

The hon. Gentleman is right that the South Yorkshire police force will not only have to deal with the outcome of the Hillsborough findings; the report on Rotherham raised a number of issues around the South Yorkshire force. The hon. Gentleman asks me to provide support to the police and crime commissioner. Next week, the people in the South Yorkshire force area will go to the polls to elect the police and crime commissioner for the next four years. We will talk thereafter to the police and crime commissioner and the chief constable about the future of the force, but it is for those two individuals, primarily, to look at the structures that they need and to ensure that the force is doing the job that it needs to do on a daily basis.

Chris Heaton-Harris (Daventry) (Con): I commend the Home Secretary and the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) for what they have done on the

matter. I also commend all the Members from Liverpool who have taken part in debates. Everyone knows my connection with football and with what happened on that day, which I have spoken about in the House. Football suffered massively on that horrible day. The family of football looked on that tragedy and changed many things, from stadium safety to how things are placed around football games.

Following on from the point made by the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), I am concerned about the culture that still exists in South Yorkshire police. From statements on its website and statements that it has made, I fear that it still has not learned all the lessons of that tragedy all that time ago. Will the Home Secretary comment on what is going on in South Yorkshire police force?

Mrs May: I think everybody will be disappointed and, indeed, concerned by some of the remarks that have been made by South Yorkshire police today. There was a very clear verdict yesterday in relation to the decisions that were taken by police officers and the action of police officers on 15 April 1989, and I urge South Yorkshire police force to recognise the verdict of the jury. Yes, it must get on with the day-to-day job of policing in its force area, but it needs to look at what happened—at what the verdicts have shown—recognise the truth and be willing to accept that.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for her statement and, in particular, for her decision when she came into office in 2010 to allow the work of the Hillsborough Independent Panel to continue. That has been absolutely crucial to this outcome. When I was first elected in 1997, my constituents Phil Hammond, Doreen Jones and Jenni Hicks were some of the first people to come to see me. They were then part of the executive of the Hillsborough Family Support Group, and between them, they lost five family members. They came to see me about the disaster, and I have campaigned with them ever since to have the truth acknowledged and to have justice done.

We all knew the truth; it just seems to be the legal system in this country—I speak as a lawyer—that has been unable to get to the truth and accept the truth. For 27 years, it failed the victims at every turn. Almost everything that could go wrong in a legal case went wrong in those 27 years. Yesterday, the legal system finally did its job, but it has more to do to hold to account those who we now know for absolute certain are responsible. The Home Secretary has more to do to deal with the appalling culture and behaviour of South Yorkshire police, which persists to this day.

This disaster was filmed live and shown on television, and within months the interim report of the Taylor inquiry put the blame squarely where it actually lay—it did not get everything right, but it was substantially correct—yet for 27 years the families of those who died have had to defend every day the reputations of their lost loved ones and of their friends and other people living in Liverpool who have been blamed for what happened.

It was only the panel taking this out of the legal system that has led to the truth being acknowledged more widely than it was, and to its then being fed back into the legal system. There is a deep issue about our

[*Maria Eagle*]

legal system, so will the Home Secretary now commit to supporting Lord Michael Wills's Public Advocate Bill to ensure that the victims of public disasters—there will be more in future—are never again forced to spend decades of their lives fighting smears, lies, official denials, indifference and cover-ups from public authorities? We have to make sure this can never ever happen again.

Mrs May: The hon. Lady is right that we need to stand back and ask what it is about our system that actually enabled this to happen and enabled people to suffer in this way over those 27 years. One of the reasons why I have asked Bishop James Jones to work with the families, to hear from them their experiences, is obviously to try to learn from that and to see what steps we need to take in response.

One of the things that has come of this is that the panel model is one that can be used elsewhere. I have indeed used that model, with fewer members, in relation to the necessity of looking into the killing of Daniel Morgan, where again the legal system, through a number of cases, has failed to get to the truth. I think it is a method that we could use on other occasions.

Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the statement she has made today. It is painfully clear that, for over 20 years, hon. Members in this place did not take the opportunities available to them to bring the matter to this Chamber and therefore to spread the light of transparency on something terrible that had happened. I just want to put on the record the role played by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotherham), who is far too humble to talk about his role. When we were first elected in 2010, he very quickly took a group of us in front of the Backbench Business Committee in a Committee Room and secured a debate that made sure light was shone on what was a terrible incident, and we have arrived where we are today. I thank him for that.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend has recognised the particular role played by a single Member of this House. I might say that, over the years, a number of Members of this House have raised this issue. The fact that authority did not listen to the issue being raised is entirely separate.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): May I, too, add my thanks to the Home Secretary for the crucial role she has played in bringing this matter to a reasonable conclusion at this point? May I ask her, alongside others, to consider the extent to which the lazy, dishonest, inaccurate stereotyping of football fans, in collusion with some sections of the media, gave some credibility—wrongly—to the original failed inquest? I attended one day of the inquest. It was agony for the families to sit there and listen day after day to their loved ones who had died being denigrated in the way that the questions were put. Does she agree with me that many other failures result from the lazy assumption that football fans in general and the people of Liverpool in particular were in some way culpable in a matter that was completely beyond their control? When she asks the bishop and others to look at the implications of all this, will she ask him to look at this question: why is it that some sections of the media and some sections of the public services,

including the police and the ambulance service, still feel that they can casually disregard the truth by accepting lazy stereotypes?

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. He is absolutely right. There was an image of football fans that people held to regardless of what they saw going on in front of their very eyes. I was struck when I heard the commentary—I think on Radio 2—that was taking place at the time, as the tragedy unfolded. Even at that time, some of the commentating and some of the assumptions being made were about unruly fans, rather than about people who were crying out for help as they were dying. To see the police actually being lined up to form a line against public order problems when there were people whose lives were being lost at the time shocks and appals us all now. He is right that we should never allow casual stereotypes to get in the way of the truth.

Steve Brine (Winchester) (Con): I obviously do not represent Liverpool, but I was so fortunate to live there for the best part of the 1990s. It is a wonderful city, with decent people—thoroughly decent people—and I believe that the way in which the families have conducted themselves over nearly 30 years has demonstrated that to those of us who knew it and to everybody else. I was very fortunate to take over one of the student unions in Liverpool in the '90s, and I was told in no uncertain scouse terms why we did not stock all newspapers in the student union shop. I have never forgotten that, and many shops and stores in Liverpool still do not stock the full complement of newspapers, as Liverpool Members will know.

What does the Home Secretary think is the main lesson that we should learn from the state's failure to do justice for the 96? Does she think that some elements of the British press—they have apologised several times since, although I think that that means little to many, or probably all, of the families in Liverpool—should take a long, hard look at themselves?

Mrs May: I think that that is important. It is important when information is spread to the public through the media that the veracity of that information is an issue that must be considered. My hon. Friend asks me what the overall, abiding lesson that we need to take from this is. I think it is about the whole issue that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) referred to, which is the culture and the attitude that is taken. It is about public institutions whose job is to work in the public interest, who should be institutions that can be trusted by the public and whose job is often to protect the public not, when something happens, instinctively wanting to protect themselves instead, but always having the view that whatever has happened and whatever the answer, they must actually find the truth for the public.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. I hope the House will forgive me, but at the risk of stating the obvious, if colleagues are concerned about being able to make their own contribution, let me say that I will of course call every colleague. This is a little different from other days, and there is therefore some latitude: Members must say what they want to say. I am sorry if people have other commitments, but if Members stay in the Chamber, they will be heard.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): May I put on the record my thanks to you, Mr Speaker? You have been incredibly supportive. May I, especially as chair of the all-party group on the Hillsborough disaster, thank the Home Secretary and her staff, and all those—officials, and the staff of Members of Parliament as well—who have worked to help our group function over the past four years?

Finally to know the true verdict—that these killings were unlawful—is just a huge weight lifted, but there is one more issue. The campaign for justice has never been for Liverpool fans alone. Shirts of all different teams were worn at the memorial service. For the 25th anniversary, Members of this House from all parts of the country sent with me to Anfield the scarf of their local team. That is why, at the recent memorial service, Trevor Hicks was absolutely right to ask football fans to be “united in grief”, though rivals in the game.

I have one last thing to say: the “Murderers, murderers” chant has got to stop now. Does the Home Secretary agree that there are no excuses—we have the truth—and that those who have suffered because of the Hillsborough disaster have, frankly, now suffered enough?

Mrs May: I agree with the hon. Lady. For those who have been through everything that they have for 27 years we now have the truth. They have suffered enough. Although part of the process still remains, to ensure accountability, I hope, as I said in my statement, that the peace that they have been so long denied will now come to them. I hope that they will be able to take from the verdicts some comfort that at last what they knew on that day has been shown to be true.

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): Weaver Vale is part of Merseyside, and I have many Liverpoolians in my constituency who have welcomed the jury’s determinations. For me, it is a case of there but for the grace of God go I. Those of us who went to football matches in the ’70s and ’80s know that the facilities were terrible and crushes were regular. I remind the House that at the Hillsborough 1981 FA Cup semi-final—the Tottenham Hotspur-Wolverhampton game—there was a very similar crush. The police allowed the fans on to the pitch. It looked very similar to the scene years later in 1989. That tells us that lessons clearly were not learned. The hon. Member for Halton (Derek Twigg) was at the 1989 game; as he said, that facility was never fit for purpose.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and right hon. and hon. Members on the Opposition Benches, in particular the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who made the speech of his parliamentary career, and the hon. Members for Halton, for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle), for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram), for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) and others, who have consistently campaigned on behalf of their constituents for justice. Will my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary assure the House that the lessons will be learned? I welcome Bishop James Jones’s report, but no family should ever have to go through this kind of tragedy again.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Sadly, the example he gave us of the game in 1981 shows that at that time lessons were not learned. Whatever comes

out of the work with the families, and from the panel’s report and all that we are now seeing, we need to make sure that we learn the lessons, and that we do not just say that we are doing that but put what is necessary into practice.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): The jury has determined that what happened on the day was negligent, unlawful and criminal. It was also tragic and unintended. The 27 years since have not been unintended; there have been deliberate lies and deception. When the Home Secretary is researching the variety of criminal charges that may be brought, will she ensure that appropriate emphasis is placed on perversion of the course of justice, conspiracy to pervert the course of justice and perjury, because that is where the real evil lies?

Mrs May: As I indicated in my statement to the House, the question of perversion of the course of justice and perjury will be looked at, but it is for the independent Crown Prosecution Service to decide whether to bring those or any other criminal charges.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): I start by paying my tribute to the families who, since before some people now in this House were even born, have had to fight the state, quite frankly. That is appalling. I thank my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary for everything she has done, and all of the Members locally who have worked for so many years. I pay particular tribute to the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) and the hon. Members for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) and for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), who have been in communication with me about the support I could offer, even as a west Yorkshire MP.

To those who wonder why MPs not related to the area have found this so hard and so difficult, I say that it is because we all have families. We all have parents, uncles and aunts, and some of us have children. We all go to events to which hundreds of thousands of people go every year. If someone goes to an event, perfectly legally, we have the right to expect that the authorities will look after them. The people who died at Hillsborough on that tragic day got there early, by definition, because they were at the front of those pens. They were ticketed. It will be a stain on this society for ever more that the state said it was their fault. It was obvious from day one—from the very moment—that it could not be their fault.

I have a huge amount of respect for the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), who is no longer in his place—indeed, we have debated this. He is absolutely right to say that police officers on the frontline for South Yorkshire police do an outstanding job every day and deserve our respect. But the behaviour of South Yorkshire police during this inquiry, and the subsequent comments since the verdict—a verdict that can leave no doubt in the mind of anyone in this country that those people were unlawfully killed—have been a disgrace. There is a stain on the name of South Yorkshire police that I am not sure can ever be erased.

Therefore, as controversial as this is, may I ask my right hon. Friend, working with other Members on a cross-party basis, to go away and consider—I do not expect an answer today—very seriously whether the only way of bringing back faith in policing in south

[*Alec Shelbrooke*]

Yorkshire, and of making sure that the officers in south Yorkshire who dedicate themselves to protecting the public can really move forward, is perhaps to merge all four Yorkshire police forces and to get rid of the name “South Yorkshire police”?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend has asked me a question that I suggest goes slightly wider than simply the issue of South Yorkshire police, as he talked about merging all four Yorkshire forces. He is absolutely right to identify that at a football match or any other public event where arrangements have been put in place by organisers to ensure people’s safety and where there is policing, fans who have gone along expect those arrangements to keep them safe and secure. They expect arrangements to have been thought through and made properly and carefully, and the right decisions to have been taken. As he and others have said, many people who are not Liverpool fans recognise what those families went through on that day, as they themselves go to similar events, week in, week out, hoping to enjoy themselves and not expecting the sort of terrible tragedy that befell families and supporters on that terrible day.

My hon. Friend has asked me to reflect on an issue. I think he knows the Government’s position on merger of forces. As I have said, South Yorkshire police will need to look very carefully at the verdict and accept it.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I commend the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) on all the work they have done, along with all hon. Members of this House. It is often the role of a Member of Parliament to give a strong voice to the weak, and this has been an example of that. May I also say a word of gratitude for the kind words of the hon. Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley) about some of the work I have done in the past? There are comparisons between what happened to the family and friends of Stephen Lawrence and what happened to the Hillsborough families. They have certainly been strong voices and advocates for themselves, and an example to us all. They were signatories to the letter sent to the Prime Minister earlier this month asking him not to renege on his promise to implement Leveson 2. Given that it relates to the relationship between the police and the press, it would seem even more imperative that we go ahead with that part of the Leveson report. Will the Home Secretary perhaps have a word with the Prime Minister to ask him to expedite that as quickly as possible?

Mrs May: Some of the issues about the relationship between the media and the police were identified in Leveson 1, and the police have taken some actions to change some of their approaches to the media as a result. As I said earlier, we have always been very clear that any investigations taking place needed to be completed before a decision was taken about Leveson 2. Some investigations are still being undertaken, which is why at this point of time it is not appropriate to take a decision about Leveson 2.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Days like this really make us think in this place. Will my right hon. Friend commit to making sure that all the resources required to

bring the criminal investigations to a speedy and thorough conclusion are brought to bear, because these families have suffered for far too long already?

Mrs May: I assure my hon. Friend that the Home Office has made funding available for Operation Resolve, and it is ensuring that the IPCC has what it needs to conduct these investigations, which will then go to the Crown Prosecution Service. Families deserve a proper, thorough process that is undertaken in a timely manner and provides them with the accountability they want.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): May I add my thanks to the Home Secretary for her statement and commitment, and thank all my colleagues for their work over so many decades on this terrible atrocity? After 27 years of pain, torment and suffering, both for the families of the 96 people who tragically lost their lives and for the survivors, at last a dark cloud is lifting. After this statement, Merseyside MPs will travel back to Liverpool to commemorate what has happened on St George’s Hall plateau, and I have no doubt that the solidarity that prevailed in Liverpool will shine bright this evening.

I pay tribute to the campaigners who have fought tirelessly and never given up. They have endured the unendurable, and they should not have to wait any more. A moment ago the Home Secretary spoke about the work of the IPCC and the police, and the investigations that are being completed, and I echo the call from my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) that the handover of files should happen as quickly as possible. Will the Home Secretary also commit to ensuring that the CPS has whatever resources it takes to expedite its work? We have the truth and we have justice; now we need accountability.

Mrs May: The Attorney General is present and has heard the hon. Lady’s comments regarding his responsibility in relation to the CPS. We want this to be done in a timely fashion, and to ensure that it is done thoroughly and properly. Having visited the work of Operation Resolve and the IPCC, I know the significant amount of material that it has had to go through. Until now, it has been supporting the coroner in the inquests, and now its focus will be on preparing those files to give to the CPS.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): Although I have always lived at the other end of the country, I have been a passionate Liverpool fan all my life. I remember vividly watching the start of that game and feeling gutted that I was not able to be there—a feeling that quickly turned to relief. Although nothing can compare with the grief, pain and sense of injustice suffered by families who lost their loved ones, it is also true that on that day Liverpool fans across the country—indeed, all football fans—were smeared by what was said in its aftermath. On behalf of all football fans, I hugely welcome the fact that at last the truth is known: football fans were not responsible for what happened that day. It is, however, an absolute scandal that it has taken 27 years to get to the truth. Does the Home Secretary agree that not only must we never forget the 96 who died that day, but we must never be allowed to forget that those in authority chose to cover up their

responsibility for this tragedy, and to smear the name of a great football club, a great city, and football fans everywhere?

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is right, and as he recognised, in the rest of the country and around the globe there are not just football fans, but there are also Liverpool supporters. I cannot reiterate enough how appalling it was that it was not just organs of the state and other agencies that were involved in this. There was a general public feeling that somehow the fans must have been responsible. Question 7 of the verdict yesterday and its supplementary question were clear. The jury was asked whether there was any behaviour on the part of the football supporters which caused or contributed to the dangerous situation at the Leppings Lane turnstiles, or which may have caused or contributed to that situation. The answer was clear: no.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): The verdicts yesterday are momentous and long overdue, and I join other Members in paying tribute to the campaigners, families, friends and survivors of what happened in Hillsborough. I warmly welcome the Home Secretary's statement and the incredibly powerful response from my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham). I join him and my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) in urging the Government and the Home Secretary to do everything possible to press the CPS to make its decisions as quickly as possible. That is certainly what the families and survivors want.

Mrs May: It is certainly the Government's desire, intention and hope that the CPS will make its decisions as quickly as possible, commensurate with it exercising proper independent consideration of the facts.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): What hits home about this tragedy is that anyone who has been an away fan or stood on a terrace can picture themselves in that tunnel, on the way to the pen, looking forward to the match, hoping to see their team win, but it ending up in tragedy. Therefore, when those fans were smeared, all of us were smeared. It could have been our club, town or city—only the finger of fate meant that it was Liverpool. Does the Home Secretary agree that looking back, steps could have been taken to avoid this tragedy? When I spoke to Coventry City fans who attended matches at Hillsborough in 1987, they recounted some of the issues that they experienced during those games but that were not addressed, with tragic consequences. After 27 years it is time for some of the organisations involved to stop the denials, accept the verdict and the truth, and move on to ensure that those responsible are finally held to account.

Mrs May: My hon. Friend is right to refer to the issues relating to the stadium, and many people will think it not just surprising but incredible that a game of that size took place in a stadium which, as I understand, did not have the proper safety certification. People will question forever how the relevant authorities can have allowed that to happen, and there are issues not just about the police and ambulance service, but about the football club and the design of the stadium.

John Pugh (Southport) (LD): As a Merseyside MP and a Liverpool supporter, I thank the Home Secretary for what is almost the last chapter of an unbearably sad book. She must recognise that in this world, justice does not compensate for loss and grief. Apart from the judicial process, what more needs to be done to support the families and for closure?

Mrs May: Obviously, the next stage of the investigation and the CPS is important for the families, and I hope that they will continue to work with Bishop James Jones through the family forums, and on his work to hear about their experiences. That process is important for the families, and also for us, so that we ensure that we have heard their experiences and can take away from that any lessons that need to be learned and any action that the Government need to take.

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab): May I add my thanks to the Home Secretary for her excellent statement, and for her work on the Orgreave truth and justice campaign? I look forward to her response on that. Having served as a special constable in the Metropolitan Police Service, I recognise the institutional defensiveness that was mentioned yesterday by the families, and I fear that that problem is not unique to South Yorkshire. As part of her review of lessons learned, will the Home Secretary consider ending the practice of officers conferring together when recording statements?

Mrs May: The hon. Lady is right, and there are issues not just for policing but for public sector institutions generally about the desire, which I described earlier, to look inwards and protect themselves. I will reflect on her comment.

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) and other Merseyside colleagues for their determination in pursuing this matter over many years. The Merseyside victims came from Bootle, Birkenhead, Crosby, Liverpool, Runcorn, Knowsley and other Merseyside communities, but as my right hon. Friend said, supporters also came from all over the country—Cheshire, Essex, Leigh, Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Gloucestershire, Middlesex, Wrexham and London among other places. Will the Home Secretary join me, Merseyside MPs, and the people of Merseyside in remembering those supporters and their brave families, wherever they came from on that dreadful day, because they are now part of the Merseyside family?

Mrs May: I am very happy to join the hon. Gentleman in doing just that. He is absolutely right to draw our attention to the fact that many of the supporters came from all parts of the country. As he said, they are now part of the Merseyside family.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): Does the Home Secretary accept that, although she gave us a long, miserable litany of organisations that failed—organisations whose very essence is supposed to be about securing our safety—one institution shines through gloriously? That is the family, and particularly the families of those who were killed at Hillsborough. Does she accept that whatever we try to say in this House, we say it inadequately, but

[*Frank Field*]

that we share in the sympathy and admiration of the whole country for those families who had to fight throughout this case? I would like to thank her, the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve) and the then Bishop of Liverpool, James Jones, for making the triumph of these families possible.

Concluding her statement, the Home Secretary read out the list of possible charges that might now follow. Although this will be a chilling task in itself, it will be an even greater chill for us if—as I hope, please God—we see through the necessary reform programme for great institutions that we thought were unquestionably on our side, but which were on somebody else's side on that fateful day.

Mrs May: The right hon. Gentleman raises a number of points. He is absolutely right that it will be necessary for us to stand back and look at how this happened and why 27 years have been allowed to pass before we have come to this point. This might mean taking a very difficult look, as he said, at some of the institutions that people expect to protect them but simply did the opposite on this occasion.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): As a Doncaster and South Yorkshire MP, I want to express my disgust and that of many people in South Yorkshire at what the services that we are meant to trust did on that day in Sheffield. I also express our disgust at the manipulation and delaying tactics that have contributed to 27 years of heartfelt pursuit and grief by the families of those killed, but also the survivors, including 730 people who were injured on that day, many with life-limiting injuries that they have had to live with and face the consequences of since then.

I believe in the rule of law and I believe in justice, but it cannot take 27 years to achieve the outcome that we saw yesterday—an outcome that has not only validated the actions of the families and others who pursued justice, but has called into question the very faith we put in procedures to bring public services to account for failure.

Will the Home Secretary pick up two issues that were raised earlier? The first is about equality of access to justice. From what I have seen and heard, having money to access legal services made a big difference to the cause of these families. Secondly, we need to look at whether it continues to be right to have police forces investigating other police forces or hospitals investigating other hospitals. Perhaps this is the time to look at having a more independent body for overseeing and investigating when, sadly, our public services fail.

Mrs May: The right hon. Lady raises two specific issues. On having an independent regime in place for inspecting public authorities, one thing we are doing in respect of policing is changing the arrangements for how complaints against the police are investigated so that serious and sensitive cases are not investigated by police forces themselves, but taken to the IPCC. We will be making changes to the IPCC in the Policing and Crime Bill that is going through the House. On the fact that the procedures did not allow for the truth to come out—and in some cases stopped the truth from coming

out—for 27 years is a crucial point that underpins the whole debate. I hope that when Bishop James Jones is able to publish his review of what we need to learn from the experiences, it will cover the right hon. Lady's second point and indeed other issues raised by Members today.

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I echo the comments of those who have thanked and congratulated everyone, including the Home Secretary, who campaigned for yesterday's verdict. The 18 people from the borough of Sefton who died are commemorated on a memorial in Crosby. As we remember all 96 who died, as well as the 730 who were injured, it is important to remember too that in these 27 years many more people have died who wished to see yesterday's verdict but who sadly did not live long enough to do so, including Anne Williams, who campaigned so long and hard for her son Kevin, who was just 15 when he died at Hillsborough.

The Home Secretary spoke about a range of possible criminal investigations. Would she say a little about the potential for criminal investigations relating to those who reported, completely falsely, what they were fed by those in authority, which added to the cover-up, to the smear and to the downright lies told about fans and the people of Liverpool at that time? Those actions added hugely to the 27-year wait for yesterday's verdict.

Mrs May: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's point about the impression given to the public of what happened. I indicated some of the offences that are included in the work that is being done. The investigation is, of course, a matter for the two bodies set up to undertake the two elements of the investigation—Operation Resolve under Jon Stoddart and the IPCC. As I said in response to other hon. Members, decisions about any prosecutions that take place will be taken entirely independently by the CPS.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): As a football fan, I will never forget 15 April 1989 and hearing the unimaginable news that 96 people—men, women and children—had gone to watch a football match and would never come home. It could have been any club, but in this case it was the proud club of Liverpool. Let me say that there were many, many football fans around the country who never believed the official verdict and always believed what Liverpool fans were saying. Let me also pay tribute to all those involved in the campaign. They are not only heroes of the proud city of Liverpool; for their extraordinary fight for truth and justice, which will go down in the history of our democracy, they are British heroes too.

In addition to dealing with the cover-up, will the Home Secretary give us a clear assurance that the appalling ways in which the families of the victims were treated in the aftermath of the disaster will never happen again? We saw police officers sitting eating chicken and chips in the gymnasium as the bodies were lying there, while families were told that they could not hug their loved ones in body bags because they were the property of the coroner. Worst of all, the initial coroner forced alcohol testing on all these victims—including children such as 10-year-old Jon-Paul Gilhooly—of this unlawful disaster. That was a disgrace, and we want to know that it will never happen to a single victim again.

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to refer to what was done and how the families were treated. How appalling it must have been to learn that one of your loved ones had died in these appalling circumstances and to be unable to touch them, and then not to know the proper details of when and how they died—the cause of death. People have had to live with that for far too long. I hope that these sorts of issues coming out of the families' experiences will be brought to light by the work that I have asked Bishop James Jones to do.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for the work she has done, but I wish to raise with her a point I raised in 2012 when she made the same statement: that the rest of the country fell for this story. The rest of the country did not fall for this story. Those of us who went to football matches expected to be treated like second-class citizens and expected the police to get their retaliation in first, even when people had done nothing wrong.

I also want to pick up on the point raised by my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary about Orgreave, as I was there in June 1984. Seven years after that, South Yorkshire police paid £425,000 in compensation to silence 39 miners who were suing them for assault, yet not one of those police officers was even disciplined for what they had done. The police used public money to bury bad news on that day.

I come back to where we are now. The hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) made the point that so desperate were the police to cover up that they actually tested young children who were dead, and that shows how seriously they took this. But the real responsibility for what happened from then onwards cannot just be left at the doors of South Yorkshire police. I ask the Home Secretary to do what the Prime Minister did not do today in response to a question from the leader of my party and say what specific action will be taken to expose everybody—at every level in this country, elected official and appointed official, of previous Conservative Governments and of my party's Governments—who played any role in this cover-up, either by omission or commission.

Those individuals are as guilty of making the people suffer for 27 years; many people went to their graves vilified when they would have been vindicated had this been sorted out at least a quarter of a century ago. We need to know that this will not just be laid at the door—rightly—of Duckenfield; other people must be called to account. Even if they did not commit criminal acts, they have done things that delayed the course of justice and they should be called to account for that.

Mrs May: Importantly, the independent panel's report showed the truth of what had happened on that occasion. That work required a number of organisations that had previously been silent about what had happened to be prepared to come forward to give their evidence to the panel.

On the criminal investigations and the potential criminal prosecutions, obviously I have answered that point. I say to the hon. Gentleman that there has been a collective recognition across this House today, from all parts of it, that there were verdicts on what happened on that day

in 1989 but that subsequently the procedures and processes that should have sought out and found the truth failed. We have to ask ourselves how that happened and what we can do to make sure it does not happen again.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): Yesterday's verdict was an historic one, and I thank the Secretary of State for her statement and, in particular, the emphasis she has put on the fact that the fans were not to blame. I was a young schoolteacher working in Liverpool in 1989 and I, like everyone in the city and right across Merseyside, remember that day well. I remember how the city was affected, both at the time and in the years that followed.

Twenty-seven years is a long time, and the families of the 96 who lost their lives at Hillsborough have had to fight for the truth. It takes a special kind of courage to fight for 27 years, and I pay tribute to the courage and determination of the families. There is nothing more powerful than the truth, and yesterday's verdict delivered that to us. I hope that will be some comfort for the families and the friends who lost loved ones, and I know that the 96 will not be forgotten.

Mrs May: The hon. Lady is right: the 96 will not be forgotten. She is absolutely right to pay the tribute she does to the families, who have kept alive the hope of truth and justice. As I said earlier, I hope they will take some comfort from the verdicts yesterday.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): May I pay tribute to the Home Secretary and the right hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), not just for the power, poignancy and import of their words here today, but for the decisive and responsive character they have both shown on this matter? Not only do I salute my fellow Members in this House who represent the families of the Hillsborough victims, but, on behalf of the Bloody Sunday families in my constituency, I want to salute the Hillsborough families. They have made that journey from victimhood, through vilification, to vindication—that tortuous journey to justice that my constituents faced. The right hon. Gentleman brought the Hillsborough families over to Derry to meet the Bloody Sunday families in advance of the panel report, for solidarity and mentoring, and I know that the Bloody Sunday families would give the biggest hugs they could possibly give to the Hillsborough families today.

We need to learn other lessons, rather than just comparing what has happened in this case and in other cases. Points have been made about what the families still had to go through even after what the panel report told us—the fact that they had to sob and seethe inside, and yet still show calm in the chamber as they listened to callous cynicism about the deaths of their loved ones, no less cruel from the paid lips of counsel.

We also need to address, once and for all, this insensitivity and arrogance of power, and this default setting of system defensiveness that the Home Secretary has rightly identified. The system tells us all when we raise these issues on behalf of families who come to us, "Move on, there is nothing more to know." I know that that is exactly what the system was telling the right hon. Member for Leigh when he was in government and was making his decision.

[Mark Durkan]

On the questions about possible charges that arise, one issue occurs to me, and it arises from the Bloody Sunday experience as well. Could we get clarity soon on whether or not the law officers in this situation are applying the same rubric that they have applied to the Bloody Sunday situation: that any question of charges of perjury, perverting the course of justice or anything else cannot be considered until the issues of any possible charges relating to the events of the day have been? That rubric is deeply troubling to Bloody Sunday families.

Mrs May: I will take that point away and look into it. I thank the hon. Gentleman for the remarks he made about the importance of a justice system. We are rightly proud of our system of justice in this country, but sometimes it has failed to get to the truth, as we have sadly seen. On Hillsborough, it is once again the families who have been prepared to fight over 27 years who have got, first, to the truth from the independent panel's report and now to the clear verdicts which have vindicated what they have said about the fans and about their loved ones all along.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): As a teenager in the late '80s, I followed my team in that stand on many occasions, and this was a victory for all of football today. The crime was exacerbated by the cover-up, so I wish to ask the Home Secretary this: apart from going to hell, what does she see as the consequences for those who bore false testimony?

Mrs May: Obviously, the question whether people have acted in a criminal way and whether charges should be made against those individuals is a decision for the CPS, after it has seen the results of the investigations.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Let me add my congratulations and commendations to the Home Secretary on her statement and her conduct so far and in particular to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) on his work over many years and on an outstanding contribution. May I recall his words of praise for Anne Williams, from Chester, who, sadly, did not live to see this day? I assure the Home Secretary and the House that Anne will be at the forefront of the minds of many of my constituents in Chester today.

Hillsborough was a tragedy. It might have remained a tragedy but instead it became a scandal. Does the Home Secretary share my concern about the toxic legacy of Hillsborough? A large proportion of people—a generation, indeed—not just on Merseyside but perhaps more widely in the north-west and, as hon. Members from other parts of the country have suggested, perhaps more widely across the country, have absolutely zero confidence in elements of the state and of the justice system. It behoves all of us in this House to help rebuild that confidence, based on the judgment yesterday.

Mrs May: I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman that we have a role to play in this House on this, as I said in response to a previous question. We have always felt huge confidence and pride in the justice system that we

have in this country, but we need to make sure that it operates properly and that it does provide justice for people.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): May I press the Home Secretary to recognise the importance of the European convention on human rights in securing justice in this case? The purpose of the reference group which she says is being reconstituted is specifically to protect the Hillsborough families' article 2 rights. Because the coronial system does not always work as it should, victims' families rely on article 2, which safeguards the right to life, to ensure that deaths that take place when people are in the care of the state are properly investigated. Will the Home Secretary think carefully before pursuing her desire, stated this week, for the United Kingdom to withdraw from the convention?

Mrs May: I must point out to the hon. Gentleman that human rights were not invented when the convention was granted. However, my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General responded to an urgent question yesterday, and responded well to the many questions that he was asked by Members.

The whole question of deaths that happen when there is some involvement of some element of the state is one of the concerns that I have had, which is one of the reasons why, for example, I have set up an inquiry into deaths in police custody. I think that we see many examples in which it is not clear whether the system is actually getting to the truth as it should, and it is right that we should look into and investigate that.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): This has been one of those occasions when I have felt very proud to be a Member of Parliament, and I commend both the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary for the roles that they have played. I also commend Liverpool football club, which I do not think has been mentioned yet. The club never told the fans that it was time to move on; it has always taken ownership of a terrible, terrible tragedy.

This was allowed to happen because, in the eyes of the establishment, football fans were less than human. As soon as the police and the establishment see groups of people not as individuals but as less than human, we enter very dangerous circumstances. Before these people, it was the miners who were less than human. Perhaps we should think about the way we treat disabled people, asylum seekers or the victims of child sex abuse today, and wonder whether we think that they, too, may be less than human. Perhaps that is a lesson for all of us to consider.

As soon as this tragedy unfolded, the first instinct of South Yorkshire police was to protect their institution and their reputation, and to think nothing of the people who died, and their families, because they considered those people to be less than human. That instinct that they experienced instantly in April 1989 appears to be just as strong 27 years later, given the way they have conducted themselves during this latest inquiry. I commend everything that the Home Secretary has done, but may I ask her to consider whether she believes that the people of south Yorkshire should have confidence in the current leadership of South Yorkshire police, and whether, indeed, she has confidence in the chief constable of South Yorkshire police? Might she take the opportunity of the

final moments of this exchange, during which she has conducted herself so magnificently, to ask the chief constable of South Yorkshire police, from the Dispatch Box, to consider his position—not just for the sake of the families, but for the sake of all the people who rely on that police force?

Mrs May: The hon. Gentleman has referred to the leadership of South Yorkshire police. As I said earlier, people will vote for a police and crime commissioner next week, thus conferring that democratic accountability.

I responded earlier to questions from my hon. Friends about the wording of the statement issued by South Yorkshire police, but let me say again that I think it behoves them to recognise the import of yesterday's verdicts. I hope that we will not see attempts to suggest that those verdicts were somehow not clear, or were in any way wrong. That jury sat through 296 days of evidence, and they were clear about the role of South Yorkshire police officers.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Home Secretary, the shadow Home Secretary, and all colleagues for what they have said, and for the manner in which the exchanges on the statement have been conducted.

Points of Order

2.34 pm

Naz Shah (Bradford West) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. May I seek your advice on how I can express my deep sorrow about something to which the Prime Minister referred earlier?

As you know, Mr Speaker, if Ministers make a mistake, they can correct the record. I hope you will allow me to say that I fully acknowledge that I have made a mistake, and I wholeheartedly apologise to the House for the words that I used before I became a Member of Parliament. I accept and understand that the words that I used caused upset and hurt to the Jewish community, and I deeply regret that. Anti-Semitism is racism, full stop. As a Member of Parliament, I will do everything in my power to build relations between Muslims, Jews, and people of different faiths and none.

I am grateful, and very thankful, for the support and advice that I have received from many Jewish friends and colleagues, advice on which I intend to act. I truly regret what I did, and I hope—I sincerely hope—that the House will accept my profound apology.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady has found an opportunity to apologise. I thank her for what she has said, and it will have been noted by the House. I think that that is all I should say on this occasion.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): I commend the hon. Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) for the words that she has just spoken.

On a point of order, Mr Speaker—a wider point of order—would it be possible for us to develop in our procedures an opportunity for the Prime Minister rapidly to correct any misleading impressions that he inadvertently gives during Prime Minister's Question Time? For example, I know that he would be incredibly anxious today, following his general attack on the procurement policies of the Scottish Government with specific reference to the Forth crossing, to acknowledge that, in fact, 45% of the total orders, which amounted to £540 million, were placed with Scottish companies.

I know that the Prime Minister would also want to correct the misleading impression that there was no Scottish steel in the contract by acknowledging that steel from the Dalzell plate mill was used in the girders at either end of the bridge. And I fully understand that he would want to acknowledge that the reason why there was no Scottish bidder for the main subcontract was the closure of the Ravenscraig steel mill by a previous Tory Government in the 1990s, which removed our capacity to supply such steel.

I know, Mr Speaker, that the provision of such an opportunity would swallow up the entire time of the House, given the many mistakes that this Prime Minister makes, but in view of the clarity of this particular example, perhaps you could consider my new, innovative prime ministerial correction procedure.

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order. It has been commented upon many a time and oft in recent years that I have sometimes judged it necessary and desirable somewhat to extend Prime Minister's questions if I have felt that

[Mr Speaker]

there has been excessive noise. I have done that because I have wanted Back-Bench Members to have their opportunity. However, there are limits. Even I would not seek to extend Question Time to absorb more than two and a half hours, notwithstanding the sedulous advocacy of the right hon. Gentleman and his obvious enthusiasm for my doing so.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your help in finding a mechanism whereby the House might be able to force a binding vote on the Government, as a matter of urgency, following the new Lord Dubs amendment to the Immigration Bill. Vulnerable unaccompanied children require help now, but it would seem that the House of Commons is not likely to consider the Bill for another two weeks, the intention being, presumably, to avoid further embarrassment to the Government.

Let me also say, Mr Speaker, that I should like to avail myself of that prime ministerial correction procedure in order to enable the Prime Minister to retract his comment that other European countries are able to cope with those children. They have, of course, asked the United Kingdom to participate in a relocation scheme, and Frontex has identified the issue of vulnerable children as one of the most concerning aspects of the refugee crisis.

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his point of order. He is, in a sense, performing a kind of double act today with the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), two seats to his left. What I would say to the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), who is a very experienced denizen of the House, having previously served as its Deputy Leader, is twofold. First, as he knows, the scheduling of business is in the hands of the Government, notably in respect of Government business.

Although his expectation, as things stand, as to when that matter will next be treated by the House may well be correct, it has not been announced.

Secondly, the scheduling will, in all probability, be announced at business questions tomorrow by the Leader of the House. If it is not, there will be an opportunity for that matter to be probed. I know I can say with complete confidence and with no fear of contradiction that just as the right hon. Gentleman is in his place now, so he will be at the appropriate time tomorrow, and I think there is more than a passing possibility that he will catch my eye.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I am not sure it is, but I always like hearing the hon. Gentleman, especially as he has such a beaming countenance today. So let us hear the attempted “further” from the hon. Gentleman.

Sir Peter Bottomley: We have heard the suggestion that the Prime Minister said something that was wrong. We heard from the right hon. Member for Gordon (Alex Salmond), from the Scottish National party, that the bit between the ends of the Forth crossing, which I would call “the bridge”, was actually made with steel that was not produced in this country.

Mr Speaker: Whatever else may be said, and it may be a point of enormous interest, that is manifestly not a point of order. We will leave the matter there for now. If there are no further points of order, perhaps we can now come to the ten-minute rule motion in the name of the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington. Whatever he may have to say tomorrow, I assume that today he intends to address his ten-minute rule motion.

Landlord and Tenant (Reform)

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

2.41 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the regulation of landlords and private rented accommodation; to extend tenants' rights, particularly in relation to the sale of occupied rental property; to cap letting agents' fees; to require the Mayor of London to establish a mandatory licensing scheme in respect of private landlords in Greater London; and for connected purposes.

It is no exaggeration to say that we have a national emergency in housing. It is unacceptable that in 2016 millions of people still suffer daily from poor housing, and live in fear and desperation without a secure, affordable place to call home. This fear is tearing communities apart and risks further dividing our country between a very well-off minority and the rest of us. We have soaring house prices, with the average cost of a two-bedroom house in London now out of the reach of more than 80% of people, and a rental sector in which too many people on low and middle incomes are spending around two-fifths of their salaries on housing—something confirmed by a report in the *Evening Standard* yesterday—and often suffer at the hands of rogue landlords. This problem is not going to go away soon.

Over the past decade, London's private rented sector has more than doubled in size to become the second-largest housing tenure in the capital. There are now almost 1 million private rented sector properties in London, housing over 2 million people—about a third of the population. For many of those people, living in the private rented sector works well, with short-term tenancy agreements offering them the flexibility they need to move homes quickly for new jobs or career opportunities. Many of their private landlords are responsible, carrying out repairs in a timely manner and returning deposits promptly. However, for many others the sector has become a tenure of last resort, rather than a housing destination of choice.

There have been huge changes in the demographics of the private rented sector in recent years with an increasing number of families, low-income and vulnerable households living in the sector, but conditions remain poor: a third of homes fail to meet the Government's decent homes standard, with over 60% of renters having experienced either damp, mould, leaking roofs or windows, electrical hazards, animal infestation or gas leaks, according to a recent survey commissioned by the housing charity Shelter.

Just last week at my surgery I met a woman who, soon after she started describing the conditions in her rented property, broke down in tears. She and her young son could no longer face waking up to live or dead rodents in their flat. In this case, her landlord is trying to help, but the quality of the housing stock makes it very difficult to stop rodents getting into the property. A few weeks previously, at another surgery, a young woman came to see me with her mother. Repairs are outstanding on their rented property. The landlord is refusing to sort them out while at the same time putting pressure on them to leave their flat. I am sure every MP will be all too familiar with these types of cases. This is why I am supporting the measures put

forward by Caroline Pidgeon's London Liberal Democrat team to overhaul the private rented sector. We believe the measures will benefit tenants and good landlords, and shut down the Rachmans of this world.

The exact number of rogue landlords operating in the sector remains unknown, but there is a growing sense that the problem is getting worse as demand for housing, and the profits that can be made from renting out any accommodation in whatever condition, continues to increase. One in 20 renters say they have rented from a rogue landlord in the past 12 months. As a survey of local authority enforcement in the private rented sector carried out in March 2016 by my Liberal Democrat colleagues on the Greater London Authority shows, the enforcement of standards in the private rented sector by local authorities is highly variable, with recent cuts to local authority budgets further diminishing the resources available to councils to tackle landlords who provide poor or unsafe living conditions. The resulting patchwork of enforcement has left thousands of Londoners at the mercy of rogue landlords.

Much of the problem lies with the lack of effective regulation and enforcement in the sector. The Residential Landlords Association, which represents small private landlords, would welcome tougher enforcement. Unfortunately, enforcement and inspection is very weak. One third of councils in London—10 boroughs—failed to prosecute a single landlord for providing unsafe accommodation in 2014-15. On average, London boroughs inspected one in every 55 homes in the private rented sector using the housing health and safety rating system. There is significant variation in the level of enforcement activity, with some councils inspecting one in 14 private rented properties for hazards and others about one in 500.

The private rented sector may have met the needs of tenants in years gone by, but the profile of renters, and the average length of tenancy, has changed dramatically in recent years. If some landlords are to lose their reputation as the property industry's wild west cowboys, it is clear that a proper framework of regulation and enforcement is required. That is what is set out in the plans I am about to refer to, which would reform the private rented sector. My Bill seeks to implement them.

First, all landlords in London should be registered. This would make it easier to identify the scale of, and trends in, the private rented sector, and to ensure landlords can be traced easily.

Secondly, there should be a crackdown on rogue landlords through a licensing scheme. The Government should introduce a licensing scheme for all private landlords in London, with the aim of professionalising the sector, improving conditions and removing rogue landlords from the housing market. I accept that this proposal would not be welcomed by all landlords, but some accept a limited role, in certain circumstances, for licensing in some areas of London.

Thirdly, unfair letting agent fees for renters should be scrapped. Moving from one rented home to another can be very expensive, with high letting fees and large deposit requirements. I am told that agents try to poach landlords from each other to secure for themselves the fees that are triggered on a change of tenancy. Of course, they dangle the prospects of higher rents in front of the would-be landlord. In Sutton, a quick check suggests fees of around £400 to £500 when signing up a new tenant. When that is added to the six-week

[Tom Brake]

deposit—currently approximately £1,500 for a two-bedroom flat—a tenant would need to find a total of £2,000 upfront.

Fourthly, renters should be given extra rights when landlords sell up. There should be a requirement for tenants to be given first refusal to buy the home they are renting, should the landlord decide to sell it during a tenancy.

Finally, councils should be given the power to manage private rental property and offer longer tenancies. This would allow councils to develop, own and manage private sector rented homes, outside of housing revenue accounts, to improve the quality of homes in the sector, with the freedom to offer long-term tenancies. I call on the Government to work with private landlords, mortgage companies and freeholders to enable private landlords to offer longer tenancies. It is often the mortgage companies or the freeholders who are standing in the way of longer tenancies. This is a package that will make a real difference.

Neither I nor Caroline Pidgeon is claiming that these measures are the silver bullet that will solve London's housing problems, because the fundamental challenge is a lack of supply, particularly of affordable homes, and that problem is no closer to a solution, given that fewer than 5,000 affordable homes were built in London last year, the lowest figure since the current Mayor was first elected in 2008. However, we believe that these proposals will improve the lot of private renters, some of whom suffer in poorly insulated, damp, mouldy properties with the threat of a retaliatory eviction hanging over the heads every time they ask for a repair. This has to stop. I urge the House to support this Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered.

That Tom Brake, Norman Lamb, Greg Mulholland, John Pugh and Stephen Timms present the Bill.

Tom Brake accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 13 May, and to be printed (Bill 168).

TRADE UNION BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 3)

2.51 pm

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Trade Union Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Orders of 14 September 2015 (Trade Union Bill (Programme)) and 10 November 2015 (Trade Union Bill (Programme) (No. 2)):

Consideration of Lords Amendments

(1) Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after their commencement at today's sitting.

(2) The proceedings shall be taken in the order shown in the first column of the following Table.

(3) The proceedings shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the times specified in the second column of the Table.

Table	
Lords Amendments	Time for conclusion of proceedings
Nos. 2 and 17	90 minutes after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments
Nos. 1, 3 to 16 and 18 to 29	Three hours after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments

Subsequent stages

(4) Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

(5) The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—(*Nick Boles.*)

Trade Union Bill

Consideration of Lords amendments

After Clause 3

PROVISION FOR ELECTRONIC BALLOTING: REVIEW AND PILOTING SCHEME

2.51 pm

The Minister for Skills (Nick Boles): I beg to move Government amendment (a) to Lords amendment 2.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): With this we will consider the following:

Government amendment (b) to Lords amendment 2.

Lords amendment 17, and Government motion to disagree, and Government amendments (a) to (c) to words restored to the Bill.

Nick Boles: The measures in the Bill aim to modernise the relationship between trade unions and their members and strike a fairer balance between the rights of trade unions and the rights of people who rely on public services, by ensuring that strikes happen only when unions have secured a clear, positive and recent democratic mandate. Consideration in the House of Lords has made important changes to the Bill, the great majority of which the Government believe will improve the Bill. However, the first group of amendments deals with those issues on which the Government do not support the proposed changes.

The first group is about electronic balloting and facility time. We have reflected carefully, in the light of the strong views expressed in debates in this House and in the other place, and I will take each issue in turn. As I have said before, the Government have no objection in principle to electronic balloting. I have also said before, and I am happy to say it again at the Dispatch Box, that it is likely to be common in 20 years' time. We are seeking a degree of sensible caution on this matter.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister will remember our many conversations about this in Committee. He says that he is not opposed to electronic balloting in principle and he accepts that it might come in. We can see the Lords amendment before us and there are moves towards a pilot scheme. Electronic balloting is used by many organisations including the Law Society, many businesses and indeed the Conservative party for the purposes of the mayoral elections. Why not just do this now?

Nick Boles: I have greatly enjoyed debating the many detailed clauses of the Bill with the hon. Gentleman over a long period when he occupied a different post on the Opposition Front Bench, and if he will give me time, I will explain why I am not quite ready to rush to the nirvana that he describes.

We are seeking a degree of sensible caution to ensure that important votes—these are indeed statutory votes—are safe and secure, so I am not asking hon. Members today to reject the clause added to the Bill in the House of Lords on electronic balloting. However, I am asking for agreement to a small but important change to ensure that we proceed prudently on the basis of evidence as we take this important step.

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): The Minister will no doubt have seen the evidence from the Electoral Reform Society that the incidence of fraud in electronic balloting is no different from the incidence of fraud in postal balloting. In the light of that evidence, what is his objection?

Nick Boles: The hon. Gentleman will have to be a little patient, because I am going to come on to talk about evidence from around the world of some of the problems that other systems have encountered when trying to embrace electronic balloting too quickly and without adequate preparation.

I appreciate from previous debates on the Bill in this House that there are differences of opinion about whether electronic balloting is sufficiently safe and secure. Lord Kerslake said that he personally was convinced that the case for it had been made, and we have heard from others in recent minutes that they too are so convinced, but Lord Kerslake was good enough to say that he appreciated that others were not. I remind the House that the Open Rights Group gave evidence to the Speaker's Commission in which it neatly summed up the concerns over the security of online voting. It stated:

“Voting is a uniquely difficult question for computer science: the system must verify your eligibility; know whether you have already voted; and allow for audits and recounts. Yet it must always preserve your anonymity and privacy.”

That was the view of the Open Rights Group, and that is the view that we must investigate more carefully. Lord Kerslake explained that that was why his clause, added to the Bill in the other place, required that a review should be commissioned.

There have already been many reviews looking into this matter, such as those carried out by Electoral Reform Services, WebRoots Democracy and, of course, the Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy. They have made encouraging comments about a move to electronic ballots, but none has been able to provide assurance on managing the risks. While there is still this doubt, I can see merit in exploring the issues further. And of course the important difference is that this review will be specifically in the context of electronic ballots for industrial action. So, in accepting that there should be a review, we accept the spirit of the clause on electronic balloting. In fact, we accept virtually the entirety of the amendment made by the Lords on electronic balloting.

Andrew Gwynne: I understand the position that the Minister is setting out, but I am struggling to understand his logic. If he is saying that electronic balloting is neither secure nor anonymous, is he implying that when Conservative party members vote for a particular candidate online in an internal Tory party election, it is neither secure nor anonymous?

Nick Boles: With the greatest respect, I would point out to the hon. Gentleman that that is an internal election within an independent organisation. We are talking here about statutory elections, which are important because the public has a deep interest in their result and it is quite right that we should hold them to a higher standard than we do others.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): The Minister sounds almost guilty of double standards on this issue. He says that he has accepted the majority of the Lords amendments, but he has neglected to adopt any of

[*Wes Streeting*]

those components that require substantial action by the Government. What possible objection could he have to piloting an e-balloting scheme? I think he realises that he just does not have a reasonable argument against it.

Nick Boles: If Opposition Members will just give me a minute, they will be able to hear my argument. Then they can decide whether they think it is reasonable or not.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister give way?

Nick Boles: No, I am now going to satisfy Opposition Members by setting out my argument, after which I will be happy to give way if they want to comment on it. There is only one element in the amendment made by the House of Lords with which we cannot agree and that is the strategy for roll-out, which prejudices the outcome of the review and irrevocably commits the Secretary of State to press ahead with a strategy for the roll-out of electronic balloting, irrespective of the review's findings.

3 pm

The Opposition may not welcome it, but they will be interested to know that there are many examples of where electronic balloting has been tried, but found not to work, and even of where it has had to be rolled back. The Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy identified 14 countries that have tried internet voting for binding elections, including five countries—not only the UK, but Finland, the USA, the Netherlands and Spain—which either piloted or fully adopted electronic voting and then decided to discontinue its use.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I am interested to hear what the Minister says about that. The last Labour Government piloted e-voting, and the Electoral Commission report afterwards indicated that there was no evidence of fraud or other things, but what did for it was the scandal around postal voting in certain areas. There was no evidence in the report that e-voting was any more corrupt or inefficient than any other type of voting.

Nick Boles: If the hon. Gentleman is correct and if there is no problem, the review will conclude so and will report to Parliament that there is—

Mr Jones *rose*—

Nick Boles: No, I am not going to give way again; I am going to carry on with my argument. The review will report accordingly to the House.

The power to permit electronic balloting already exists in section 54 of the Employment Relations Act 2004, but we have not yet exercised it because we have not been convinced, and neither have any previous Government, including a Labour Government that held office for 13 years, that the system would ensure privacy, opportunity and minimise the risk of fraud and malpractice. There has been much positive progress in the way that technology can help to address such issues, which is reflected in the reports I have cited.

We have been clear that we will be willing to use the power when we are convinced that the concerns have been adequately addressed. The legislation is framed in a way that requires us first to be satisfied on such matters, and for good reason. That is why, instead of a strategy for roll-out, I am today seeking agreement to a statutory requirement for the Government to publish their response to the review, which would be laid before Parliament, making it readily accessible to hon. Members, who could ask questions and raise matters in the House in the usual way.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Before the Trade Union Bill reached the House of Lords, the Minister wrote a letter to ministerial colleagues that was leaked to the *Socialist Worker*, for which the Minister may have an explanation. Will he confirm that he will use secondary legislation to put e-balloting in place should the pilot be successful?

Nick Boles: Madam Deputy Speaker, I can assure you that my relations with the Socialist Workers Party or its newspaper are probably rather less good than the hon. Gentleman's, so it was not through my good offices that it got hold of any document—not that I accept that it did get hold of any document.

The hon. Gentleman asks a reasonable question, and I have made it clear that the Government have no objection in principle and that we expect statutory elections eventually to move towards online voting, but we will do that with trade union strike ballots when we are convinced that such voting is safe. That is why we want an independent review that will report to Parliament. I will not prejudge its outcome, because if I did, it would be slightly pointless to have the review in the first place.

Mr David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab) *rose*—

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab) *rose*—

Rachael Maskell *rose*—

Nick Boles: I am happy to give way and will do so first to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Anderson: The Minister said before that online voting was okay for the election of the Tory candidate for Mayor of London because the Conservative party is an independent organisation. I hope that he would accept that trade unions are also independent. Did the Tory party carry out a review into how secure the system was before it set up the discussions for having electronic voting for the Tory mayoral candidate?

Nick Boles: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman heard my previous answer and he must recognise that these are statutory elections. Internal elections for candidates in any party are not statutory. They might be subject to problems, but that is a problem for the organisation, not for the public. The public have a right to expect a higher standard in the consideration of statutory elections.

Stephen Doughty *rose*—

Nick Boles: I will not give way to the hon. Gentleman; he has had a go. I will give way to the hon. Members for Brent Central (Dawn Butler) and for York Central (Rachael Maskell), who have not yet had a go, but all

hon. Members are welcome to speak in this debate in their own right, so it would be right to make some progress.

Dawn Butler: I am grateful to the Minister for allowing me to speak. He says that it might be pointless to have a review and all the other various stages, and I agree with him. A review of the technology is pointless, because it already exists. It has already been mentioned that the Conservative party has used the technology and, as a previous programmer, I can tell the Minister that it already exists and is secure. It has been used not only in various businesses and independent organisations, such as the Conservative party, but in “The X Factor” and various other TV shows. The Minister does not need a report; he just needs to move on to the next stage.

Nick Boles: The hon. Lady is a fan of “The X Factor” and so are many of us, but she will recognise that, important though it is to the public, “The X Factor” is not a statutory election. While I am absolutely happy to acknowledge her expertise, I hope that she will acknowledge the evidence of the Open Rights Group. It is not a Tory front organisation—she can investigate it—but an independent specialist organisation that gave evidence only last year and said that there were specific issues to overcome. She will also have to explain to the review why it is that several countries have experimented with online voting and then reversed the decision because they found it to be unsafe. The review will allow us—

Rachael Maskell: Will the Minister give way?

Nick Boles: Of course. I did say that I would give way to the hon. Lady.

Rachael Maskell: Will the Minister be specific and say how electronic voting is less secure than postal voting, which has additional risks?

Nick Boles: No, I will not be specific, because we are going to set up an independent review involving people with real expertise in the matter. The hon. Lady will be welcome to give evidence to the review, which will produce a report that will be laid before Parliament. She can then interrogate the report and the Government’s response.

Mrs Flick Drummond (Portsmouth South) (Con): On the point being made by the Opposition about the Conservative party’s online voting, I found it impossible to get on to the site and was unable to vote for my candidate in the mayoral election. Did my hon. Friend experience the same issue?

Nick Boles: I did not have that issue, but that does show that there can be issues with online voting, as there can be with postal voting. While it is not a matter of enormous public interest, because it was not a statutory election, we would be very worried if a statutory election, such as a union strike ballot, was subject to the same level of problems.

Chris Stephens *rose*—

Nick Boles: Have I not given way to the hon. Gentleman already? I will give way one more time and then I will get on.

Chris Stephens: Is the Minister seriously suggesting that whoever is the Conservative party candidate for London Mayor is not a matter of interest to the public? I find his argument bizarre.

Nick Boles: I am quite happy to explain again that it is not a statutory election.

The review will allow us to consider again the case for e-balloting and ensure that we have assessed the latest technology. Taken together, the review and the Government’s response will enable the Secretary of State to make a properly informed and transparent decision about the risks of achieving safe, secure electronic balloting, and therefore whether such a system should be rolled out.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): The Minister has invited us to contribute to the review. I wonder whether he will accept electronic submissions or do we have to get our quills and parchment out?

Nick Boles: The hon. Lady makes a good point—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) suggests that submissions should be inscribed on vellum, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office has a particular enthusiasm for that means of communication, but I prefer the more modern kind, so I suggest that an online submission—perhaps even by WhatsApp—might be appropriate.

Turning to the reserve power to cap facility time, the Government do not agree with the Lords amendment.

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): As my hon. Friend knows, I am in favour of electronic voting, but the route that he is taking is the correct one. The one real fear out there, which can be put paid to right now, is that this approach is designed simply to delay the onset of online voting. Will he tell the House that, when the Minister receives the report, it will be dealt with with appropriate dispatch?

Nick Boles: I thank my right hon. Friend for his contribution on this and other important matters. He has made a significant contribution to the improvement of this Bill. On his particular question, the amendment that we propose agrees with the noble Lords that this review should be commissioned within six months and then reported to Parliament. I have made it clear that we have no objection in principle to e-balloting. If the review suggests that it is safe to embrace, we will proceed with it. I think he will have noted that the amendment specifically suggests that we should be able to introduce pilots. One issue with the existing provisions is that it might not be possible to do a pilot without going for a full application. Such pilots might well be an appropriate phase after the review has been completed.

Let me return now to facility time and the facility time cap. The Government do not agree with the Lords amendment and, in consequence, I am moving amendment 17, which brings back the reserve cap, but with safeguards that respond to the concerns that were expressed in our debates and that led to the deletion of the clause in the other place and were the subject of quite forensic inquisition in both Houses.

[Nick Boles]

Together with the publication requirements, it is my view that a reserve power to cap facility time to a reasonable level delivers our manifesto commitment to “tighten the rules around taxpayer-funded paid facility time for union representatives.”

I shall reiterate what I said when this House was previously considering the Bill. We are not seeking to ban facility time. That has never been our intention. Our strong preference is that transparency alone should be enough to change practices in the public sector, with employers voluntarily reducing their costs where they are found to be spending more on facility time than is reasonable.

Chris Stephens: The Minister is being very generous. In the aforementioned leaked memo to which I referred earlier, there was an indication that there would be concessions and discussions with the devolved Administrations in relation to facility time. Will he confirm whether consultations have taken place with the devolved Administrations, or whether it is his intention to dictate to the devolved Administrations what the facility time should be for their own workforce?

Nick Boles: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand that I never comment on articles in the *Socialist Worker*. He will also understand that we have regular conversations with Ministers in the devolved Administrations, but all of the matters addressed in this Bill are reserved matters. It is a matter not of dictating, but of this Government fulfilling their duty to legislate on the matters for which we have exclusive responsibility.

Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Specifically on the point about devolved powers, is it not the case that in that letter the Minister received legal advice saying that there is a very weak case for enforcing those powers on the Welsh Government?

Nick Boles: The hon. Lady, who made an admirable and, for me, rather challenging contribution to our deliberations in Committee, knows that we do not comment on legal advice.

If publication, and the proper monitoring and recording that it necessitates, do not achieve the aim of bringing excessive spending on facility time back down to a reasonable level, it will be necessary to consider the imposition of a cap. A reserve power is very much a power of last resort.

Mr Anderson *rose*—

Nick Boles: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I wish to explain what we are now proposing, because it is a little different from what we proposed previously. I will give way to him before I conclude on the facility time cap.

A reserve power is very much a power of last resort. Although our amendment 17 brings back the reserve power, we are not simply replicating the provision that this House considered previously and that was deleted from the Bill in the other place. The amendment before the House today incorporates a number of safeguards that will trigger how and when the reserve power to cap facility time would be exercised. We have listened to the

concerns of Members of this House and the other place and have sought to address those concerns in the amendment.

3.15 pm

The published data under the facility time publication requirements in this Bill will provide valuable information about levels of spending across the public sector and inform decisions about what should be regarded as a reasonable level of spend on facility time, taking into account the needs of the relevant sector as well as the particular circumstances of individual employers within the sector.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con) *rose*—

Nick Boles: Let me finish this bit, because I am trying to explain what is different about what we doing. I will then be very happy to give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr Anderson: And me.

Nick Boles: Of course.

It is our intention that exercise of the reserve power will not even be considered before there are at least two years of data from the bodies subject to the publication requirement. Following the publication of the second year's data, should a particular employer's facility time be a cause for concern, having regard to all relevant factors, the Minister will send and publish a letter to the employer drawing attention to the concerns. The employer will have the opportunity to set out the reasons for the level of facility time. They will then have at least a further year from the date the Minister notifies it of concerns to make progress on its facility time levels. Nothing will be done until a third year's data have been published. Only then will the Minister be at liberty to exercise the reserve power and make regulations to cap facility time for those employers.

Mr Anderson: A person who enjoys facility time will spend a lot of that time trying to manage huge reorganisations and redundancies, most of which are the responsibility of the Minister's former Government. Can he explain what he means when he says things such as “excessive” and “reasonable”? Over the past four years, Gateshead council has lost 48% of its budget and 2,000 people have been made redundant. People have been engaged day and night, trying to redeploy and retrain people. How on earth is a Minister in Whitehall going to be able to pull all that together and say, “Well, that works for them, but it does not work for others.”? It is nonsense.

Nick Boles: The hon. Gentleman is right. What is reasonable can vary according to the organisation and the situation of that organisation, which is why we want to collect two years of data before we establish what seems to be a reasonable level by looking at comparable organisations. I will come on to the fact that we will also be creating the possibility of removing the cap from an organisation if it has a particular situation, such as the one that he describes, that would justify a much higher level of spending on the different kinds of facility time.

Alec Shelbrooke: What my hon. Friend is trying to make explicit is that, across the trade union movement there are shop stewards who do an excellent job, day in, day out, but there are some situations where the facility time is taken advantage of. One merely has to think of

Grangemouth. Can he be clear on this? He has struck the right balance in the way that he looks at things, but at no time has he said that all shop stewards are swinging the lead or that a lot of valuable work goes on.

Nick Boles: I am very happy to confirm and applaud what my hon. Friend said. In truth, I would be as worried if an organisation was declaring no spending on facility time as if it was declaring excessive spending on facility time. Helping people with training or with health and safety issues is not just appropriate, but vital in a well-run organisation. He will recognise, as will Members across the House, that there have been agencies and Departments—we have had direct dealings of this within the civil service—that were allowing an abuse of the system. We want to restore confidence in the system by making it clear that we need transparency. If there is still excessive behaviour, we will introduce a cap.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): In order to try to help the House understand why you feel that there is a need for this cap on facility time, could you tell the House what percentage of public sector employers excessively grant facility time and how many of them would this cap be beneficial in stopping?

Nick Boles: I am not at all sure, Madam Deputy Speaker, whether you feel that there is a need for a cap, but I think the hon. Gentleman was referring to me.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs Eleanor Laing): Order. Let us clear that up. The hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) will get used to the fact that if one says “you”, that means me. If one says “the hon. Gentleman”, that means the Minister.

Nick Boles: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thought that for your sake I should clarify that.

The hon. Gentleman asks a very reasonable question, but I hope he understands that until we have applied the transparency clause, we do not know the current level of spending across the broader public sector, so we cannot judge which organisations are spending in excess.

Wes Streeting *rose*—

Nick Boles: No, I will finish. We know that when we introduced a similar provision in the civil service, we found that some organisations were acting perfectly responsibly and others were allowing an abuse of the system, hence we introduced a cap in the civil service. That has saved the taxpayer money and has not in any way undermined the proper fulfilment of responsibilities by trade union representatives. I shall now make some progress—

Stephen Doughty *rose*—

Nick Boles: Well, okay. I have such a soft spot for the hon. Gentleman.

Stephen Doughty: The Minister is indulgent. I appreciate his generosity. Given some of the rhetoric from some of his ministerial colleagues and others about the matter, does he recognise that people might have a reasonable suspicion that even after collecting the data, the Government might seek to use these powers perniciously, going after

particular groups whose practices they are not happy with, rather than using the powers in the way that he describes? Does he accept that that is a reasonable suspicion?

Nick Boles: I do not. After all, I am the Minister and I will be in charge of this until the Prime Minister decides otherwise. The hon. Gentleman has had enough time to judge whether or not I am sincere. He will also note that in the amended proposals that we are putting forward today, there have to be three years’ data before we can introduce a cap, and that where there is some concern about the level of spending we have to allow the organisation an opportunity to explain why that level of spending is appropriate. That responds in part to what the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr Anderson) said. Partly through the good offices of hon. Members in this House and in the other place, there are now greater safeguards to ensure that there can be no abuses.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I am a bit confused about what the cost will be of a Minister or civil servants sitting down and sifting through mountains of data from every council and every public body covered by the provision to determine whether facility time has been abused, when from his own lips the Minister has just admitted that he does not know whether there has been any abuse. If there is not a problem, why are we bringing in this expensive system that is impossible to regulate?

Nick Boles: I do not accept that it will be expensive. Although there are no data because the transparency clauses have not yet been applied, I point the hon. Gentleman to estimates that the public sector as a whole spends on average 0.14% of its total pay bill on facility time, the civil service spends 0.07%—half of that—and the private sector spends 0.04%. I can promise him that if he multiplies the pay bill of the public sector by that percentage, he will arrive at a very large figure indeed, and a great deal more than the cost of implementing these clauses.

Wes Streeting *rose*—

Nick Boles: I have been generous and I will be generous again, but I shall try to make some progress.

As I indicated, the amendment provides that the cap may be disapplied for as long as necessary and to the extent necessary for individual employers. This would enable a temporary lifting of the cap for one or more specific employers, and we propose to use it in circumstances where the employer and Ministers consider it necessary. We envisage that should a particular employer experience a need for more facility time, perhaps during a period of change or following a particular incident, Ministers can allow this so that facility time can be increased to respond to the circumstance. The reserve power that this amendment would deliver is considerably improved from the version that was deleted in the other place, and I urge the House to support it. I commend the amendments to the House.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I want to make it clear right at the outset that we remain opposed to this Bill. Despite some of the changes that it has undergone

[Kevin Brennan]

in another place, it remains a dreadful, mean-spirited, partisan, petty piece of legislation. Having got that off my chest, I recognise that Members in another place have made a valiant attempt to make a silk purse out of this particularly malformed sow's ear, so that after today it may end up being a slightly less ugly sow's ear than it was, but it will remain a malodorous porcine lug, for all their lordships' noble efforts.

Many of the changes that peers made are welcome if we consider the crudeness of the Bill in its original form. On the first group of Lords amendments and the Government's response to them, Lords amendment 2 was passed in the other place by 320 votes to 181, requiring the Government to commission a review of electronic voting in industrial action ballots within six months of Royal Assent. After the review, amendment 2 would require the Government to publish a strategy for rolling out electronic voting.

Government amendment (a) would revise Lords amendment 2 so that Ministers are required only to publish a response to the review, but need not take further action to actually introduce e-balloting. The Government have consistently resisted e-balloting on the grounds that they still had concerns about the safety of electronic voting, despite the fact, as many hon. Members have pointed out, that the Conservative party used electronic ballots for the selection of its London mayoral candidate, although I suppose the Conservatives may now be regretting that, given the poor performance of the candidate they selected using that method. Perhaps that explains the Government's concern.

It is clear that the Government's real objection to e-balloting and, indeed, to workplace balloting, which we argued for unsuccessfully in this House and in the other place, has been that they do not want high turnouts because their new threshold barriers could be more easily reached if more people were more easily able to vote.

Not only will all ballots for industrial action require a minimum 50% turnout under the Bill, but those working in the loosely defined "important public services group" will face an additional hurdle of needing a 40% yes vote from all those eligible to vote. That means that these thresholds place higher requirements on those industrial action ballots than on any other democratic process within the UK. For example, the 50% turnout threshold was not reached for the last London Mayoral election or most local government and devolved elections.

The Government have agreed that Ministers should be required to commission an independent review of the use of e-ballots for industrial action within six months of Royal Assent. They have agreed that it will be possible to run pilots as part of that review, as the Minister said, but the Government are proposing that after the review Ministers would need to publish a response, but not necessarily to take any further action. There would be no requirement to publish a strategy for rolling out electronic voting.

Andrew Gwynne: Is there not a slight concern that this is just a delaying tactic by the Government, who do not intend to introduce these measures? Given that in 2016 many people are quite used to banking online,

registering to vote online and submitting their tax returns online, do not questions about security and anonymity fall by the wayside?

3.30 pm

Kevin Brennan: I know the Minister, and I take him at his word when he says that that is not his intention and that this is not a delaying tactic. However, to coin a phrase, he is a here today, gone tomorrow Minister—I say that from experience, as a former Minister—and somebody else may well occupy his place in the future. That person may not have the good intentions the Minister has outlined to the House today, and we must legislate for that possibility, rather than assume that somebody with good will is going to occupy his seat in perpetuity.

The Government propose that they would not have to publish a strategy after the review. Let me be clear: their amendment is not necessary. I accept that they have moved a long way in accepting the review, the pilots, the requirement to lay a report before Parliament, the need to consult experts and to get advice and recommendations, and the need to commission a report within six months of passing the Act. Those changes are significant, and they go part of the way towards achieving what we have argued for right from the start, as well as achieving most of what was agreed in the other place with cross-Bench support.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): As someone who, along with other colleagues, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), considers that electronic balloting is probably the right way to go, may I ask whether the hon. Gentleman welcomes the progress the Minister and the Government have made in that direction? I believe that the Minister, and indeed any future Minister, although I hope this Minister remains in his place for a long time, will ensure that the evidence is looked at and that, provided it shows that electronic balloting is the right way to go, which I very much hope it does, we will go forward with it.

Kevin Brennan: Obviously I cannot comment on how long the Minister will remain in his post—we will see what happens in the forthcoming reshuffle. However, I did recognise the movement the Government have made, although I made it clear that their amendment to their lordships' amendment is unnecessary and that the whole matter could have been dealt with in a much more straightforward manner. However, we are where we are, having received these amendments from the Lords, and those are all that we can discuss today.

Ultimately, it is inconceivable that any Minister, having received a report on how e-balloting could be introduced safely, would then deny trade union members the opportunity to participate in a ballot using modern electronic communications. The only possible reason for Ministers at that future point to reject an expert report outlining the appropriate way to introduce modern technology into ballots and to offer the opportunity for easier participation in a democratic vote would be a desire to suppress turnout.

Mr David Davis: The hon. Gentleman comes right to the point. He does not have to rely on the good will of this Minister, who I am sure will be in the Cabinet in six months. The reason I asked the Minister to outline

at the Dispatch Box the Government's intent on receipt of the report was that, if another Minister were ever tempted not to follow the explicit policy line we have now, the hon. Gentleman and I could hold that Minister to account in this Chamber.

Kevin Brennan: I do not know whether future Prime Minister Gove will appoint the Minister to the Cabinet—we shall have to wait and see—but the right hon. Gentleman is exactly right. That is why the Government's amendment is unnecessary and dilutes the effect of accepting the rest of this Lords amendment. However, I am seeking to put on record the fact that, should any future Minister take another path, having had a clear recommendation in the report, one could only interpret their intentions as less than honourable.

Nick Boles: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Could you advise me whether it is in order for the House to spend quite so much time talking about my career prospects, because I do not feel that that is really helping?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): I am not sure whether that is good or bad for the House.

Kevin Brennan: I am happy to leave the Minister alone for the rest of the debate, apart from on the issues we are discussing.

If any Minister did take the path I described, there would obviously be considerable anger and opposition from not just the Labour party but other parties and Members of the other place, who worked so hard to craft this amendment on electronic balloting. In practice, I think the momentum for e-balloting will be unstoppable if the report is published and comes to the conclusions we think it will. However, we prefer the Lords amendment, and we will seek to keep it in the Bill this afternoon.

Let me move on to the other part of this group of amendments, which includes Lords amendment 17, on facility time, the Government's motion to disagree with it, and their proposed additions to clause 13—should the House decide to reinstate it by voting to disagree with the Lords. The Lords passed amendment 17 by 248 votes to 160, removing Ministers' power to impose a cap on union facilities by deleting clause 13. The Government have tabled a motion to disagree with Lords amendment 17 so that they can restore their ability to impose a cap on facilities. They have proposed a further amendment to amend the reinstated clause in line with assurances they gave in the Lords, providing that no cap could be imposed for the first three years after the new reporting requirements on facilities came into force.

Before Ministers could impose a cap they would need to review the published data on facilities, the cost of facilities for the relevant employer, the nature of the services run by the public authority, any particular factors relevant to the employer, and other related matters. They would also need to consider the type of organisation and any relevant factors—for example, if the organisation was facing a major restructure. If the Minister had concerns about the level of facilities in a particular public authority, under the Government's proposed provisions he would need to write to the employer expressing those concerns.

Mr Kevan Jones: What is having to review all this information going to cost the taxpayer? The Minister skated over that. Surely if it is to be done thoroughly and effectively it will come at great cost to the taxpayer.

Kevin Brennan: Indeed. Given that the Government's stated purpose in doing this is to look after the interests of the taxpayer, it is ironic that what my hon. Friend says is exactly the case.

As I said, we are dealing with what we have got back from the Lords. We would not have wished this provision to remain in the Bill at all. We support the Lords amendment to remove it from the Bill completely, and I am setting out to the House the consequences of not doing so.

The original clause 13 included a reserve power for Ministers to introduce regulations imposing an arbitrary cap on the amount of time that union reps in the public sector can spend in the workplace improving health and safety standards, promoting learning and training opportunities, consulting on redundancies or on TUPE transfers, negotiating better pay and conditions, and even representing members in grievances and disciplinary hearings. We agree with the Lords that the clause on facility time should have been removed from the Bill altogether. It is an unnecessary interference in the conduct of good industrial relations. It also goes against the Government's professed desire to support devolution, as other hon. Members have pointed out, including the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) and my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Cardiff Central (Jo Stevens). As the Minister will know, it is being resisted by the devolved Administrations.

We acknowledge, however, that significant advances have been made in Government amendment (a). We support the Lords and want this clause removed from the Bill, but if the House decides not to do so, Government amendment (a) will at least make some improvement to a proposal that should never have appeared in the first place.

Alec Shelbrooke: I should like to speak to amendment (a) to Lords amendment 2. I hope my comments are met in the spirit in which I hope to make them.

I want to outline a frustration that I expressed on Second Reading when I spoke about turnout thresholds within the private sector. In my remarks, I made it clear that trade unions have a very important part to play in the workplace, whether on health and safety, bullying, contract renegotiations regarding a change in working practices or funding, or many such issues. It is wrong to be seen not to appreciate the work that trade unions do. Indeed, as I said earlier, many shop stewards in this country do an outstanding job. I had experience of that when I was a member of Unite, with some excellent shop stewards who worked very well.

I also said on Second Reading that I was not keen on turnout thresholds in the private sector, because, as I outlined, the threshold to go on strike in the private sector is much higher than in the public sector. Whatever the rights and wrongs of it may be, when people go on strike in the public sector, there will generally always be a job to go back to because it is being funded largely by Government through taxation, whereas in the private sector the same threshold cannot be guaranteed, especially in smaller business. If a workforce withdraws its labour,

[Alec Shelbrooke]

it has gone through a much higher threshold, in its own mind, in perhaps putting at risk the ongoing viability of the company. Therefore, taking strike action in those circumstances means, first, that the conditions that have led to that strike must be very bad, and, secondly, that there has been a complete breakdown of relations between the shop stewards and the owners of those companies.

On Second Reading, I cited Grunwick in the 1970s. I repeat that I do not support the Conservative party's attempts in the 1970s to break the strike in that company, run by George Ward, because people were working in appalling conditions. Strike action was taken to try to improve conditions that would be unacceptable today. As I said previously, I applaud the last Labour Government for introducing a legal requirement to allow a trade union to operate in the workplace if that is the wish of members of staff.

I therefore hope hon. Members understand my regret that movement was not made on turnout thresholds in the private sector. The flip side of that is that I believe that it is right to have a turnout threshold in the public sector.

Mr Kevan Jones: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that many trade unions have thresholds in their rule books to ensure that a certain percentage of members must vote? When I was a full-time official, my union, the GMB, had a threshold. It is therefore not the case that the threshold is uniform across all unions or businesses.

Alec Shelbrooke: I accept that, but as the hon. Gentleman says, the threshold is not uniform, and in the public sector it is right to have a threshold for taking action when there is a lot of employment protection in terms of having jobs to go back to.

Although I have regrets about the threshold for the private sector, I believe that electronic balloting will lead to higher turnouts and will meet strike thresholds, and as long as the system is secure and can be seen to be genuine, it is the right thing to do. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to apply the policy as quickly as possible because that will enable the private sector to meet the thresholds more easily than perhaps it can now.

There is a balance to be struck. There needs to be some control on those in the public sector who cause great disruption to people who work in the private sector who may not enjoy the terms and conditions that they do. I unreservedly support thresholds in the public sector, but I do not have the same regard for them in the private sector. Hon. Members can refer back to *Hansard* and my comments on Second Reading, which explain my views further.

The Government's approach to electronic balloting is right. When it can be proved to be safe and reliable, it should be introduced because I believe the Bill will have the unintended consequence of having a bigger effect on union members in the private sector than on union members in the public sector.

Chris Stephens: I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and my trade union activity in the past 20 years.

In the past few days in the media, we have seen the performance of somersaults of Olympian proportions, and I commend Ministers for that. Having voted down sensible amendments in Committee and on Third Reading to allow alternative methods of voting in industrial action ballots, Ministers found themselves so out of step on the work and organisation of trade unions that even arch-Thatcherites such as Lord Michael Forsyth are friends of the workers by comparison. If I were a member of the Conservative party, I would be very worried about that.

I welcome this minor change. As we have argued previously, if e-balloting is good enough for the Conservative party to elect its candidate for London Mayor, surely it is good enough for trade unions to use when making their choices. As Lord Cormack said in the other place, "I cannot for the life of me understand why the Government are arguing against a system that the Conservative Party felt was good enough for the selection of a candidate for London Mayor"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 March 2016; Vol. 769, c. 1861.]

3.45 pm

I listened carefully to the reasons the Minister gave for the decision to let the Conservative party use that system, but not the trade unions. I gently say to him that if a vote was taken on who out of the trade unions and the current Mayor of London had disrupted the public's lives more, I do not think that the answer would be what the Government would hope.

Online balloting is more accessible and inclusive. We firmly believe that access to electronic balloting will enhance engagement and participation, as more people use electronic devices to communicate every day.

Frankly, we cannot fathom the suggestion that online balloting is unsafe and insecure. The hon. Member for Portsmouth South (Mrs Drummond) said that she had difficulty accessing the ballot. I wanted to ask her a number of questions. Did the email with the accompanying link to the ballot paper say, "If you press this link, the website may be unsafe and insecure"? Perhaps it said, "Clicking this link may lead to a fraudulent act." What does that mean for the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith)? Is he unsafe and insecure—some Government Members are nodding their heads—or is it only Conservative party members who have access to safe and secure emails? Do Conservative party members have more privileges than an American Express gold card offers? That is what the trade union movement and members are asking themselves. Why is there one rule for them and another for the rest of us?

The difficulty with postal balloting—the Minister has been pressed on this before—is that the number of post boxes across the UK has reduced by 17% in the past 10 years, so it is more difficult for people to participate in a postal ballot.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Given the increase in postal charges in recent years, does my hon. Friend agree that it also costs more to do postal balloting?

Chris Stephens: Yes, I agree. I also take the view that postal balloting prolongs the length of a dispute because of the time it takes to conduct such a ballot. Electronic balloting allows for greater flexibility and efficiency.

Like the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), we are disappointed that the pilot will not extend to workplace balloting as a secure option, because that would increase democracy in the workplace. The TUC

has previously argued that there is no evidence that workers feel intimidated into voting a particular way when ballots take place in the workplace, as has been argued by the Government.

Although the Government have accepted the need to commission an independent review on the use of e-ballots for industrial action, their amendment (a) effectively means that Ministers would only have to publish a response to the review. They would, therefore, not be obligated to introduce a strategy to roll out electronic voting. That is simply unacceptable.

Lords amendment 2 is actually very moderate. The question is whether the Government's response is good enough or whether it weakens the intent behind the Lords amendment. Having listened carefully to the Minister, we can only conclude that Government amendment (a) does weaken the other place's intention.

The Government propose to revise the Lords amendment in such a way that Ministers would be required only to publish a response, but they would not need to take any action. That underlines what the Government intend to do after the e-balloting review. They intend to do nothing: there will be no strategy on how to proceed and, therefore, no actual commitment to allowing electronic balloting in the future. That is absurd. If the Government were truly intent on modernising the law, they would allow for electronic balloting and secure workplace balloting. I would be interested in the Minister's response to that. Our view is clear. Electronic balloting will modernise the law, promoting democracy and inclusion.

We have always been clear that the clause on facility time is completely unnecessary and unwanted. Having such a clause in the Bill signals intent: the Government's intent to interfere with the facility time arrangements—the basic industrial relations arrangements—not only of devolved Administrations but of local authorities across the United Kingdom. As Lord Kerslake put it in the other place,

“The Government are saying that the costs should be transparently known and proportionate to the benefits...However, this is fully secured...through Clause 12. There is no need for the reserve powers contained in Clause 13.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 March 2016; Vol. 769, c. 1905.]

He further stated:

“If, however, the public body is a local authority, it has its own democratic mandate and is answerable to its own electorate for the cost. Given the immense financial pressures now on local authorities, do we really think that they are incapable of making this judgment?”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 March 2016; Vol. 769, c. 1906.]

Although we acknowledge that some amendments have been made by the Government, that is simply not good enough. Any attempt by the UK Government to instruct devolved institutions on how to treat their workers should be robustly resisted. Facility time allows union representatives to spend time in the workplace improving the safety and health of their workers. Representatives also promote training opportunities and negotiate better pay, terms and conditions for employers, among many other roles and responsibilities. Limiting the ability of unions to play such a role in our public sector will have a damaging impact on public sector workers across the United Kingdom.

Trade unions are key social partners, which play an important role in sustaining effective democracy in society, particularly in the workplace. The existence of good employment practices is a key contributor to

economic competitiveness and social justice. In Scotland, the SNP Government have taken a different approach. We have taken a modern and progressive approach to industrial relations and believe that trade unions are at the heart of achieving fair work. The UK Government should work with trade unions in a social partnership approach rather than launching yet more attacks against them.

Industrial relations mechanisms should be agreed at a devolved or local level. It beggars belief that the UK Government do not believe that a legislative consent motion is required for a UK Minister to dictate policy in these areas. The detail of much of the Bill is set out in regulations, and there will be no formal opportunity for the Scottish Government or the Welsh Government to influence such regulations. Today, we need a commitment from the UK Government that the rights of workers across the UK will not be restricted by the imposition of facility time.

In Committee, the hon. Member for Cardiff South and Penarth (Stephen Doughty) asked the Minister whether the Health Secretary would

“make regulations that affect facility time in the health services of Scotland and Wales, which are wholly devolved and under the control of Health Ministers in those countries”.

The Minister replied, “Yes,” but stressed that

“health policy and the management of the NHS in those countries will remain...in the control of the Governments” —[*Official Report, Trade Union Public Bill Committee*, 22 October 2015; c. 347.]

He was referring to the Governments of the devolved Administrations. I said at the time:

“Having only just debated Evel last week, it seems that the UK Government now want to dictate to devolved administrations”.

On 2 February, the Minister said that the Government would not change the proposals on facility time and check-off provisions in the Bill. However, the infamous letter referred to earlier of 26 January—the letter was leaked by the *Socialist Worker* newspaper and published widely in other media outlets—contained a number of concessions that the Government proposed to make to the Bill in the House of Lords. Those concessions included giving devolved Administrations the right to maintain facility time and check-off arrangements. It would be helpful if the Minister confirmed today that devolved Administrations will maintain that control over facility time. The SNP will continue to push to derail any attempt by the UK Government to dictate to Scotland and other devolved Administrations how they should treat their public sector workers.

Mr Kevan Jones: First, I declare an interest as a member of the GMB. My wife also works for a trade union.

We often hear the cry from Conservative Members that the turnout in union ballots is not high enough. We have before us a mechanism that would at least assist with that, by getting more people to participate in e-balloting. I have seen some pretty poor excuses for statements, but today's statement about why we cannot introduce e-balloting for trade union ballots must win the prize for the poorest argument.

This Government pride themselves on wanting to be an e-Government on everything from driving licences to the new universal credit, which can only be accessed

[Mr Kevan Jones]

online. The Minister said the Government need to be convinced that e-balloting would be secure, but in response to numerous interventions from Labour Members, he did not articulate the reasons why he thought the process was in any way insecure. I would respect his position more if he came up with reasons and said what the problems are. The idea of a review is clearly the classic civil service “kick it into the long grass” approach.

Nick Boles: I do not want to take up time because lots of Members want to speak, but may I draw the hon. Gentleman’s attention to elections conducted in the Philippines? Interestingly, a company called Smartmatic—chaired by a former Labour Minister, his colleague Lord Malloch-Brown—was put in charge of conducting online voting for the entire population of the Philippines. There was a hack, in which the identity data of 70 million people were stolen, and a report said that every registered voter’s data were open to abuse.

Mr Jones: I know this Government love things foreign, but may I tell the Minister, with great respect, that he need not go very far to find examples of where e-voting has worked and there have not been any problems? I am referring to the pilots that took place in 2004, including in my constituency and others in the north-east, after which the Electoral Commission’s report found no problems with e-voting. He will obviously want to go on a fact-finding trip to the Philippines to look at this—I am sure we would all welcome his going there—but the fact is that he just needs to look at has happened in this country.

I must say that the Minister put up the very flimsy defence to the question, “If it’s all right for the Conservative party, why is it not all right for the trade union movement?” I would have respected his position if he had come up with concrete reasons why he thought electronic—*[Interruption.]* Well, he cites the Philippines, but has he actually looked at the Electoral Commission’s report on e-voting in 2004? It quite clearly stated that there was no issue of fraud or any risk to security. The fact that the Government then got cold feet about what I must say was a rather hysterical campaign against postal voting is neither here nor there.

Andrew Gwynne: That has been said not just by the Electoral Commission, but by the Electoral Reform Society, which is obviously expert in e-voting. It has certainly conducted a number of internal elections for the Labour party using e-voting, and it would be quite capable of running similar elections for the trade union movement.

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. The Minister backed himself into a corner by saying that such votes were so important that they could not be done electronically. Let us look, for example, at foundation trusts, which elect their governors by electronic voting and are quite happy that such a system is secure. The Minister may think that that is not very important, but my constituents certainly think that choosing those who run their local hospital and have a lot of powers in my area is a pretty important decision.

My hon. Friend is right that electronic voting is used by many organisations, including private companies and charities, to consult their members. Organisations such as the Electoral Reform Society, which are used by

many bodies to conduct ballots, whether in electronic or postal form, not only have a track record of impartiality and strict adherence, but are respected not just in this country but internationally—the Minister is interested in international comparisons—so it is pretty pathetic to say we need more evidence.

The other weakness in the Government’s argument is that I am not convinced that, once they have had this so-called review, they will actually implement the proposal. The proposal came from the trade unions, and I congratulate the general secretaries and others who have backed it. It would be a move forward by improving access to voting for trade union members and by improving the situation.

4 pm

I turn briefly to the facility time cap. This one is remarkable. The Minister quite clearly stated that he did not know what the abuse was. If he does not know what it is, why is he trying to fix it? We all know why—it is a way of attacking the trade unions. I will give him a chance to say this, but he has not demonstrated what the cap system they have come up with will cost. It will mean sifting through all the various organisations and then going into detail, because those organisations will individually have to justify why they need facility time. It is a bit of a dog’s breakfast.

I agree with what the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) said about devolution. This Bill is another example of this Government saying that they are committed to devolution and to giving decisions to local authorities, but then doing exactly the opposite and dictating to local authorities what they should and should not do. With democratically accountable organisations, these things should be up to the electorates to decide.

There is another important issue that the Minister did not touch on. It is all right to argue about whether people can use facility time, but, in these so-called reports that are going to be done, no indication is going to be given of what money is saved by organisations such as local councils because they have good industrial relations and can ensure that, for example, when redundancies are needed that can be done efficiently.

Rachael Maskell: I wish to challenge the Government about the way in which they are handling the Lords amendments. They need to be clearly scrutinised to make sure that there is evidence behind what is said, as today is yet another example of a Government who are evidence light when putting their proposals before Parliament.

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Rachael Maskell: I will just quickly declare an interest first. I am a member of Unite and of the GMB, and was a Unite official for 17 years.

Rebecca Long Bailey: Does my hon. Friend agree that the evidential basis for the entire Bill has been non-existent throughout its passage through Parliament? Levels of industrial action are at historical lows in the UK. The days of work lost per year to strikes are down 90% since the 1980s.

Rachael Maskell: I thank my hon. Friend for making those points, and in particular, the point that levels of industrial action are at an all-time low. The industrial action that is occurring is in the public sector, where the Government are failing to negotiate with the trade unions, as we see today with the junior doctors. We have to examine why we are in the situation that we are in, but the evidence does not sit on the Government's side.

I have overseen many industrial action ballots, including paper ballots and electronic indicative ballots. There is greater engagement with electronic balloting. There is a reason for that—it is convenient. It is also far more accurate. We do not have the same issues as with paper ballots, because in electronic ballots it is very clear whether a vote is a yes or a no, whereas other forms of voting can be more ambiguous—we all experience that on election night. The intention of the person voting is very clear in an electronic ballot.

I put this challenge to the Minister. He has talked about his tour of the world, but we are talking about ballots here in the UK and an evidence base from the UK. That evidence is overwhelming; I would say that it shows 100% security of electronic balloting. Other countries may not have such rigour in their processes, so it is inappropriate to bring them into the equation. It was very telling that the Minister was unable to say why it was less safe to use electronic ballots than postal ballots because the evidence simply is not there.

It is also important that the Government acknowledge the temperature of industrial relations, in the public sector in particular. People express a view about decisions that have been made on terms and conditions because it is essential that the Government respond to that. High turnouts will help inform the Government in their decision-making processes. They are vital.

Like many of my colleagues, I point out that the Government depend on electronic means for matters that I would say are far more serious: tax returns, local government council tax collection, driving licence applications and registering to vote in a parliamentary election are all done electronically. We know that many—if not all—bank transfers of millions of pounds in which the Government engage are done electronically, so why does a vote of an independent trade union require even more vigour than processes that the Government already use? It does not add up, other than to say that the Government are using this as a political tool.

The Labour party does not have confidence in the Government's intentions for the process of review and roll-out for electronic balloting, and they should set out the timetable for that review. They say that it will start in six months, but when will it end, how long will it last, and how will it lead positively to a roll-out? We must start enabling trade unions now to provide and build up evidence from the pilots, which they can then run in parallel to prove that electronic voting is safe, accurate, and gets a clear result on the intentions of workers over a dispute.

There is no evidence behind what the Minister said about a facilities time cap. Let us consider the cost of administration, and the time taken up by ministerial hands to review what has been put together. How many personnel will be involved? Will a whole unit be set up for that three-year review? What about public sector employers who will also need to dedicate a lot of time to provide evidence for that review? That will be time that

they do not have because, as we know, they are already challenged with the cuts in local government, the NHS and elsewhere. How will they find the resources to supply the Minister with the information that he will then scrutinise for hours and hours, day and night, before assessing whether there have been excessive costs?

How will the Minister balance the minuscule cost of facility time with the amount of money that trade unions save through employers not going to employment tribunals or having such high sickness levels, and by so much value being added to organisations through increased productivity? I would like a response. How will the Minister assess the cost of health, safety, learning, and all the value that trade union reps bring?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. If we are all brief, nearly everybody will get in.

Tommy Sheppard: At every stage of this Bill I have asked what great calamity there is in our land's industrial relations that requires us to bring forward new primary legislation. I have yet to receive an answer, because of course there is none. This proposal is unique among many that we have considered in this House, because it is not a proposal to change public policy as a result of a problem that has been identified in society; the proposal before the House is motivated purely by the ideology of factions inside the Conservative party that have scores to settle, and whose antipathy towards the trade unions is manifest.

Some Conservative Members—they are not in their place at the moment—do not share that view, but overall that is where the centre of political gravity lies in the party of government. It is setting itself an attitude that will inform public policy on trade unions that is not shared by almost any other Government in Europe, or in the advanced capitalist world. Why are the Government going so far out on a limb to set themselves apart from everyone else? I accept that the Bill is now slightly less bad than it was on Second Reading, but we should be under no doubt that this is still very much an anti-trade union Bill.

This Bill is designed to curtail the expression, capacity and effectiveness of free trade unions in our country, and I must speculate about whether this is a genuine change of heart on behalf of the Government, or whether other factors may be involved in their consideration of how many fronts they can fight on at once. I wonder whether the proximity of 23 June and the referendum that will happen then have persuaded the Government that they should try not to engage in too large a conflict with the trade unions of this land, because they need their support in order to secure the Government's position of staying in the EU. That is why we all want to see the words written down in black and white, rather than accept the spoken words of Ministers from the Dispatch Box at this time.

I am glad to say that the situation is different in Scotland. As my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) explained, the Scottish Government are committed to working in partnership with the trade unions of Scotland to try to build our economy towards prosperity. We believe that trade unions are a vital component of civil society. If my party is

[Tommy Sheppard]

re-elected next week, we are pledged to do everything we can within the law to compromise the provisions of this Bill and to prevent them from frustrating the operation of free trade unions.

I shall engage with two further issues under consideration. The first is e-ballots. When the Government first announced their attitude to e-balloting, it sounded very much like an analogue Government in a digital age and that they were scared of the possibility of e-balloting. It is a matter of some irony, is it not, that it takes such a contemporary, modern and forward-looking institution as the House of Lords to try to persuade the Government of the error of their ways? I accept what the Minister said and I accept the Government's position that they have moved slightly on this issue. They can no longer defend the indefensible, which would be to say that they would not allow electronic balloting in a society where it is now commonplace and the norm for most of our citizens.

I see you looking at me, Mr Deputy Speaker, so I shall try to be as quick as I can. We are concerned when the Minister tries to give himself a get-out clause. If he had come up with an amendment saying that e-balloting would go ahead unless it could be shown that there were clear and demonstrable problems for its introduction and roll-out, we might have had more sympathy with him. What he is trying to achieve, however, is to give himself a get-out clause to prevent this from happening in the future. In a post-referendum situation, he might not be so well disposed to favouring the trade unions.

The Minister also provided what I think is a thin defence when he spoke about this being a statutory matter. It is statutory only in the sense that trade unions operate within the framework of legislation—but so do charities, private companies and indeed political parties. As I say, I find that to be a very thin defence.

Finally, I want to make a point about the cap on facility time. I have witnessed some bizarre debates in this Chamber, but frankly, this one borders on the surreal. We are being asked to pass legislation to try to prevent something that the Minister accepts we do not even know exists. This is fantasy legislation and fantasy law-making. I think we should reject the proposal for a facility time cap, support the Lords amendments, reject the Government's attempts to weaken them and, if we get the chance, finally vote against this anti-trade union legislation.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): I shall be brief. I welcome the Government's shift in position, particularly on check-off. I do not believe that check-off has any intrinsic costs to employers. For many public sector organisations, this is literally a check in a box on the payroll system. I view the shift of view as testament to the hard work of thousands of ordinary working people who take on additional responsibilities as shop stewards in their own time to support and protect their fellow workers' rights—a task for which they are often thanked neither by their co-workers nor their employers, yet they sometimes go above and beyond in their role.

Trade unions have a proud history of internationalism, and tomorrow is International Workers Memorial day—a day strongly supported by the TUC, the trade union movement as a whole, lawyers and the Health and Safety

Executive. I mention this because I shall not be able to attend tomorrow's events. I would like to pay tribute to Herbert Styles, the former Unite representative and Blue Star Fibres worker who religiously organises this event sequentially in Immingham, Grimsby and Cleethorpes.

This is a growing event, with greater attendance every year by families who are deeply grateful for the work Herbert puts in. Time is taken to remember those who have lost their lives in the course of their day-to-day work. I shall not be there to lay a wreath tomorrow, but Jonathan Spurr will be there in my place to do so. I would like to see this day recorded on our calendars. Can the Minister do anything to assist in recognising the role of trade unions and workers and those who lose their lives in the course of their day-to-day work. Can he help to get this recorded in calendars and diaries across the UK?

4.15 pm

Mr Anderson: This is supposed to be about modernising—that is the word the Minister used—ballots, but it is really about trying to limit people's ability to take strike action. Let us be honest: he knows that if electronic balloting was allowed, the turnouts would go up, way beyond the limits set out. The lights have come on in the Conservative party and it has realised that it has set itself a trap and walked into it. In a situation where the Government are trying to stop people being able to take industrial action by setting ludicrous limits, they have set a precedent and had a debate that says, "If you are genuine, let us have as many people participating as possible." Let us look at the history on this issue. In the 1980s, the Tory Government tried to control the right of people to take legitimate industrial action under the law and were told, "If you do away with workforce ballots, you will reduce the turnout." The facts and figures have proved that for more than 30 years; the average turnout in workplace ballots was 80% but now if you get 40% you are doing well.

The proposals on facility time show the real ignorance of the Conservative party, tied to its arrogance; it just does not know what goes on in the workplace. Let me give two examples. In 1986, I spent every day for a fortnight visiting a man in hospital, 30 miles away from his workplace. He had been buried under 50 tonnes of coal and ultimately died, and we did not take evidence from him; we took what was used in a coroner's case. Five years later, I was working for Newcastle City Council, encouraging home careworkers who had worked themselves into an early grave. I was saying, "Look, it is really in your interests to leave work on ill-health retirement agreements." They would not talk to personnel officers because they were frightened of that sort of authority figure, but as a local trade union representative I was able to convince them it was the right thing for them to do and for the authority to do. We saved having to give people compulsory redundancy and we were helping to manage the system. Under what is being proposed now, the likes of me will no longer be there. There will be some clerk filling in forms to send down to London for a clerk there, and there will be thousands of these things. This really has to be stopped. It is nonsense and it should be thrown out.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): My hon. Friend and I know, as does anybody who has been involved in these things, that for the past 50 or 60 years

every Tory Government manifesto has had a clause attacking the trade unions. He referred to facility time, and the proposal shows how inexperienced Ministers are on industrial relations. Any major employer welcomes facility time as it saves them a lot of money in the end.

Mr Anderson: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about that. If instead of talking to the TaxPayers Alliance to get information, the Government had spoken to any reasonable employer in this country or any trade union that deals day in, day out with this, they would have got a picture of the real story, not just some made-up attack on the trade union movement, which is what this is really all about.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): I realise that time is short, so I shall be brief. Welcome as it is that the Government have been forced into a series of embarrassing U-turns, my party, which does not receive funding from the trade union movement, does not regard the Bill as a sensible attempt to look at some of the issues relating to party funding. Clearly, that should be done in the round and fairly, including looking at trade union funding, and we would support such an approach. This always set out to be a cynical, politically motivated Bill that undermines the important role that trade unions play in the democratic process. Encouragingly, Members in the other place have acted in a measured and cross-party way. Rather than simply striking down rafted of the Bill, as many would have liked—we would have liked to see that for some parts of the Bill—they have suggested cross-party, sensible and measured amendments.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Is it not amazing that a party that tells us all that it is in favour of the free market has in this case resorted to very high-handed regulation?

Greg Mulholland: It certainly presents itself as an extremely draconian Bill whose drafting involved no collaboration of any kind.

I think that, welcome though it is, the Government's change of heart has not gone far enough. I echo the words of the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard): it is clear that the Government have realised that they cannot make enemies of the trade unions when they need the trade union movement in order to secure a "yes" vote—an "in" vote—in the EU referendum. I look forward to working with trade unionists, with the Government, and with members of all parties in seeking to achieve that.

Time is short. Let me end by saying that, given the Government's welcome U-turn, we will not oppose the amendment. Nevertheless, the Government have simply failed to make the case that electronic voting is not a sensible, modern way forward, which exposes the fact this is really about trying to stop trade unions from reaching the threshold rather than sensibly reforming the system. Alongside others, we will continue to make the case for such reform.

I believe that the Government should think again about the attitude to trade unions that they have shown during this process, and should work together with parties.

Jo Stevens: Let me begin by drawing the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, and to my membership of the GMB and Unison.

I want to make just one brief point, which relates to my earlier intervention about the Welsh Government. The Minister is placing the UK Government on a collision course with the Welsh Government in respect of facility time. The case will end up in the Supreme Court at great cost to the public purse, and the UK Government will—according to their own legal advice—lose. So I ask the Minister please to reconsider his approach to this part of the Bill.

Question put, That amendment (a) to Lords amendment 2 be made.

The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 260.

Division No. 256]

[4.21 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel	Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Afriyie, Adam	Cleverly, James
Aldous, Peter	Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Allan, Lucy	Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Allen, Heidi	Collins, Damian
Amess, Sir David	Colville, Oliver
Andrew, Stuart	Costa, Alberto
Ansell, Caroline	Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Argar, Edward	Crabb, rh Stephen
Bacon, Mr Richard	Davies, Byron
Baker, Mr Steve	Davies, Chris
Baldwin, Harriett	Davies, David T. C.
Barclay, Stephen	Davies, Glyn
Baron, Mr John	Davies, Dr James
Barwell, Gavin	Davies, Mims
Bebb, Guto	Davies, Philip
Bellingham, Sir Henry	Dinenage, Caroline
Benyon, Richard	Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Beresford, Sir Paul	Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
Berry, Jake	Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Bingham, Andrew	Donelan, Michelle
Blackman, Bob	Double, Steve
Blackwood, Nicola	Dowden, Oliver
Blunt, Crispin	Drax, Richard
Boles, Nick	Drummond, Mrs Flick
Bone, Mr Peter	Duddridge, James
Borwick, Victoria	Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Bottomley, Sir Peter	Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Bradley, Karen	Dunne, Mr Philip
Brady, Mr Graham	Elliott, Tom
Brazier, Mr Julian	Ellis, Michael
Bridgen, Andrew	Ellison, Jane
Brine, Steve	Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Brokenshire, rh James	Elphicke, Charlie
Bruce, Fiona	Eustice, George
Buckland, Robert	Evans, Graham
Burns, Conor	Evans, Mr Nigel
Burns, rh Sir Simon	Evennett, rh Mr David
Burt, rh Alistair	Fabricant, Michael
Cairns, rh Alun	Fernandes, Suella
Carmichael, Neil	Field, rh Mark
Carswell, Mr Douglas	Foster, Kevin
Cartledge, James	Fox, rh Dr Liam
Cash, Sir William	Francois, rh Mr Mark
Caulfield, Maria	Frazer, Lucy
Chalk, Alex	Freeman, George
Chishti, Rehman	Freer, Mike
Chope, Mr Christopher	Fuller, Richard
Churchill, Jo	Fysh, Marcus
Clark, rh Greg	Gale, Sir Roger

Garnier, rh Sir Edward
 Garnier, Mark
 Gauke, Mr David
 Ghani, Nusrat
 Gibb, Mr Nick
 Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
 Glen, John
 Goodwill, Mr Robert
 Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matthew
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leslie, Charlotte

Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan
 Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Paisley, Ian
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David

Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shannon, Jim
 Shapps, rh Grant
 Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly

Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jackie Doyle-Price and
Guy Opperman

NOES

Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina
 Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara
 Allen, Mr Graham
 Anderson, Mr David
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barron, rh Kevin
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boswell, Philip
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa

Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Cox, Jo
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Mr David
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 De Piero, Gloria
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter

Dromey, Jack
 Dugher, Michael
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Edwards, Jonathan
 Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elliott, Tom
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mr Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian

Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
 Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGinn, Conor
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahan, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, rh Angus
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey

Ryan, rh Joan
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen

Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Jessica Morden and
Jeff Smith

Question accordingly agreed to.

Amendment (a) made to Lords amendment 2.

4.35 pm

More than 90 minutes having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments, the proceedings were interrupted (Programme Order, this day).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that time (Standing Order No. 83F).

Amendment (b) made to Lords amendment 2.

Lords amendment 2, as amended, agreed to.

Clause 13

PUBLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Motion made, and Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 17.—(Stephen Barclay.)

The House divided: Ayes 307, Noes 268.

Division No. 257]

[4.36 pm

AYES

Adams, Nigel
 Afriyie, Adam
 Aldous, Peter
 Allan, Lucy
 Allen, Heidi
 Amess, Sir David
 Andrew, Stuart
 Ansell, Caroline
 Argar, Edward
 Bacon, Mr Richard
 Baker, Mr Steve
 Baldwin, Harriett
 Barclay, Stephen
 Baron, Mr John
 Barwell, Gavin
 Bebb, Guto
 Bellingham, Sir Henry

Benyon, Richard
 Beresford, Sir Paul
 Berry, Jake
 Bingham, Andrew
 Blackman, Bob
 Blackwood, Nicola
 Blunt, Crispin
 Boles, Nick
 Bone, Mr Peter
 Borwick, Victoria
 Bottomley, Sir Peter
 Bradley, Karen
 Brady, Mr Graham
 Brazier, Mr Julian
 Bridgen, Andrew
 Brine, Steve
 Brokenshire, rh James

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

Gove, rh Michael
 Graham, Richard
 Grant, Mrs Helen
 Grayling, rh Chris
 Green, Chris
 Green, rh Damian
 Greening, rh Justine
 Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
 Griffiths, Andrew
 Gummer, Ben
 Gyimah, Mr Sam
 Halfon, rh Robert
 Hall, Luke
 Hammond, Stephen
 Hancock, rh Matthew
 Hands, rh Greg
 Harper, rh Mr Mark
 Harrington, Richard
 Harris, Rebecca
 Hart, Simon
 Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
 Hayes, rh Mr John
 Heald, Sir Oliver
 Heapey, James
 Heaton-Harris, Chris
 Heaton-Jones, Peter
 Henderson, Gordon
 Herbert, rh Nick
 Hinds, Damian
 Hollingbery, George
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Hollobone, Mr Philip
 Holloway, Mr Adam
 Hopkins, Kris
 Howarth, Sir Gerald
 Howell, John
 Howlett, Ben
 Huddleston, Nigel
 Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
 Hurd, Mr Nick
 Jackson, Mr Stewart
 James, Margot
 Javid, rh Sajid
 Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
 Jenkin, Mr Bernard
 Jenkyns, Andrea
 Jenrick, Robert
 Johnson, Boris
 Johnson, Gareth
 Johnson, Joseph
 Jones, Andrew
 Jones, rh Mr David
 Jones, Mr Marcus
 Kennedy, Seema
 Kirby, Simon
 Knight, rh Sir Greg
 Knight, Julian
 Kwarteng, Kwasi
 Lancaster, Mark
 Latham, Pauline
 Leadsom, Andrea
 Lee, Dr Phillip
 Lefroy, Jeremy
 Leslie, Charlotte
 Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
 Lewis, Brandon
 Lewis, rh Dr Julian
 Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
 Lidington, rh Mr David
 Lilley, rh Mr Peter
 Lopresti, Jack
 Lord, Jonathan

Mackinlay, Craig
 Mackintosh, David
 Main, Mrs Anne
 Mak, Mr Alan
 Malthouse, Kit
 Mann, Scott
 Mathias, Dr Tania
 May, rh Mrs Theresa
 Maynard, Paul
 McCartney, Jason
 McCartney, Karl
 McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
 McPartland, Stephen
 Menzies, Mark
 Merriman, Huw
 Metcalfe, Stephen
 Miller, rh Mrs Maria
 Milling, Amanda
 Mills, Nigel
 Milton, rh Anne
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mordaunt, Penny
 Morgan, rh Nicky
 Morris, Anne Marie
 Morris, David
 Morris, James
 Morton, Wendy
 Mowat, David
 Mundell, rh David
 Murray, Mrs Sheryll
 Neill, Robert
 Newton, Sarah
 Nokes, Caroline
 Norman, Jesse
 Nuttall, Mr David
 Offord, Dr Matthew
 Parish, Neil
 Patel, rh Priti
 Pawsey, Mark
 Penning, rh Mike
 Penrose, John
 Percy, Andrew
 Perry, Claire
 Phillips, Stephen
 Philp, Chris
 Pickles, rh Sir Eric
 Pincher, Christopher
 Poulter, Dr Daniel
 Pow, Rebecca
 Prentis, Victoria
 Prisk, Mr Mark
 Pritchard, Mark
 Pursglove, Tom
 Quin, Jeremy
 Quince, Will
 Raab, Mr Dominic
 Redwood, rh John
 Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
 Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Robinson, Mary
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Rudd, rh Amber
 Rutley, David
 Sandbach, Antoinette
 Scully, Paul
 Selous, Andrew
 Shapps, rh Grant

Sharma, Alok
 Shelbrooke, Alec
 Simpson, rh Mr Keith
 Skidmore, Chris
 Smith, Chloe
 Smith, Henry
 Smith, Julian
 Smith, Royston
 Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
 Solloway, Amanda
 Soubry, rh Anna
 Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
 Spencer, Mark
 Stephenson, Andrew
 Stevenson, John
 Stewart, Bob
 Stewart, Iain
 Stewart, Rory
 Streeter, Mr Gary
 Stride, Mel
 Stuart, Graham
 Sturdy, Julian
 Sunak, Rishi
 Swayne, rh Mr Desmond
 Swire, rh Mr Hugo
 Syms, Mr Robert
 Thomas, Derek
 Throup, Maggie
 Timpson, Edward
 Tolhurst, Kelly
 Tomlinson, Justin
 Tomlinson, Michael
 Tracey, Craig
 Tredinnick, David
 Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
 Truss, rh Elizabeth
 Tugendhat, Tom
 Turner, Mr Andrew
 Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew
 Vara, Mr Shailesh
 Vickers, Martin
 Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
 Walker, Mr Charles
 Walker, Mr Robin
 Wallace, Mr Ben
 Warburton, David
 Warman, Matt
 Watkinson, Dame Angela
 Wharton, James
 Whately, Helen
 Wheeler, Heather
 White, Chris
 Whittaker, Craig
 Whittingdale, rh Mr John
 Wiggin, Bill
 Williams, Craig
 Williamson, rh Gavin
 Wilson, Mr Rob
 Wollaston, Dr Sarah
 Wood, Mike
 Wragg, William
 Wright, rh Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Jackie Doyle-Price and
 Guy Opperman

NOES

Abrahams, Debbie
 Ahmed-Sheikh, Ms Tasmina

Alexander, Heidi
 Ali, Rushanara

Allen, Mr Graham
 Anderson, Mr David
 Ashworth, Jonathan
 Austin, Ian
 Bailey, Mr Adrian
 Bardell, Hannah
 Barron, rh Kevin
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Black, Mhairi
 Blackford, Ian
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blenkinsop, Tom
 Blomfield, Paul
 Boswell, Philip
 Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
 Brake, rh Tom
 Brennan, Kevin
 Brock, Deidre
 Brown, Alan
 Brown, Lyn
 Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
 Bryant, Chris
 Buck, Ms Karen
 Burden, Richard
 Burgon, Richard
 Butler, Dawn
 Byrne, rh Liam
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Cameron, Dr Lisa
 Campbell, rh Mr Alan
 Campbell, Mr Ronnie
 Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
 Champion, Sarah
 Chapman, Jenny
 Cherry, Joanna
 Clwyd, rh Ann
 Coaker, Vernon
 Coffey, Ann
 Cooper, Julie
 Cooper, rh Yvette
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Cowan, Ronnie
 Cox, Jo
 Coyle, Neil
 Crausby, Mr David
 Crawley, Angela
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Stella
 Cruddas, Jon
 Cryer, John
 Cummins, Judith
 Cunningham, Alex
 Cunningham, Mr Jim
 Dakin, Nic
 Danczuk, Simon
 David, Wayne
 Davies, Geraint
 Day, Martyn
 De Piero, Gloria
 Docherty-Hughes, Martin
 Dodds, rh Mr Nigel
 Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
 Donaldson, Stuart Blair
 Doughty, Stephen
 Dowd, Jim
 Dowd, Peter
 Dromey, Jack
 Dugher, Michael
 Durkan, Mark
 Eagle, Ms Angela
 Edwards, Jonathan

Efford, Clive
 Elliott, Julie
 Elliott, Tom
 Evans, Chris
 Farrelly, Paul
 Fellows, Marion
 Ferrier, Margaret
 Field, rh Frank
 Fitzpatrick, Jim
 Ffello, Robert
 Fletcher, Colleen
 Flint, rh Caroline
 Flynn, Paul
 Fovargue, Yvonne
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Gapes, Mike
 Gardiner, Barry
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gibson, Patricia
 Glass, Pat
 Glindon, Mary
 Godsiff, Mr Roger
 Goodman, Helen
 Grady, Patrick
 Grant, Peter
 Gray, Neil
 Green, Kate
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hanson, rh Mr David
 Harman, rh Ms Harriet
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayman, Sue
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Mr Mark
 Hendry, Drew
 Hepburn, Mr Stephen
 Hermon, Lady
 Hillier, Meg
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hollern, Kate
 Hopkins, Kelvin
 Hosie, Stewart
 Howarth, rh Mr George
 Hunt, Tristram
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hussain, Imran
 Jarvis, Dan
 Johnson, rh Alan
 Johnson, Diana
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Graham
 Jones, Helen
 Jones, Mr Kevan
 Jones, Susan Elan
 Kane, Mike
 Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
 Keeley, Barbara
 Kendall, Liz
 Kerevan, George
 Kerr, Calum
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kyle, Peter
 Lamb, rh Norman
 Lammy, rh Mr David
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Leslie, Chris
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive

Lewis, Mr Ivan
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 Lucas, Caroline
 Lucas, Ian C.
 Lynch, Holly
 MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
 Madders, Justin
 Mahmood, Mr Khalid
 Mahmood, Shabana
 Malhotra, Seema
 Mann, John
 Marris, Rob
 Marsden, Mr Gordon
 Maskell, Rachael
 Matheson, Christian
 Mc Nally, John
 McCabe, Steve
 McCaig, Callum
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Stewart Malcolm
 McDonald, Stuart C.
 McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
 McDonnell, John
 McFadden, rh Mr Pat
 McGarry, Natalie
 McGinn, Conor
 McInnes, Liz
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McLaughlin, Anne
 McMahan, Jim
 Mearns, Ian
 Miliband, rh Edward
 Monaghan, Carol
 Monaghan, Dr Paul
 Morris, Grahame M.
 Mulholland, Greg
 Mullin, Roger
 Murray, Ian
 Nandy, Lisa
 Newlands, Gavin
 Nicolson, John
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onn, Melanie
 Onwurah, Chi
 Osamor, Kate
 Oswald, Kirsten
 Owen, Albert
 Paisley, Ian
 Paterson, Steven
 Pearce, Teresa
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Perkins, Toby
 Phillips, Jess
 Phillipson, Bridget
 Pound, Stephen
 Powell, Lucy
 Pugh, John
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Rayner, Angela
 Reed, Mr Jamie
 Reed, Mr Steve

Rees, Christina
 Reeves, Rachel
 Reynolds, Emma
 Reynolds, Jonathan
 Rimmer, Marie
 Ritchie, Ms Margaret
 Robertson, rh Angus
 Robinson, Gavin
 Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
 Ryan, rh Joan
 Salmond, rh Alex
 Shannon, Jim
 Sharma, Mr Virendra
 Sheerman, Mr Barry
 Sheppard, Tommy
 Sherriff, Paula
 Shuker, Mr Gavin
 Skinner, Mr Dennis
 Slaughter, Andy
 Smith, rh Mr Andrew
 Smith, Angela
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Owen
 Smyth, Karin
 Starmer, Keir
 Stephens, Chris
 Stevens, Jo
 Streeting, Wes
 Stringer, Graham
 Stuart, rh Ms Gisela
 Tami, Mark
 Thewliss, Alison
 Thomas, Mr Gareth
 Thomas-Symonds, Nick
 Thompson, Owen
 Thomson, Michelle
 Thornberry, Emily
 Timms, rh Stephen
 Trickett, Jon
 Turley, Anna
 Umunna, Mr Chuka
 Vaz, Valerie
 Watson, Mr Tom
 Weir, Mike
 West, Catherine
 Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
 Whitehead, Dr Alan
 Whitford, Dr Philippa
 Williams, Mr Mark
 Wilson, Corri
 Wilson, Phil
 Winnick, Mr David
 Winterton, rh Dame Rosie
 Wishart, Pete
 Woodcock, John
 Wright, Mr Iain
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
Jeff Smith and
Jessica Morden

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment 17 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) to (c) made to the words so restored to the Bill.

Clause 3

BALLOTS: 40% SUPPORT REQUIREMENT IN IMPORTANT PUBLIC SERVICES

Nick Boles: I beg to move, That this House agrees with Lords amendment 1.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): With this it will be convenient to consider the following:

Lords amendments 3 to 6.

Lords amendments 7 and 8, Government motions to disagree, and Government amendments (k) to (p) in lieu.

Lords amendments 9 to 16 and 18 to 29.

Nick Boles: The amendments improve the Bill and take account of a number of points of concern raised by Members of both this House and the other place. This is a raft of amendments, and I hope hon. Members will understand if I focus on the highlights in the order in which they appear in the Bill.

The 40% ballot threshold relates to strike action in important public services. The broad reference to “ancillary workers” has been removed and a “reasonable belief” defence for unions has been added. Those changes provide more clarity and certainty for unions and employers.

On the timing and duration of industrial action, the ballot mandate has been extended from four to six months, and to up to nine months where the union and the employer agree to that. That responds to concerns that four months was simply too short a time to enable both sides to resolve a dispute.

On the provision to provide two weeks’ notice of industrial action to an employer, the Bill now continues to allow for the current period of only seven days’ notice, where the employer and the trade union agree to that.

On picketing, there was great concern in this House, but less so in the House of Lords, about the Bill’s reference to “armbands”. That reference was taken from the original picketing code, which has been in force for a great deal of time. We do not want picket supervisors mistakenly believing that they must wear an armband. I hope that that will be welcome, particularly to my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), who is not in his seat, but who eloquently raised concerns about the issue.

The House debated at length the principle that union members should make an active choice to contribute to a trade union’s political fund. The other place established a Select Committee on Trade Union Political Funds and Political Party Funding under the chairmanship of Lord Burns, and I would like to place on record my gratitude to him and all the members of the Committee for their deliberations on this question.

The Bill has been amended to reflect the Select Committee’s recommendations on opting in. Our manifesto commitment suggested that we wanted to extend the opt-in principle for trade union members, and the revised provision meets that commitment. In future, all new trade union members will have to make an active choice to contribute to the political fund through an opt-in.

Our amendment corrects some legally defective drafting in the amendment tabled by Lord Burns and agreed to by the Lords. In particular, instead of the certification officer being given responsibility for issuing a code of practice, our amendment places a statutory obligation directly on unions to provide an annual reminder to existing members of their rights to opt out. That complements the position for new members, who will be required to be offered the right to opt in.

We have also improved requirements on unions to report details of political expenditure in their annual returns. That reflects the debates that we had about the importance of that issue in assisting union members to make informed decisions about whether to contribute to a union’s political fund. At the heart of the provision is transparency and proportionality.

The Bill has been amended to require reporting on all expenditure from a union’s political fund, including to causes and campaigns, but it also fixes what became characterised as the onerous obligation for the union to report on “every bus fare”. Instead, unions will be required to report on the total expenditure going to each political party or organisation in each of the categories.

Finally, the other place rightly agreed to increase parliamentary oversight of regulations that could seek to lower the reporting threshold once it has been raised and therefore increase the regulatory burden on trade unions.

On check-off, we had robust debates in this House, and there were equally robust debates in the other place. Those debates related to union subscriptions being deducted automatically from wages in the public sector. The Bill we welcome back to the House allows check off to continue where the costs are met by the trade unions and on the basis that union members have the option of paying subscriptions by other means. My hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), who is not in his place, made an eloquent argument for an amendment on this very issue, and I indicated on Report that we would look at it closely as the Bill went through the House of Lords. I therefore hope that he is satisfied with the decision by the Government to accept this amendment. I pay tribute to him for his work, both privately and publicly, in making the case for this important change.

Our manifesto committed us to reforming the role of the certification officer. The Bill removes the requirement for the certification officer to be able to act in some areas only where a complaint has been received from a member of a trade union. Instead, the certification officer will be able to look into issues that come to his attention from third parties, or in the course of his duties. However, the provisions have been amended to increase the independence of the certification officer by ensuring that he is not subject to ministerial direction. As I have said previously, the certification officer is under no obligation to act on complaints or representations from third parties.

Nevertheless, concerns were raised that spurious or vexatious complaints could tie up the certification officer’s resources and, indeed, place an unfair burden on trade unions. The Bill has therefore been amended to require that the certification officer must have reasonable grounds to suspect a breach before appointing an inspector to conduct an investigation. I am confident that this will

protect unions from vexatious complaints and over-zealous regulation. However, I am happy to assure hon. Members that we will keep this under review to see how it works out in practice. In response to human rights concerns, the judicial oversight of the certification officer has been strengthened. The Bill has been amended to allow appeals to the employment appeals tribunal on the certification officer's decisions on the grounds of fact as well as law.

I hope that hon. Members will welcome the amendments. I believe that they improve the Bill, and I hope the House will see fit to accept them.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I call Kevan Jones.

Mr Kevan Jones: Kevin Brennan.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I am sorry—Kevin Brennan.

Kevin Brennan: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. There is a great physical similarity between me and my hon. Friend, and it was entirely understandable on your part to mistake one for the other.

First, as I should have done when speaking on the previous group of amendments, I declare my membership of Unite the union and my very proud membership of the Musicians Union.

As the Minister said, the Government are accepting most of the amendments in this group. Due to the time constraints, I will not deal with all of them. He highlighted the significant changes, including on check-off, which we very much welcome. He will recall that during our debate on Report the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) tabled an amendment on these provisions. I pointed that out that it was extraordinary that a Conservative Government were seeking to make illegal a voluntary arrangement between parties, even where one party is paying for the service, when that arrangement is neither immoral nor illegal. That would have been an extraordinarily illiberal measure. I am glad that in their lordships' House the Government gave way on this matter and it is no longer in the Bill. That is very welcome.

I welcome what the Minister said on the record about the certification officer. It is extremely important that the Government recognise the concerns that have been expressed about the potential for vexatious complaints by third parties and the tremendous waste of time that that could be for all concerned. I also welcome his comments on a review of how the provision works out in practice. Although, as I have made clear, we do not agree with what the Government are doing in relation to the certification officer, that is a welcome assurance, and I am glad that he has put it on the record here at this stage before the Bill goes back to the Lords.

Perhaps the most controversial and contentious element of the Bill has been the Government's desire to create an opt-in process for trade union political funds. Lords amendments 7 and 8 relate to that. The original Government proposal meant that existing trade union members who pay into their union's political fund would have to opt back into the fund, in writing, within three months of the Bill's passage, and do so again after five years.

5 pm

Let us imagine if every organisation in the country was required to get a recommitment to every standing order payable to it within three months and in writing. It would obviously result in only one thing: massive problems for that organisation, whether it was a bank, a voluntary group, any membership organisation or a subscription to a magazine. It was always clear to us that the proposal was utterly unworkable, and designed mainly to deprive unilaterally the governing party's main political opponent—the Labour party—of an important source of funding. It seemed to be a pretty naked attempt to undermine effective opposition from the Labour party in this place and beyond.

That is why the House of Lords set up a special Select Committee to look at the matter, as the Minister said, under the able chairmanship of Lord Burns. We, too, are grateful for his efforts and those of his colleagues on the Committee and other Members of the House of Lords. We thank them—not only Labour peers but those from other parties and Cross Benches—for approaching the issue in such an imaginative and collaborative way. I recognise, as did the House of Lords in its report, that the Government made a manifesto commitment to introduce opt-in. However, they made other manifesto commitments about big business and we have not yet seen much action on those, but we will leave that for the moment.

The Conservative party manifesto stated that it would introduce opt-in, and it was elected with an overall majority in the House of Commons, albeit on less than 40% of the vote. The Government have therefore been able to argue that the House of Lords should not remove opt-in from the Bill under the normal conventions that the other place follows. The Lords amendments are extremely skilfully drafted. The House of Lords has taken the view that opt-in should apply only to new members of a trade union, that there should be a longer period—at least 12 months—for trade unions to adjust their rules and procedures and that there should be no automatic requirement to opt-in again after five years.

Mr Kevan Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that this will not be difficult for many trade unions because on their application forms to join, there is a box to tick to contribute to the political fund? As someone who ran a political fund, I know that that was the case in the GMB. Is this therefore not another example of proposed legislation that is not really needed?

Kevin Brennan: Given that my hon. Friend has been physically mistaken for me, I am not surprised that our opinions are identical on this matter. I agree with him.

Mr Anderson: May I take my hon. Friend back to his comments about the work of the House of Lords? I echo the words of Lord Patrick Cormack, who was a Member of this House for 40 years. He said:

“But we do not have to advance on that at such a pace that we seriously disadvantage one of the great parties of the realm and unbalance our democracy in the process.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 16 March 2016; Vol. 769, c. 1876.]

Does not that get to the nub of what this was all about—unbalancing democracy in this House and disadvantaging the Labour party? Lord Cormack was absolutely right. It is a shame that there are not more like him in the Conservative party in this House today.

Kevin Brennan: I pay tribute to Lord Cormack for his work on the Bill and his words in the House of Lords. He might seem to some an unlikely hero of the working class, but in this instance he has reflected what one nation Conservatism should mean. That phrase is bandied about from time to time, but his interventions and those of other colleagues in the House of Lords remind us that we legislate not just for one Parliament but for the future. I will go on to describe why it would have been very dangerous if the Government had stuck to their original plans.

The House of Lords looked for a workable way for the Government to introduce their stated manifesto commitment without it becoming a crude and clumsy device to starve the second largest party in Parliament—the Labour party—of a long-standing source of finance from the very institutions that founded it. My hon. Friend just said this in another way, but I think that the Lords have done the Government a big favour. Had they proceeded with the original proposals, they would have created—make no mistake about it—a lasting bitterness and resentment in the trade union and Labour movement and, indeed, beyond. We are grateful for the support received from other political parties.

I have no doubt, as many of their lordships pointed out, and, indeed, as paragraph 130 of the House of Lords cross-party Select Committee report noted, that the original proposal would

“make the Labour Party more inclined to take unilateral action against the Conservative Party and its funding when next in government.”

It appears that, at this very late hour, that point has hit home with Ministers, and I very much welcome that.

The Government have decided to think again about their proposals on political fund opt-ins and have tabled amendments (k) to (n) to replace Lords amendments 7 and 8. The requirement to opt into political funds will apply only to new union members. As a result, union members who have already voluntarily agreed to make contributions will not be required to opt in again to support ongoing trade union campaigns. Existing members will be required to opt in only if their union votes to establish a political fund for the first time. The Government have also conceded on the issue of five years and have allowed for a minimum 12-month transition period for unions. Union members will be able to opt in or opt out not only on paper, but through electronic means, so it is now okay to use electronic means to opt in—we will eventually get it to apply to ballots—including online forms, emails and, potentially, texts. Unions will still be required to remind members annually of their right to opt out and they can do so by using individual communications or through their usual systems for informing members, including union newsletters and notice boards.

The Government’s amendments take on board all of the core elements in the proposals made by Lord Burns’s Committee’s report, and I remind the House that it passed the Lords by 320 votes to 172. It therefore passed by an even greater majority than that which set up the Select Committee in the first place, which demonstrates the growing support for this approach.

I still believe that the proposals for an opt-in system for political funds are totally unnecessary—that should be put on the record—but we recognise that the Government’s new proposal is a substantial improvement

on the original Bill, which would have required all members to opt in within three months and to renew that opt-in within five years. On that basis, while retaining our opposition to the Bill in general and to opt-in in particular, we will not seek to divide the House on the Government amendments, given the substantial concessions they have made.

Tommy Sheppard: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the clear intention behind the move from opt out to opt in is an attempt by some members of the Conservative party to attack the funding of the Labour party. Does he agree, however, that our defence of the right of trade unions to engage in political activity will be more effective if we ensure that they are able to engage not just in activity to support the Labour party, but in other political action that achieves change and support, whichever party they feel serves their members’ best interests?

Kevin Brennan: It is accepted that there is a special relationship between the Labour party and the trade union movement, which founded the party. Of course, they use political funds to campaign in all sorts of way. I am grateful to all parties that have recognised the importance to our constitution of the political funds of trade unions and the vital role they play in our democracy. Trade union money is the cleanest money in politics, compared with some of the sources of money and donations to political parties, and long may that continue.

I do not want to detain the House for much longer, but it would be remiss of me not to conclude without paying tribute to all those who have made this change possible and worked so hard to improve this dreadful Bill. I include all my hon. Friends in our BIS Front-Bench team, including my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State; former members of that Front-Bench team who helped at earlier stages of the Bill; Members from other parties in the House who have helped to fight the good fight; and my hon. Friends in the Labour party.

I want to pay special tribute to my good friend Baroness Smith of Basildon and her team in the Lords—Baroness Hayter, Lord Stevenson and Lord Mendelsohn—as well as all the other peers from other parties and from no party at all who voted to create the Select Committee and who worked so diligently and expertly to get us to where we are today.

It is said that our constitution means that the Opposition have their say but the Government get their way. In this instance, the Opposition have had their say and, at least in part, also got their way. As a result, the legislation has had some of the most pernicious edges knocked off, even if it remains a pig’s ear.

Mr Kevan Jones: I welcome the work of the Lords, which my hon. Friend has just outlined. It is quite clear what the Bill is about. The Prime Minister talks about being a one nation Conservative, but he wants to be a one nation Conservative with one party—the Conservative party—at an advantage. If we want to understand Conservative Members’ disappointment, we have only to look at the Secretary of State’s face, which says it all.

There was no need for the legislation. It was based on a prejudice born of not understanding the way in which trade unions work, and it was an attempt to ensure that the Conservative party had not only a political advantage but a major financial one. The original requirement in

the legislation for new trade union members to opt in would not have come as any great surprise to trade unions. If the Minister takes the trouble to review some trade union application forms, he will see that they have a box on them, next to which is written: "If you want to pay the political levy, tick this box". It is up to members whether they wish to do that, so the idea that that provision needs to be in the Bill is quite remarkable. We know what the provision was really intended to do, and we know the reason for the climbdown that we have seen. That climbdown has nothing to do with the Trade Union Bill; it has to do with the Prime Minister's realisation that if he wants millions of trade unionists to vote yes in the EU referendum, he will have to keep them on side. As we often see in politics, the coming together of events has been of benefit and has defeated that bit of pernicious legislation. If it had gone through, as the House of Lords said in the Select Committee report, it would have given the Conservative party an advantage in political funding.

I totally agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan) when he says that trade union money is as clean as any type of money. There is transparency about how it is spent, and it is regulated. The same cannot be said of the way in which funding comes to the Conservative party, whether it be through dining clubs or unincorporated associations, which are a way of masking the true source of donations. I look forward to the Government's bringing forward legislation on the reform of party funding, including greater transparency about sources of funding. That is vital if we are to have an even playing field in terms of the ability to raise funds and the knowledge of where money comes from.

There is another side to this. The media have completely misunderstood the matter, and certainly the Minister—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry that I seem to be boring the Secretary of State, who is just leaving. He is obviously not very happy about the fact that one of his flagship pieces of legislation is in tatters. The clear impression given by the Conservative party and its supporters is that every single trade union that has a political fund donates it all to the Labour party, but that is simply not the case. Many are not affiliated to the Labour party, and many make no donations at all to any political party. Having run a political fund for the GMB, I know that the proportion that goes to the Labour party is small compared with the proportion that is spent on campaigning work. That allows the union not only to campaign on political issues, but to have a say, quite rightly, on things such as health and safety legislation or reorganisations of hospitals and other institutions. Without the political fund, the union would not be able to do that. The proposal would not only have taken away from my party the ability to receive money from trade unions, but would have hampered trade unions from taking part in civic life in this country, as they are quite right to do, through having a voice and making sure that their members' collective voice is heard in consultations on whatever affects them directly.

5.15 pm

Another big misconception is the idea that once people have ticked the box for paying a political levy, they are somehow locked in forever. I am sorry, but that is not the case. I used to deal every day of the week with

people who, having been a member for a while, chose for whatever reason to opt out. There is a clear mechanism, in most trade unions, for people to do that. The idea that people are being forced to give money against their will, is just not the case. As I said earlier, when people join and fill in an application form, they take a conscious decision to tick whether they want to pay the political levy. Again, this provision is not really needed, but is based on both the ignorance of Conservative Members and the vindictiveness of a section of their party. When they won the general election in 2015, they thought that they could just roll on and do anything they liked to the democratic processes of this country.

The provision on check-off is another useless piece of legislation, because many councils and organisations already choose to levy an administration fee for handling the check-off system. Again, I do not think that the provision will be very onerous on the many trade unions who already pay such a fee. As my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) said earlier, this is a minor issue in that it does not involve a huge amount of money. If we are saying that trade unions should not be subsidised by the taxpayer in such a way, that is fine, but in many cases trade unions are already not being subsidised, so this is another provision that is not needed.

Rachael Maskell: It is really important to calculate the real cost of check-off. The cost is absolutely nominal, and many trade unions are actually subsidising local authorities, the NHS and other public bodies with the amount that they pay for the levy.

Mr Jones: I agree. This shows my age, but the process used to have to be done manually, which meant that there was a cost. My hon. Friend is quite right that, with modern-day computer payroll systems, for example, the cost is very difficult to determine.

I, like my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West, oppose the Bill as a whole, but given the compromise that we have got because of the EU referendum, we are in a good place. However, I would just issue a final warning. I hope Conservative Members will not, once the EU referendum is over, bring in legislation to fill in what has been left out of the Bill. That would not only be another attack on trade unions, which are among the most highly regulated sectors in our country, but would show the vindictiveness that still exists in a section of the Conservative party. I look forward to the introduction, not long after June, of a Bill exploring total transparency in party funding in this country. If trade unions can have openness in terms of their money, we should decide it is time for other donations to political parties to have the same type of scrutiny and transparency, so that people can make up their own minds when they go to the ballot box.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Natascha Engel): I apologise to Chris Stephens. I should have called him before the last speaker.

Chris Stephens: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones). I agree with many of the points he made.

[Chris Stephens]

SNP Members have always opposed the Government's proposals on trade union political funds for the simple reason that it should be up to trade union members to decide where their money goes. It is up to them to decide whether they should support one political party or another, or whether they should sponsor individual candidates, as has happened in some cases, rather than work for a particular political party.

I emphasise the point that this is an attack not just on the Labour party but on the ability of a trade union to organise effectively across a community. Political funds have done great community work, health and safety campaigning, and anti-racism campaigning, sponsoring organisations such as Hope not Hate and Show Racism the Red Card. There is also charity work and international work—trade unions do fantastic work across the world.

It will come as no great surprise to any trade unionist that the change on check-off is not a major one. Unison has said that it has 11,000 different agreements where it contributes to the cost of check-off. We welcome the Government's U-turn on that.

I have participated in proceedings at every stage of the Bill's progress. I will say a few words about that. If the voices of those with experience of a trade unionised workplace and those with a trade union background had been listened to and heeded, we would not be where we are now. There perhaps would not even have been a Trade Union Bill. Many Opposition Members have pointed out on a regular basis how unnecessary and unwanted this legislation is.

Wes Streeting: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate. I declare an interest as a member of Unison and of the Community trade union, and I refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I should also say that although I am a member of those unions, I have very good employers in the people of Ilford North and do not anticipate going on strike any time soon.

The Government's concessions are welcome, but it is something of an irony that it has fallen to the unelected House to defend some of the most democratic elements of trade unions and their commitment to democratic life in the country. For some reason, this Government, who were elected with a slender majority of just 12, seem to think that that majority gives them carte blanche to trample all over the democratic traditions, values and heritage of our country.

It is not just the brazen attack on party political funding, and the Labour party in particular, that the Government have embarked upon with this Bill. Look at their record in the short time that they have governed as a single party. They have sought to rig the House of Commons, pack the House of Lords, gag charities and civil society, and restrict trade unions. This Sunday, new restrictions kick in on any publicly funded body, restrictions that have the potential to gag all sorts of people, including academics. It is a complete dog's breakfast of a proposal. We will see what the higher education Bill says later this year; the Government will undoubtedly try to have another go at student unions, like they did in the 1990s.

I have been listening to the Minister this afternoon, and in particular, to what he said about the previous group of Government measures, which unfortunately

passed, underlining why the Bill should still be opposed. There can be no decent evidence-based argument against trialling electronic balloting for trade union industrial actions and proposals to strike. The Minister himself could not offer a single shred of evidence to argue against a simple trial.

The Bill has really been about delegitimising trade unions. Whenever people go on strike and take industrial action the Government want to be able to say that a hard rump of activists have prompted it. But even the measures in the Bill would not have stopped the junior doctors or London transport workers going on strike. The turnout in both cases exceeded the threshold in the Bill. If the Government are serious about trade unions having broader and greater democratic legitimacy, they should unshackle the hands of trade union leaders and activists, so that they can do what they want to do and have asked to do, namely enter the 21st century by having electronic balloting.

We also had the farce about facility time. That goes to the heart of the Government's fundamental misunderstanding of the role of trade unions. Full-time reps and staff who are let off part time for facility time play a valuable role in good industrial relations. They take up cases on behalf of their members, and ensure that they are well represented and supported. They advise employers on how to improve the workplace environment. Where there are good industrial relations, with trade unions and employers working together, the likelihood of a strike is lessened, and the workplace environment is better for everyone.

Chris Stephens: Is another key role for trade unions that of welfare, and giving workers assistance and help that they might not know about?

Wes Streeting: I wholeheartedly agree. The hon. Gentleman speaks with great experience from his own background in the trade union movement, and good employers value that working relationship with trade unions. When I speak to trade union members—whether in my local authority where I am an elected member of the London Borough of Redbridge, or representatives in other workplaces—they tell me that they do not have excessive facility time; often they do not have enough. They struggle to cope with caseloads, particularly when there are major changes to employment involving terms and conditions or staff numbers. That generates a huge burden and workload, and I do not think that the Government appreciate or value that.

Mr Kevan Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is only thanks to trade unions campaigning and funding legal action that millions of people have received rightful compensation for industrial injuries such as mesothelioma, or that there is the miners compensation scheme that was pioneered by the trade union movement? Without that, millions of people in this country who suffered through no fault of their own—apart from going to work—would not have received rightful compensation.

Wes Streeting: I wholeheartedly agree, and if we are honest, too often trade unions have to speak up for people who would otherwise not have a voice. Often, because of the failures of this place and different Governments over the years, trade unions have had to

exercise pressure on behalf of their members, and exercise that muscle to ensure that Governments act to protect those who have been done a terrible injustice.

Jo Stevens: I speak as a former trade union lawyer who dealt with the legal cases that my hon. Friend referred to, and as an employer who benefited from having a unionised workplace to resolve issues and disagreements, and to get changes through companies. Without union representation in the workplace, that would have been much more difficult. Does my hon. Friend agree that we can see things from both sides?

Wes Streeting: I agree with my hon. Friend. I have sat on the employer side of the table when working with trade unions more than I have sat on the side of employees, even though I have been a member of a trade union for as long as I have been in full-time work. Employers often value that relationship with trade unions. It is not an adversarial relationship—well, sometimes it can be, and the breakdown of industrial relations, particularly when strike action occurs, is a sign of failure. When people choose to strike they lose their pay, so they do not do it lightly. Many families struggle to balance their budgets at the end of the month, with too much month and not enough money left, so losing a couple of days' pay is often a real hardship. They do not take such action lightly, and that is not understood enough when we speak in glib terms in this place about trade union industrial action.

I listened to what the Minister said about concessions that have been made, and how no changes will be made to facility time for a few years until we have done all the counting and assessment, but how long will that take, and how much money and civil service time will it cost? Bizarrely, the Government will waste time counting trade union facility time for employers up and down the country, but they will not count the number of children in poverty. That tells us all we need to know about this Government's wrong-headed priorities, and about the timewasting involved in introducing this Bill in the first place. I congratulate Members of the House of Lords—where the Government do not have a majority—on the way that they have torn this Bill apart and exposed it to forensic scrutiny, and we heard expertise from across the political spectrum.

Kevin Brennan: The Bill also received forensic scrutiny in the House of Commons, but we could not win any votes.

Wes Streeting: My hon. Friend has pre-empted me. I was about to congratulate not just my Front-Bench colleagues on their diligent work, but also my colleagues on the Bill Committee. I followed some of the sessions and read the evidence, and there was forensic scrutiny. The Government's arguments did not stack up, and many of us have come to this Chamber time and again to get them to rethink.

5.30 pm

The Government have done some rethinking, but I share the cynicism of my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) that this probably has more to do with the fact that the penny has dropped for the

Prime Minister, who has realised that trade unions play an important role not only in the workplace, but in the life of our democracy. He is probably counting on those trade unions to make a positive case for Britain to remain in the European Union because of all the benefits it brings to people's rights at work. Many of those rights would not be enjoyed, if it were not for the pressure that trade unions bring to bear, whether it be on this Parliament, the European Parliament or the European Commission. We should celebrate the work of trade unions and end this futile denigration of their work. This Bill in its current form, even as amended, should not be supported.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I would like to put on record the fact that I am a member of the GMB union. It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting), whom I commend for his long-standing commitment to this issue and for his work on the Bill.

Trade unions are a vital part of a free and democratic society, with a proud history of working hard on behalf of their members to achieve fair and just outcomes. Their roots lie in the industrial revolution, but their aims and aspirations are just as important to the 21st century context of an increasingly digital workforce, the European marketplace, globalisation, the challenges presented by an ageing population and the need for highly skilled workers to deliver the higher-skilled, higher-waged workforce that we need and aspire to in the UK.

My constituency is rich in small and medium-sized enterprises, and I want to see a vibrant local economy, providing high-quality services, well-paid jobs, excellent apprenticeship schemes and clear routes for progression in the workplace for those who want to develop their career. Trade unions have as much a role to play now as they did when they were first created in a very different employment and economic environment.

I want to share some examples of the positive differences unions have made and continue to make in my constituency. As a councillor, I was proud to vote for Southwark Council to adopt Unison's ethical care charter—a commitment to dignity and respect for those who work so hard on behalf of vulnerable residents. The ethical care charter delivers better terms and conditions for care workers, but just as importantly, it delivers better standards of care for vulnerable residents by providing minimum visit times, paid time for travel and a commitment to training. Paying the London living wage for home care workers has resulted in higher-quality applicants working in this vital service, as well as a better quality of life for carers and their families.

BECTU—the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union—has fought a hard campaign for its members working at Picturehouse cinemas in my constituency. The campaign started at the Ritzy in Brixton and has extended to the new East Dulwich Picturehouse and the West Norwood Picturehouse, which will open next year. It is an excellent example of a modern trade union campaign, generating huge support among local residents and customers via social media. This campaign has achieved significant progress in driving up rates of pay for Picturehouse staff by 26% over three years, but there is more to do to achieve the goal of ensuring that all staff receive the London living wage—work that is hampered in part by the approach of Picturehouse and its parent

[*Helen Hayes*]

company Cineworld in refusing to recognise BECTU in some branches in favour of internal staff forums, which is a practice that should not be allowed.

Last week, I attended the launch of an important new campaign by Unison, “Making waves for a Living Wage”, calling for the water industry in the UK to become the first sector to be fully living wage accredited. This campaign has already succeeded in persuading several water companies to progress towards living wage accreditation—and in some cases to achieve it. It is an achievable, practical campaign, which the water companies can afford to implement and which will have huge benefits for low-paid staff working in this sector. It is a great example of the positive difference unions can and do make.

Jo Stevens: The Unison campaign on the living wage provides a perfect example. We would not have had a living wage campaign without the trade unions setting up the wider campaign in the first place.

Helen Hayes: My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

Only yesterday, I was encouraged to see so many local NHS staff who are members of trade unions, including the GMB, Unite and Unison, coming out during their lunchbreak to show their support for the BMA and the junior doctors’ strike. They know that it is only by working together as one team—doctors, nurses, therapists, technicians, receptionists and cleaners—that our wonderful NHS delivers the world-class healthcare that it was set up to do.

Union members across the country know that industrial relations work best when there is a professional and respectful relationship between employers and employees. Change is often needed in response to changes in the economy, policy or legislation, or when particular injustices arise, and it is often best achieved by different parties—unions, employers and consumer groups—coming around the table to negotiate, work together and resolve differences or develop new practices. The situations we never hear about, but which are much more common, are those where there was no strike action and a settlement was reached through effective joint working. Such effective working relies on an even balance of power between different parties. This divisive and mean-spirited Bill seeks to shift the balance of power in a way that can have only negative consequences. It is right that negotiation and positive joint working take place in every possible circumstance, but in the rare instances where all other avenues have been exhausted—for example, when a Secretary of State for Health rejects out of hand every compromise offer he is asked to consider—the right to withdraw labour by taking strike action is an essential right, and its existence can often be the very thing that focuses minds on all sides on achieving effective negotiations.

The Government’s change of heart on opting in to unions’ political funds and check-off is welcome, but it reveals the extent to which the Bill is politically motivated. It is completely unacceptable that the Government are applying double standards to the turnout required for a strike ballot by expecting a much higher turnout of union members than they would accept as providing legitimacy for their own Members of Parliament or indeed for the election of councillors, whom they accept

as having democratic legitimacy. MPs are not, by rule, required to be elected by more than half of the eligible residents living in their constituency, and this is even less likely to be the case for councillors. In an age where the Government are rightly encouraging the greater use of digital services and technologies, it must be right that there should be the ability to vote electronically, with the oversight of the Electoral Commission. What is considered good and fair for the Conservatives in selecting their candidate for London’s Mayor must be considered good and fair for union members in casting their votes on critical issues. It is very disappointing that the Government have not accepted Lords amendments on this matter. They are applying a mixture of different standards to trade unions, refusing to implement e-balloting to maintain consistency with public elections but requiring an even higher turnout threshold than that required for public elections. The Government therefore appear to be picking and choosing standards to suit their own political ends. They appear now to be trying to unravel some of the mess, but it would be better simply to scrap this Bill.

Greg Mulholland: I will not detain the House for long, as it has been a long day. I just want to remind the House that in this place it has consistently been the Liberal Democrats who have called for a proper reform of the party funding system. We have done that fairly and equitably, looking at the issues relating to funding from big business and from wealthy private donors, as well as the issues with trade union funding. It has been frustrating, even in my 11 years in Parliament, that that has been frustrated at times by the Conservative party and at times by the Labour party, with both acting in their own self-interest, seeking to preserve their own sources of funding while seeking to deal with the other’s. The Bill is still clearly doing that today and it is the wrong approach.

Mr Kevan Jones: I accept the hon. Gentleman’s point, but his party is not clean on this, given the money it accepted from Brown, who was found to be a fraud. So I do not think the hon. Gentleman should be lecturing others about transparency in party funding.

Greg Mulholland: I respect the hon. Gentleman, but that is a poor comment, given that I am talking about the party funding system. As he knows full well, issues have arisen for all parties with various donations that were accepted in a reasonable way and later found to have question marks about them. That is one reason we need to deal with this, but it is about the system and so his comments do him no favours on this occasion.

I warmly welcome the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard), another Member of a party outside the two-party system that we have had in the past, but which is now gone in British politics. He said that although it is right that trade unions use their funding for political campaigning to stand up for the rights of their workers and important rights for British people, that is not the same thing as simply funnelling money to the Labour party to win elections.

I have a very interesting perspective on the matter. During my first five years as the proud, new, and perhaps in some ways slightly naive MP for Leeds

North West, I found myself courted regularly by my local trade unions. I got on with them very well. As for their agenda, they told me consistently how disgusted they were with what Tony Blair's new Labour Government were doing to workers' rights and trade unions, and sought my Liberal Democrat support. I was only too happy to give that support, and to work with them.

I subsequently became lead member of Leeds City Council, and had direct and very strong relationships with my local trade union representatives—but then came the 2010 general election, and despite all that, and despite their disdain for Tony Blair and new Labour, they paid for billboards to go up in my constituency saying "Please vote for your local new Labour candidate". That is not what I think hard-working trade union members paying into a political fund expect, and I think that it should be looked into by the trade union movement and by the Labour party.

Ultimately, we need to move to a system of transparency. I agree with the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) in one respect: he made the sensible point that we should be doing all this together rather than through what is clearly a cynical Bill, and indeed a cynical attack on the main source of funding for the Labour party. I do not support that, although I have spoken of the need for a greater differential between funds for the Labour party and funds for political campaigns that may, from time to time, be supported by other parties—indeed, potentially all parties, and even Conservative Back Benchers.

We also need more transparency when it comes to the very shady organisations that funnel money from companies and private donors and pass it on without always revealing who those donors are. That arrangement is clearly unacceptable and needs to be reformed, but, again, all of us—all the parties in the House—must reform it together. The Bill does not provide for that, but we will continue to do it.

I am proud that it was the Liberal Democrats who pushed for a House of Lords Select Committee to lead recommendations on party funding reform, and that it was that Committee which twisted the Government's arm so that they came up with these U-turns. We think that that is sensible, as it saves the trade unions the

clearly unfair and unnecessary administrative burden of having to contact all their existing members who signed up on the existing basis.

I look forward to continuing this discussion in the right place and in the right framework—not in the context of this divisive Bill, but in the context of proper cross-party discussions about how we can finally, and properly, reform party funding as a whole. We will participate fully in those discussions, and we look forward to working with Members in all parts of the House.

Lords amendment 1 agreed to.

Lords amendments 3 to 6 agreed to.

Lords amendments 7 and 8 disagreed to.

Government amendments (k) to (p) made in lieu of Lords amendments 7 and 8.

Lords amendments 9 to 16 and 18 to 29 agreed to.

Business without Debate

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 4 May—

(1) paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments) shall apply to any Motion in the name of Jeremy Corbyn as if the day were an Opposition Day; and proceedings on such a Motion may continue, though opposed, for three hours and shall then lapse if not previously disposed of; and

(2) notwithstanding sub-paragraph (2)(c), as applied by paragraph (4), of Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business), backbench business set down for consideration at that sitting may then be entered upon at any hour, may continue, though opposed, for three hours, and shall then lapse if not previously disposed of.—(*Stephen Barclay.*)

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Stephen Barclay.*)

5.45 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 27 April 2016

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Violence against Women and Girls (Sustainable Development Goals)

9.30 am

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered violence against women and girls and the Sustainable Development Goals.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, on this fine crisp morning. I do not need to rehearse to many Members in the Chamber the importance of the sustainable development goals. Many Members and the Minister and his Department have worked hard on refining and developing the goals. Goal 5 is to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”.

That is the most important goal in our efforts to combat violence against women and girls. A number of targets flow from it, directly addressing the issue. In particular, the second target under goal 5 is to

“Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation”.

The third target is to

“Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation”.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): May I suggest that we add breast ironing to that list of harmful practices? People do not know much about it, but it tries to damage the young breast to stop it developing because of a misconception that the child will then not go through puberty and develop. It is incredibly destructive. People do not know about it, in the same way that we did not know about FGM.

Mark Durkan: I thank the hon. Lady for that point. So much work has been done under the sustainable development goals. We have a target that gives examples, and we now have awareness of other things that might well have been included as examples, such as breast ironing. Her point proves that the sustainable development goals should not be seen as frozen in cold print on the page. They are meant to be an ongoing, changing, ever-improving and ever-strengthening commitment on all our parts. Remember, they are universal goals. That is one reason why we need to demarcate the sustainable development goals from the millennium development goals in terms of their universality. We want to see the infrastructure of commitment, investment and intervention underpinning the sustainable development goals.

The Minister will face many questions and hear many suggestions in this debate on assurances that he can give on behalf of the Department for International Development and the Government more widely. He is responding on behalf of DFID, but the universal goals are not just about what happens in other countries. We should be supporting and helping to foster those goals, but the goals also involve commitments and standards in our

countries and jurisdictions. That is not just the responsibility of Ministers and all of us who serve in this House, but people at other levels, including devolved levels.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman's point that this is not just a DFID issue. These things happen in this country every day. The pressure group End Violence Against Women has pointed out that 146,000 domestic violence incidents were recorded in London in 2015. There were 5,500 rapes, 300 cases of forced marriage and honour-based violence and thousands of prostitution cases. Specialist support services for all those things are being cut. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need to be looking at the issue at home, too?

Mark Durkan: Absolutely. The issues do not just happen elsewhere; they happen here, and we need to fully understand that. We also need to understand the range of interventions and support required not only to raise awareness and improve behavioural standards and expectations, but to respond better to violence against women and girls where it happens. We need to ensure that women and girls feel more empowered, more enabled, much better supported and truly vindicated and justified when they come forward to report and to tell. We have to give them that comfort and confidence.

There are huge issues that we need to address, and that is why the universality of the goals can be so important. It allows Governments and Parliaments in the developed world to make it clear to our colleagues in the developing world that this is not just about us saying that they have to catch up with us; we, too, are on a page of learning and a journey of understanding in our awareness of the issues. In that context, I acknowledge the range of briefings we have received from many different charities, non-governmental organisations and campaign groups.

I am sure many Members will have questions for the Minister, but we have to ask questions as parliamentarians about how we do our bit to ensure meaningful coherence around the range of sustainable development goals and their interpretation and application. We also need to ensure better adherence in their implementation and realisation. We therefore have to ask not only how Government will provide joined-up management and oversight of the issues, but how we as a Parliament can get better at providing joined-up scrutiny of and support for such initiatives and investments.

It will not be enough for us just to say, “The International Development Committee will be able to oversee all these things, and we are leaving domestic and sexual violence at home to the Home Affairs Committee and the Justice Committee.” We need to think about something more bespoke and dedicated. We need to recognise that though some of the goals and targets will be amenable to particular scrutiny and oversight by respective Select Committees, others will fall in the shadows between Select Committees and perhaps need a more dedicated audit mechanism to pick them up.

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): My helpful advice to the hon. Gentleman is that leaving anything to the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice will leave enormous gaps, because domestic violence and sexual violence commissioning are almost exclusively done by

[Jess Phillips]

local government and devolved authorities. I suggest we call on the Minister to look for something that will tie everything together and not just leave domestic violence in its silos.

Mark Durkan: I am sure that the Minister will have heard that call and will ensure that others hear that call, but there are questions for us at a parliamentary level on what we do to ensure real parliamentary tracking and backing of what is happening with the goals, particularly with the vexed, serious and sometimes invisible issue of violence against women and girls.

I called this debate in response to a long lobbying campaign by ActionAid. I am just one of many MPs who responded to that fearless campaign by applying for this debate. I acknowledge the work of ActionAid and all its supporters in campaigning and the quality of the briefing it provided to us. I hope I can leave it to other Members to pick up on that in their contributions.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. Will he join me in condemning the state-sanctioned violence against women and girls in North Korea? Technically, that country joined in support of the SDGs last autumn, but it operates violence against women and girls as a tool of oppression. Even the UN has described it in a report as having human rights violations that

“reveal a State that does not have any parallel in the contemporary world”.

Those violations include sexual violence; exploitation; rape; forced abortion; human trafficking; institutional, economic and psychological violence; slavery; and torture, even until death. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the UK must use what limited engagement it has with North Korea—it is mainly via the Foreign and Commonwealth Office—to press for change? Also, will he join with me and other parliamentarians in putting on the record that the abused women of North Korea are not forgotten here?

Mark Durkan: Yes to all those points and questions. That is not to belittle or trivialise the seriousness of them, but as the chair of the all-party group for Sudan and South Sudan I want to address other countries’ specific issues.

I mentioned that we have received a strong briefing from ActionAid, and it has been working with Womankind Worldwide. The Minister will know everything that ActionAid is arguing for in respect of how we take forward the goal and the targets, including its work with Womankind Worldwide in advocating for a voice, choice and control fund. He knows the main argument: such a fund would take an integrated approach that would address the structural causes of gender inequality, giving women’s rights organisations the support that they need to lead the transformation of societies and economies towards an enabling environment, so that women can realise their full potential and enjoy their whole spectrum of rights.

A second objective would be to increase the quality of funding available to organisations and movements, including those led by adolescent girls, women with disabilities and LGBTI groups.

Dr Philippa Whitford: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again. Does he agree that, from the developmental point of view, putting more of our effort and money into helping girls and women strengthens the whole community?

Mark Durkan: Yes, it is one of the best ways of fulfilling the “leave no one behind” principle. Investments and interventions to support women and girls would be one of the best multiplier contributions that could be made towards fulfilling not only those targets and objectives, but others as well. The enablement and empowerment that comes with advancing the position of women and girls, allowing them to counter the ravages of sexual and other violence, would be one of the most transformative things. So if we want a real change multiplier in any society, we must address the position of women and girls. Our own history and social experience demonstrate that.

Mrs Helen Grant (Maidstone and The Weald) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Foyle on securing this important debate. Women and girls are rightly at the forefront and at the heart of DFID’s activities. I commend the Secretary of State at DFID for fighting so hard in the face of real opposition to achieve stand-alone goal 5, which is a gender equality and empowerment goal that is very important indeed. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if the goals are to be achieved, including goal 5, we have to turn billions into trillions in development finance? For that to happen, we have to do much more work with the private sector.

Mark Durkan: I fully accept what the hon. Lady has said. Again, that raises the question of our long-term commitment. It is great that we are able to celebrate the sustainable development goals, but we have to plan for what will be achieved by them. Making commitments is important, but making the commitments work well and developing them and growing them is even more important, and that is what we need to do.

I want to acknowledge the briefings that we have received; I hope that other hon. Members will be able to do more justice to them than I can in the time that I want to take—and the time I do not want to take—in this opening speech. We have received an important contribution from UNICEF, which has done so much in terms of the sustainable development goals and on the whole question of violence in all its forms as it affects children, particularly girls. I say that as a parliamentary champion of UNICEF.

We have also had important briefings from Christian Aid and Amnesty International. I hope other hon. Members will be able to take up some of the asks suggested in those briefings to ask the Minister about how DFID will pursue these goals alongside the others. Similarly, we have a useful contribution from the Bond SDG group, which raises the question of the parliamentary commitment to oversight of the goals, rather than simply the governmental commitment.

I told the hon. Member for Congleton that I had a country-specific issue of my own to raise as the chair of the all-party group on Sudan and South Sudan.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): Before the hon. Gentleman moves on to Sudan, may I take him across the world to Afghanistan? British troops made an enormous sacrifice in terms of lives lost in Afghanistan, but they also made a tremendous contribution to rebuilding

schools for girls and women teachers to avoid the violence that had been meted out to them by the Taliban and others. Is the hon. Gentleman able to update us on the status of women and girls in terms of education in Afghanistan post the withdrawal of British troops?

Mark Durkan: I am not in a position to speak authoritatively on that, but I am sure the Minister will be able to answer those points. The hon. Member for North Down has drawn attention to the issue of education and schools, an issue that the all-party group on protecting children in armed conflict, which existed in the previous Parliament, addressed. In the context of conflict and humanitarian crises, education was not always to the forefront in the immediate interventions that were planned, and DFID acknowledged that it was not so much a lower order but a later order consideration in its response to crisis and emergencies.

The points in the report, which were well supported by the charity War Child when the APPG was chaired by Fiona O'Donnell, are being taken forward now in the APPG on global education for all, working with the Global Campaign for Education. The urgency of delivering children's right to education during crisis is highlighted in the report, "Education cannot wait". One of the points emphasised is that education investment in schools in conflict and post-conflict situations is good because it helps to save boys from falling prey to being recruited as child soldiers and then being corrupted into engagement in violence against women and girls. It also gives girls the opportunity of education and the transformative empowerment that that gives them.

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in order to ensure that girls can be taught safely in Afghanistan, security is absolutely key? Will he urge the Minister to look at the situation in the federally administered tribal areas of Pakistan, the buffer zone between Afghanistan and Pakistan, where the Pakistani army is keeping the peace, but no one is sure for how long? Can we urge DFID to look into that?

Mark Durkan: I am happy to be a conduit to the Minister on that point. I know he understands that when any of us make points in such debates, we do so on the basis of urging rather than begrudging the very good efforts that have already been made by Government. We are urging the Government because they have earned the position of leading positively on various issues internationally.

As chair of the APPG on Sudan and South Sudan, I am conscious of the report by the charity Waging Peace last November: "Rape in Darfur—A History of Predation". It had nine key recommendations and some telling observations. If I may advertise, hon. Members can sign early-day motion 903, which takes points from the report, before the end of this Session.

Waging Peace stated:

"Our testimonies indicate that in Darfur the measure that works best at preventing sexual violence is the physical protection offered by the region's...United Nations-African Union peacekeeping mission, UNAMID...However, it is in the immediate vicinity of the UNAMID-controlled compounds that our testimonies indicate that the worst abuses occur. Almost two-thirds of the victims report being raped upon leaving the relative safety of UNAMID-controlled zones: either to collect firewood, perform agricultural work while living in temporary accommodation near farms, or to

collect personal belongings immediately following a displacement. The similarity in the accounts provided in the testimonies suggests that such attacks...have become routine."

In the context of UNAMID, it goes on to suggest community liaison assistants on a model similar to that in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The criticism of what is happening near UNAMID's location is supported by a former spokesperson for the African Union-UN mission in Darfur, Aicha Elbasri, who has effectively turned whistleblower. She says,

"Victims of rape, systematic rape and mass rape in Darfur suffer in silence, as the use of these horrible crimes as weapons of war no longer commands international attention. But brutal attacks on the bodies and souls of women and girls continue unabated, and may have worsened in the absence of public scrutiny."

Reports by Waging Peace go some way to redressing the balance.

I want to draw particular attention to the law in Sudan and the issue of zina, which really affects victims there. Waging Peace says:

"While we recognise that international pressure contributed to the Sudanese government amending controversial laws around rape in early 2015, the changes did not go far enough. Formerly, under Article 149 of the Sudanese Criminal Code of 1991, rape was defined as 'zina', meaning intercourse outside marriage, without consent. If women or girls reported a rape but could not produce the necessary evidence, including witness statements from four males confirming that the act was 'without consent', they would instead be charged with 'zina' (adultery), and face being jailed, flogged or stoned to death. The law was changed in 2015 to reflect the fact that rape involves physical or psychological coercion, but Article 62 of the country's 1994 Evidence Act remains unchanged, meaning four male witnesses are still required in cases of this kind. This places a prohibitive burden of proof on victims of sexual violence."

It also means that victims still fear that they, not their attackers, will be punished if they reveal what has happened to them. In the context of the renewal of dialogue between the UK and Sudan and with Governments being invited to be involved in the wider Khartoum process, as it is known, there are issues that must be addressed.

If you will allow me, Mr Owen, I want to put in a further plug. One of the key reporters of the mass rape of girls in Darfur is Eric Reeves, who will meet the all-party group on Sudan and South Sudan on 7 June, I think—certainly that week. He has called the continuing mass rape of girls in Darfur the "most heinous crime" that "generates no international outrage". I hope that we can reflect some of that outrage.

The problem does not exist only in Sudan. A recent report by the Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust—HART—addresses the issues in South Sudan. It says:

"Some 185,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) have sought refuge in UN Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites, while around 90 per cent of IDPs are on the run or sheltering outside PoC sites...Nearly one in every three schools in South Sudan has been destroyed, damaged, occupied or closed, impacting on the education of more than 900,000 children, including some 350,000 who have been forced out of school by the conflict."

Elsewhere in the report is the observation:

"An adolescent girl in South Sudan is three times more likely to die in childbirth than complete primary school."

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this extremely important debate. Does he

[Dr Lisa Cameron]

agree that it is really important that we obtain disaggregated data on young women and girls with disability? They are doubly at risk because of their vulnerability to violence and sexual violence and because they could be left behind.

Mark Durkan: I fully concur with the hon. Lady. Her point echoes one made in a previous Westminster Hall debate. The issue is not only girls with disabilities, but indigenous people and others who might be marginalised in their society.

I want to read out one more quote from the HART report:

“The overall death toll is unknown. In Leer, Mayendit and Koch counties of Unity State alone, an estimated 1,000 civilians were killed, 1,300 women and girls were raped and 1,600 women and children were abducted from April to September 2015.”

That was not so long ago. The report is aptly titled “They are killing us loudly, but no one is listening”. This debate is an opportunity for us to show that we are listening, and hopefully we will be able to show how we will follow through on the commitments and targets in goal 5.

We must show that we are not just listening but working effectively in support of those women and girls who are confronted by violence and those who are trying to be advocates for them. Let us remember that in many areas women who are active human rights and women’s rights defenders are particularly targeted. Violence and sexual violence are used against them in so many countries. I am sure that other Members will address some of those points in their contributions.

Several hon. Members rose—

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. Before I call David T. C. Davies, I should say that a large number of Members have requested to speak in this debate. I do not want to enforce a time limit, but if Members limit their remarks to five minutes, everyone who has requested to speak will be able to do so.

9.55 am

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Thank you very much indeed, Mr Owen. I will try to comply with your request.

I thank the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) for raising this very important issue. I became interested in the subject almost 10 years ago, when I sat on the Home Affairs Committee, which conducted an inquiry into honour killings, female genital mutilation and forced marriage. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) on being one of the people who helped to bring this subject to the forefront.

Over the past 10 years, a lot of moves have been made to raise these very difficult issues, but I am still concerned that not enough action is being taken. We now have strong legislation against female genital mutilation, but I think we have had only one arrest and no convictions whatever. Around six years ago, I spent a lot of time trying to get information out of the Metropolitan police about how many investigations they had carried out. I eventually had to go to the Information Commissioner to find out that, in fact, they had done very little.

We all know that these are difficult issues to raise. There is a reluctance to raise them because of a perception that to do so is in some way racist. I do not accept that at all. I recently met some women of Islamic heritage, if I can put it like that, including Maryam Namazie, who said that one of the problems is that it is racist not to raise these issues. I have particular concerns about attitudes towards women within the Muslim community—not in general, of course, but certainly not enough is being done.

Mrs Helen Grant: Does my hon. Friend agree that to achieve our goals and to stop the type of abuse he is describing, we need an absolutely massive leap in women’s economic empowerment? Although we have made good progress, there are still far too many glass ceilings that need to be shattered.

David T. C. Davies: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. I shall mess up my speech a bit now by saying something I was going to say at the end. One of the more respected organisations in the Muslim community in the UK is the Muslim Council of Britain, yet looking at some of the organisations affiliated to it gives rise to a lot of concerns. For example, one affiliated group is the Blackburn Muslim Association—another organisation that is in receipt of public funds. My hon. Friend mentioned women in the workplace; the Blackburn Muslim Association says:

“It is not permissible for a woman to travel a distance exceeding 48 miles without a Husband or a Mahram (those men who can never marry the woman)”—

in other words, a close male relative. It goes on to quote from chapter 74 of the Book of Hajj, and then ends by saying—this is all in English, by the way—that “it will not be permissible for a woman to travel individually or with a group of women except with a Mahram or her husband, and this ruling applies to any form of travel including the journey for Hajj”.

This is an organisation that is publicly funded and affiliated to allegedly one of the most moderate Muslim groups in Britain saying that a woman should not be able to travel more than 48 miles because, presumably, that is how far a woman would have been able to travel in three days in 7th-century Saudi Arabia. How on earth will we be able to integrate women in the workplace and encourage equality when there are publicly funded organisations putting out such nonsense?

Dr Huq: I completely accept the hon. Gentleman’s point. All of us elected officials in this Chamber must be wary of community leaders who command airspace and the ear of officialdom and purport to speak—I say this as, I think, the only elected Muslim woman in the room—for the faith of Islam, which is a worldwide religion. We should not give these people who speak in the name of an entire world faith the credence that they have.

David T. C. Davies: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Muslim women in London recently pointed out to me that whenever we see these organisations, we always seem to be talking to the men. We are not doing nearly enough to talk to Muslim women. Presumably, there are Muslim women’s organisations, but why are they not at the forefront, and why are women not at the forefront of these other organisations? The hon. Lady is absolutely correct that we need to address that.

Very quickly—I cannot see how long I have been speaking on this clock—[HON. MEMBERS: “Four and a half minutes.”] In that case, very, very quickly, I am extremely concerned about sharia courts, which are spreading across the UK, because sharia law in some ways advocates violence against women and allows beating. I do not suggest that that is going on in the sharia courts that we have at the moment, but unless the people running them are willing to reject that notion absolutely, I have grave concerns about allowing sharia courts to make any judgments in the UK. I am particularly concerned to learn that one High Court judge sits on those courts.

I am also concerned about the rise of the wearing of the veil and the fact that it is going on in schools. I think the veil is a symbol of violence against women. It sends out a message to women that they are property and should not be looked at, and it gives men an excuse. It almost sends out a message that a man has a right to sexually attack an uncovered woman. I know that that happens on only a minority of occasions, although there was a dreadful instance of it in Cologne. The message has to go out to all men in all communities that they have absolutely no right to attack women under any circumstances whatever. The veil gets in the way of that.

There is much more that I could say. I thank the hon. Member for Foyle again. If we cannot get things right in our own country—

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

David T. C. Davies: At the Chair’s discretion, yes.

Imran Hussain: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that women have freedom of choice in exercising the right to wear a veil if they want to? The connection that he makes between attacks on women and the wearing of veils is worrying. I feel that he should retract some of those words.

David T. C. Davies: It is a right, and I would not want to take it away, but it needs to be challenged. We certainly need to challenge the reasons behind it.

Jess Phillips: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

David T. C. Davies: No, it would not be fair to other people. I hope the hon. Lady gets a chance to speak later.

It is vital that we take up the issues that the hon. Member for Foyle spoke about in countries around the world, from Afghanistan to Sudan. If we cannot get things right in our country, and if we are not willing to challenge people in our country about their belief systems, we cannot expect other countries to take notice of us.

10.2 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I thank the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) for making such a coherent and detailed case.

Without doubt, women’s empowerment is crucial to achieving sustainable growth and development across the world, so we need to address that issue. According to the UN, more than one in three women experience

physical or sexual violence, mostly from an intimate partner. As my party’s equalities spokesman, I am very happy to contribute to this debate. The hon. Gentleman referred to goal 5, on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. That is exactly what I am going to speak about, and I will give a few examples.

The Home Office has published its refreshed strategy for ending violence against women and girls, and it has said that in 2017 a service transformation fund will be launched to encourage new approaches. It is most welcome that the Government are taking this issue seriously and are taking action but, as the hon. Gentleman said in his introduction, we cannot take our eyes off the ball. As I have said previously, it is all too easy to forget those who are thousands of miles away. Sadly, nations such as ours, which have the influence to make a difference, too often turn a blind eye.

Let me give a couple of examples of where equality for women does not exist. I could give dozens if I had the time, but I do not. This is the story of a 12-year-old girl—Kakenya Ntaiya, a member of Kenya’s Maasai tribe:

“When I was 12 years old, my family organized a ceremony to transition my sisters and myself to become women...I was first because I was the oldest. I was told to open my knees, so I opened them. A woman grabbed my clitoris and cut it off. I bled. I fainted. But I am so lucky I am alive, because so many girls die from this.”

She had no idea that the ceremony would include female genital mutilation until after the woman made the cut.

The second story is of a young girl from India. While still a teenager, Monica Singh had the courage to stand up for her rights and to say no to a marriage proposal from an older man. However, she paid a very high price for claiming control of her future. After the rejection, the man tried to intimidate her into marrying him by repeatedly stalking and harassing her on her way home from school. She was just a teenager. One day, the man blocked her path completely. She said:

“Before I knew it, a bucket of acid was thrown on me...All I could feel was searing pain. Ninety per cent of my body had no skin left, and 65 per cent was permanently disfigured. I had to undergo 46 surgeries and be fed through a straw for more than a year of my life.”

When we hear such horror stories from across the world—not film stories, but stories from real life—we cannot fail to be annoyed.

When it comes to sex, no still does not mean no in some parts of the world. In Singapore and India, non-consensual sex within marriage is not a criminal offence and does not constitute rape as long as the wife is above a certain age—15 in India and 13 in Singapore. In Yemen, where child marriage is rife, there is no lower age limit for defining rape in marriage. Laws affecting people’s national identity continue to discriminate against women. In Jordan and Lebanon, a child needs a Jordanian or Lebanese father to automatically gain citizenship; their mother’s nationality is not passed on. Again, that is clear discrimination against women.

There are 46 countries that do not provide legal protection against domestic violence. In Nigeria, it is within a husband’s legal rights to beat his wife for the purpose of correcting her, as long as it does not cause grievous bodily harm. What is grievous bodily harm, if not beating one’s wife? Whether it is done gently—if

[Jim Shannon]

there is such a thing—or ferociously to the point of drawing blood or breaking bones, it is grievous bodily harm.

A fatwa imposed in 1990 makes Saudi Arabia the only country in the world in which women are forbidden to drive. Although a fatwa is not an official law, it is a religious declaration that carries the authority of law and imposes strict modes of behaviour. There are more female fighter jet pilots in neighbouring Jordan than women who can drive in Saudi Arabia—that is a fact. Saudi Arabia’s recent progress on women’s rights offers some hope. Saudi women were allowed to vote in municipal elections, and 19 women gained seats in local authorities—a landmark moment in the country’s recent history. We have to be mindful of the need to respect sovereignty, but the international community has to come together to address this issue and put deserved pressure on Administrations, wherever they are in the world, to abandon such blatantly sexist legislation. Sadly, that is not even the tip of the iceberg. We have barely scratched the surface, although we will do so in this debate.

I will conclude on this point, because I want to keep to my five minutes. There needs to be pressure from a co-ordinated international effort to confine such blatantly sexist laws to the history books. We must condemn practices such as FGM and acid attacks. We have a lot to do, but this House can take a stand today. I look forward to the Minister’s response.

10.7 am

Mrs Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) on securing this debate, and I thank the men who have come to speak. It is very important that men speak up for women; it is great to see that.

I had the pleasure of representing this country at the United Nations negotiations at which the sustainable development goals were agreed. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for International Development, who has consistently pushed for a strong and explicit commitment to empowering girls and women and achieving gender equality. The SDGs are universal, as the hon. Gentleman pointed out. We have to think about what that means for us here. There is no room for complacency. I pay tribute to ActionAid for its excellent Fearless campaign, which draws attention to the fact that this phenomenon affects countries worldwide, including the UK.

According to Home Office figures, up to 3 million women and girls in our country experience rape, domestic violence, stalking and other forms of violence every year. I set up a charity in my constituency to help the victims of domestic violence, so I can testify to the fact that it is very difficult to raise funds for that cause. We were able to provide a 24-hour counselling service with the help of volunteers. It was only then that I realised that domestic violence is no respecter of class or religion. It cuts across the whole community in every one of our constituencies. I also pay tribute to the fact that the popular media have done well in drawing attention to the fact that this happens everywhere, all around us and far too often.

I found it shocking that, when 18 to 25-year-olds were polled by MORI about their attitudes to violence in girl-boy relationships, one in five young men said they thought it is normal. Even more disturbingly, one in nine girls thought that violence is a normal part of girl-boy relationships. That set me on the course, with the charity, of trying to prevent that attitude from persisting in our society. We supported a charitable project called Keep Cool to teach youngsters at the top of primary school, before they move on to secondary school, that violence is not a normal part of relationships. Sadly, the funding for it no longer exists, so, through the good offices of the Minister present, I ask the Government to look at preventing the prevalence of acceptance of violence in our society.

Something that hon. Members might not know is where the phrase “rule of thumb” comes from. It has been said to come from a law of 1861 that allowed a man to beat a woman with a stick as long as it was no wider than a thumb. Luckily, it has been repealed, but it shows how accepted that was in our society, and how hard we need to continue to work to eradicate such acceptance.

The domestic violence statistics have remained stubbornly and depressingly high: sadly, two women and two children a week die as a result of domestic violence. I am using this opportunity for us to reflect on what the sustainable development goals mean for us, although of course I recognise that right around the world many women—many very poor women—are in a difficult position, in violent and abusive relationships.

On the brighter side, I commend the work of many British-registered charities in empowering women. Through Tearfund, I saw at first hand, in Bangladesh, how female garment workers are being empowered by mobile banking to return their wages to the homes and communities that they come from, without the middleman taking a cut, resulting in the transformation of those villages through solar power and sanitation, and in the opportunity for many of their siblings and families to secure an education.

As key decisions about the future funding of DFID’s key priorities approach, as part of the upcoming civil society partnership review, donor leaders such as the UK can prioritise and target resources effectively to help to end violence against women and girls. I strongly recommend that we do.

10.11 am

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) on bringing the debate to the House today. He said, rightly, that we should be listening, and raising our voice. I want to highlight in the UK Parliament the continuing plight of the Nigerian female students abducted by Boko Haram. I want to talk briefly about the specificity of the crime, which is worth narrating, and, more broadly, about violence against girls, in particular in education.

Simon Schama, the historian, wrote well when he stated:

“Education, the idea of teaching our children something other than the parroting of sacred texts, has become a target.” That is not only aimed at girls, but they are a particular focus for radical Islamists.

On the night of 14 to 15 April 2014, 276 female students were kidnapped from the government secondary school in the town of Chibok in Borno state, Nigeria. Responsibility for the kidnappings was claimed by Boko Haram, an extremist and terrorist organisation based in north-eastern Nigeria. Over the next few months, 57 of the schoolgirls managed to escape, but the 219 remaining girls are still missing and have now been away from their families for 744 days, subjected to God knows what at the hands of the terrorists. On 14 April this year, a video was obtained showing 15 of the hostages in black robes. It was the first time they had been seen since May 2014. It is widely believed that the girls, who have forcefully been denied their education, are being held as a negotiating tool.

The wonderfully brave and inspirational Malala Yousafzai, who fled the Taliban in Pakistan, which wanted to deny her an education, came to learn in the great city of Birmingham. She wrote an open letter to the parents of the missing Nigerian girls on the second anniversary of their kidnapping:

“I write this letter with a heavy heart, knowing you have endured another year separated from your daughters...As I did last year, I call on President Buhari of Nigeria—and everyone who can help rescue the Chibok girls—to act now...Parents, thank you for having the courage to send your daughters to school. My dream is that one day they will come home, finish their education and choose their futures for themselves.”

I congratulate the Minister on his joint statement with the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend East (James Duddridge), on the two-year anniversary of the kidnapping of the girls. I urge him to ensure that, when we are, rightly, involved in bilateral aid for Nigeria, we impress on the Nigerians the need to use their military and intelligence to rescue the girls. Concerns have been expressed, in particular by United States officials, that the President is more focused on fighting political opponents than on fighting Boko Haram.

Will the Minister tell us what our Government are doing to ensure that the Nigerian Government focus on securing the release of the Chibok girls? Will he call on the Government of Nigeria to release the report of the investigation panel into the abduction of the Chibok girls? Will he also ensure that the British Government step up support for the Safe Schools initiative in Nigeria, set up in the wake of the Chibok kidnappings by a coalition of inspired Nigerian business leaders working with the UN special envoy for global education, Gordon Brown, the Global Business Coalition for Education and A World at School?

The issue does not affect girls only. We have seen assaults on education by radical Islamist forces with a fear of enlightenment, autonomy and learning—a rancid assault on education and reading—which began with the Beslan school siege, when hundreds of young boys and girls were slaughtered by radical Islamists; we saw it in the assault on the school in Peshawar, Pakistan, and the butchering of young boys who wanted to learn; and we have seen it with the Chibok girls.

My message is that the UK Parliament has not forgotten the 219 missing girls. As parliamentarians, we want to give our full support to UK Ministers pressing the Nigerian Government to do everything that they can to secure the girls’ release, so that they may fulfil their rights under the United Nations to an education and to autonomy.

10.16 am

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I give credit to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) for securing the debate. I, too, state my support for the ActionAid campaign to tackle violence against women and girls around the world.

We all in this Chamber long to nurture an environment in which everyone is empowered to live full and active lives, but more than one in three women experience physical or sexual violence, mostly inflicted by an intimate partner, according to the UN. That is a scourge of society and I welcome every effort to achieve positive social change that will help all women of all ages.

Empowering women is crucial to achieving sustainable growth and development throughout the world. So much effort, as we know, is put into achieving that. Women have a right to be heard, but as we have heard already, so many girls and women in the world are silenced by violence and intimidation. We have no time to lose, and we must give greater support to organisations and to the networks established to ensure that the voices of women are heard.

Of the 17 sustainable development goals, I want to focus on SDG 5, which states:

“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. The goals are a wonderful set of agreements, but it will be a huge challenge to achieve all of them. SDG 5, in particular, would be a wonderful thing for the global population to achieve—gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. Within the goal are nine targets, including:

“End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere”,
and

“Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.”

Following the landmark Modern Slavery Act 2015, we must continue to break the supply chains that lead to the abuse of trafficked victims. We must ensure that the victims of trafficking are properly identified when they come into contact with public authorities and agencies. We must ensure that those authorities and agencies have the resources and training to enable such women to rebuild their lives and to support them as they re-enter society, giving them confidence.

I welcome the Government’s recently published strategy for the period from 2016 to 2020 to end violence against women and girls. However, a strategy is of worth only if there are robust tools in place to check progress regularly and hold to account all those responsible for delivering the goals that have been set. If we are to stamp out the violence we are concerned about, we need national and international bodies to pay continual close attention to the strategy to protect and empower women and girls. The Secretary of State for International Development spoke on 11 March about the urgency of the fight. We must systematically challenge the terrible harm being done to women and girls.

A key starting point must be to take a stronger lead about making any violence, discrimination and emotional abuse of women and girls socially unacceptable, in the UK and around the world. We must not tolerate any behaviour that is aimed at crushing and devaluing women. There is much to be done, and some may feel that the task is too great. I do not accept that, and I am

[Derek Thomas]

encouraged that through the efforts of ActionAid we are discussing the challenge today. I recognise that there is a massive task ahead. It is a huge challenge to provide safety and opportunity for women and girls around the world, but I join those in this Chamber, and the UK Government, in making a commitment to do all I can to achieve that target.

10.21 am

Anne McLaughlin (Glasgow North East) (SNP): Having done so several times before, I know what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) on securing the debate and on a thoughtful and perhaps shocking speech. The issue of violence against women is a question of fundamental human rights, and the prominence given to women's empowerment in the UN sustainable development goals is absolutely correct. The focus of the fifth goal for development around the globe—after poverty, food, health and education—is women. The UN recognises and acknowledges the positive effect that women's rights, safety, gender equality and empowerment will have on all its other goals. Yet I believe that the Government have not given adequate support to women in crisis.

I want today to raise the issue facing a particular group of women, who are being let down even more than the average victim of violence in the home. Last week the investigative journalism platform “The Ferret” published a report subsequently covered in the national press, with three linked pieces focusing on Scotland, England and Northern Ireland. Each contained strong case studies demonstrating how badly the system has let down women with insecure immigration status who experience domestic abuse. I want to add my voice to those of lawyers, psychologists, campaigners, journalists and leading human rights experts, including the Refugee Council, the Scottish Refugee Council and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. They are all calling on the Government to take action to stop the lives of refugee women who are fleeing domestic violence being put at risk. As the hon. Member for Monmouth (David T. C. Davies) said, if we cannot get things right in our own country, where can we get them right?

The primary issue is that women who experience domestic violence and who have insecure immigration status are being discriminated against in access to protection and safety. By insecure immigration status, I mean women who are asylum seekers or women who have the legal right to remain but no recourse to public funds, such as women who have joined refugee husbands through family reunion. They do not have access to refuges because they cannot get housing benefit, on account of their immigration status. In some cases, lawyers are advising them to stay in violent relationships. They give that advice because Home Office guidelines state that women must be able to prove that they are experiencing violence for that to be taken into account. The Glasgow-based Legal Services Agency has a women's project, which has supported 45 such women in the last year. Sarah Crawford, one of its lawyers, questions how women can provide proof. She says that

“the amount of evidence required is overwhelming particularly for a vulnerable woman who has been abused”.

The women have a choice. They can stay and be beaten, and often raped, or they can face life literally on the streets. Are those really the only choices we can offer them? Dr Marsha Scott, chief executive of Scottish Women's Aid and the UK's expert on the European Women's Lobby Observatory on Violence against Women, calls the situation a “bureaucratic form of torture,” which “re-victimises women and puts them in great danger.”

Nina Murray, of the Scottish Refugee Council, goes further:

“Sooner or later someone else is going to be seriously harmed, or even killed, because we have failed to ensure that there is adequate protection there.”

To keep within the time limits on speeches, I will not speak as I planned to do about any particular women. We have all heard the stories. Some of us have worked with women in situations of the kind I have mentioned, and some may have personal experience; we know who we are talking about. The Home Office does have a policy on responding to reports of domestic abuse from women it accommodates, but campaigners have been seeking a review of that for more than two years, because it is inadequate and applies only to certain women. The Home Office has accepted the inadequacy of the policy: in February 2015 it completed a consultation with refugee organisations as well as those working on combating violence against women. The consensus among all of them was that asylum-seeking women who report domestic violence should have access to mainstream domestic abuse services—refuges and all the support that they entail. The Home Office indicated acceptance of that, but today, 14 months later, it is still considering its response.

I have some questions to ask. I realise that the Minister who is responding to the debate cannot answer them all. However, perhaps he can help us to get answers. The shocking case studies in the media report that I referred to illustrate an unacceptable safety gap for particular groups of women. How can the Government possibly justify that? How is what I have spoken about today compatible with the Home Secretary's violence against women and girls action plan and the Government's stated intention to ratify the Istanbul convention? Will the Minister ask the Home Secretary to lead a rapid review of the Government's arrangements for protecting those women survivors of domestic abuse and report her conclusions swiftly to Parliament, so that what we have heard about today will not be repeated?

No woman, man or child should have to live with violence in their home. There are question marks over funding for refuges for victims of domestic violence in some parts of the UK, but there is no question about entitlement. All victims, we all agree, should be and are entitled to support and protection and the right to be protected from violence—all, that is, apart from the women I have been speaking about today. I congratulate the journalists who carried out the investigations on behalf of “The Ferret”, and in particular Karin Goodwin. They have done their profession proud. Now it is our turn in this place to do our profession proud. As soon as possible we must do something to put an end to the discrimination and to women having to live in terror in their homes.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for finishing. The Front-Bench speakers have agreed to curtail the time they will take, and there are

three other Members who want to speak. One made a request in writing and I will call him first. If Members take about three and a half minutes each, we will be able to hear them and the Front Benchers, and protect the Minister's time.

10.27 am

Greg Mulholland (Leeds North West) (LD): I add my congratulations to those that have been offered to the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) on securing the debate. I also congratulate ActionAid on its excellent Fearless campaign, and on asking so many of us to apply for the debate and attend it. The only problem, as you have outlined, Mr Owen, is that clearly the time given to the debate is completely inadequate. It should have had at least three hours and possibly, given the importance of the issue and the number of hon. Members present, a six-hour debate in the main Chamber. That is something we may consider.

To all the ActionAid campaigners I want to say that campaigning works. I say that as a former campaigner, and it is nice to see it happening, and to see the number of people here. The turnout shows how passionately Members across the House care about the issue. There is no denying that the sustainable development goals have the power to change the world as we believe it should be changed, but that requires politicians from around the world to adopt them, take them seriously and be accountable for their progress. We in Parliament accept that, and we must work with parliamentarians and Governments around the world to achieve that change.

In the limited time I have I will briefly remind the House of the types of violence that scar humanity and the world. Violence by an intimate partner remains the most common. Global surveys suggest that half of women who die in acts of homicide are killed by their current or former husband or partner. That is a shocking statistic and I am proud to wear the white ribbon, the badge of a worldwide campaign of men standing up against violence against women. In terms of the horror of sexual violence in conflict, the fact that rape is still frequently used as a tactic of war is shocking. I pay tribute to the previous Foreign Secretary, Lord Hague of Richmond, for the work he did in making that issue a focus of the Department. We were showing global leadership on that, and we have to keep pressing it.

Female genital mutilation has been mentioned. While we have been strong on that, rightly, in this country, the reality is that between 130 million and 140 million women and girls today are believed to have undergone that horrific form of sexual abuse. Three million girls—including, shockingly, 137,000 girls here in the UK—are still at risk of it every year.

So-called honour killings remain a problem, including, I am sorry to say, in this country. That must be stamped out. I pay tribute to the amazing Karma Nirvana charity, based in Headingley, which does wonderful work. I know there was a ministerial visit to that charity recently. There are also appalling risks for women who are victims of modern slavery and trafficking. I pay tribute to the Palm Cove Society, also based in Headingley, for the work it does.

I have only managed to touch on a few things, but I hope we can debate this further, because it is clear how seriously we take this issue here.

Several hon. Members rose—

Albert Owen (in the Chair): There are two Members left who wish to speak. They may take two minutes each, and we will then call the Front-Bench spokesmen.

10.31 am

Ben Howlett (Bath) (Con): Thank you, Mr Owen; I will try to be as quick as possible. I congratulate the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) on leading this debate. I have spoken with him a number of times in different debates on this issue, and it is always a privilege to speak after him. I agree with the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) that the issue requires a longer debate on the Floor of the House; I am happy to join him in that call.

In a debate on the implementation of the sustainable development goals a couple of weeks ago, the Minister of State, Department for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Mr Swayne), responded—very eloquently, as ever—and was quite clear that we should hold back and wait for the response. The Government are doing great things in introducing the 0.7% international aid target, and a report will be produced later in the year.

Since then, as the Minister who is present is aware, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr Letwin), has given evidence to the Select Committee on International Development. As a member of the Select Committee on Women and Equalities, my interest in this debate focuses on sustainable development goal 5. Our Committee's visit to the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations a couple of weeks ago was one of the most eye-opening things I have done in my life.

At the International Development Committee, my right hon. Friend was quite clear that there is cross-party support on sustainable consumption, and he therefore believes progress can be made. He said that there are already a number of programmes, such as the troubled families programme, and others through which Britain is leading the way on sustainable development.

I was pleased to hear that a report is due to be published later in the year that will outline the Government's position on co-operation between Departments in implementing the SDGs and on specific SDGs that Departments seek to address. However, further details of departmental co-operation will not be released in that report, and there will be no new body, committee or group of MPs to monitor progress. It would be good to find out the view of those in the Department for International Development on that point.

I must ask the Minister how he feels the Department will fit into the new structure outlined by my right hon. Friend at the Select Committee. It was intimated that the Prime Minister is responsible for international implementation and the Cabinet Office for domestic implementation. We are thus now not necessarily aware of where the Department for International Development sits in the wider scheme of things. I hope the Minister will use this opportunity to answer that question. As he knows, our responsibility as parliamentarians in the Women and Equalities Committee is to hold the Government's feet to the fire in relation to goal 5 and ensure that we implement a strong strategy at international

[Ben Howlett]

and domestic levels. Given that response, what can we do in our Committee to ensure we hold the Government to account on that specific point? I will end my speech there, due to the time.

10.34 am

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): I am pleased to participate in this debate under your stewardship, Mr Owen. I thank the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) for bringing this matter to our attention.

The level of physical and sexual violence perpetrated by men against women and girls across the world is simply staggering. Such violence does not respect national boundaries. That is not to say the extent of violence is the same in every country or that the mechanisms to tackle it are the same; that is clearly not the case. However, it is clear and unambiguous that such violence is endemic in many parts of the world. It is a daily act—it is routine in the most sickening way. For some women and girls it is virtually a way of life. It is administered by both individuals and patriarchal institutions. In some cultures, it is not simply tolerated but positively encouraged and endorsed.

The nature and extent of the violence are shocking. A United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime study of global homicide revealed that 119 women are killed every day by an intimate partner or family member, and that is likely to be a significant underestimate. Between 100 million and 140 million girls and women have been subjected to female genital mutilation. As many as 70 million girls worldwide have been married before the age of 18, many of them against their will, and 150 million girls are sexually assaulted every year at or on their way to school.

Whenever and wherever violence is perpetrated by men against women and girls, in whatever fashion or form, it must be stopped. It should not and cannot be tolerated, nor should religious belief, cultural norms or expectations be used as an excuse or reason for its continuance. There must be no room for doubt or manoeuvre, no shilly-shallying and no ifs or buts. Quite simply, it must be eradicated.

We support campaigns to eradicate polio, malaria, hepatitis and many other diseases, so why not violence? Paradoxically, those in a position to help stop this violence are women themselves, but they must be empowered, encouraged and helped to do that with resources that, for example, assist women's support organisations. That is not my prescription; I am not imaginative enough to think of that, but ActionAid is. It has indicated that:

“Women's rights organisations have long been at the forefront of the fight to end violence—from providing life-saving services, raising women's voices, to holding governments to account for their policies and practices.”

ActionAid, which I must thank for its briefing, highlighted a study across 70 countries over four decades that found the mobilisation of independent women's rights organisations to be the single most effective way to tackle violence.

I will finish on this. As the right hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman), suggested, the Government should grasp the opportunity presented by the civil

society partnership review and the bilateral and multilateral reviews to put much more much-needed resource into this policy area.

10.37 am

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. May I start by congratulating the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) on securing this debate? This is an important issue for all of us, as evidenced by the fantastic turnout. Indeed, a number of my constituents have taken the time to write to me personally to make their feelings on this matter clear. I am therefore pleased to have the opportunity to sum up on behalf of the Scottish National party.

As we have heard, one in three women and girls across the world will be victims of physical and sexual violence at some point their lives. Such atrocities know no borders; they are committed within our communities, throughout our country and across continents each and every day. It is right therefore that the international community comes together and works in a common endeavour to eradicate violence and discrimination in all its forms and to secure equality for women and girls in every corner of the globe. The UN sustainable development goals are an opportunity for countries the world over to come together and change the course of the 21st century.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I apologise for my late arrival and early departure. Will my hon. Friend welcome the commitment made by the Scottish Government, and particularly the First Minister, to women's equality and early adoption of the sustainable development goals and the leadership that that shows?

Gavin Newlands: I do, wholeheartedly. I was going to mention that, but I have cut my speech down due to time, so I welcome that intervention.

We have an opportunity to tackle the entrenched problems that afflict our world, such as poverty, inequality and gender-based violence, and we must seize that opportunity with both hands. In addition to the one in three women who will be victims of physical and sexual violence, 150 million girls across the world will be sexually assaulted at or on their way to school each year. Each and every day, some 159 women die at the hands of a partner or family member in so-called honour killings—killed by the very people that we would expect to care for them the most. It is simply beyond comprehension.

To date, only two thirds of all countries have outlawed domestic violence and only 52 countries have explicitly criminalised rape within marriage. We live in a world where human trafficking, sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and forced and child marriages still prevail. Throughout the world, 133 million women have been victim to the abhorrent practice of FGM and, sadly, millions of women and girls will be forced into marriages with men against their will.

There is absolutely no defence for these demeaning acts or disgraceful attitudes. The fact that violence against women is more prevalent in some other countries underlines the importance of the UK fulfilling its vital part on the world stage in this matter. At every opportunity,

we must tell these countries, whether friend or foe, that violence against women and girls should never be committed and must never be condoned.

Needless to say, it is clear that the problem before us represents a significant challenge—but it is a problem that we cannot shy away from and a challenge that we must undertake to eliminate together, because behind the depressing statistics are many devastating stories, some of which we have heard today. Although the sustainable development goals cut across a diverse range of areas—from equality and education to the economy and the environment—we simply cannot succeed in a number of those areas without confronting the violence that is sadly perpetrated against women and girls throughout the world.

I am sure that Members from across the House will be pleased to hear that earlier this month, the Bulgarian Government decided that Bulgaria would be the latest state to sign the Istanbul convention. The Istanbul convention places an obligation on Governments to put appropriate measures in place to prevent violence against women in all its forms, protect victims and to prosecute perpetrators.

The UK Government signed the Istanbul convention in 2012; however, it has failed to ratify it to date. In January 2014, the Prime Minister stated that the treaty would be ratified in the “next few months”, yet here we are, almost two and a half years later, and the Government have yet to fulfil their promise. Ratifying the convention will send a strong message to the international community about the world that we seek to build and the improvements that we wish to make. The UK can—and should—lead by example on the issue of violence against women. We have been told for two years that the delay is due to an issue with extraterritoriality. In summing up, will the Minister tell us the latest on ratification and about any discussion between Home Office and Justice Ministers and their devolved counterparts?

As I stated, women and girls have an important role to play in all the sustainable development goals, because many of the 17 goals have female equality and empowerment at their heart. Therefore, ending gender-based violence and discrimination are preconditions for meeting many of the goals. Just as women have an important role to play in achieving the sustainable development goals, so too do men. White Ribbon is a global campaign that encourages men to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women. The work of White Ribbon and other similar groups is invaluable and shows that men are able and willing to rise to the challenge of eradicating violence and discrimination against women and girls. That being said, Mr Owen, you, the mover of the motion and three Members summing up this debate are all men, so perhaps we are a tad over-represented today.

Finally, I commend the hon. Member for Foyle again on securing this debate and all the hon. Members who have attended it and spoken. Politics in Westminster is known to sometimes produce more heat than light. I believe, however, that a rare consensus has emerged today as we debate this important issue.

Beyond this Chamber, there is now growing consensus and support among international organisations, that to achieve the SDGs by 2030, investment in the work of women’s rights organisations is central to the implementation of this ambitious agenda. Such organisations are vital

in attempting to tackle violence against women and girls. However, they are poorly resourced, receiving just under 1% of total UK aid for gender equality. The Scottish National party supports ActionAid in its calls for DFID to support and increase funding to grassroots women’s rights organisations working on the front line to promote gender equality and tackle violence. Will the Minister give a commitment to do that today?

We have a duty to never shirk nor shun an opportunity to end such violence and discrimination, and to secure equality and empower women and girls wherever they live throughout the world. Be in no doubt that, although that will not be simple or straightforward, the prize for it is a world that is less hungry and more healthy, more equal and more educated, safer and more secure, and more free and fair—indeed, the best of all possible worlds for women and girls to grow up and live in.

10.44 am

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I thank the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) for securing this very important debate and add my thanks to ActionAid for its continuing fearless efforts in this very important area. Violence against women and girls is truly deplorable and I applaud the Government’s efforts thus far to address the issue. Hon. Members from across the House have made excellent contributions today. Unfortunately, time does not permit me to speak about them all, but I will come on to one or two during my contribution.

Let us be clear that we face a huge undertaking. Awareness of violence against women and girls has grown considerably in recent years. I welcome the Government’s efforts to increase that awareness. I also recognise that the UK has often been at the forefront of raising the issue, as a key player not only in the development of the SDG, but in the girl summit 2014 and the global summit to end sexual violence in conflict. However, the UN General Assembly says, and it is absolutely right, that violence against women and girls is one of the most systematic and widespread human rights violations. One in three women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime, which is an alarming statistic. Alongside that, 150 million girls under 18 experience some form of sexual violence; 80% of trafficked people are women, with the vast majority being trafficked for sexual exploitation; and the most common victims of conflict around the world are women and girls.

The UN has identified a variety of factors that are responsible for the increasing occurrences of violence against women and girls: poor education, economic inequality, community gender biases and proximity to conflict are just a few. Conversely, better education, later marital ages, gender equality and economic autonomy for women help to reduce violence. It is therefore clear that the Government need to focus their attention on boosting protective factors while minimising risk factors. Tackling this violence needs much more than just financial assistance. Factors such as gender inequality, impunity for offenders and insufficient data create the environment in which violence can take place.

The challenge is huge, of course, and there is significant work to do for the SDGs to be achieved and for the UK to implement them. That is why I am concerned that the Government have yet to issue a single, unified action

[Imran Hussain]

plan and strategy for how the SDGs, and within them, the goal of tackling violence against women and girls both at home and abroad, will be implemented by the Government. Without the publication of that strategy, there will be considerable difficulties with transparency, and not having sufficient guidelines could hinder the implementation of the measures that would have the greatest success. I note that the Select Committee on International Development is leading an inquiry into how the SDGs are being implemented and I look forward to the publication of that report, as, I am sure, does the Minister.

It is also important to mention the millennium development goals. Although they were not as extensive as the SDGs with regards to women and girls, I believe that the UK's work on them holds considerable lessons that will be invaluable in going forward on the SDGs. We should learn those lessons and go into the SDGs a little wiser. I recognise that DFID has included analysis in its annual reports and accounts, but that is not substantial enough. I therefore press the Minister for an answer on whether the Government will issue a single authoritative report on the UK's contribution to meeting the MDGs.

Ultimately, I have several concerns about how DFID will be able to achieve success in reducing violence against women and girls. This is a challenge on an extraordinary scale and, without measures to address inhibiting factors, we cannot make sufficient progress. I am also concerned that, without a single unified strategy on the SDGs' implementation, DFID will not have the necessary guidelines for its work, causing the goals to suffer. The lack of strategy and unification across Government already appears to be causing difficulties, with a divergence existing between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence and DFID in work to address sexual violence in conflict. I would appreciate a response from the Minister on how DFID is working with those other Departments to create a unified strategy in this area.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his time keeping. I call the Minister, who may give a minute at the end to the hon. Gentleman who secured the debate.

10.49 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Nick Hurd): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I congratulate you on getting all hon. Members in. I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) on creating the opportunity for so many hon. Members of both sexes and from all parts of the kingdom to come here to put on the record and reassert the priority that this House attaches to tackling this incredibly important issue.

One of my most powerful experiences as a young Member of Parliament was listening to a young mother telling me how her life had disintegrated under the weight of systematic domestic violence. It has never left me, so I am delighted that this debate has rammed

home the point that violence against women and girls is one of the most systematic and widespread human rights violations worldwide.

The fact that, as we understand it, one in three women globally is beaten or sexually abused in her lifetime is totally unacceptable. My right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs Spelman) was right in saying that we must never allow that to be considered normal. It is absolutely unacceptable wherever it takes place. We continue to have a very substantive problem in the UK and there may well be safety gaps that we need to be forensic about, whether it is sexual violence, intimate partner violence, so-called honour killings, female genital mutilation, rape as a weapon of war or child marriage.

As well as being a gross violation, violence against women and girls is fundamentally an issue of human rights and it would be enough to consider it simply in that context. It has not come through in this debate, but we should also recognise that it restricts opportunity by holding people back and limiting the potential of individuals, families, communities and economies in multiple ways. Girls who experience violence are less likely to complete their education and are at increased risk of dying when giving birth. Women and girls suffering from the health consequences of violence are less able to earn a living, which prevents families from escaping poverty.

No country can achieve sustained economic development if half its population is locked out of economic opportunities. World Bank data on the economic costs of intimate partner violence alone suggest that it accounts for a loss of 1% to 2% of GDP in many countries. So tackling violence is vital if we are to protect women's rights and address poverty. It is also vital if we are to help to deliver the global goals and to play our part as a country in helping to shape a fairer, more prosperous world. That goes completely with the grain of British values, but is absolutely in our national interest. This agenda matters enormously, and the Chamber wants to know whether the UK is pulling its weight.

I am relatively new to this agenda. I do not lead on it in DFID. The Secretary of State does that superbly with Baroness Verma. When I assess the evidence I am proud of the role we have played so far, but there is zero room for complacency. There is a case for saying that Britain has been a global leader in tackling violence against women. That leadership can be seen in the priority we attach to it in our programming at DFID. Since 2012, we have doubled the number of programmes that address violence against women and girls. We currently have 127 programmes across 29 countries. In 23 programmes where the absolute priority is to focus entirely on this agenda, the funding commitment has been £184 million of taxpayers' money since 2010. So there has been leadership in making this a priority within programming and in our commitment to advance our knowledge through research and development, as in our world-leading research and innovation fund, which is drawing together experts across the globe to test ideas and produce rigorous evidence on how to prevent violence. That will be a global public good, helping countries, Governments, donors and non-governmental organisations everywhere to address violence and to get the most from every penny spent on prevention.

We have a strong agenda about leaving no one behind, so our leadership also means reaching the most vulnerable, including women and girls living with disabilities, a point that was raised earlier. To give just one example, DFID is working with the United Nations and civil society groups to improve access to justice in Zimbabwe, specifically for girls and women with disabilities who have experienced violence. This process is hard enough for survivors to go through without the additional barriers that people with a disability face.

British leadership can also be seen in our absolute determination to improve access to justice. The UK is supporting Physicians for Human Rights in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to help women and girls who have experienced sexual violence to access justice. One physician said that

“this team work was not being done before...But they trained us together with police officers, magistrates, lawyers and now we understand that the collection of proofs regarding forensic data needed all of us to work together.”

In fact, over the last five years, UK aid has helped to improve access to justice for more than 10 million women and girls globally, which is a staggering achievement that I am very proud of.

Our leadership also means preventing and responding to violence against women and girls in humanitarian crises, not least in Sudan and South Sudan. Some people thought that policy area was too hard or not important enough to be a priority, but since 2012 we have invested around six times the previous amount in this area. For example, in the Syria response, UK support is providing specialist assistance to those affected by sexual and gender-based violence. That includes clinical care, case management and counselling. Our leadership has meant tackling issues where others were afraid to take them on, or felt they were too private a matter for a public forum—issues such as FGM, child marriage and domestic violence, both at home and overseas.

During the debate, hon. Members have pressed the Government to work more closely together. We are doing that on these issues more than ever before, including on the new Home Office-led ending violence against women and girls strategy, which brings together a set of actions in our efforts in the UK and internationally.

I am proud that we are the largest donor on female genital mutilation, investing £35 million across 17 countries over five years, alongside a £12 million programme in Sudan. Our programme to end child marriage, along with other donor support, will reach more than 2.5 million girls, giving them greater choice and control over their future. We can and should be incredibly proud of the UK's contribution to these agendas. This is not just about spending or development programmes; it is about advocacy and using the full range of the UK's assets to

influence others to protect and to progress women's and girls' rights. I am delighted that cross-party this debate has recognised the work by many ministerial colleagues, not least Lord Hague and my Secretary of State, but Baroness Verma as our ministerial champion for tackling violence against women and girls and Baroness Anelay as our special representative on preventing sexual violence and conflict. Through them, we can drive action on the international stage and support it at national level.

There is British leadership not just in Government, but through our civil society networks.

Mr Robin Walker (Worcester) (Con): Does the Minister agree that sustainable development goal 5 cannot be seen in isolation and that the contribution of goal 4 on education for all is crucial to reducing violence against women and girls? Will he commend the Global Campaign for Education and its Send my Friend to School and Send my Sister to School campaigns?

Mr Hurd: I agree with my hon. Friend and place on record my support for and congratulations on those campaigns, which are symptomatic of some of the powerful work by civil society to support and to challenge the Government in this respect. As a former Minister for Civil Society, I defer to no one in my admiration for that effort. We have invested in many new programmes working with grassroots women's rights organisations in the past 18 months.

On the call for the creation of a new fund, we do not think that a new fund is the best value-for-money option. There is a strong case for supporting existing funds so they can draw on existing expertise and networks, and make the most of the economies of scale.

I want to give the last word to the sponsor of this debate. I will do my best to ensure that those who raised specific points receive substantive replies in writing. I close by placing on the record the absolute determination of the Department for International Development and the rest of the Government to sustain the leadership that Britain has shown on this agenda.

10.59 am

Mark Durkan: I thank everyone who has spoken. We have heard about the issue from so many different angles and with so many different accents. That is hugely important. As others have said, we need to take the matter further and to debate it for longer. Our task is to keep narrowing the gap between what is and what ought to be until we close it and eradicate it.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).

Ambulatory Care

11 am

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the use of ambulatory care.

I will start by referring to the NHS England publication that prompted me to call for the debate. NHS England has recently published a multi-agency quick guide and supporting information to support local health and social care systems to reduce the time that people spend in hospital. It acknowledges that people's physical and mental ability and independence can decline in a hospital bed. For people aged 80 and over, 10 days in hospital equates to 10 years of muscle wasting. The report therefore recommends that people should seek to make decisions about their long-term care outside hospital and preferably in their own home or in a bed where their true long-term needs are understood.

The report was prepared not by the Government, but by the emergency care improvement programme of NHS England. It adds to the overwhelming clinical evidence that this approach is by far the best way of proceeding. The report goes on to say that care at home enables people to live independently and well in their preferred environment for longer. It contains checklists of questions for patients and commissioners to achieve that situation.

I am immensely encouraged by that, as it is on that basis that the number of beds has been worked out at Townlands hospital in Henley and the answer of up to 14 initially has been reached. Those beds are to be associated with the hospital, but in the care home at the side of the hospital. It is reassuring to know that we are at the forefront of current thinking and action. This approach is supported by organisations such as the Alzheimer's Society and clinicians throughout the NHS. It is the right way to proceed and in the best interests of the whole community.

Before I continue, I should probably say what ambulatory care is, besides what I have just described. Ambulatory care is medical care provided on an out-patient basis. It includes diagnosis, observation, consultation, treatment, intervention and rehabilitation services. This care can include advanced medical technology and procedures, the costs of which should not be underestimated. Under this new care model, outlined in the NHS five year forward view, GP group practices would expand and include nurses, community health services and, in particular, social workers. Those practices would shift the majority of out-patient consultations and ambulatory care to out-of-hospital settings.

Let us consider the effects of hospitalisation. For many older persons, hospitalisation results in functional decline despite cure or repair of the condition that took them into hospital in the first place. Hospitalisation can result in complications unrelated to the problem that caused admission or to its specific treatment, for reasons that are explainable and avoidable. Age is often associated with a number of functional changes—which I am sure you and I, Mr Owen, have no experience of at this stage in our lives—including reductions in muscle strength and aerobic capacity; diminished pulmonary ventilation; altered sensory confidence, appetite and thirst; and a tendency towards urinary incontinence, which I am not saying any of us suffer from.

Hospitalisation and bed rest superimpose factors such as enforced immobilisation, reduction of plasma volume, accelerated bone loss, increased closing volumes and sensory deprivation. Any of those factors may thrust vulnerable older persons into a state of irreversible functional decline, so hospitalisation is a major risk for them. I am talking particularly about the very old. For many, hospitalisation is followed by an often irreversible decline in functional status and a change in quality and style of life.

A recent US study showed that of 60 functionally independent individuals aged 75 or older who were admitted to hospital from their home for acute illness, 75% were no longer independent on discharge. That included 15% who were discharged to nursing homes.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): By intervening, I am not of course in any way suggesting that my hon. Friend needs to take the weight off his feet after that sad list of symptoms. He is rightly concentrating on the needs and degeneration of older people who go into hospital, but does he agree that ambulatory care is also important for younger people? In our local general hospital, the Horton, there is a marvellous new children's out-patient service, which is used by both his constituents and mine. Does he agree that that is a centrally important part of the offer of that hospital, which provides acute in-patient care as well as the out-patient care on the side?

John Howell: I thank my hon. Friend for allowing me to have a rest and to make the most of that time—as I get older, I need that. I do agree with her; she makes a very valid point. I am concentrating on older people because traditionally that is where the population who have used the hospital in Henley have come from. I think that in the past year only one was under 55. But as I said, my hon. Friend makes a very valid point.

In many cases, the decline that people experience cannot be attributed to the progression of the acute problem for which they were hospitalised in the first place. An example is pneumonia. Even if the disease is cured in a few days or, indeed, if a hip fracture repair is technically perfect and uncomplicated, the patient may never return to the same functional status as they had before they went into hospital.

According to the US study, between 30% and 60% of patients with hip fractures are discharged from the hospital to nursing homes; 20% to 30% of those persons are still residing in nursing homes one year later. Only 20% of one large group of patients returned to their pre-operative functional level after a hip fracture repair.

Many hospitalised patients have difficulty implementing their habitual strategies to avoid incontinence. The environment is unfamiliar. The path to the toilet may not be clear. The high bed may be intimidating. The bed rail becomes an absolute barrier, and the various “tethers”, such as intravenous lines, nasal oxygen lines and catheters, become restraining harnesses. About 40% to 50% of hospitalised persons over the age of 65 are incontinent within a few days of hospitalisation. A high percentage of hospitalised older persons discharged to nursing homes never return to their homes or community. In one study, 55% of persons over the age of 65 who entered nursing homes remained for more than a year. Many of the others were discharged to other hospitals

or long-term care facilities, or simply died. The outcome for many hospitalised elders is loss of home and, ultimately, loss of place.

It is most important that relationships among physicians, nurses and other health professionals reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the whole of this process. In particular, I am a great enthusiast for the integration of the NHS with social care. That needs to move ahead very quickly to give the clinicians the responsibility for commissioning the social care that is required. Maintaining wellness and independence in the community prevents conditions deteriorating and therefore results in better health outcomes. Emergency hospital admissions are distressing.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing this very important issue to Westminster Hall for consideration. Over the past five years in Northern Ireland, category A ambulance call-outs have increased by 30.9%. It is a devolved matter, but it does indicate a greater dependence on and need for ambulance responses. Does the hon. Gentleman have any thoughts about the best way to ensure that the ambulance service and ambulance staff can do better for elderly people?

John Howell: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. The costs need to be offset. This is a balancing exercise within the NHS. Costs that are saved by stopping people going into hospital can be spent on the treatments and services they require to get them better. That is a far better way of working.

Emergency hospital admissions are distressing. Better management that keeps people well and out of hospital should lead to a better patient experience. The King's Fund estimates that emergency admissions for ambulatory care-sensitive conditions could be reduced by between 8% and 18% simply by tackling variations in care and spreading existing good practice. That would result in savings of between £96 million and £238 million, which, as part of the overall management of the NHS budget, could be allocated against the provision of the often quite expensive services that provide the necessary medical investigations on the spot.

A doctor in my constituency, Dr Andrew Burnett of the Sonning Common practice, said:

“Very few of my patients want to be admitted to hospital.”

Most people, if they need to be treated or, indeed, if they are nearing the end of their life, would like that experience to be located at home. I think that probably applies to us all.

There is a particular problem in relation to dementia. I spoke to the Alzheimer's Society, which said that people are often admitted with an acute physical illness on top of their dementia, and the combination of the two can cause their confusion to become worse. They are then taken out of familiar surroundings and placed on a hospital ward with lots of strange people, noises and smells. That can be terrifying for them and they rapidly deteriorate. The advice from the Alzheimer's Society is to try to keep people out of hospital for as long as possible. That is why we, and the Oxfordshire medical facilities, are striving hard to develop systems to enable people with physical illnesses to be managed out of hospital.

That is one of the rationales for the new Townlands hospital in Henley, where the clinical commissioning group, along with Oxford University hospitals, Oxford Health and, indeed, the county council, are members of the ambulatory emergency care network, through which organisations can learn from one another to develop robust pathways. Some good case studies are involved in that, but time prevents me from going through them at the moment. I draw the Minister's attention to those if he needs some examples of how ambulatory care actually works.

Another clinician, Pete McGrane of the CCG, has said:

“Patients who were recently hospitalized are not only recovering from their acute illness; they also experience a period of generalized risk for a range of adverse health events.”

There have been cases in my constituency where the health of elderly people has deteriorated following discharge, or even in hospital, due to other conditions. The relatives have sought to blame the health service for poor care. After following up on those cases, the complaints investigation has shown that it is not poor care that has exacerbated the patients' distress and symptoms; it is a direct consequence of hospitalisation.

I went to see a hospital in Welwyn Garden City, which has no beds inside. Instead, it has beds in an adjoining care home at the side of the hospital. The place was absolutely heaving with people. I met a gentleman there called Dave. I do not have his surname, nor have I asked his permission to use his name, so we will just keep it as Dave. He could not speak highly enough of the treatment he got. He called in every day for treatment and then got on with his life at home. It revolutionised the treatment he received, which, doctors had confirmed, would otherwise have required a debilitating 56 days of medication, staying in hospital. His experience of hospital stays had shown up their disadvantages, and he pointed out that people were so much more likely to improve, as he had, and to feel better, as he did, if they could stay at home. He was clearly a great enthusiast for this type of service.

In Henley, there is one issue, above all, which I have already touched on and want to emphasise. It was helped by some papers that were forwarded to me by the Health Foundation, which said that it is undertaking “a joint research programme...monitoring how the quality of health and social care is changing over time.”

I have been very concerned by the way in which we move forward with the integration of social care and health in the county to ensure that it delivers the sort of services that are required in the full context of the patient.

I am pleased and proud that I have helped to deliver a 21st century medical facility for the people not just of Henley, but of the whole of southern Oxfordshire, and that that incorporates ambulatory care. It is clearly the way forward and it is a way forward that I am sure will work.

11.17 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ben Gummer): I thank my hon. Friends the Member for Henley (John Howell) and for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), both of whom have spoken with great expertise about the place that ambulatory care has within a

[Ben Gummer]

developing and modernising national health service. I cannot better the description that my hon. Friend the Member for Henley gave of the purpose of ambulatory care and the place it holds in his constituency, which I will turn to at the end of my speech.

For the benefit of the House and the record, I will add some examples of what ambulatory care entails for patients around the country. There is a clinical decision unit in the Royal Free hospital that provides an alternative to admission to an emergency department for patients who may benefit from an extended observation period. The James Cook University hospital has an ambulatory emergency care unit that handles nearly a quarter of all emergency admissions and manages a whole range of medical emergencies, including cardiac failure, cellulitis, diabetes and low-risk gastrointestinal bleeds.

The university hospital of Leicester has a frailty unit, which supports patients who are over 70 and need treatment for conditions such as delirium, dementia and fractures. The rapid assessment and treatment unit at Queen's hospital in Romford has greatly reduced the time between a patient being assessed and a care plan being implemented. Those examples are in addition to the example that my hon. Friend the Member for Henley gave of Townlands in Henley.

Where ambulatory units are collocated with an emergency department, patients arriving at A&E by ambulance or as walk-ins are triaged according to clinical need and directed to the unit for treatment or tests, effectively bypassing the main emergency department. Patients identified as needing specialist treatment, tests or monitoring at the hospital, but who do not need to stay overnight, can also be referred to ambulatory units by a general practitioner. Patients with long-term conditions can be booked in for regular treatments such as dialysis.

Ambulatory care units can also focus on returning patients to their homes after treatment as quickly and safely as possible, as my hon. Friend outlined. As a result, patients are more likely to have good health outcomes because they avoid unnecessary overnight stays. He outlined beautifully the principle behind ensuring that people do not stay in bed any longer than they need to. The statistics on that developing area of academic study are stark, and he put them plainly to the House for its attention, but at their core they encompass something rather encouraging for many, although not all, patients. The best principle is to keep on going. We have all seen that with our elderly relatives: the minute one stops prematurely or unnecessarily, one precipitates a decline in condition, rather than an improvement.

Ambulatory care is an exciting and important approach to providing patient care, just as my hon. Friend outlined, and it will be central to the development of the national health service in the years to come. It has not come about by accident. It is based on good science and academic study. We in the Department are led by the Royal College of Physicians' acute care toolkit and NHS England's "Safer, faster, better", which is based on the royal college's advice.

While ambulatory care units may vary between trusts, both the royal college and NHS England have provided guidance on what a good unit looks like, so the underlying principles that all units are built on are the same. The principles fall into three main categories. First, the units

must be patient-focused, meeting the needs of patients through timely treatment and discharge, and bringing together secondary and primary care services to avoid admission where beneficial. Secondly, effective clinical decision making is key, ensuring not only that patients in ambulatory units receive the high standards of care we expect from the NHS, but that the patients who would benefit from an ambulatory setting are identified early and directed to the service. Finally, ambulatory care needs to form a coherent part of the hospital-wide health system and structure to improve the patient's journey flow through the hospital. Gaining support from other parts of the system, including clinical commissioning groups, as in my hon. Friend's constituency, and primary care more generally is key to ensuring that the potential benefits are realised.

Ambulatory care units work well as independent units within acute trusts, but they work best when they are part of an integrated system. That is why I am pleased to see that there is an ambulatory emergency care network, which allows trusts to share best practice and to understand how to improve their services further. The Royal College of Physicians estimates that more than 30% of patients admitted for medical, as opposed to surgical, reasons could be treated in an ambulatory setting. By treating and discharging patients on the same day, emergency admissions are reduced, leaving hospital beds available for those patients who need them the most. There is therefore an advantage not only to the patient but to the system as a whole, because we are freeing up capacity for people who really do need the beds.

Increasing the numbers of patients seen in ambulatory care also has the potential to reduce waits for patients in A&E, which in turn decreases pressure on wards and increases bed availability, providing benefits to patients in other parts of the system. A whole number of benefits therefore come from ambulatory care. My hon. Friend mentioned the urgent and emergency care review and the place that ambulatory care has in that. I turn quickly to his experience of it at Townlands, where some features are particularly impressive. The first is the way in which the service has been brought together in the rapid access care unit—I imagine it is called a RACU, but I am sure the people of Henley pronounce it with a soft C. I found the integration of that with the Orders of St John Care Trust next door exciting.

It is clear that the clinical commissioning group in my hon. Friend's constituency has been thoughtful about commissioning the care needed, involving other providers of care and using beds only when absolutely necessary. It is an ambulatory care setting without beds, but if beds are needed, it has 11 beds on a three-year contract, purchased from the trust next door, and if that number needs to increase still further, it can procure such beds through the CCG's usual spot purchasing arrangements. For people who are admitted to an ambulatory setting, beds are available if needed for step-up care—or for step-down care for people coming from the John Radcliffe or from other acute trusts that serve my hon. Friend's constituency.

Ambulatory care allows for a far more subtle approach to people needing care. As my hon. Friend outlined, it provides much better patient outcomes, is better for the health system as a whole and is much more flexible, ensuring that resources go precisely where they are

needed. That opens out a much wider point, which he alluded to elegantly—I will say it rather more vulgarly than he did—namely the serious question of how we frame community services in the future. In parts of the country, we have a far older model of community service provision based on large bed capacity in community hospitals, which are much loved by their local communities, often funded in part by the local communities and in almost every instance founded by the local communities. We know, however, that in many cases they are not providing the best care for patients. It will often be a difficult transition to a better standard of care for patients, providing them with better outcomes and releasing resources for better outcomes for all patients across the health system.

By bringing the experience of Townlands hospital to the House's attention, my hon. Friend has shown that we can be thoughtful and direct with constituents about the implications of change, and can explain carefully how improvements that might be challenging on the face of it, because it might seem that a benefit is being lost, can produce a whole series of additional benefits that enable better patient outcomes and a better distribution of resources within the system. He has allowed the House to understand how the benefits could be more widely spread across the NHS.

I turn finally to NHS England's plans for ambulatory care. My hon. Friend will know about the vanguard sites in place across the country. Many of them involve the use of ambulatory care systems. There are many different kinds of ambulatory care settings involved in the vanguard sites, but the principle remains broadly the same: to try to identify those areas and experiences that replicate the positive experience that he, with the co-operation of his clinical commissioning group and primary care and acute trusts, has brought to Henley, and to ensure that that is tested on a system-wide basis. We can then roll that out across the rest of the country. We have 50 vanguard sites involved in one way or another in community care settings across the country, and I hope that that will inform a far wider transformation by the end of the five year forward view period, which concludes at the end of the Parliament.

Mr Andrew Smith (Oxford East) (Lab): I am sorry to come in at the end of the debate, but I was delayed by traffic. I congratulate my colleague from Oxfordshire, the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), on securing this important debate. Does the Minister agree that in the roll-out it is important that the ability, training and qualification of home careworkers is raised, so that they can complement the changes in services?

Ben Gummer: The right hon. Gentleman makes an interesting and subtle point. That is absolutely the case, and that is partly why, as part of the workforce review that I instigated, we are looking at apprenticeship and nursing associate models that will help to upskill nurses and care practitioners in not just acute but community settings. The result will be an ability to provide a far better, more holistic service to patients when they turn up at an ambulatory care setting, or indeed at the John Radcliffe, or, hopefully, when they are looked after at home before that happens, and when they return from either of those places. All that taken together provides a far better service to constituents.

I welcome the approach that Members have taken in this little but important debate. If we are positive about these changes and have a will to explain them to constituents, they will quickly understand why this system is better for them. Those Members who wish to pursue a cruder campaigning method that looks purely at the number of beds provided in any one setting, based on the model inherited from 1948 rather than one relevant to 2018, will be doing their constituents a disservice. In being brave and direct with his constituents and in explaining clearly the benefits that he has endeavoured to get, my hon. Friend the Member for Henley has delivered a far better service for the people of Henley than the one they had last year. It will continue to improve throughout the course of the Parliament.

Question put and agreed to.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.

Coal-fired Power Stations

[JOAN RYAN *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Amanda Milling (Cannock Chase) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the future of coal-fired power station sites.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan. I thank hon. Members and my hon. Friends for attending this afternoon's debate. My hon. Friend the Minister might be wondering why he is to respond to a debate that, on face value, may seem to be within the remit of the Department of Energy and Climate Change. It is because my contribution will focus on the future of coal-fired power station sites once the plants have ceased to operate. The issue will affect all coal-fired power stations over time, as the Government have announced that they plan to phase out coal-fired energy generation by 2025, given our commitment to reducing our carbon emissions.

For many coal-fired power stations, 2025 is a long way off. Five stations across the country have announced either their closure or part-closure over the past few months. There is now a real need to consider the future of those sites. The remaining coal-fired power stations face an uncertain future, too, and I am sure that there will be hon. Members who would like to address the issue of using the existing energy generation infrastructure for biomass conversion.

Rugeley B in my Cannock Chase constituency is one of the five power stations to announce its potential closure. In February 2016, the station's owner, Engie, announced the likely closure of the plant this summer. The potential closure has come much sooner than expected and was accelerated by deteriorating market conditions. There are various issues: the future development of the site, given its size, location, connectivity and strategic importance to the west midlands; the need for the site to be developed speedily to create new jobs, as well as to mitigate the financial impact on the local council due to the loss of business rates; and the need to consider the planning process for building combined-cycle gas turbines where power stations already exist.

I will start by setting out the story of Rugeley B to date and how we find ourselves in a situation in which the power station could potentially shut in a matter of weeks. Cannock Chase was once dominated by mines and power stations. Now, Rugeley B is the last remaining reminder of our mining heritage. At one time, Rugeley A and B were the centre of innovation in coal-fired power generation. Rugeley A was home to a dry cooling tower and was a test-bed for locating power stations in areas with no water supply. Rugeley B saw the testing of different coloured cooling towers. Ms Ryan, if you happen to pass the Rugeley B cooling towers, I encourage you to take a good look at them, as you might notice that they are made from two different colours of brick. The intention was to assess which colour blended more effectively into the countryside and landscape. To be honest, I am not sure that either achieves that aim.

A few years ago, the owner of Rugeley B considered conversion from coal to biomass. In 2013, however, it decided that conversion was not commercially viable. Like many other hon. Members, I have spoken about the benefits of biomass as a fuel for energy production.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. I know of her close interest in this issue. Those of us who are members of the all-party parliamentary group on biomass have continued to push the fact that biomass is the cheapest form of renewable energy in this country, but under the contracts for difference scheme it is currently outside of future bidding. Does she agree that it makes sense to go for the cheapest source of renewable energy? We get biomass from secure sources in the US and Canada, and biomass will secure jobs in this country in a way that some other technologies that have been deployed do not.

Amanda Milling: My hon. Friend will not be surprised to learn that I agree. We need to create a level playing field to allow us to compare biomass with other renewable sources, such as solar and wind. Unfortunately, as regards creating a level playing field, I fear that this debate comes too late for Rugeley B.

On a positive note, where there were once mines and Rugeley A, there are new homes, business parks and logistics centres, which have created thousands of new jobs. The change in the industrial landscape demonstrates the area's resilience in adapting to the challenges it faces. The chairman of the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire local enterprise partnership referred to the area's resilience in a recent letter to me, citing the changes over the past few decades since the closure of the pits. Over recent years, under a Conservative-led Government, Cannock Chase has been doing well. Unemployment has fallen, with the claimant rate falling by 75% since March 2010. Apprenticeships are on the up, and new business start-ups are increasing. However, despite the local success story over the past few years, the news that Rugeley B may close this summer is a blow to all of us who live in Rugeley.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): My hon. Friend mentioned Rugeley A, which happened to be in the Lichfield constituency, so I have a personal interest in this debate. Does she agree that, as tragic as the closure of Rugeley power station will be, it can be changed into an opportunity for new homes, which we know we have to build in the Lichfield and Cannock Chase districts, and for employment? Although she has a deep love for the cooling towers, the views across from Lichfield to Cannock Chase will be improved by their removal, and greatly enhanced by low-rise industrial, commercial and housing opportunities.

Amanda Milling: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for attending this afternoon's debate, because two of the cooling towers sit in his constituency; we share the cooling towers. He is right that there will be opportunities for homes and enterprise on the site, and later I will discuss some of those opportunities in a bit more detail.

In the short term, the closure of Rugeley B is a blow for the employees, the contractors and the wider supply chain, as well as for the local community, with many clubs and groups using facilities on the site. We cannot be complacent and assume that the area's resilience will see us through this difficult period. We must be proactive and plan for both the short term and the long term. Of course, my first priority has been to help those people who are directly affected by the potential closure: the

workforce, both employees and contractors, and the supply chain. We must ensure that they all get all the support they need at this difficult time.

To give a sense of the scale of the impact, Rugeley B has 150 employees and at least the same number of contractors from across Staffordshire and the midlands; I am pleased so many Staffordshire Members are here this afternoon. Those employees and contractors have worked at the plant for decades. Others with young families have recently bought a home. There is also the wider supply chain, which goes far beyond Rugeley. The impact of the potential closure will be felt in ports and by freight services that serve the power station, and it cannot be overestimated.

The mines and the power stations have been a central part of our local community, with Rugeley B housing facilities including a sports and social club, football and cricket pitches, and even a model railway. If the plant shuts, over the coming months we must find alternatives for the various clubs that will be affected and their 2,000 members. I call on other local community facilities and groups to come forward and offer their support to those clubs and groups that will be affected, and to rehome them, at least for the short term.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I am very glad that my hon. Friend has secured this debate, and I apologise for being a few minutes late. In my neighbouring constituency of Stafford, we face the prospect of losing sports pitches at Shugborough Hall and at Staffordshire University, because of its transfer up to Stoke, so there is a real crisis for sports facilities in the Rugeley and Stafford area.

Amanda Milling: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that issue. He is absolutely right: we are losing facilities, not only at the Rugeley B site but at Shugborough, a few miles up the road. We need to look at leisure provision across the area. One thing that we need to include in any kind of site development at Rugeley B is leisure facilities.

Since the announcement on Rugeley B, I have visited the site and met the owners and unions several times to discuss practical ways in which we can support all those affected. I will hold a jobs fair in Rugeley in June, and I encourage any members of the workforce who might be affected by the potential closure and who are seeking new employment to attend this event. A couple of weeks ago, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government accompanied me on a visit to the site, to understand the situation we face, to tour the site and to understand its potential future uses and the issues that we face in realising them. I take this opportunity to thank him for his time and support.

Whether the plant closes this summer, next year, or even in a few years, it is essential that we speed up plans for Rugeley's future, and in doing so develop and implement a strategy for the site. The same is true of other coal-fired power station sites that might face closure. We need to mitigate the loss of jobs and create new employment opportunities for all those affected and for the wider economy.

The Rugeley B power station site is of national strategic importance, as it is unique in size, location and connectivity. It is a 374-acre brownfield site that could

accommodate a range of different developments, including housing, commercial and industrial units, and a gas turbine; it could help to deliver much-needed homes, jobs and electricity. I will talk about each of these in a bit more detail shortly.

A taskforce that includes the district councils, the county council and the two local enterprise partnerships has been set up. It has held its first meeting to discuss ways of supporting the workforce during the consultation period and to establish strategic plans for the future use of the site if the plant closes. The site is in the heart of England, and it is incredibly well connected by road and rail links. It is close to many of the major motorways and trunk roads, including the M6, the M6 toll road, the M42, the A50, the A38—I could go on. It also sits alongside the west coast main line and has its own siding. The fact that there is an Amazon fulfilment centre on the land opposite Rugeley B demonstrates how well served the location is by various transport links.

Then there is the site's connectivity. Naturally, as a power station is situated there, the site has national grid connectivity, so there is a strong case for using the existing infrastructure and building a gas power station, which would help to create jobs for the highly skilled workforce at Rugeley B. I also understand that fibre-optic broadband runs down the railway and along nearby canals. This connectivity crossover opens up new enterprise opportunities relating to innovation and technology.

Michael Fabricant: I have been busy on my iPhone, but for good parliamentary reasons: I have just been looking up on Google Maps the exact location of the site, not that I have never been there; I have obviously made many visits to the power station. I see that, as my hon. Friend says, the site is right alongside the River Trent. As a keen narrow-boater, I suggest that she adds to her list of possibilities that of the site being a very good tourism destination for narrow-boaters in the area. As the president of the Lichfield and Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust—

Andrew Percy: Some have glory thrust upon them.

Michael Fabricant: Absolutely. As the president of the trust, I know that narrow-boating is becoming an important form of leisure.

Amanda Milling: I thank my hon. Friend for his hard work in looking at Google. His name came up in conversation only the other day as I went along the canal with someone from the Canal and River Trust—

Michael Fabricant: Of which I am a member.

Amanda Milling: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there are also tourism opportunities, because we have not only the River Trent, but the canals and the beautiful Cannock Chase, which he referred to when talking about the views from Lichfield.

The Rugeley B power station is where roads, rail, power and technology all come together. To realise the site's economic and regeneration opportunities, we need to develop it as quickly as possible if the plant is closed. However, before the site can be redeveloped, the plant

[Amanda Milling]

needs to be decommissioned and demolished, the site needs to be decontaminated and infrastructure improvements need to be made, including the creation of a new access road.

As I have said, the site presents opportunities for multiple uses, and I will take each one in turn. It is no secret that we have a housing shortage, and the Government are committed to building a million homes during this Parliament. Brownfield sites such as Rugeley B present a real opportunity to deliver some of those homes without building on green-belt land. Where Rugeley A power station used to be, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), there are many new homes. Building homes on part of the Rugeley B site would help to support the Government's plans.

To address employment losses, the regeneration of the site will need to include significant commercial development to attract enterprise and create new jobs. In my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's Budget in March, new enterprise zones were announced in the midlands, including in Loughborough, Leicester and, as was raised in Prime Minister's questions only today, at Brierley Hill in Dudley. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to support me in putting forward the case for creating a Rugeley enterprise zone.

As I mentioned, Rugeley was once at the centre of innovation in the power generation industry. I believe there is an opportunity for the site to be a new home of innovation. With the connectivity crossover of national grid and broadband infrastructure, there is an argument that the site could become home to data centres, which in turn could attract other businesses in the technology and innovation space.

The need to ensure that the site includes commercial development is important not only in creating jobs, but in filling in the gap in business rates that Cannock Chase District Council will face if the power station closes. The local council is set to lose £1 million in business rates, which represents 9% of its business rate income. Over time, this gap will be met by rates from the new Mill Green designer outlet village, which is due to be built in Cannock, and which is another good reason for people to visit Cannock Chase, but the short term looks really bleak for the council. The Labour-led council faced financial difficulties before the announcement about the power station, as it has a net deficit of £1.2 million. I am told that the power station's closure could lead to the council cutting front-line services. Will my hon. Friend the Minister therefore consider supporting the request for transitional relief funding to help the council manage its short-term financial pressures?

Finally, there is the possibility of building a gas-fired power station on the site. The national grid infrastructure there means that it would be the ideal location. The development process for a new-build combined-cycle gas turbine includes obtaining a development consent order. Such an order is required when developments are categorised as nationally significant infrastructure projects. Engie, the owner of Rugeley B, has raised concerns with me about the length of time and costs associated with obtaining a DCO. It says that the timeframe is anywhere between 26 and 32 months. There are large up-front costs associated with the preparatory work required

before an application can be submitted. If any information is missing from the application after it is submitted, the process stops and the applicant must begin the process from the start. The applicant does not have the option of providing further detail once the application is submitted. The ability to make minor design changes during the process is therefore limited. That can add to the timeline and costs of a new-build project and create delay in an application for a capacity contract.

We would all agree that the planning process must be robust and effective, but power station sites such as Rugeley B are brownfield sites where there would be no change of use from power generation. We need to make the process of applying for a DCO faster and more flexible for such sites. With my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield, I recently met the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change and raised that issue. I am pleased that the Planning Inspectorate will hold a workshop for potential applicants before the end of June, with a view to explaining how they can use the pre-application process to ensure that applications are progressed as swiftly as possible once submitted. That said, will the Minister undertake a review of the DCO process to ensure that it is both robust and flexible, so that coal-fired power station sites can be speedily redeveloped into gas-fired power stations?

Michael Fabricant: Although this is a Treasury matter, perhaps the Minister could also comment on the funds that could be made available for building on brownfield sites containing contaminated land. Some of that power station land will be contaminated.

Amanda Milling: My hon. Friend makes an important point. There is the time it takes to decontaminate land, but there is also the cost associated with that.

Cannock Chase may be a resilient area, but Rugeley has big challenges ahead as it faces life after coal-fired power stations. We have adapted to the changing industrial landscape over the last few decades, and we face the same challenges again. The redevelopment of coal-fired power station sites such as Rugeley B provides an opportunity for such areas to play their part in delivering the Government's priorities: encouraging enterprise, creating jobs, providing new homes and generating energy. When coal-fired power stations such as Rugeley B close, we need to prioritise their wholesale and speedy redevelopment. Given the strategic importance of the site to the west midlands and to the nation, will the Minister work with me to ensure that the plans for Rugeley B's redevelopment are accelerated, so that the economic benefits of the site's redevelopment can be realised?

Joan Ryan (in the Chair): I think we will be fine for time, but I ask the Minister to allow three minutes at the end of the debate for the mover of the motion to make their concluding remarks.

2.54 pm

Martyn Day (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (SNP): May I start by thanking the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) for securing this timely debate? Indeed, for Scotland it could hardly be timelier, given last month's closure of Longannet power station in Fife. That closure ended coal-fired electricity production in Scotland completely. Longannet is a landmark that is

highly visible from many parts of my constituency on the other side of the River Forth. It directly employed 236 people and supported another 1,000 jobs within the supply chain. The plant was Scotland's largest power station, capable of producing 2,400 MW of electricity for the grid, accounting for about 15% of the country's electricity capacity. Its premature closure will inevitably leave an energy capacity gap in Scotland during peak demand, and that gap now needs to be filled.

Decommissioning will continue until December, and ScottishPower's plans for the site are expected to be known by the end of the year. Can the Minister provide some clarity on the support and fiscal incentives that can be provided to stimulate investment in the conversion of former coal-fired power plants?

Despite the UK Government's commitment to ending coal power by 2025, they have failed to produce the financial backing and subsidies necessary to ensure that the UK energy market undergoes a productive transition towards viable alternatives. Energy firm Carlton Power was awarded a subsidy contract by DECC to build a new 1.9 GW plant at Trafford in Greater Manchester, but it was unable to meet its start date as a result of a failure to secure financial backers. The company pinned its failure on a combination of long-term policy decisions that skewed the market and uncertainty caused by recent cuts to wind and solar subsidies.

The Government's decision to slash the fiscal infrastructure surrounding carbon capture and storage has failed to facilitate the UK's coal industry. A report by the Energy and Climate Change Committee earlier this year warned that the opportunity to develop CCS infrastructure in the UK by the early 2020s is likely to have been missed.

In conclusion, I echo the comments of Fergus Ewing, Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism at the Scottish Parliament. He pointed out that, with the closure of Longannet, the margin of spare capacity will get even tighter, but the Tories have put the brakes on the development of replacement capacity in Scotland; onshore and offshore wind power; and the carbon capture and storage project that would have resulted in increased low-carbon thermal generation at Peterhead. As Fergus Ewing said,

"They need an urgent rethink of their failing energy policy."

2.57 pm

Nigel Adams (Selby and Ainsty) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) on securing this timely and important debate. I know that this subject takes up an awful lot of her time. Having been elected only last year, the last thing she wanted to find out about a few months into her new role was the closure.

Michael Fabricant: And there is HS2.

Nigel Adams: That is a whole different debate. It is timely that we are discussing this issue today. Members may have seen the news earlier this week that Aberthaw power station, Wales' largest coal-fired power station, will reduce its operating hours from 1 April next year. That is just the latest in a long line of announcements from power stations up and down the country that have decided either to downgrade their operations significantly or to close their gates completely. Such announcements inevitably have severe and wide-ranging consequences.

We often refer to the trilemma when discussing the pros and cons of UK energy policy, but the widespread closure of our coal-fired power stations presents its own trilemma. The first challenge is the clear impact the closures have on the communities in which the power stations are based. My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase outlined that. She speaks passionately about the uncertainty facing her constituents who work at Rugeley and the distress that uncertainty inevitably causes locally and regionally.

Unfortunately, I have witnessed similar scenes in my constituency. Eggborough power station, which employs almost 300 people, was on the brink of closure earlier this year—it had announced a consultation on plans to close—until its new owner, the Czech group EPH, managed to secure a contract with the grid to provide extra capacity this winter. But it is just a year's contract. It is a stay of execution; we cannot ignore the fact that a cloud still hangs over Eggborough's future.

By contrast, Ferrybridge power station, which is right on the border of my constituency—I know it well—was not so lucky. It was forced to close earlier this year, to the detriment of the hundreds of workers based there. If that is added into the mix with the closure of Britain's last deep coal mine at Kellingley colliery, which is also in my constituency and which closed last year, these are unquestionably very challenging times in my part of north Yorkshire.

As well as the socioeconomic impact of the closures, we need to consider the consequences for the nation's energy security, which is the second element of the coal trilemma. At least 2.5 GW of coal closures have been announced in recent months, in addition to the 4.9 GW announced last year. That power would otherwise be supplied to millions of homes throughout the country. By losing those units, we are diminishing the resilience of our grid and its ability to absorb unforeseen risks.

Our margin of capacity, particularly when it is cold in winter, is already worryingly low. We are also significantly reducing the number of power stations that can provide ancillary services, such as system balancing, frequency response and black start, which allows us to turn the lights back on in the event of grid paralysis or partial shutdown. In the absence of coal-fired power stations, how will we procure such essential, often under-appreciated, services in future?

Because of the technical nature of this subject, I find there is a lack of understanding of the comparative capabilities of different types of power generation. Intermittent renewables, along with nuclear, are simply technologically incapable of delivering the services I have described. The lack of nuance in consideration is leading us blindly to risk our energy security.

The third element of the coal trilemma is cost. The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, my hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), has rightly said on many occasions that securing electricity at the least cost to consumers is an absolute priority. We totally buy into that—it is a commitment the Conservative party made in our general election manifesto and it is one we should keep.

If we are to pursue an orderly transition away from coal, as the Government intend, it is only right that we do so in the most affordable way possible. That is why it

[Nigel Adams]

is so important that, when we consider which technologies to promote to fill the gap left by coal, we do so on a whole-system cost basis. Such an approach more accurately reflects the costs that intermittent generators pass on to the system because they are not available all the time.

I understand that during yesterday's meeting of the Energy and Climate Change Committee my hon. Friend the Minister of State noted that the latest analysis her Department has commissioned on whole-system costs is currently being peer reviewed and is nearing completion. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on pushing ahead with that and urge her to make the findings available as soon as is practically possible, so that they can inform the growing debate on this incredibly important issue.

We face three key challenges associated with coal coming off the grid: the socioeconomic impact, the security of supply impact, and the cost of filling the gap. On the face of it, it seems a particularly daunting task, but I am pleased to say that it is not insurmountable. Nowhere is that more vividly illustrated than at the Drax power station in my constituency—if you think you have cooling towers in your neck of the woods, Ms Ryan, there are certainly plenty more in my part of north Yorkshire.

Many Members present will be familiar with Drax. It is the largest power station in the UK and generates approximately 8% of all the UK's electricity. Over recent years it has gone through an incredible transformation by converting and upgrading some of its generating units to use sustainably sourced compressed wood pellets instead of coal. In doing so, it has addressed the three core issues I mentioned earlier.

On socioeconomic impact, switching from coal to biomass has helped Drax to protect and secure the 850 employees who are based at the power station. It has also created new employment opportunities across the biomass supply chain, which has attracted hundreds of millions of pounds of private investment.

On security of supply, thanks to the conversion it has already undertaken, Drax has become the UK's single largest source of renewable electricity. Around 12% of the UK's renewable power came from Drax in 2014. Crucially, this power is not only renewable but flexible and dispatchable, like coal or gas. It is available as and when we need it and can be ramped up or down to respond to the requirements of the grid at a moment's notice.

On costs, as I have stated often in Westminster Hall and many times in the main Chamber, on a whole-system costs basis biomass is the cheapest and most affordable renewable technology available to us today.

Andrew Percy: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Nigel Adams: I am happy to give way to my hon. Friend and neighbour, who also has the benefit of looking at the cooling towers at Drax.

Andrew Percy: I declare an interest: I live opposite the Drax power station and a small wind farm. People are taxed by the wind farm, which does not create any jobs, and very supportive of the power station, which does.

Does my hon. Friend agree that biomass makes sense, not only on a cost basis, but because the industry supports jobs in the UK in a way that some of the alternatives do not? He mentioned the many power station workers, but the whole supply chain goes all the way through our region, including to the ports, which have taken a big hit in the Humber because of the loss of coal imports. Support for biomass makes sense on so many different levels. We need Ministers to work cross-departmentally to get a proper assessment of the industry's true value to the whole UK.

Nigel Adams: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The regional impact on supply chain jobs is huge, not just for the ports, which are hugely important, but for rail as well. The wagons that Drax has commissioned to transport biomass—I had the great honour of launching them at the National Railway Museum—were built by a British company.

With respect to costs, we have to remember that it was the taxpayer who built these power stations right across the country under the Central Electricity Generating Board. We have already paid for these stations, so it makes absolute sense that we should—to use an unpopular phrase—sweat these assets as long as possible to ensure that we get the best possible value out of them for the taxpayer.

Reusing the existing infrastructure at a power station essentially eliminates the substantial grid connection costs and upgrade work that are associated with new builds, and that might have contributed to so few new stations being built. It also reflects the value that dispatchable power adds to the energy grid by balancing the system while the wind is not blowing and the sun is not shining—we all remember the problem with the grid last November.

Going from being western Europe's largest coal-fired power station to being its biggest de-carbonisation project in less than three years has made Drax an incredible success story. The question is, then, how can we build on that success and, where possible, replicate it at other sites around the UK? It may be too late for Rugeley, but other stations could certainly benefit from conversion.

A sensible and practical solution would be to allow coal power stations to compete for Government support to convert to biomass in upcoming contract for difference auctions. The auctions could operate on a whole-system basis to allow the stations to compete on a level playing field against other renewable technologies. The biomass industry—I declare an interest as the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on biomass—is not looking for any special treatment; it just wants the opportunity to bid on a level playing field along with other technologies.

Alternatively, funding could simply be provided through the dedicated biomass pot that already exists to support biomass conversions. That pot does not currently allow bids from those who are looking to convert, only from new station builds, which are very costly. That does not seem to make a lot of sense when we already have the infrastructure with coal power stations.

I recognise that the Minister has previously indicated that £730 million has been committed to supporting less-established technologies in the CfD process through to 2020. However, research recently completed by NERA

Economic Consulting and Imperial College London has shown that DECC could save consumers up to £2.2 billion by supporting biomass alongside offshore wind as part of a more cost-effective renewable energy mix.

In conclusion, I urge the Minister to work closely with his colleagues at DECC to consider how further biomass conversions could also be facilitated in the near future in the light of the significant benefits that I and my hon. Friends have outlined here today. Biomass is simply the quickest and most cost-effective way to get coal off the grid. As a nation we should look to promote its deployment further through additional station conversions while we still have a window of opportunity to do so.

3.10 pm

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan. I would like to make two or three points in response to the very fine speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling). First, I congratulate her on securing this important debate and on focusing her remarks on Rugeley B power station. It is no surprise that she has been supported by our hon. Friends the Members for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and for Burton (Andrew Griffiths), and has had very vocal support from my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) and me, because we all recognise Rugeley's importance to our local economy.

I know Rugeley and the power station well. In the days before satellite navigation, it provided a handy navigation device for those trying to find their way toward Rugeley. More seriously and importantly, it provided many jobs for local people, including my constituents in Tamworth. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase in her determination to hold a jobs fair to help those people who may lose their jobs in finding new gainful employment. In our part of Staffordshire, we are lucky that new jobs are being created to fill the gap that may be left by the closure of Rugeley B.

My hon. Friend mentioned the importance of housing and the development of housing on brownfield sites. I agree with that. In our part of the west midlands, we need to build some 88,000 new homes to cater for growing demand, and Rugeley B could provide part of the solution. I commend that thought to the Minister. She also mentioned the importance of local infrastructure and roads such as the M6, the M6 toll road and the A50. One road she did not mention that I think is important to the local infrastructure—my hon. Friend the Minister will know this all too well—is the A5, which runs through Leicestershire and Warwickshire into Staffordshire and up to Cannock. Part of the A5 is not dualled. If we are to build new homes on the Rugeley power station site, we need to make sure we have the infrastructure to cater for those new homes.

I hope the Minister will use all his artistry and invention to prevail on our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to include in the next road investment strategy the development of the A5. That would help not only Rugeley but my constituents in Wall; Highways England could fix the problem it created at Wall Island. Also, residents would be able to get more effectively on to the A5 and up to Rugeley to benefit from the retail park that may be developed there.

I will conclude as I began: by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase on securing this debate. She spoke passionately and eloquently, and I trust the Minister will listen to her.

3.14 pm

Kelly Tolhurst (Rochester and Strood) (Con): Thank you for allowing me to speak, Ms Ryan. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) on securing this debate. I know that the impact of this issue on her constituency has troubled her extremely over the past few months and that it has been at the forefront of her mind.

I represent the south of the country, but I know what my hon. Friend is feeling. In Rochester and Strood, we had two power stations that closed: our oil-fired power station on the Isle of Grain in 2012, and the Kingsnorth coal-fired power station in 2013. Luckily for the Rochester and Strood constituency, we have been able to maintain the energy industry in that part of my constituency with gas-fired power stations. Obviously, that has been some solace to people who were able to transfer to the gas-fired industry. I support all my hon. Friends here who are encouraging us to look at the new energy markets for biomass and more gas. It is absolutely right that we look at how the old coal-fired power station sites can regenerate the new energy industry.

There has been discussion around the cooling towers and how they look to my hon. Friends' constituents. We are waiting with bated breath in Rochester and Strood for the Grain chimney to be demolished at some point in the future, and I have been told by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), whose constituency is on the other side of the river, that people in Essex will be sad to see the chimney go. As a keen yachtsman, I know the chimney of Grain is often used as a navigation mark; we all know that we are not far from the Medway when we see the old chimney of the Isle of Grain.

In my constituency, the people who have worked in the power stations for a long time feel passionate about the energy industry and their skills, which they want to keep up. It is absolutely right that we should be able to keep those skills and utilise them. We need to do whatever we can to encourage the decommissioned sites to change, but to stick with energy.

I am pleased my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase highlighted the planning process and the need to make sure it is easy for decommissioned sites to regenerate quickly, or change the power type that they produce quickly. In my constituency—this is not a bid, I promise—I would like an Isle of Grain energy island enterprise zone for my constituents, but we will leave that for another time.

Constituencies in the south of England are not unlike those in the midlands. There are a lot of similarities that I have heard about today between the constituents in Rugeley and the issues around Rugeley power station, and the issues in my constituency of Rochester and Strood. We have been lucky in the sense that we, too, have seen a fall in unemployment over the past five years. It is absolutely right that commercial sites be used for the development of new houses, but with regard to our high-tech industries, we need to use the skills and expertise that are around, so that we do not lose them

[Kelly Tolhurst]

forever. We still want to be able to create the jobs that we need in the midlands and the south around these sites.

My hon. Friend mentioned that Rugeley was strategically placed, and I can also say that about the peninsula in my constituency. We have always benefited from the energy industry because of our strategic position, and because we are able to feed into the grid and can supply energy to homes. I call on the Minister to support my hon. Friend in her calls for help in regenerating Rugeley, so that there will be a positive outcome for the constituents of Cannock Chase.

3.19 pm

Philip Boswell (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Ryan. I thank the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) for obtaining a debate on this issue. Clearly, the imminent Rugeley power station closure prompted it, and I applaud her for her efforts in seeking retraining packages and jobs for staff, as well as financial aid to decontaminate the site for redevelopment. I wish her the very best in her endeavours. None the less, the Conservative Government's commitment to a decade of austerity continues to strangle development, competition and investment in the UK's energy sector.

There have been some excellent contributions to the debate. The hon. Member for Cannock Chase spoke extensively, passionately and eloquently about reuse of the site after demolition and decontamination. Her points were reiterated and supported by the hon. Members for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher) and for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst); but I offer words of caution, if the hon. Lady will have them. In the constituency of Motherwell and Wishaw, which neighbours mine, we have made great use of the land that was vacated following the destruction of the Ravenscraig steelworks by a similarly right-wing Conservative Government; but our experience is that enterprise zones, houses and sports and leisure facilities are no substitute for jobs. I will focus on that and related issues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) recounted his experience of the failure of a specific energy provider, Carlton Power, to build a power station. That was due to legislative changes, among other things, and it was frustrating to investors. My hon. Friend quoted Scotland's Minister for Business, Energy and Tourism, and spoke about the Longannet closure, which resulted in the loss of key jobs and problems for the community.

Given that so many Staffordshire Members have spoken, I am surprised that there has been no mention of Shakespeare yet, but I am sure—[HON. MEMBERS: "Warwickshire!"] Is it Warwickshire? That is why, then. I stand corrected. It all sounds the same to me.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk mentioned, in March, Scottish Power closed the Longannet coal-fired power station. More than 200 direct jobs and more than 1,000 in the supply chain were lost. The problems and devastation that such closures can cause to the families and communities that are all too often heavily reliant on such large power plants are evident to many in Scotland. Having seen the

detrimental impact in Scotland, I sympathise with those affected by the Cannock Chase closure. Geographically based transmission charges were much to blame for the closure of Longannet, but the commitment of the Secretary of State for Climate Change and Energy to overseeing a consultation on ending unabated coal-fired power stations by 2025 doubtless played its part in both closures. As the *Financial Times* reported last November, the Secretary of State wants more gas plants to replace the coal plants.

What of the future of coal-fired power stations? That, after all, is what the debate is about. The shorter answer is that without carbon capture and storage alongside, they appear not to have a future in the UK. Carbon capture and storage, for anyone not familiar with it, is a technology that can currently capture about 90% of the carbon dioxide emissions produced by fossil fuels in electricity generation and industrial processes, preventing the carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere. It is seen as essential alongside coal-fired power stations, to enable UK and world climate change targets to be met. There are working CCS plants such as Boundary dam in Canada and numerous others in the US and Norway, but the world seeks its first large-scale operational plant to further prove the viability of that rapidly advancing technology and the opportunity to improve emissions capture to above 90%, which is the current target.

The previous UK Government created a £1 billion fund to seize the opportunity to have fully functioning CCS projects in the UK. Until last year, we were set to proceed with CCS projects at the White Rose coal-fired power station in Yorkshire—in the constituency of Selby and Ainsty, I believe—and at the gas-fired power station in Peterhead in Scotland, which I was fortunate enough to work on for Shell. The Chancellor's cancellation of the CCS funding late last year was the latest in a long line of greener and renewable energy cuts that set us yet further back on our journey to cleaner energy.

In November 2014, the BBC reported on how changes in Government energy policy were likely to increase CO₂ emissions rather than reduce them, citing—my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk mentioned a few of these—the block on solar in the countryside, the cut to the industrial solar subsidy, cuts to solar subsidy for homes, cuts to biomass subsidy, scrapping the green deal, cutting zero-carbon homes, imposing carbon tax on renewables, blocking onshore wind, increased tax on small cars, tax breaks for the oil and gas industries, cutting zero-carbon offices and support for community energy and selling the Green Investment Bank, to name just a few changes. Ironically, those short-term savings will cost us in the long term.

The UK Committee on Climate Change told the Secretary of State that the cost of meeting the 2050 decarbonisation target will be twice as high without a carbon capture and storage programme. The CCC points out that the proposed budget to 2032 is a minimum and suggests that the Government be prepared to do more, not less, to reduce total UK domestic carbon emissions in line with the Paris agreement objectives. The committee also noted that greater decarbonisation ambition will be needed by the European Union. In short, we need to make more reductions. For that, CCS is essential, and

an urgent plan is needed for a minimum of 7 GW of clean power by 2030, together with support for industry-wide decarbonisation.

Professor Stuart Haszeldine, director of Scottish Carbon Capture and Storage, commented:

“To stay on track in the ‘high ambition coalition’ of leading nations agreed in Paris climate talks, the UK needs to do a lot more on UK electricity, and a lot more on UK low-carbon industry and low-carbon heat. But now this government is doing a lot less.”

He went on:

“There is no sign yet that facts, unbiased scientific evidence and rationality are regarded as more important than lobbying by corporations and colleagues wishing to take the UK back to the 1960s energy mix”.

That would be a retrograde step. Professor Haszeldine said there was a choice—and it is a stark one—

“between spending £40 per household in 2016 or spending £200 per household each year from 2050. We can afford it.”

The Times reported in December 2015, during the Paris climate change conference, that worldwide more than 2,400 coal-fired power stations were under construction or planned, mostly in India or China. Without CCS, that makes a mockery of the world’s climate change commitment. The UK was in prime position to have a positive effect in the ongoing reduction of the world’s coal-fired power station emissions. Given the progress made in CCS, we had the opportunity to become the world leader in large-scale CCS project design and construction, something that would have been great not only for UK businesses, but also for the world at large, as the UK would have been able to provide a substantial decrease in global CO₂ emissions by providing more efficient and affordable CCS schemes, with ever-rising emissions capture figures.

We cannot discuss the future of coal-fired power stations without thinking about ethical coal mining. The UK Government’s decision to import coal, rather than investing in an export-led energy market in the UK, has had detrimental consequences on human lives and the environment. According to Government figures, nearly 4 million tonnes of Colombian coal was imported to Hunterston in North Ayrshire alone in 2013. Rogelio Ustate from the Federation of Communities Displaced by Mining in La Guajira stated:

“The coal which is used to warm your houses on cold nights is the same coal which has taken our homes from us.”

Workers face poor and dangerous working conditions in mining much of our imported coal. It is not lost on the few British miners who remain that we no longer have deep mines in the UK, as hon. Members remarked earlier. That is despite the fact that the UK has massive coal reserves to draw on, especially in Scotland. At least if we mined the coal locally it would be ethically sourced, and it would also create jobs.

I must point out the differences in policy between the UK and Scottish Governments. The UK Government have failed to provide the fiscal incentives necessary to stimulate investment in conversions of former coal-fired power stations. Despite a commitment to ending coal power by 2025, the UK Government have failed to produce the financial backing and/or incentives to enable the UK energy market to transition from its heavy reliance on fossil fuels to being the more renewables-based energy market we seek, as per our climate change targets. The Scottish Government are concerned that the UK will continue to import energy despite the vast untapped

potential of the UK’s energy market, especially in Scotland. That is especially pertinent given the potential disaster of the Government’s “all your eggs in one flawed basket” energy policy, and the French and Chinese nationalised companies at Hinkley C nuclear power station.

The Scottish Government believe that we must carry out comprehensive research into the viability of the conversion of plants to carbon capture and storage. Experts deem that prospective site planners may favour sites that are already equipped with a grid connection and immediate infrastructure. As a member of the CCS advisory committee, I concur with those findings. Industrial hubs where there is power generation, and which are linked to existing CO₂ transportation and storage systems and the power grid, are deemed the most likely locations to succeed.

Dr Jenifer Baxter, the head of energy and environment at the Institute of Mechanical Engineers and the lead author of the report, “Engineering the UK Electricity Gap”, said:

“The UK is facing an electricity supply crisis. As the UK population rises and with the greater use of electricity use in transport and heating, it looks almost certain that electricity demand is going to rise...However, with little or no focus on reducing electricity demand, the retirement of the majority of the UK’s aging nuclear fleet, recent proposals to phase out coal fired power stations by 2025 and the cut in renewable energy subsidies, the UK is on course to provide even less energy than it does at the moment.”

That does not bode well for energy users.

Unless we reverse the abandonment of the cleaner renewable energy incentives for the failing Hinkley C nuclear power programme, and the Government’s rash dash for gas—fracking—this country will face an energy supply crisis. We will become ever more reliant on imported energy, despite the massive resources and skills at our disposal.

The UK Government’s decision to slash the fiscal infrastructure for carbon capture and storage has failed to facilitate matters for the coal industry in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK. The Scottish Government believe that financial backing and subsidies must be put in place to give the energy market the fiscal incentives necessary to stimulate investment in coal-fired plant conversion to CCS-converted plants.

Nigel Adams: The hon. Gentleman mentioned that the proposed White Rose project would have been sited in my constituency. It would have created many thousands of jobs—not just construction jobs, but hundreds of ongoing jobs, too. I want to clarify a point: is it the Scottish Government’s policy to convert every single coal-fired power station into a CCS plant?

Philip Boswell: As other hon. Members said, some plants are more susceptible to conversion than others. As the hon. Gentleman said, it makes sense to sweat out the value of power stations that we have already paid for. It very much depends on the technology. We must evaluate whether power stations are fit for purpose on a case-by-case basis. The secret is to create a world-leading industry. We had the opportunity to do so through carbon capture and storage, which would have enabled us to sell CCS, develop it, increase it from 90% of emissions to 92%, 94% and 96%, and create an industry and a supply chain in the UK for exportation and exploitation around the world.

[Philip Boswell]

Ironically, the Chancellor said explicitly that his latest Budget was

“a Budget for the next generation.”

It is not, and the bleak legacy left for the next generation is nothing to be proud of—skills shortages; a lack of research, development and innovation; and the wider economic implications of the UK having an import-led energy sector. Those are the results of the Government’s complete mishandling of energy. The failure to seize the opportunity that carbon capture and storage presents to the UK and rest of the world for managing the effects of the continued use of coal-fired power will sound the death knell for coal-fired power in the UK. That missed opportunity is one more failure in the long list of the Government’s energy policy failures. It will create a toxic financial legacy, which will be a problem for future generations.

3.34 pm

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I would like to congratulate the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) three times. First, I congratulate her on securing this important debate on the future of coal-fired power stations. Secondly, although I would not like it to be thought that I have an unhealthy interest in her website, I congratulate her on her hard work on the future of the Rugeley site—not just on whether it continues as a coal-fired power station, but on the other possible uses for the site, including conversion to a gas-fired power station.

Thirdly, I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing to the debate an interesting category dilemma. I am responding as a member of the shadow energy and climate change team, and the distinguished Minister represents the Department for Communities and Local Government, so between us we may be able to provide a complete landscape of discussion in response to her concerns. I will concentrate particularly on the energy issues and the future not just of Rugeley but of coal-fired power stations across the UK.

As the hon. Member for Coatbridge and—

Philip Boswell: Chryston and Bellshill.

Dr Whitehead: I will get the entire title of the hon. Gentleman’s constituency right one day. He will have to forgive me for not getting the various parts entirely correct. As he said, coal-fired power stations in this country will not have a future unless there is a clear programme accompanying their development to capture 90% of their emissions through CCS.

It was with considerable regret that we saw the termination of the UK’s two potentially world-beating pilot projects for comprehensive CCS; among other things, they would have paved the way for a much more widespread implementation of CCS for new and existing power stations across the country. I do not think that the route to CCS in this country is dead, although I was sad that the Opposition’s call for a comprehensive new CCS strategy from the Government, which we made during the passage of the Energy Bill and which was supported by the Scottish National party, was not incorporated into the Bill. In the light of the termination of those projects, there is an urgent need to develop a

viable new way forward for CCS, whether exclusively in this country or in collaboration with other countries, to keep alive the idea that it is possible to attach CCS to power stations in future.

Nigel Adams: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman agrees that there should be a way forward for CCS, but does he not also agree that, although the Government funding allocation has disappeared, the industry itself could step up to the plate and drive forward a UK CCS industry?

Dr Whitehead: I hope the industry will be involved in that. However, the hon. Gentleman ought to bear in mind that, although a great deal of intellectual property remains from the project that was to take place in his constituency, for example, the project itself was not at all progressed—the CCS industry in this country remains nascent, so for the industry to take on the load of developing itself to any extent over the next period seems to be quite an ask. It is therefore essential for the Government to become involved in strategising and underwriting the development of CCS. I hope that that will now be done, even if it is not at the same level of expense as in the original two projects supported by the Government.

On the future of coal-fired power stations in the UK, it is important to be clear. The proposal is to close all coal-fired power stations by 2025, which has been mentioned this afternoon. The Government have suggested that there should be a consultation leading to the closure, subject to the caveat put forward last autumn by the Secretary of State in her energy reset speech:

“we’ll only proceed if we’re confident that the shift to new gas can be achieved within these timescales.”

That is the caveat on the proposal to close all coal-fired power stations by 2025.

The estimate is that only something like 1% of our electricity will be supplied from coal by 2025 because of the closures of coal-fired power stations for various reasons, other than the Government saying that they should close by 2025—those reasons include the European large plant directive, the age of the plants, the running out of the plants, and the economics of running them. Therefore, those plants are likely to close by that date anyway. One way or another, we face the prospect of pretty much all coal-fired power stations in the UK being closed, and the hon. Member for Cannock Chase rightly raises the issue of what will happen to those sites. What should be done with all of them, not just Rugeley B power station?

A number of us can sympathise with the issue of what happens to a large site that is vacated in or around one’s own constituency. Recently, a Ford transit van plant located on the edge of my constituency closed, creating a 600-acre site. We need to think carefully about assistance for the people who have been displaced from the site by the closure, the different possible uses for the site, and the best use given its connections and how it is going to work in future. Those are all important considerations, and the hon. Lady is clearly alive to all the issues to do with what can be done with the Rugeley B site.

No other world car manufacturer is hovering in the wings, waiting to occupy the Ford site near my constituency and to build cars instead of the Ford Motor Company.

However, as far as Rugeley B is concerned, the hon. Lady has looked at whether it could remain, if not as a coal-fired station, then as another form of power station. That particular line of reasoning makes considerable sense. Her suggestion is also germane to the issue of our energy mix in future years: could Rugeley B be converted into a gas-fired power station?

Like the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), who I am afraid is no longer in his place, I looked at Google Maps and a large National Grid gas line runs right alongside Rugeley B power station. So the question of changing the configuration of Rugeley B from coal to gas is, in principle, very doable as far as the supply of gas to the power station is concerned. The issue would be the circumstances in which any such conversion could take place. My concern is that, in particular instances, the mechanisms in this country for encouraging the development of new gas-fired power stations, assuming that we need a number of them over coming years—

Joan Ryan (in the Chair): Order. May I ask the hon. Gentleman to consider bringing his remarks to a conclusion as we have only 14 minutes left? Thank you.

Dr Whitehead: Indeed, Ms Ryan, I am about to conclude my remarks, having revealed my thoughts on the idea a gas-fired power station at Rugeley. However, before I do so, I want to spend a minute on the question whether that conversion is feasible under existing arrangements in the capacity market. At the moment, the market provides either underwriting for existing power stations to continue to supply, or the possibility of contracts for new power stations, but there does not appear to be a category within them to enable conversion to take place—certainly not in the 15-year period.

I encourage the hon. Member for Cannock Chase to talk to DECC about whether the capacity market might be amended to take account of such arrangements. A number of coal-fired power stations have been converted to gas recently in the United States, so it is technically feasible. It depends on the kind of power station. Nevertheless, it certainly makes sense—if we are to have new gas-fired power stations anyway, why not have a gas-fired power station where a coal-fired one was? We would not then have the problem of how long the gas-fired station would need to operate over the next period. If that can be done, it would be a positive addition to our fleet of power stations and might be a solution that could apply to other former coal-fired power stations.

Philip Boswell: Given that CCS technology is proven and that the hope for Government funding is not entirely lost, does the hon. Gentleman agree that Government investment in research and development and stable legislation are key to the industry confidence necessary to develop CCS in the UK?

Dr Whitehead: I agree. That is something for the future that applies to the whole power sector. We need a series of stable policy bases on which to proceed with future power provision.

Finally, given the well-known interest of the hon. Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams) in biomass and his leadership of the all-party parliamentary group on biomass, he must be aware that Rugeley B was

scheduled to be converted to biomass in 2012, but that the company that took over the power station decided to pull the idea. Perhaps a reopening of that interest might be appropriate, although he must also be aware of the question about contracts for difference and how they may or may not come to the aid of biomass in future, given the budgets available.

In conclusion, I encourage the hon. Member for Cannock Chase in her pursuit of alternative uses for the Rugeley B site. If it can be given new life in a different form, that would indeed be a good outcome for the power station.

3.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Marcus Jones): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Amanda Milling) on securing this important debate. In her speech she alluded to the fact that just over a week ago my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State accompanied her on an inspection of this major site, and I warmly endorse his determination to ensure that the planning system operates quickly and effectively to assist the local authority in reaching prompt decisions on any planning proposals that may come forward for the site.

I am conscious of my hon. Friend's discussions with other Ministers and with the owners of the Rugeley B power station. She has also met members of the taskforce of local government and local enterprise partnerships, and trade union representatives, to discuss the future of the site should the power station close.

My hon. Friend has underlined the national and strategic importance of the site and the implications of its closure. She is doing what I would call a very good sales job in promoting the site as the asset that it is, given its size, location and connectivity, which make it an attractive location for redevelopment for a range of uses. Both she and my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) mentioned the site of Rugeley A power station and I am sure that lessons can be learnt from the redevelopment of that site, where there are now homes, business parks and logistics centres, which have created thousands of jobs for the local economy. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase said, under this Conservative Government many more people in her constituency are in work and many fewer people are unemployed than was the case in 2010.

I will cover three specific areas mentioned by my hon. Friend. Before I do so, on planning issues, because of our formal role in the planning system, Ministers are not able to comment or advise on any particular planning applications, nor would we wish to fetter judgments to be made by decision makers in the future. However, I may say the following.

My hon. Friend mentioned enterprise zones. We have no current plans for new enterprise zones, but we would be happy to work with her local enterprise partnerships to look at what options might exist for Rugeley. I note that Cannock Chase is covered by both the Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire and the Greater Birmingham and Solihull local enterprise partnerships. As part of the growth deal round three negotiations, it will be for her local area to put forward a bid in relation to its priorities to secure investment for future growth. She might want

[Mr Marcus Jones]

to consider discussing that with her local councils and local enterprise partnerships. My Department is certainly willing to have a conversation with her and those organisations in that regard.

Consideration will also be given to local development orders, which can be used to relax planning controls for particular areas or categories of development where the impacts would be acceptable and where that would promote economic, social or environmental gains such as boosting enterprise. Bearing in mind that I am short on time, I will write to my hon. Friend to say more about how those orders can be used.

My hon. Friend also mentioned transitional relief to help with a local council's short-term funding pressures. Before 2013, local councils could not benefit from growth in business rates because money raised from rates was returned to central Government to be redistributed, but that is no longer the case. At the moment, councils may keep up to 50% of any growth in their business rates. Before talk began of the closure of Rugeley B, the council estimated that it would retain just over £4 million of its business rates under the retention scheme in 2016-17—a 46% growth since that scheme started. Although it would lose more than £1 million in business rates income following the power station's closure, the ability to retain income from business rates will put the local authority pretty much back where it was in terms of baseline funding.

There is a safety net: in circumstances where losses are so significant that they exceed 7.5% of the local authority's baseline funding, the Government top the local authority back up to its baseline funding, although that is not the situation currently in my hon. Friend's constituency. There are, though, a number of other financial support mechanisms that she may want to consider. I would like to set those out—they include the support that we are offering for brownfield development and the remediation of brownfield sites, particularly for new housing development—but I am extremely short on time, so again, I will write to her about that important issue.

My hon. Friend also raised nationally significant infrastructure planning. I recognise what she said about gas-fired power stations and conversion and that the planning regime must be robust, but it must also be flexible. As she knows, we reviewed the Planning Act 2008 in 2014 to ensure that it was still delivering a streamlined, fair and faster nationally significant infrastructure planning system. Respondents to that

review felt that the system was working reasonably well but suggested some practical improvements, many of which we have implemented, including the publication of a prospectus by the Planning Inspectorate setting out help and advice to applicants before submitting an application for development consent. I also welcome the Planning Inspectorate's intention to hold a workshop in June to ensure effective pre-application discussions, and my hon. Friend talked about how that could be beneficial to her area.

I apologise that I have been too short on time to cover in more depth some of the questions asked by my hon. Friend and others, but I assure her that I will write to her about the items that I have not been able to respond to. If the coal-fired power station she referred to closes, she can certainly come back to my Department to discuss further the challenges of that site and the development that the local area may aspire to.

3.58 pm

Amanda Milling: I thank all hon. Members who attended the debate and the Minister for his comments. I look forward to following up on them and going through the issues that I have raised.

In this short time, I would like to thank hon. Members, in particular my hon. Friends from Staffordshire, who were here en masse. I add my support to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher) for the dualling of the A5, because, as he rightly said, it affects Cannock Chase, too. I thank my neighbours, my hon. Friends the Members for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) and for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), who have been incredibly supportive throughout this pretty difficult time with the power station.

The debate has demonstrated that this issue affects Members from across the UK, from the hon. Member for Linlithgow and East Falkirk (Martyn Day) to my hon. Friend the Member for Rochester and Strood (Kelly Tolhurst). I noticed that cooling towers seem to have a role as a navigation device, whether for drivers or for sailors. I want to refer specifically to my hon. Friend the Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams), who has demonstrated that his constituency is the original northern powerhouse. I thank everyone for their time this afternoon.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the future of coal-fired power station sites.

Electoral Participation (Media)

[DAVID CRAUSBY *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Owen Thompson (Midlothian) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the role of the media in encouraging electoral participation.

Today's debate is very timely. With the EU referendum only a few weeks away and elections to the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and Northern Ireland Assembly and local elections in some parts of the UK only one week away, this issue really has become a focus.

I will give my opinion on how the media can and should be involved in electoral participation—an interest of mine that developed through the Scottish independence referendum, when the media had so much impact. That became an influence on my work as an MP, and now as co-chair of the all-party group on democratic participation. I intend to talk today about matters such as electoral turnout and how it can vary between groups in society; the role the media had in the Scottish independence referendum and the subsequent impact on voter turnout; changes in demand and how the media need to reflect those; what support politicians can give to an evolving audience; and how media of all platforms have a responsibility to their audiences.

With the general election almost a year ago, when we saw an overall increase in electoral turnout, now seems the right time to pause and reflect on the many different factors that influenced that rise, the role the media undoubtedly played in it and how we can best support efforts to encourage electoral participation.

Since 1950, when electoral turnout was 83.9% across the UK, there has been a steady decline in voter turnout, ending with a staggeringly disappointing low turnout in 2001 of just 59.4% across the UK. Although we have seen the beginnings of a rise in turnout, it is not rising equally across all sectors of society or, indeed, all parts of the UK. While I am sure there were a variety of reasons for the increased turnout in 2015, there has been an increase in media engagement of the electorate and a platform shift in not only the types of media that reach out to engage and influence but the platforms from which people seek their information.

While many Members present today may expect me to use this debate to have a pop at biased media during the Scottish independence debate, I have bigger points to make than to shame the BBC, the *Daily Record* or the *Daily Mail*. The media no longer influence the electorate just through traditional party political broadcasts or biased newspapers. It is not only a question of leaders' debates on the telly, although they are important. The media have evolved and begun to recognise the role they can play in not only voter registration and turnout but overall engagement. As people have become more politically aware, there is a far higher demand of media. I believe broadcasters realise that and want to meet the expectations of their audiences.

Engagement in politics can be a difficult factor to measure. Even more complicated is how and why people are influenced and how the media can contribute to that. Recent findings of the Audit of Political Engagement 13 in 2016 concluded that

“the public's perceived levels of knowledge of and interest in politics have reached, respectively, the highest and second highest levels recorded in the history of the Audit tracker.”

However, that is not the case across the whole of the UK, with notable variance regionally and in relation to class and ethnicity. The audit also found that in terms of an interest in and knowledge of politics, those who ranked themselves with the lowest indicators were black and minority ethnic adults, women, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and non-homeowners.

In Scotland, we have seen an unprecedented level of electoral participation, with the percentage of people who claim they are either very or fairly interested in politics standing at 74%, compared with just 57% in the general UK population. That trend has continued to grow after the referendum.

There are so many lessons we can learn from the experience of the Scottish referendum, in which people themselves took to the issues. Information was exchanged peer to peer far more than by interaction with traditional media. Some media outlets caught up with that and embraced it, which fed a real enthusiasm for politics that we had not seen a lot of in other parts of the country. That was a good thing, and it shows that if people are genuinely engaged and interested in politics, we can get beyond the, “Oh well, it's only politicians; they don't really count” mentality.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Does he agree that the engagement inspired by the referendum in Scotland has continued to the present day? We, as Scottish National party Members, are very much aware of that, as constituents continue to interact with us through social media, even while we are taking part in debates in the House.

Owen Thompson: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. That is certainly something we have all had to adapt to, because there is still an expectation of availability, accessibility and the opportunity to interact and exchange ideas with us. It puts a great responsibility on us, but all politicians should look to live up to that responsibility. After all, we in this place are the representatives of the people.

Voter turnout in the 2015 general election across the UK was 66.1%—a rise of 6.7%, which, on the face of it, is not too bad. At a regional level, voter turnout was 65.8% in England, 65.7% in Wales, 71.1% in Scotland and 58.1% in Northern Ireland. However, if Scotland is excluded from that overall figure, and we look across a number of years, turnout in elections has not changed very much. The average combined turnout in England, Wales and Northern Ireland was 62.9% in 2001, 62.2% in 2005, 62.6% in 2010 and 63.2% in 2015. That helps to demonstrate the difference in engagement we have seen in Scotland because of the referendum and the grassroots movement of people accessing information in different ways, and the ways that that has been taken forward.

It is clear to many—I suspect many of my colleagues from Scotland will agree—that we need to learn the lessons from the referendum and understand and encourage all types of media to engage with people politically. We must look to and support a host of platforms to enable that, from the arts and social media to self-gathering grassroots media, which was such a factor in the Scottish

[Owen Thompson]

independence referendum. It was not simply traditional and social media; the arts got involved in the debate. There were theatre productions on all sides of the argument and on no side of the argument, allowing people to engage in politics in ways that were suited to them individually. It created a far better level of engagement than could otherwise have been hoped for.

It cannot be the case that people in the rest of the UK have any less desire to have a say in how their country is run or do not understand how politics affects them. I campaigned in the referendum and spoke to people who did understand, but many had either lost trust in politicians or political systems. During the referendum, those myths were blown out of the water. Politicians were replaced by neighbours, family, friends and colleagues. Trust in Scotland's politicians—certainly those in some parties—has begun to be regained.

I actively encourage and celebrate campaigns such as those run by Bite the Ballot, Use Your Vote and Rock Enroll!, which have played a huge part in engaging and encouraging people up and down the country to register to vote. I draw particular attention to campaigns designed to capture people who are disfranchised and targeted media campaigns, such as those run by the National Union of Students, Gingerbread—a charity for single parents—and Crisis and Shelter, which give a political voice to homeless people. Those campaigns give a voice to those who most need to be engaged in politics.

I also recognise the role of other forms of media, including the recent efforts of TV programmes such as “Hollyoaks”, “Coronation Street” and “River City”. They have shown politics as an everyday thing affecting real people in their communities, with characters, certainly in “Coronation Street” and “River City”, becoming councillors and being directly involved in the political process.

I mentioned the TV debates earlier. This week in Scotland we have seen a very new approach to the debates, with a character from Scotland's own “Gary: Tank Commander” interviewing each party leader in the run-up to the Scottish elections. That has, in a way, allowed party leaders to present their messages in a forum that is so different from anything that any of them would have ever experienced, and it has made politics relevant and accessible to people who might otherwise have thought that they had no interest in the subject. Suddenly, because it is a character that they enjoy, they look at things from that point of view and watch politics almost accidentally—much in the way that “Gogglebox”, another example of a great piece of innovation from Channel 4, manages to promote politics in what does not feel like a traditional way of accessing it.

Following the Scottish independence referendum, and because of the thirst of Scottish people to be engaged and to participate in political decision making, there has been a huge growth in peer-led, grassroots media. Initiatives such as Common Weal and CommonSpace have seen people from across the political spectrum unite in their desire to participate. That has been felt on a local level in my constituency, where media platforms such as Midlothian View and The Penicuik Cuckoo have become sources of information about what is happening as much as our local newspaper, the *Midlothian Advertiser*.

People are looking to access information in different ways. Those media that are on the ball and keeping up with things are listening and reacting, but we as politicians have a responsibility to encourage that and promote it across all levels of the media.

Jonathan Lord (Woking) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for securing this important debate. In my constituency we have two excellent local newspapers: the *Surrey Advertiser*, which is branded the *Woking Advertiser* in Woking, and the *Woking News & Mail*. They cover local and national politics in a very considered way. However, so many towns are now without a local newspaper—never mind two—and I wonder whether local radio stations should also be covering local and national politics more than they do to make up for the very unfortunate decline in our traditional local press.

Owen Thompson: I absolutely agree; this is a responsibility of all media platforms. My constituency is very fortunate to have two community radio stations—Black Diamond FM and Crystal FM—that take an active interest in politics locally and that do their bit when it comes to elections by hosting hustings and such. Coverage should absolutely be across all platforms.

Although the media, social media platforms and broadcasters must participate, politicians also have a part to play. They need to rebuild trust within their constituencies and communities and listen to how voters want to be engaged. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook are helpful, but are not enough—after all, not everyone can be quite as popular as Nicola Sturgeon.

When we see huge swathes of the population disfranchised because their vote never influences election outcomes, we should be worried. When steps are taken to refuse votes at 16—even though, as a demographic, they are more engaged—we should be worried. As well as exploring how the media engage with politics, we should also consider how politics engages with people. Reforms are certainly needed.

The key message that I would like the Minister and others interested in the debate to take away is that we should all take steps—every step we possibly can—to engage all aspects of the media and encourage them to be involved in politics. The meaning of the word “politics” translates to “of, for, or relating to the citizens,” and it is high time that we all paid attention to that.

4.14 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (John Penrose): It is good to have you looking after us this afternoon, Mr Crausby, and making sure we all behave ourselves and have a productive debate. I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Midlothian (Owen Thompson) on securing it. As he said, he is involved in the all-party group on democratic participation, which does incredibly important work. We need to develop a better cross-party approach in this area, particularly on such things as voter registration; we do better together than we do separately. Political parties no doubt have a place in getting their normal demographic supporter base to get registered and to get out, take part and use their vote on polling day. More than that, however, if we can co-operate on a cross-party basis, it

is often reassuring for voters because they can see that it is being done from purer democratic motives, rather than just for party advantage. That can make a difference, so the all-party group's work is in that proud tradition and is hugely to be supported and applauded.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned various surveys of democratic engagement and democratic involvement. Interestingly, the results that he quoted pretty closely match—directionally at least—what we see if we start to compare levels of voter registration. Voter registration is not a perfect proxy for democratic involvement, because someone can be registered to vote and then not use their vote on polling day, but it is not a bad one. It was very interesting to hear him mention that some BME community groups are under-represented and less likely to be registered. Incidentally, others are extremely well represented—there are some parts of the Asian community in this country whose registration rates are well above average—but as he rightly mentions, some are below average.

Equally, we have problems with people who live in short-term rented accommodation and perhaps move regularly. There is some debate about whether their reason for not registering is that they are disaffected and do not believe in the idea of democracy being relevant to them, or whether it is just inconvenient because the registration folk do not keep up with them as they move around—it may be a bit of both. There are some queries about that. Students can be a problem in terms of levels of registration, although interestingly, a degree of evidence now shows that quite a lot of students are registered at their parental home address as opposed to their university address, so we need to be careful about how that set of figures are taken.

The single worst group for registration is one that we often forget about—expatriates. There are between 1.5 million and 2 million Brits currently living abroad who are legally entitled to vote. At present, they lose the right to vote after 15 years, and we aim to change that in due course. However, as the law stands, there are perhaps 1.5 million people, or even more—estimates vary, but there could be up to 2 million—living abroad who are legally enfranchised, but the level of registration among that group was just over 100,000 at the last general election. Therefore, only between 5% and 10% of them are registered, at most. They are by far the least well-registered group and are therefore the least well-represented group among all the different ones that we need to get involved and bring into the fold.

As the hon. Gentleman said, the role of media is incredibly important. He pointed out that the way in which social media has changed democratic debate is important not only for us as practising politicians, but for the overall body politic—for the state and how our democratic consensus is forged, and how democratic debate takes place—and I particularly liked that. He is absolutely right that more of that is now peer to peer, which I think was the phrase he used. I venture to suggest that in the past, peer-to-peer debate was basically what people said to their mates down the pub, but the advent of social media means that Facebook groups, Twitter streams and, I dare say, even Snapchat groups of one kind or another, are now all over the place. They mean that people with very disparate interests and opinions can come together much more easily and share their points of view.

That is relevant for campaigning groups: people who have a particular interest in anything from saving hedgehogs through to democracy in Burma, and everything in between—the sorts of things that, actually, are frequently covered by all-party groups in this building. It allows them to organise nationally much more effectively, much faster and much more cheaply than they ever used to. However, we need to be careful: if someone is always surrounded by like-minded people online, or physically in the offline world, they risk finding themselves purely in an echo chamber where everybody always agrees with them. I am sure the hon. Gentleman agrees that nothing is more dangerous for a politician than to hear the opinions only of people who always agree with them. That can lead to dangerous waters, including the belief that they are always right and, if not careful, they may become impatient with people who have the temerity to hold a different point of view. Part of the weft and warp of good democratic debate is that someone can disagree honestly, fervently and strongly without being a bad person. They may just be incredibly principled and happen to hold different views.

One danger of the echo chamber effect is that people become more likely to be short-tempered with one another if they hear competing views. None the less, digital media and the vastly extended scope of peer-to-peer debate is incredibly important to the way our democracy functions—not just our democracy, but every democracy.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the effect of broadcast media and we should include TV, national radio and local radio. I thank him for introducing me to Gary of “Gary: Tank Commander”, who does not make it quite as far down in the south-west as where I live in Weston-super-Mare. I am resolved to try to find him because I am told that he is very funny and has done some interesting stuff as a comedian interviewing politicians in Scotland, which is an interesting cross-over that has not been done commonly, certainly not in this country or much more widely. If it has, it has been done more along the lines of taking the mickey out of unsuspecting politicians, rather like Sacha Baron Cohen, which is different. It is potentially very interesting, but there are other areas where the broadcast media have historically done great things.

4.21 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

4.45 pm

On resuming—

John Penrose: The temptation to restart by just saying “‘Gary: Tank Commander’ and” is very strong. However, I remind everybody that we had just finished talking about the effect of social media and the way it has changed our democratic discourse mostly for the better, but with some caveats. I was moving on to talk about broadcast media—national TV and radio, and local radio—and the arts. The hon. Member for Midlothian was rightly taking pains to emphasise their contribution.

I think we are all familiar with the national contribution of broadcasters in current affairs and news programmes, but there are many other aspects. The hon. Gentleman mentioned soap operas. Voter registration and political involvement have played into the plotlines of “Hollyoaks”, “River City” and various other programmes. Those are

[John Penrose]

examples of drama portraying what should be normal life—normal political involvement, whether that is, for example, someone standing for the local council or getting involved in a campaign to save their local theatre.

Those examples bring home to people that political involvement is part of the normal way in which the world works—what ordinary, normal people do—and reduces the distance between politics and people. As the hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out, the two should be synonymous. The roots of the words are the same. Such examples stop politicians being seen, necessarily, as a slightly weird class of other people who have different interests and motivations from everybody else, and remind us all that politicians should be the same as everybody else. We should be the same as our next-door neighbours and live in the same world as everybody else. Drama can do that in a very powerful way.

Broadcast drama obviously has huge reach and theatre can also make a difference, as can other arts such as the visual arts. For example, Weston-super-Mare recently played host to a world-class, world-famous exhibition organised by the street artist Banksy at the Tropicana lido on the sea front. It was fascinating because much of the art produced by Banksy and some other artists featured had a political message. It was mainly the politics of protest, interestingly; none the less, it will have driven political involvement.

I was asked by a number of journalists whether I was comfortable with those politics of protest—in many cases, they were slightly left-wing political statements—as part of the art in the middle of Weston-super-Mare, to which my unhesitating answer was, “Yes. I’m very happy indeed, if only because it makes people think.” One of the things that art is supposed to do, of course, is to make people think. If it made people think and made them realise that such issues affect us all, not just politicians and a class of other people, it is all to the good.

Comedians can do the same. We have mentioned “Gary: Tank Commander”, and political comedy and satire has a long and respectable history, although it is probably wrong to call satire respectable. As politicians, we need to be careful because satire is partly, by its very nature, a distancing thing. It creates the distance that we need to collapse, so some forms of comedy can add to the problem, as well as subtract from it. We must acknowledge that comedy can be a double-edged sword.

Going back to national TV and radio, and local radio, we are all comfortable and familiar with news and current affairs programmes. More recently—this has been a huge adornment and improvement to our national political discussions—the leaders’ debates have made a great deal of difference. Although we are used to those, there is a broader approach in drama and things other than current affairs, which the broadcast media should use.

More broadly, there are other media, particularly the material used in schools. The hon. Gentleman mentioned, for example, the Rock Enrol! school materials, which are produced in the Cabinet Office by people in my

team and used widely in schools across the country to teach pupils about democratic engagement as part of a broader programme of citizenship. All those materials and media are important for making democracy part of what everyone is brought up with. If people are brought up with democracy, and if it is explained to them even before they are of voting age, and certainly when they have just achieved voting age, it becomes part of their normal life in the same way as owning a tablet PC or phone might be nowadays. Like breathing, it becomes part of their life, which makes a huge difference.

There are two final groups. Civil society groups can make a huge difference, and many of them produce their own media, either written or, in many cases, online. Many civil society groups are tightly focused and deeply engaged with specific groups of voters, many of them the hard-to-reach, under-registered groups that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. Operation Black Vote, Bite the Ballot and many others, for example, are incredibly effective, and if they are not incredibly effective, they are more effective than anybody else. They are leaders in their field at persuading people in those groups that it is worth while getting involved in the democratic process.

As we were saying earlier, part of the difficulty is that some groups are under-represented or under-registered because registration is inconvenient. For example, the system may not keep up with people who move house frequently and ensure that their registration moves from one house to the next. There are also groups where that inconvenience or bureaucratic friction is not the whole story. In some cases there is a high degree of distrust in democracy, in the democratic process, in politics and in politicians of all kinds and of all political persuasions. All of us, as politicians and in these various groups, therefore need to develop a poetry of politics to persuade people that politics is something that can be effective in improving their lives, rather than something for other people.

Finally, no debate on the media would be complete without mentioning the print media. It is noticeable that the hon. Gentleman barely touched on the print media, perhaps partly because it is no secret that although many newspapers are still immensely powerful and widely read, many are suffering from declining circulations. Although it will always be a huge mistake to write off the newspaper industry, it has broader problems, even though it still carries an enormous amount of weight and heft. All our comments on the broadcast media, although with some differences due to the nature of the medium itself, also apply to the print media.

Jonathan Lord: The much maligned council newspaper or magazine can also help. We have an excellent council newspaper in Woking, and it always encourages registration and participation. It explains, in a grounded, proper way, how the electoral process works and when the elections are.

John Penrose: I could not put it better myself. Those final words are a good way to finish our debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Devolution (East Anglia)

4.53 pm

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered Government proposals for devolution in East Anglia.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Crausby. It is also a pleasure to see the Minister, who in his relatively short time in post has done an excellent job of driving the Government's regional and devolution agenda, particularly as the Minister with responsibility for the northern powerhouse.

I come to this debate wearing two hats: one as the Member of Parliament for Peterborough for the past 11 years; and one as someone who is genuinely asking the Government to explain more coherently their rationale for this policy as it pertains to East Anglia. Obviously, we are a proud municipal entity in Peterborough. Our local authority was first incorporated in 1874, and 20 years ago we were liberated by throwing off the yoke of Cambridgeshire County Council to become, like other notable cities in England, a unitary authority as the city and county of Peterborough.

I am not ideologically against devolution in any sense, but it is incumbent on the Government to explain their position. It would be remiss of me not to draw the House's attention to the excellent National Audit Office report published on 20 April, which was considered by the Public Accounts Committee on Monday in unison with another excellent report, produced on 23 March, on local enterprise partnerships.

Obviously, devolution is predicated on Government functions being moved to local areas and local entities. It is very much a bottom-up, not a top-down, process. That has certainly been the case in the majority of the 34 English local government areas that submitted bids following the Government's invitation in 2014—the successful bids were announced in the 2015 autumn statement—but the policy of devolution must be seen within a wider context.

When the coalition Government were elected in 2010, we expressly set our face against regional government. We got rid of regional assemblies, having seen the mess made by the regional policy of the previous Labour Government, the rejection of regional government by the people of the north-east and, particularly, the rejection of the regional spatial strategies that had been trying to force inappropriate housing on many largely rural areas across the country. That was the basis of the Government's position, and the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Sir Eric Pickles), specifically said at the time that there would be no further local government reorganisation.

It seems strange that, in what is essentially a financial statement, the Government disregarded the good work being done in places such as Manchester and Birmingham to announce, out of the blue and with limited consultation and collaboration with key stakeholders, local enterprise partnerships, local authority leaders and majority groups, three further devolution schemes in Greater Lincolnshire, the west of England and, of course, East Anglia. Given that the overall tone of the NAO report is that the process is a potential risk, and complex, the Government need to explain why that happened.

The policy involves 16 million people across 10 deals, and it arises from the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016. I can understand why the policy is attractive to local authorities. It involves a cumulative sum of £7.4 billion over a 30-year period, or about £246.5 million per annum, but in the east of England it is only £30 million, which has to be set in the broader financial context. Currently, the three counties in the East Anglia scheme already spend £660 million in capital infrastructure funding and have already received £37 million of growth funding in the last financial year. The deal promises officially the lowest per capita funding of all the 10 devolution deals: £13 a head. That compares, for instance, with £22 a head for Sheffield, £20 a head for Liverpool and £23 a head for Tees valley—I am sure the Minister will have something to say about Tees valley.

If it were genuine devolution, I would be a bit more sanguine. I agree, of course, that it is not an ignoble aspiration for any Government to integrate and promote collaboration between key public services to improve them in sectors such as transport, business support, further education, housing and planning, although, incidentally, we are not devolving to any great extent the work of the Department for Work and Pensions, which has never been very agreeable to having any kind of subsidiarity or devolution. Also, the area of health is pick 'n' mix; some of the deals will have some health funding devolved and some will not.

A number of key issues cause me concern. One is about synergies. Is there really a synergy between the Suffolk coast, south Suffolk, St Neots, King's Lynn and the city of Peterborough? I do not think there is. We should remember that the regional policy of the Labour Government was about reducing inequalities in the economies within regions and between regions, but the local enterprise partnerships that were established by the previous coalition Government were intended to take into account infrastructure and economic growth in travel-to-work areas, which, incidentally, are not coterminous with these new devolution deal areas.

I do not believe that there is any synergy. In fact, this is unprecedented. Unless we count Boadicea and Hereward the Wake, no one has ever decided it would be a good idea to have an overarching governance structure for the whole of these three counties in East Anglia. This is different from the other schemes. Of course, the Greater Manchester scheme and the Birmingham scheme effectively reconfigure the old Greater Manchester County Council and the West Midlands County Council, and they make sense. But regarding economic, demographic and social links, the East Anglia scheme does not stack up and it looks like a back-of-an-envelope calculation by someone in the Treasury.

That is an issue that concerns me. Another is duplication. Let me give just two examples. What is the point of LEPs now if some of their key functions in sectors such as skills and training are devolved to an executive elected mayor and a cabinet, with the numbers, powers, duties and responsibilities unspecified? We read that the combined authority will have an education committee. What will happen to Norfolk County Council's education committee, or Suffolk County Council's education committee and the cabinet functions that they discharge as local education authorities?

[Mr Stewart Jackson]

These are important issues and I do not believe that the Minister or the Government have addressed the potential for duplication across four tiers, and that is not including parish councils. The four tiers will be the LEP, the combined authority with the elected mayor, county councils and district councils. Quite reasonably, each of those bodies—particularly the district council and county council—is saying, “Which one of us is going to be abolished?”

Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): My hon. Friend is presenting a superb case. Where would the police and crime commissioners, who have only been going for four years and who the Government now say are doing a very good job, go in all this? They are another elected tier and are doing well. Chances are that, if the elected mayor comes in, the PCC will disappear, as will the LEPs. Those two initiatives, which are actually working very well, would effectively be scrapped.

Mr Jackson: My hon. Friend makes a very pertinent point and I pay tribute—

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Jackson: May I just finish the tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (Sir Henry Bellingham)? He raised this issue very forcefully and robustly in the Budget debate in March, and I pay tribute to him for that. He is absolutely right.

Heidi Allen: I am just a turkey voting for Christmas, because following on from that point it occurred to me that there will also be a debate between MPs and the mayor. Who will be fighting for the infrastructure? I do not understand where the demarcation will lie.

Mr Jackson: That is a superb point about competing mandates, which was eloquently made in an erudite fashion by our hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk on the “Today” programme this morning. It is a very important point.

We also need to look at democracy and accountability. I repeat the point that there was very little discussion or debate with important people in local government before this deal was announced at the Budget, and I deprecate that. It is not right when we are talking about a potential expenditure of £7 billion that will affect 2.3 million people. We do not know what primary legislation will be needed, and we do not really know what the powers, duties and responsibilities of the elected mayor will be. I will develop that point a bit later.

There is also a question about resilience. One of the issues that the NAO brought out in its report was whether there is the resilience in the civil service at departmental level—between the Treasury, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Department for Communities and Local Government—to manage this very complex issue of different deals across the country, because of the heterogeneous nature of each of the areas involved. I am referring to the Cities and Local Growth Unit in central Government, but also to local government. The NAO wondered whether there

was the capacity to deal with this sustainably. My hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr Bacon) knows that on the Public Accounts Committee we have seen that, in straitened financial times, when we do not have a benign environment, there have been significant problems about the sustainability of big projects, whether they are projects involving fire control, the fire service and fire authorities, the police, further education in particular, or of course local government. That is the case now, so what will it be like when we have really big budgets and functions across different boundaries?

The question is this: will devolution of the “planning and organising services across institutional and geographical boundaries...lead to more integrated and efficient services”?

That question was put by the NAO. One only has to look at the health economy in the eastern region—at the problems at Norfolk and Norwich University hospital, at Hinchingsbrooke hospital, and at Peterborough City hospital—to see how difficult it has been to align geographical areas to clinical care and to work between acute district hospital care and primary care trusts. But we are looking to do something on a much bigger scale in the future.

Of course, I welcome some aspects of the proposal—the devolution of local transport budgets, skills, adult further education and business rate retention. However, there is a lack of specificity, as well as an ambiguity, about these proposals. The Government say that over time funding streams will be put in a single pot in sectors such as transport and local growth. However, the NAO says that

“the government needs to provide a clear statement of the new accountability arrangements...aligned and coherent across government...many of the assumptions about devolution deals are untested.”

That raises great concerns about scrutiny and oversight. We got rid of the Audit Commission six years ago. We do not have a body that can look in detail at the spending priorities of the elected mayor and his cabinet. It is no good saying that we will have a scrutiny panel of, frankly, under-resourced Back-Bench MPs and small district councils to oversee these huge budget decisions and infrastructure projects. That does not really wash. We only need to look at some of the problems about cronyism and inappropriate contracts in some academy chains, and most recently the problems with the fire and rescue service in Cambridgeshire, to see that without proper accountability and oversight things can go wrong.

We need to ask questions about why there is not a proper timetable and timeline. Also, there is no clear statement of objectives. The NAO says that the Government do not have

“a clear framework for how the deals will link to other ongoing localism initiatives.”

That is an important point. The NAO also says that

“The expected...pace of future devolution deals is not known at present.”

I do not want to take too much longer, but it is important to put this point to the Minister. It is not good enough to rely on good will and a statement of intent, which is what most of the deals now are relying on. As I said, we got rid of the Audit Commission and despite improvements there is not an effective process for accountability system statements. It is no good the DCLG saying that it is reviewing accountability system statements and that it

does not require any more primary legislation for oversight. I do not think that that is good enough.

More importantly, given that this major issue is about driving up economic performance and macroeconomic strategy—that includes infrastructure, regeneration, new housing and so on—no performance or cost data are outlined at the centre so that economic performance can be properly measured. In particular, no data are outlined for the proposal's value for money to be assessed.

I will finish with a few questions for the Minister. I know others want to speak. I say in passing that we are in the middle of the EU referendum campaign, and we take different sides. I believe that in politics most things are a cock-up rather than a conspiracy, but I have to say that it is strange that those most in favour of the European Union are those most in favour of this regional governance scheme. I wonder why that is. They include the council leaders who wrote to the *East Anglian Daily Times* saying how wonderful the European Union was about six weeks ago. The small print says that the new East Anglian combined authority would be the intermediate body for the European social fund and other European structural funds. I see the fingerprints of a well-known former Deputy Prime Minister all over the proposals. I am young, but I am way too cynical.

When will we see primary legislation come forward to allow the mayor to fund infrastructure through business rates? What non-statutory spatial framework and what local plans will be put in place? What non-statutory supplementary planning documents will be produced? What will the joint investment and asset board do? What will its powers, duties and responsibilities be? When will we see a garden town in Fenland or west Norfolk? When are we going to see a taught degree university in the city of Peterborough? That has been an omission by the Peterborough Development Corporation over the past 30 or 40 years.

Will the Minister tell us about flood defence and coastal management? Will he tell us about the potential role of the regional schools commissioner? A lot of people are concerned about that. Surely the employment and skills board will duplicate some of the work of the local enterprise partnership. There is also the Orwellian-sounding, Stalinist tractor organisation that is the productivity commission. No doubt the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) would like that organisation; it is right up his street. The productivity commission—very Fidel Castro.

I generally welcome what the Government are doing, but I think there is a compromise.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr Jackson: I was just reaching my peroration, but I will give way.

Mr Bacon: I thought I would try to get there before my hon. Friend started his peroration. He reminded me of a meeting I had with the Italian Minister for productive activities in Rome some years ago. Curiously enough, he was not responsible for fertility in Italy, although one might have thought he was.

Because I cannot stay until the end of the debate, I felt inhibited from making a speech, but I want to ask

my hon. Friend one thing. Also, I do not want to have to listen to the Minister, who is a noted Eurosceptic, torturing the English language in defending the deal. Unfortunately, I have other commitments.

We have 330 district councillors in Norfolk. There are 293 in Suffolk and a further 286 in Cambridgeshire. That is a total of more than 900. There are 228 county councillors for the area, and 57 councillors in the unitary borough of Peterborough. That is a total of nearly 1,200 councillors in the three counties, which feels a little top-heavy. There are also the 6,000 or so parish councillors. That is something like 7,500 councillors altogether. Has my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough had people queueing at his constituency surgeries—I certainly have not—demanding more elected representatives?

Mr Jackson: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The need for an executive elected mayor is not the talk of the Dog and Duck in Peterborough, it is true. We have enough government and enough councillors. We do not need another tier of governance, as he has probably gathered from the tenor of my remarks.

Having said all that, the Government can rescue the situation with all the Cs: collaboration, consultation, clarity and coherence. If they can explain the role of the elected mayor, explain in a timely way how the passage towards powers and duties will work, create a timescale and show us that it is in the financial interest of our constituents to accept this new governance structure, we will be mindful of that and be prepared to be broadly supportive.

There is an alternative model, which would be to effectively have two greater local enterprise partnerships: one for Norfolk and Suffolk and one for Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and the city of Cambridge. That is a perfectly reasonable alternative model if the Treasury and the Department for Communities and Local Government do not get fixated on population numbers, but instead go back to first principles, which is economic sustainability.

I offer my remarks with good will and a degree of cross-party support. I am not yet persuaded, but I may be in the future. I look forward to hearing the Minister's remarks. I hope he can specifically answer some of my queries and concerns.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): Order. Due to Divisions, this debate will end at 5.54 pm. I intend to give the two Front Benchers 10 minutes each, so I will call the first at 5.34 pm. Six Members have indicated that they wish to speak. Doing the maths, they have around three minutes each, including interventions.

5.16 pm

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby. I congratulate the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) on securing this debate. Unusually, we might find ourselves in agreement on one or two issues today.

From my very first contribution in the House, I have been banging on not about Europe, but about the real

[Daniel Zeichner]

and immediate challenges facing Cambridge on housing and transport. In the last year, the problems have only become more acute. We have some of the fastest rising house prices in the country—they are even outstripping London—and too many occasions when the city has been near gridlocked.

I am sorry to say that the policy response from the Government has made the situation worse. Cambridge City Council and local housing associations have rightly been horrified by the range of Government housing proposals that will dramatically reduce the already limited amount of affordable housing in the city and undermine the only recently agreed long-term business plan underpinning the building of new affordable homes for rent. Moreover, the much-vaunted city deal plan inherited from the previous Government has morphed into the mess before us today.

The devolution deal at the heart of this debate, while much trumpeted by the Government, is not much welcomed by anyone else. It is a devolution deal for Norfolk and Suffolk, with Cambridgeshire bolted on as a last-minute add-on, with an unwanted elected mayor bolted on top of that. Let us be clear: Cambridge and the surrounding area need the freedom to make the investments needed to tackle the housing and transport challenges.

A detailed case has been developed by the local business-led organisation Cambridge Ahead, and I urge the Minister to revisit it. “The Case for Cambridge” enjoyed strong local support across councils, local MPs, all sectors of business, the LEP, the chamber of commerce and our universities, which are a unique asset. Unfortunately, instead of responding to that locally agreed and developed proposal—the very bottom-up proposal that the Government sought—the Government instead came back late in the day with a completely different solution. They basically said, “You’ve got three weeks to take it or leave it.” The reaction was rightly furious. The LEP rejected it, business leaders rejected it, Cambridge City Council rejected it and Cambridgeshire County Council rejected it. So far as I am aware, only one district in the area has any real enthusiasm.

I do not have much time, so I will jump straight to my final conclusions, although I note in passing that the National Audit Office highlighted a discrepancy in funding between regions. Why does the west of England get £27 per capita additional investment per head, while in East Anglia we are offered just £13?

As a more optimistic conclusion, may I say that we need to get more flexibility and funding into the region? I suggest that the Minister look again at the suggestions coming from Cambridgeshire and the very special opportunities in Cambridge in particular. Why can those two deals not be folded into one? No one really wants your mayor, Minister. If we have to have it, I dare say they can be safely ignored. There is a much bigger prize for Cambridge. We can be the catalyst for UK prosperity. We are already hugely successful, but that future success is at risk. Of course there are always risks with major investments—we know that, and we have explained how those can be underwritten. Cambridge is up to the task, but as it stands we do not have the powers we need.

5.19 pm

Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner), with whom I agree entirely. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) on securing this debate.

Ministers have done an excellent job on devolution. I support devolution, which is an absolute natural partner to localism—I think that was the point made by the hon. Member for Cambridge—and localism is all about buy-in from local people. In Norfolk, we have an affinity to Norfolk. We love it and are passionate about it. The same is true of people in Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. We have no affinity to a concept such as East Anglia. In a metropolitan area, people have a sense of belonging to a city. The idea works very well in London, Manchester and Birmingham, but the proposal for an elected mayor of East Anglia will not gain public support, and that is why it is my red line.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough mentioned, we opposed Lord Prescott’s regional assemblies. We were very anti the regional spatial strategies. According to the agreement signed by the 23 council leaders, the mayor will have some reserve powers over housing. Any change has to command public support. At a time when local government is cutting back on many third sector organisations—I can think of the citizens advice bureau in my constituency, transport for the disabled and mental health charities—it is not going to look kindly on us for putting in place a very expensive fifth tier of local government.

When council leaders say that the proposal will be cost-effective, that some of the personnel will be stripped out of existing councils and that it will not cost anything extra, what planet are they living on? This will be an opportunity for empire building. It will be a very costly tier of local government. The Government say that they will take out another tier. I am a veteran of at least three campaigns on unitary government. They are very divisive and difficult. It is far better to have collaboration and co-operation between councils. We can then move forward on that basis.

Ministers overlook the political sovereignty of MPs. We have sovereignty on our own patch to convene meetings to get things done or to stop things happening. Frankly, I do not want an elected mayor barging into my constituency and saying, “Henry, you’ve been a bad boy. You don’t want these houses or this incinerator in your constituency, but we would like you to have them. I am a regional mayor with a mandate from a turnout of all of 5%.”

Lucy Frazer (South East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Sir Henry Bellingham: I am afraid I will not because I must press on.

I put it to the Minister that there is an alternative. There are 23 council leaders, two LEPs and three PCCs. They can get together and select or elect a head honcho to carry forward the devolution process and oversee the strategic transport fund that is going to be put in place. It will be seen as an administrative arrangement, not another tier of government. It will be a Tory solution to the demand that we have devolution. If the Government

go down that route and let it work for perhaps two, three or four years, we can see whether there is a democratic deficit and people are crying out for an elected mayor and revisit the matter. But if they insist on pushing ahead with the elected mayor part of the proposals, I fear they will fail. There is an alternative, and I hope the Minister will embrace it.

5.23 pm

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby, and a privilege to speak after my fellow Norfolk MP, the hon. Member for North West Norfolk (Sir Henry Bellingham).

When the devolution initiative was first proposed, I had an open mind. Like Councillor George Nobbs, leader of Norfolk County Council, and Councillor Alan Waters, leader of Norwich City Council, I wanted it to work. Lord Heseltine's devolution report, which was published a little while ago, was quite clear that previous devolution attempts had failed because they were top down. He said that it would be different this time because local areas would write their own deal. That was what was promised, and it was on that basis that many councillors approached the initiative with a good conscience, thinking they could work with it, whatever their political party.

Unfortunately, nothing could be further from the truth. Councillor George Nobbs was a staunch supporter of the initial efforts. He wrote a letter to Lord Heseltine in which he said:

"Like you I have been an enthusiastic believer of devolving power from central to local government all of my adult life. However I feel that I should share with you, not just my views, but those of some of my fellow councillors, and ask for your help... You will know that there is widespread opposition to the concept of an elected Mayor, disquiet about the perceived rush to meet government deadlines and concern about a consultation to be held in July and August of all months. The financial incentives that are dangled in front of us, only to be threatened with withdrawal if there is any dissent, are in any case considered inadequate by many."

We have to accept that if we are to have real devolution, we need real financial power for our local authorities and communities, which is not on offer in the deal. The past 35 years have seen centralisation by Whitehall and Westminster. In 1979, local authorities raised 75% of their own funding; they now raise less than 20%. The deal on the table goes nowhere near the level of fiscal independence required—a fact that so many councillors can now see. The meagre amount local authorities can raise from business rates was undermined in the most recent Budget when the Chancellor took money from them.

For cities in our region—economic powerhouses such as Norwich, Cambridge and Ipswich—there is little to no incentive for devolution.

Mr Jackson: And Peterborough.

Clive Lewis: Of course! I am sorry. How could I forget Peterborough?

Where is the control for local authorities over their own housing revenue accounts? Where is their control over the right to buy or the right to stay? Those would be the most effective ways to allow local authorities to build more of the affordable homes that are so desperately needed by so many people and that are acting as a bottleneck to economic progress.

Ultimately, if we want real devolution, we have to devolve control from central Government, which is increasing, to local government, and give local government the financial ability to do something with it. It is about empowering local authorities and local communities. As things stand, that is simply not happening.

5.26 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time, Mr Crausby. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) on securing this timely debate. Many concerns have been expressed and points raised, and I agree with many of them, particularly the point about police and crime commissioners. We are about to have a PCC election in Suffolk. As I understand it, the Mayor of London is the PCC for London. In a year's time, are we going to be electing someone who will take over the functions of the three recently elected PCCs? I would like to know, because among the biggest concerns of all Members present are the layers of government.

I cannot go into too much detail—I have had to remove layers of my speech—but, notwithstanding all the concerns we have heard, we do need to be aware of the big picture. The Government have got it right—if not in all the detail then certainly in the thrust of the policy—on two points. First, let us not forget what happened in the referendum on the future of the United Kingdom. After that referendum, a promise was made to the people of Scotland and, at the same time, a promise was made to the people of England that we would get devolution—real power in local areas. The Conservative party is trying to deliver on that promise, and that is absolutely right.

Secondly, this country has a long-standing fundamental weakness: it has been completely over-centralised in London and its economy has been over-centralised in London and the south-east. We have paid a heavy price for that, with many parts of the country far poorer than London and the south-east. It would not be easy to deliver, but the key to solving the problem is infrastructure and long-term, sustainable economic growth for our region. If devolution could deliver that, it would be a victory for young people in our communities.

My final point is about rail. I think it is fair to say that the biggest economic weakness in our region is our railways. They are very poor, but we have a franchise going through. There has been talk of the reunification of the track and the operator, so that they would be run by the same body. If that were introduced, I would certainly support it, because the fragmentation between Network Rail and whichever franchisee is a problem. The regional government could then have a role, which would give us far greater strategic control over rail. That would be a welcome benefit. We must remember the potential positives, while asking questions on the key issues.

5.29 pm

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) on securing the debate. I am a supporter of devolution, but on the feedback I receive from Suffolk, and from my

[Peter Aldous]

constituency in particular, a lot of work needs to be done to ensure that the devolution deal has local support and will work. There is concern that the deal is being rushed in a way that adds bureaucratic complexity and blurs the lines of accountability.

As we have heard, much of Cambridgeshire is opposed to the deal at present and the idea of an elected mayor does not currently have public support. There is concern that another layer of local government is being added and the challenge of considering removing a tier is being sidestepped. If there is to be a mayor, we need to consider carefully their role and responsibilities, and how those will tie in with the work that councils will continue to do. What happens to the police and crime commissioners? Who will be responsible for the other blue-light services? How can national and local government best work together to meet the health and social care challenge of an ageing population, which is a huge issue in East Anglia?

There are many unanswered questions. There is a need for a pause to allow us to work with local people to produce a long-term strategic plan for East Anglian devolution. We must confront the devil in the detail now, and come up with a proposal that will have public support.

5.31 pm

Jo Churchill (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) for bringing forward this important debate. Much of what I have to say has been gone over by other Members, but I reiterate the view of my hon. Friends the Members for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) and for Waveney (Peter Aldous) that devolution in principle is the prize, and we should not lose sight of that prize. It is highly important that we get there.

On the NAO report to which my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough alluded, there is the retort to it that a lack of structure gives areas the ability to drive their own futures. That is an important point, because as the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) said, we have slightly different structural pressures. The need for housing in Cambridge is acute, and that bears down on my constituency, but the partnership working that devolution offers us gives us the ability to move that forward and to help each other positively and productively.

We have the benefit of living in one of the best areas of the country—one of the primary areas for health, wealth, food and energy. We are an area for bioscience innovation. We would like what is put forward to be innovative. Innovation in devolution is an exciting concept. With Cambridge University sat in the heart of our region and the University of East Anglia in Norwich leading in life sciences, and agri-tech in particular, we ought to grab such opportunities and drive them forward, because that is the innovation that will help with the health and social care issues that we will have in the future.

We have infrastructure needs in broadband, housing, roads and rail. Nothing has been given back to us, while we have contributed to the Treasury for years—we will

give it £2.2 billion this year and up to £8 billion by 2020—so we would like a little more. The potential lever of £900 million is great, but we would like to know what else there is. Unlocking the potential of businesses throughout our region is the prize here. We want to drive forward entrepreneurship and access markets through measures such as enterprise zones, growth hubs and productivity plans.

Innovation can be a game changer, and I am glad to see Andy Wood's appointment as an independent chair, because that is a huge move forward. I was pleased to learn that, only this morning, a positive meeting of leaders from across our region was held; they are starting to build a shared vision. Work is going on to look at monetary value. There are problems, but if we can have a common vision, with layers of government, business, universities and civil society working to shared goals, we could really set the scene, as a first mover.

One of our primary problems is the lack of love for yet another layer of government. We have gone over that, and I am sure that we can discuss that going forward, but I do not want us to cut ourselves off at the knees and not give ourselves the chance for discussion. There are many concerns about the proposal; I am sure that the Minister will say whether there is a more moderated approach. Whatever the arrangements, it is important that any leader has defined powers but entertains a collaborative role and works with other local leaders to deliver.

I advise caution on the points that have been made. We must put meat on the bones of this deal to see whether it stacks up for people in our constituencies. I would like to know whether there is one deal for the combined area—Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire—or no deal. That sharp focus might incentivise us to get to the point of devolution: it should be iterative, and it should unlock potential and opportunity. As in Manchester, we should be able to come back to the table to ask the Government for more.

Mr David Crausby (in the Chair): I thank hon. Members for their co-operation. They got the maths almost exactly right.

5.35 pm

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Crausby. I thank the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) for securing this important debate.

I have listened carefully to the debate, and I hope the Minister responds clearly to the genuine concerns raised by hon. Members, many of whom are on his side of the Chamber. When the Chancellor stood up in the House on 16 March to declare triumphantly that his Government had agreed a single powerful East Anglia combined authority, headed by an elected mayor with almost £1 billion of new investment, he was of course wrong. There was no agreement in place. There was only a document signed by council leaders agreeing that they would run the proposed deals through their respective councils and perform public consultation. That was enough for the Chancellor to stand before the nation and declare that the devolution revolution was taking hold. Just days later, the East Anglia devolution agreement began to fall apart.

The Conservative-administered Cambridgeshire County Council voted overwhelmingly, by 64 votes to zero, not to accept the plans. The Minister will be aware that that is not the only deal in disarray. This is more a rebellion than a revolution. Of the 38 devolution proposals from cities, town and counties across England, only 10 have materialised into plans. Many fell at the first hurdle because they disagreed with the Government's insistence on a directly elected mayor. As we have heard today, this is one of the main problems with the East Anglia deal.

The whole point of devolution is to move away from over-centralised governance, to award more powers to local areas, to create more accountability, to improve the democratic process and to open up a dialogue between central Government and local government about what will work best for an area to bring decision making closer to its people. Council leaders have told me, as they told my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), that they were promised that devolution would be a bottom-up process based on those principles, yet the Government have taken a heavy-handed, top-down, dictatorial approach.

The geographical area covered by this deal makes it the largest of all devolution deals; it covers the three counties of Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire and spanning almost 5,000 square miles. No other deal comes near the expected collaboration requirements. Of the 23 local authorities, 22 have been lumped together. That is more than double the number of local authorities working together in any of the other deals. Common sense should dictate that it is ridiculous to expect 22 local authorities to work together, headed by one elected mayor, when each county has vastly different needs.

Suffolk was promised its own deal, but that was reneged on at the last minute. Cambridgeshire requested its own devolution deal, but was told that the Chancellor would not accept one-county deals. Then Greater Lincolnshire was awarded its own one-county deal. Norfolk and Suffolk asked for £75 million per annum for 30 years. Instead, they gained a county at the last moment, when Cambridgeshire reluctantly joined the deal and everyone was offered £1 billion over 30 years. That might sound good, but when one drills down, it is a modest sum of just over £30 million a year, over 22 local authority areas.

In short, this deal, like many others, is a complete shambles. It is all smoke and mirrors—giving with one hand and taking away with the other. There is huge unease at the speed with which the deal is being pushed through. There is significant pressure on local authorities to develop and complete the necessary work to set up the combined authority before they have had a chance to consult their councillors, let alone the public. Will the Minister comment on the timetable and confirm whether this proposal has been processed so quickly because of the Government's obsession with having elected mayors in place by May 2017?

Places such as Manchester have had half a decade to progress their deals, but the councils in the east of England have been given seven months. Why will the Government not give those councils adequate time to allow the process to be democratic and fair? Having an elected mayor for a large rural area covering three counties is an unprecedented constitutional innovation. It is untried and untested, and that mayor is likely to be

democratically remote. It is difficult enough for counties to get behind the idea of having one mayor covering one county, and unthinkable that one person could cover the needs and demands of three counties with diverse communities, complex internal geography, and varied urban and rural hubs.

Councils have made it clear that they do not want such an arrangement. The Communities and Local Government Committee has said that elected mayors are not an "easy fit" for non-metropolitan areas, and it believes that councils and their local populations should have the right to choose whether to have one. We heard today about some of the many alternatives, such as the one in Cornwall, but the Government continue to insist on elected mayors.

The East Anglia deal is insubstantial. Although the Government entice signatories by promising to devolve more powers at some unspecified future date, those powers are subject to negotiation with the Treasury, not enshrined in statute. Promises can and, given this Government's track record, will be withdrawn. The elected mayor is the only statutory creation, and once elected, the mayor will be a fixture on the political landscape, even if these devolution deals, as they are currently envisaged, collapse.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) said, housing is critical in the east of England, but it was offered as a devolved power only as an afterthought, just two days before this deal was signed. The £175 million housing investment fund was thrown in on the condition that there was a fast-track timetable in place for an elected mayor by 2017, but that was not the only condition. In the draft deal, that £175 million is earmarked largely for shared-ownership homes—homes that we know are beyond the means of many people and will not address the issue of the affordability of housing. This Government's assault on council housing continues. That is yet another example of how their version of devolution is actually about delegation.

There is no real fiscal devolution here. Cuts will continue to be made to local authority budgets, yet councils will be expected to support a combined authority with reduced resources and capacity. Draft deals have only been signed because council leaders who genuinely care about their areas want real devolution and want to make it work. For that, they need a Government who want the same thing, but I fear that this Government do not.

When it was in power in Scotland and Wales, Labour achieved real devolution. We did not rush things through at lightning speed, and we did not expect huge decisions to be made that would affect communities and governance for decades. We had robust public consultation, and we would not have introduced new tiers of governance without allowing time for scrutiny and due diligence. We certainly would not have conducted devolution veiled in secrecy behind closed doors, or imposed last-minute changes from the centre.

The sad truth is that the appetite for devolution among councils and the public is incredibly strong, but this Government are failing to harness that or, as noted in a recent National Audit Office report, clearly articulate what exactly they are trying to achieve through these deals. The upshot is that we, local authorities and, most importantly, members of the public, on whom such deals will impact, do not know what the Government

[Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck]

are trying to achieve. Yet again, we are seeing a masterclass in undemocratic process, which is leaving councils feeling like they are engaged in a Faustian pact.

Lucy Frazer: I know that several Members here are not in favour of the devolution plan that is on the table. Is the hon. Lady aware, however, that some councils are in favour of it? Her speech is a little one-sided. For example, I represent two district councils, including one for East Cambridgeshire, which is very much in favour of the deal. Some questions must be asked, and we would all like some more money, but will she acknowledge that there is some support for devolution?

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I will acknowledge that there is some support, but my role is to scrutinise the Government and to express concerns, so that is what I am using my time for today.

To sum up, will the Minister, once and for all, come clean about the real purpose of the deals? How do they serve the interests of the public, rather than of the Government?

5.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (James Wharton): We have had an interesting debate, with a wide range of contributions from Members with different party backgrounds and outlooks. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) on securing it. He is greatly exercised about the issue, but that is because he is well informed about it. He has asked some important questions, as have other hon. Members, and I will try to address them as best I can in the limited time available.

I will reconfirm one point for the record, which is that any accusation that I am a European Union stooge is far from the mark. I stand here as a Minister speaking on behalf of the Government, but the EU is a matter on which the Government and I have rather different views. I have maintained my view for some time, and it continues to be my position. That feeds into the comments my hon. Friend made about intermediate body status, because as it happens, I am also the Minister with responsibility for the European regional development fund—an interesting role to have at this time. I assure him that on this point there is no conspiracy, and the intermediate body status is not part of a greater plot, as he might suspect. I am happy to talk to him on another occasion, at as much length as he might desire, to reassure him of that.

Devolution is exciting. It has been offered to the country as a whole; 38 different areas have said they want to be part of it, and this Government are doing it differently from the Labour Government, who in previous attempts tried to force regional assemblies on to people, first of all in the north-east, where I am from. At the time, I was very much involved in the campaign against the regional assembly, and I was close to the detail, but I am closer still to the detail of what we are doing now and discussing today, and I can assure hon. Members that this devolution really is quite different. It is driven by people in the areas to which devolution is being offered, and it is based on geographies that they determine, through discussion, and on the powers that they want.

James Cartlidge: Will my hon. Friend confirm that at this moment in time, there is only one devolution deal on offer to anyone in East Anglia?

James Wharton: I am happy to confirm that to my hon. Friend. The Government have made a deal, and signatures were added to the document. We want to deliver on that deal and to meet the obligations to which we are committed by the deal, but we do not expect or plan to reopen discussions and to start again. Other areas want to talk about devolution and to secure deals of their own. It is very positive that East Anglia is forging so far ahead with that policy agenda, but we must recognise that if areas want to go back on deals that have been agreed and want to reinvent them before they have been enacted, we will have to look at the allocation of our time and resources to other areas that have not yet reached agreement and need attention and focus.

Heidi Allen: To be absolutely clear, I thought I heard music to my ears a moment ago—that devolution deals should come from the regions that want them. Given that all the parties that have signed a tentative document are not happy, for whatever reasons, what is stopping us from going back to the drawing board? I think what would work for us all would be Suffolk and Norfolk, and Cambridgeshire-Peterborough-Huntingdon. With that, we could find real traction and make things happen quickly.

James Wharton: I am conscious of time, but I want to be very clear: a deal has been agreed, on a geography that has been agreed, and it is not the intention of the Government to reopen discussions of geography. We will not compel any area to agree a devolution deal, and we do not have that power—the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 does not allow the Government to do so, and nor would we want to. If devolution is to last, it must be done with local agreement. When those agreements are reached, however, just as local areas expect us to meet our obligations as a Government, we expect them to deliver the devolution deals to which they have agreed.

Dr Daniel Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): In principle, I am signed up to devolution, but is this issue worth considering? The first step towards delivering a deal that works for all is recognising that there are some initial natural synergies that can be delivered through local councils working much more effectively together at both regional and local level. Some of the mergers that are planned—for example, between Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils, and perhaps in the future Babergh and Mid Suffolk—may be a very desirable way of bringing about closer working in a way that also delivers something that local people want.

James Wharton: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. We want to see collaboration—local authorities working together. We want to see local authorities finding and driving efficiencies, so that they can focus on the services from which our residents benefit. Devolution is part of that picture—it can facilitate and encourage that process—but we want local authorities to do that regardless of the devolutionary landscape. My hon.

Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (Sir Henry Bellingham) talked about collaboration and co-operation, and rightly so. That was born of his experience of local government, of which he spoke. It is important that local areas look to see where they can best co-operate and what the right areas of co-operation are for them in their particular circumstances.

Lucy Frazer: Will the Minister give way?

James Wharton: I have to make progress. My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartledge) asked particularly about police and crime commissioners. The legislation is quite clear. It is possible for elected mayors to take on the roles currently exercised by police and crime commissioners, but only where the police forces in question are coterminous with the devolution areas. That does not mean that if a devolution agreement is for an area that has more than one local police force or crosses the boundaries of different forces, it would be impossible to go down that route, but it would require a number of additional steps, in terms of local force reorganisation, that are not currently planned for by the Government. If there were demand from the local area to do something along those lines, of course we would welcome any discussion that would help to meet the desires and ambitions of that community.

That question was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), who made the very important point that we must work for local support. We must explain why devolution matters. We must explain to people that this is not about taking powers up and away from local authorities. The previous incarnation of local government mayors, created under Labour, very often took powers from local authorities into a single elected person. This is about a single elected person taking powers down from Government, away from civil servants and away from Ministers—even ones as benevolent and helpful as I can be at times. Instead, there is recognition that perhaps sometimes decisions are best made by people who understand and are from the communities most directly affected by them.

A number of hon. Members asked about the scope of the deal. Is it sufficiently ambitious? Does it cover the areas that it would want to? What does it actually mean

if the area finds additional things that it wants to do? Greater Manchester is indeed a case in point. These processes are iterative. The deal, the election of the mayor and the implementing of devolution are steps on a journey, and that journey can continue to expand. Greater Manchester is now, I think, on its fourth round of asks for additional powers. We would look to—and, indeed, want to—continue to talk with areas that have agreed devolution about the further powers that they might want, and the things that they could do with those powers to improve their economy and the lives of the people who live in the communities served by—

Lucy Frazer: On that point, will the Minister give way?

James Wharton: I apologise to my hon. and learned Friend, but I must wrap up, given the time constraints. We can see that there is great interest in this process—great interest in devolution. Devolution is an important part of Government policy. We know that it must be done with local support. Deals are two-way processes. If we are to deliver deals that last, we need that local support and understanding. I look forward to continuing to work with colleagues on both sides of the House to ensure that this important policy objective, which can benefit the communities that we all represent, is not only delivered, but lasts the course.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: Will the Minister give way before he ends? He has time.

James Wharton: I do not have time.

5.53 pm

Mr Jackson: It is clear that there is a broad welcome for the central concept of devolution, albeit multi-speed and multi-layer. It is clear, though, that unlike places such as Cornwall and Manchester, East Anglia is not based on established geographical and institutional arrangements and things such as coterminous local enterprise partnerships and healthcare economies.

5.54 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).

Written Statement

Wednesday 27 April 2016

CABINET OFFICE

Arm's-length Bodies: Administrative Classification

The Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General (Matthew Hancock): We are today publishing the "Report on the outcome of the classification review into the future classification of public bodies", together with new guidance at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/public-bodies-reform#classification-review>. This report summarises the issues relating to the classification system and recommends measures to improve it, moving towards a simplified and more transparent landscape for the different types of public body.

The Public Administration Select Committee's report "Who's accountable? Relationships between Government and arm's length bodies" highlighted the complex system for the administrative classification of arm's length bodies. In their response the coalition Government acknowledged these issues and committed to addressing them through a review of the classification system.

Today's report endorses the guiding principle that the classification of a public body should be determined by the degree of freedom it requires and recommends changes to the current classification framework. From now, new bodies should be set up within this framework and existing bodies will adapt to it overtime. The Cabinet Office guidance on classifications has been updated to ensure that these changes are applied consistently.

The summary of findings and recommendations outlined in the report follow extensive engagement with Government Departments, public bodies and others, as does the accompanying guidance.

Copies of both the report and the guidance have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS705]

Petition

Wednesday 27 April 2016

PRESENTED PETITION

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Child Support Agency

The petition of Mr Craig Bulman,

Declares that the petitioner received unacceptable treatment from the Child Support Agency (CSA); further that the petitioner incurred significant losses and damages including loss of job as result of this treatment; further that the CSA has admitted to acting in an inappropriate manner towards the petitioner and awarded a consolatory payment of £5,000 in April 2012; further that this

payment does not suffice to cover loss of earnings or impact on the petitioner's health and life; and further that the petitioner is unable to access legal aid or other legal assistance to challenge the value of this payment, which the petitioner believes is against his rights under Article 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Article 47 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is integral to upholding the rule of law.

The petitioner therefore requests that the House of Commons urges the Government to put pressure on the Child Support Agency to re-examine the case of Mr Bulman and award a much higher compensatory payment for the loss, harm, injury and damages caused as a result of their unacceptable treatment of the petitioner.

And the petitioner remains, etc. — [*Presented by Mr Alan Campbell .]*

[P001688]

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 27 April 2016

DEFENCE

Air Cadet Organisation and Gliding

The following is an extract from the Westminster Hall debate on Air Cadet Organisation and Gliding on Wednesday 13 April 2016.

Valerie Vaz (in the Chair): Does the Minister wish to check the note that has been passed to him?

Mr Brazier: Thank you, Ms Vaz. I failed to say how much I have enjoyed speaking under your chairmanship for the first time. The note says that cadets are assisted

through squadron and wing HQ budgets. Similar to when they attend annual camps in mainland UK, food and accommodation are free to cadets.

[Official Report, 13 April 2016, Vol. 608, c. 117WH.]

Letter of correction from Julian Brazier:

An error has been identified at the end of my winding up speech in the debate on Air Cadets Organisation and Gliding on 13 April 2016.

The correct response should have been:

Mr Brazier: Thank you, Ms Vaz. I failed to say how much I have enjoyed speaking under your chairmanship for the first time. The note says that cadets are assisted through squadron and wing HQ budgets. Similar to when they attend annual camps in mainland UK, **travel** and accommodation are free to cadets.

ORAL ANSWERS

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Wednesday 27 April 2016

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Wednesday 4 May 2016**

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